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Transitioning From Under-Resourced Schools to University: An Application of Schlossberg's Transition Model to the South African Context



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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by coursework and Research Report in the field of Organisational Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 15 March 2018

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Shira Gutnick, declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree of examination at this or any other university

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Word Count: 33,638

Abstract

The transition from school to university is a process commonly characterised by stress and significant challenge. Ensuring that this transition happens successfully is critical for academic success. The challenges associated with this transition are exacerbated for students from under-resourced environments. It is believed that failure to transition effectively contributes to the high university drop out-rates in South Africa currently. This study explores the individual experience of the under-resourced student's transition to university through the application of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory. This was done with specific focus on Schlossberg's (2011) *4S System*, which focuses on the resources that students' utilise during a transition. These resources (4 S's) include *situation, self, support and strategies.* This model was specifically chosen, as Schlossberg (2011) emphasises the importance of understanding the individual in transition. Participants were obtained through a purposive sampling technique. Interviews were conducted with nine participants from under-resourced backgrounds, with an age range of 20 to 23, in different faculties at The University of the Witwatersrand. Thematic Content Analysis was utilised for data analysis. Findings demonstrated the centrality of students' access to various resources, in the context of their transition to university, as these impacted the transition process. Concurrent stressors including insufficient skill, language barriers and culture shock which were among the factors that compounded participants' *situation*. Further, participants' sense of *self* was often compromised due to feelings of inferiority and a sense of lack of control. However, some participants demonstrated high self-efficacy and motivation. In terms of *support,* participants expressed the importance of family, friends and academic staff, and the stress associated in the absence of these support structures. Lastly the exploration of *strategies* indicated how students used an array of strategies in order to manage the transition. Importantly, the results demonstrated that under-resourced students are not passive victims in the transition to university, but are active agents attempting to negotiate in the processes to which they are exposed. These themes and additional subthemes were explored and considered in the light of previous literature.

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1. Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Extensive research suggests that students who have been educated in under-resourced, rural schools face significant challenges at tertiary institutions (Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson & Strauss, 2003; Theron, 2016)[1]. Students in these schools are marginalised in terms of their race, geographical location and economic circumstances (Theron, 2016). According to Pillay (2004), there is often a void of the most basic necessities like water and electricity in rural schools. Classrooms are over-crowded, students are expected to share desks and textbooks and teachers are ill qualified and often absent for prolonged periods at a time (Barac, 2015; Maree, 2015). These infrastructural challenges widen the gap between South Africa's privileged and under-resourced, despite the promise of a more equal society (Bojuwoye, 2002). Due to an insufficient schooling background, the difficulty of the transition process for under-resourced students to university is exacerbated. Unsuccessful transitions contribute to the alarmingly high dropout rates, the failure of multiple courses at universities and the repetition of failed courses (Alexander, 2016; Badat & Sayed, 2014; Maree, 2015).

The development of a stable and prosperous economy is integrally linked to successful outcomes from universities (Edwards & Coates, 2011). However, student success is not only significant for the greater economy, it also has important ramifications for the institutions themselves. One of the most important outcomes of a university is "the extent to which it facilitates the access, retention and success of people from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Edwards & Coates, 2011, p. 154). Universities' provision of access to students from under-resourced schools is not enough; these students must in addition successfully negotiate their transition and complete their degrees as well (McKay, 2016). Ensuring that under-resourced students transition successfully will serve to reduce university dropout rates thereby ensuring increased university throughputs and a more diverse student population (Badat & Sayed, 2014). Enhancing students' from under-resourced backgrounds capacity to manage their transition has the potential to mitigate the negative psychological consequences related to transitions including stress and anxiety (Sennett et al., 2003; Theron, 2016). Further, increased capacity to transition may result in superior performance and therefore increases students' future career opportunities (Theron, 2016).

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[1] In this research, under-resourced will refer to students from quintile one and quintile two schools, which are schools that cater for the poorest 40% of learners ("National norms and standards for school funding", 2004), and are often found in rural areas. Given the nature of this study and that the fact that the vast majority of students from rural areas are significantly under-resourced in comparison to their urban counterparts, the terms 'rural' and 'under-resourced' will sometimes be used interchangeably.

The present study aimed to explore the transition process of students from under-resourced schools to university. The intention was to explore the subjective experience of each student, as no two transitions are alike (Schlossberg, 2011). This will be done specifically through the application of Schlossberg's (2004) transition theory, with specific focus on the *4S System*. This system looks at the various resources that an individual draws upon to manage their transition including *situation, self, support and strategies.* It is expected that each person has access to different resources resulting in each transition experience being unique. Schlossberg (2011) suggests that there are both societal and personal factors that influence the resources to which an individual has access (Anderson et al., 2012). The intention, therefore, was to demonstrate that students are not powerless in the transition process. Even in a compromised setting, students' are able to make choices and influence the way that their transition is managed.

Whilst previous research has been conducted that focuses upon under-resourced South African students transitioning to university (Badat & Sayed, 2014; McKay, 2016; Sennett et al., 2016; Theron, 2016), the uniqueness of this study lies in the specific application of Schlossberg's (2011) transition model. In doing so, this project aims to contribute to the growing body of research that seeks to explore how students from diverse backgrounds may be better accommodated in higher education institutions.

In the first section that follows, a review of the literature that explores the experiences of South African students from under-resourced schools and their transition to university will be presented. This review will justify the specific focus on such students and illustrate how their particular circumstances have a material impact on their transition process. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory will be reviewed for the purpose of providing insights into the subject matter. This section culminates with the presentation of the research questions of this study. Following the research questions, the methods chapter, outlining the design of the study, will be discussed, whilst lastly, the results and discussion chapter will be presented. The results and discussion provides an integration of the data from the current research with past studies of a similar nature as well as an application of Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012). The research culminates in suggested interventions for future under-resourced students.

1.2 Broadening University Access

It is globally accepted that all young people who meet minimum requirements, regardless of

their backgrounds, should be given the opportunity to pursue tertiary education following high school (Chireshe, Shumba, Mudhovozi, & Denhere, 2009). Many developed countries are therefore finding ways to increase participation in and accessibility to university education (See, Gorard & Torgerson, 2012; Thomas, 2002). This is reflected in the fact that during the twentieth century, the percentage of individuals participating in higher education grew from approximately 1% to 20% globally (Testa & Egan, 2014). With increasing pressure to educate people to ensure individuals are equipped to compete in today's competitive labour market (Christie, 2009), governments around the world are prioritising the democratisation of higher education thereby ensuring that historically excluded students are also included and eligible to enter the 'knowledge economy' (Christie, 2009).

In South Africa, where participation levels lag behind the global levels, universities are "compelled by the Higher Education Act (No 101 1997) to broaden access and support equity" (as cited in McKay, 2016, p. 190). As a result of this expansion, many previously excluded students from under-resourced background have now been given the opportunity to access higher education on a large scale (Pillay, 2004). Between 1993 and 2004, there was an increase of 193, 000 in the number of students enrolled in South African universities (Cloete & Moja, 2005). Historically, the typical university body was compromised of students from a similar race, age and socio economic group. Universities presently accept students with diverse backgrounds, including large numbers of students from under-resourced environments (Barac, 2015; Testa & Egan, 2014). There is however a tension that exists between broadening the access students have to university, while simultaneously ensuring student graduation (McKay, 2016). The National Plan for Higher Education emphasizes the importance of being cognisant of the South African context when it comes to addressing the issues associated with retention and graduation rates in South African universities (as cited in Petersen, Louw & Dumont, 2009). Although South African universities have made progress in ensuring there is increased equity regarding access to higher learning institutions, there is still inequality in terms of student graduation rates (Sommer & Dumont, 2011). According to Petersen et al. (2009) drop out rates are highest for first year students and specifically first year students from under-resourced backgrounds. This is because while the university invests effort in ensuring inclusion of under-resourced students, the responsibility of successfully negotiating the transition falls predominantly on the students themselves (Christie, 2009).

1.3 Exploring Students' University Transition

The process of broadening university access in South Africa has proven to be fraught with extreme challenges (McKay, 2016). Under "normal" circumstances, transitioning from high school to university is an adjustment with which many students struggle (Briggs, Clarke & Hall, 2012; Christie, 2009; Human-Vogel & Mahlangu, 2009; Sennett et al., 2003). This is because individuals generally feel less secure in an unknown environment; especially in an unfamiliar environment like university that may be simultaneously overwhelming (Barac, 2015; Bojuwoye, 2002). Additionally, individuals often feel anxious in a new environment that has meaning for them. Meaning in this context refers to the importance attributed to the new environment and the anxiety around failure in that environment (Bojuwoye, 2002). Failure could result in loss of self-esteem and loss of personal status (Christie, 2009). Although this is a pressing issue worldwide, it has been suggested that given the scale of the problem, the field is under-researched (Briggs et al., 2012). Research suggests that globally 50% of university students drop out within the first three years of university and of that, 30% drop out in their first year (Sommer & Dumont, 2011). Alarmingly, South African universities are ranked with the lowest graduation rate in the world, with only 15% of students ultimately graduating (Sonn, 2016). Students struggle to accurately predict what university life will entail, and there is often a mismatch between expectations and reality (Barac, 2015; Briggs et al., 2012).

Universities have many pressing issues to address and often the issue of successful transition is not a priority (Briggs et al., 2012). This is a process that requires students to adapt to an array of new challenges including academic, social and emotional demands (Bojuwoye, 2002; Harley, Winn, Pemberton & Wilcox, 2007). For many, the transition to university changes almost every aspect of their life (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Coming to university is often seen as a pathway towards adulthood, where the student is now expected to establish a more adult-like independent sense of self (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). New entrants to university face the pressure of navigating self-directed learning as opposed to a more didactic approach which is the norm in secondary education (Bojuwoye, 2002). Many students find this transition overwhelming and disorienting until they develop the capacity for independent learning (Harley et al., 2007). In addition, students need to learn how to manage new daily routines, such as late-night studying and less structured days (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Managing new routines is especially difficult for students who reside in the universities dormitories as it often means having to deal with the new responsibility of

domestic demands (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Mackie (2001) suggests that this transition does not only entail successfully negotiating academic demands. Students simultaneously need to formulate a new identity. The experience of identity formation differs for each student depending on each individual's past identity (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). This process involves disengaging from the central identity of a high school student and establishing one as a university student (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). This also involves the renegotiation of existing relationships with friends and family, as well as establishing new networks of support at the university (Mackie, 2001; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer 2000). It is likely that students who fail to do this will seriously consider withdrawing from the university (Christie, 2009). It is argued that students who are able to establish new friendships gain both emotional and instrumental support from these relationships (Mackie, 2001). Part of being independent entails the responsibility of having to make decisions alone. This may include issues around sexual behaviour and use of alcohol and drugs. All of these factors contribute to the sources of stress in the transition process (Bojuwoye, 2002; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). However, many students from an advantaged background have a sense of entitlement regarding university education which creates a sense of emotional security when formulating a new identity (Mackie, 2001). Importantly, advantaged students have access to important resources like financial support and family, which reduce the effect of negative feelings associated with transition (Christie, 2009).

In the South African context specifically, the difficulties of this transition are exacerbated for students who come from under-resourced backgrounds (Pillay, 2004; Sennett et al., 2003). This stems from a structural disadvantage in the schooling system, which creates unequal opportunities for students attending certain schools (Theron, 2016). In South Africa, under-resourced students are generally Black South African students who have grown up in rural or township areas, attending quintile one or quintile two schools (Dass-Brailsford, 2005). Unfortunately, one of the enduring legacies of Apartheid is that race and socio-economic status are still inherently linked (Pillay, 2004; Dass-Brailsford, 2005). The extent of poverty in South Africa's socio-political landscape is undeniably a product of Apartheid's past (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). Bojuwoye (2002) suggests that, "the university should be seen as a micro-society which is experiencing problems generated by the macro-society of apartheid South Africa (p. 286). Students coming from under-resourced socio-economic and

educational backgrounds are more vulnerable to risk in the university transition process (Sennett et al., 2003). Christie (2009) argues that the when looking at under-resourced students' transition, it is important to keep in mind that this is not the traditional student transition. The emphasis needs to be on the individual agency of each student and the complex and contested pathway that presents itself upon encountering this transition (O'Shea, 2014). Therefore research on students' transition in South Africa needs to look beyond the "normative ideal of a young, White middle-class person leaving home to attend university, to more hybrid, multiple, socially constructivist notions of personhood and transition" (Christie, 2009, p. 124).

1.4 Under-Resourced Background

A child's growth and development can potentially be compromised when growing up in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions (Sommer & Dumont, 2011)**.** Poverty limits a child's access to basic necessities including education and is therefore strongly correlated with poorer academic achievement in both school and university (Dass-Brailsford, 2005). As an effect, the percentage of Black South African students, the population most exposed to such conditions, achieving a university entrance is still relatively low (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Sennett et al., 2003). This is particularly the case in the rural schooling education where children are "racially, geographically, and economically marginalized" (Theron, 2016, p. 44). Pillay's (2004) research on the experience of learners in an informal settlement in Lenasia found that growing up in an informal, under-resourced settlement negatively impacted students' entire school experience. Statistics South Africa states that 77% of the country's rural school population is found in the provinces of KwaZulu Natal, The Eastern Cape and Limpopo (as cited in Aldridge, Laugksch, & Fraser, 2006, p. 124). Additionally, 54% of the *total* South African high school students are found in these three provinces (Aldridge et al., 2006). Despite the magnitude of the issue, Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay & Moletsane (2011) point out that research focused on rural education in South Africa is unfortunately significantly limited.

During Apartheid, under the notorious 'Bantu Education' system, specific schools allocated to Black learners were deliberately under-resourced, thereby ensuring inadequate education for Black learners (Bojuwoye, 2002; Probyn, 2009). Today schools are desegregated with attendance no longer being limited to those from exclusive race groups (Aldridge et al., 2006; Pillay, 2004). Although the end of Apartheid in 1994 offered the promise of transformed and

equal education opportunities, over 20 years later, many South African learners still suffer from Apartheid's legacy of unequal opportunity (Barac, 2015; Bojuwoye, 2002; Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Theron, 2016). There is still gross inequality in the provision of resources at many rural and township schools (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Sennett et al., 2003). Rural schools (quintile one and quintile two) often have demoralized and inadequately qualified teachers, classrooms that are both under-resourced and over-crowded, and consequential low exam results (Aldridge et al., 2006; Barac, 2015; Theron, 2016). In many rural schools, teachers are often absent for many months at a time (Barac, 2015). When teachers are present, the majority of classes are taught in the home language that is spoken in each rural area, which creates significant barriers for students as tests and exams are written in English (Dass-Brailsford, 2008; Rapetsoa & Singh, 2012; Sonn, 2016).

Additionally, students have very limited (if any) access to libraries, computers and the internet at school, and no supporting technology at home (Barac, 2015; Dass-Brailsford, 2008; Maree, Fletcher & Sommerville, 2011). Often, students in rural schools do not have basics like water and electricity at home (Pillay, 2004). Therefore, even simple tasks like completing homework are stressful as students often have to spend time collecting wood and water before homework can be attended to (Pillay, 2004). In instances where this is coupled with parents who abuse substances, a particularly disruptive and volatile home environment may be created (Pillay, 2004).

The effect of the inadequate quality of learning in under-resourced schools and the extended under-resourced environment is demonstrated in the Annual National Assessment (ANA) (as cited in Badat & Sayed, 2014). The ANA found that students in quintiles one and two had far lower scores than students in quintile five. Quintile one schools refer to the poorest schools in the country and quintile five constitutes the wealthiest (Strassburg, Meny-Gilbert & Russel, 2010). In grades one to six, the scores from learners in quintile five were 10 to 15% higher than those in the lower two quintiles (Badat & Sayed, 2014). It is evident that there is a strong correlation between students from under-resourced backgrounds and poor achievement in schools (Badat & Sayed, 2014). The few students from under-resourced schools who do make it to university are often less prepared for the intensive demands of university education due to their compromised educational foundation (Theron, 2016). This is demonstrated in research conducted by Uys, Van der Walt, Van den Berg, and Botha (2007) who found that only 12% of grade 11 learners who had applied for university bursaries had the appropriate

literacy level.

Numerous studies have focused on the competencies that generally ensure academic success at a tertiary level. These include reading skills, English language proficiency, high lecture attendance and past experience with advanced academic material (Sommer & Dumont, 2011; Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). In their study, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) found that writing and oral communication are among the most important cognitive skills that a student needs to master in order to succeed. According to Petersen et al. (2009) academic performance is seen as the "single most revealing indicator" of successful student integration (Pertersen et al., 2009, p. 100). It is evident that students coming from under-resourced schools often lack the opportunities to fully develop many of these foundational competencies (Bojuwoye, 2002). As a result, coming from an under-resourced environment without adequate preparation exacerbates the difficulty of the transition.

1.5 Exploring Under-Resourced Students' Transition

Predictably and unfortunately, studies assessing the performance of under-resourced students in university have demonstrated an "unacceptably poor pass and graduation rate" among this group (Badat & Sayed, 2014, p. 143). This is due to the fact that two of the main contributing factors of students' poor performance in universities are a deficient schooling background and inadequate socio-economic conditions (Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). A study reported by Badat and Sayed (2014) presents the success rates of South African university students in 2010. There was a large discrepancy between White and Black students' under-graduate results, with White students achieving an 82% success rate versus 71% for Black students. According to Sommer and Dumont (2011) there is a significant disparity in dropout rates between White students and those from historically disadvantaged groups. The difference in graduation rates is said to be an 'alarming reality' with more than double the number of White students graduating over those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sommer & Dumont, 2011). Furthermore, a study conducted by Maree et al. (2011) found that close to 40% of Black South African first-year students fail during the first year of a natural sciences degree (including mathematics, science, engineering and technology degrees). This was especially true for learners coming from under-resourced backgrounds (Maree et al., 2011). Therefore, as Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015) explain, the throughput rates at South African universities are still reflective of the past inequalities, with White students performing significantly better than Black or Coloured students. Of the students who drop out

of South African universities, 70% are from poverty-stricken families (Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). Shockingly, McKay (2016) suggests that 45% of South African students never graduate.

In studies that focused specifically on South African students from under-resourced backgrounds, it was found that overall both entry to university and completion of university studies were compromised and loaded with challenge (Alexander, 2016; Pillay, 2004). This is attributed to the financial stress that these students face as well as the general adjustment process to academic requirements and university life (Pillay, 2004; Sommer & Dumont, 2011). A student coming from an under-resourced background faces numerous challenges that those from a privileged background do not (Yorke & Thomas, 2003). This is expected as a students' class and economic status are known to be mediators in the transition process (O'Shea, 2014). Challenges include learning difficulties, social adjustment issues, cultural difference, language barriers and poor self-esteem (Barac, 2015; Pillay, 2004). Social and material resources are critical for managing the student's transition (O'Shea, 2014). The resources available to students from middle class backgrounds are mostly unavailable to those from under-resourced backgrounds (Sommer & Dumont, 2011). For example, students are expected to pay tuition fees upon registration. For many students from under-resourced backgrounds, this causes significant stress, as many do not have the funds available to make this payment (Bojuwoye, 2002). From the onset, feelings of insecurity and inadequacy are experienced in the transition, with many feeling anxious about being potentially turned away from the university before even beginning (Bojuwoye, 2002). As already mentioned, whilst the advantaged student enters university with an entitled sense of belonging (Barac, 2015), for students from rural schools, the university world is frequently a foreign, alienating and overwhelming place (Christie, 2009). Many rural students, therefore, do not experience university as a right. Many feel insecure and displaced in the transition process, even though the idea of going to university has often been a long-held dream (Christie, 2009). Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015) suggest that when there is fit between the resources derived from a student's background and the demands encountered at university, the transition process is smoother. As such it is expected that when there is a mismatch, this process will be loaded with challenge.

Students may feel a sense of social displacement, especially when they are the first in their family to attend university, often believing that higher education is not for them (Read,

Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Transitioning to university means that students are expected to adapt their current identity and transform it to one that aligns with other higher education students (Briggs et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). The existing research around identity formation of students from disadvantaged environments is complex (O'Shea, 2014). Often students from under-resourced backgrounds feel as if there is a contradiction between their existing selves and the self they now need to establish (Sennett et al., 2003). A 'learning identity' is generally formed in previous educational environments and entrance to university can either confirm or disrupt this existing identity. This is because "identity is not composed of essential traits but instead represents constructions that are powerful in their ability to exclude some and empower others" (O' Shea, 2014, p. 138). Research suggests that students from under-resourced backgrounds feel a sense of frustration and isolation when they feel that they don't fit in at university (Yorke & Thomas, 2003). In addition, students who are the first in their family to attend university often feel as though their families cannot understand what they are going through, and therefore rely less on them as a source of support (Barac, 2015; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Students' adjustment to university is quicker when they internalize the institutional discourse of the university (Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006; Sennett et al., 2003). Anxiety about not fitting in is often reinforced for students who come from communities (like rural communities) where higher education is not the norm (Barac, 2015; O'Shea, 2014). This can also be understood as a 'culture shock', where students feel as if they don't understand the academic culture and expectations (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). In addition, for many this is the first time that they are expected to mingle with individuals from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bojuwoye, 2002; Sennett et al., 2003). For many students from under-resourced backgrounds there is a feeling of exclusion as they feel distanced from the so-called 'normative' and mainstream accounts of student life (Pillay, 2004; Read et al., 2003). This is because peers "provide a framework against which we measure and judge ourselves" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. 9). Rural students, who are generally the minority in urban universities, generally feel marginalised, which Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) suggest can be a threatening and challenging experience. Students who are unable to establish a positive learner identity are at danger of abandoning their studies (Briggs et al., 2012).

An essential part of identity development is peer interaction as this enhances a sense of self-

belief and belonging (Harley et al., 2006). The process of creating new friendships on campus is often fraught with difficulty as students from under-resourced backgrounds feel marginalised from their mainstream peers (Pillay, 2004; Reay, 2005). This is coupled with the feeling of shame and inferiority, which also creates a barrier in friendship formation (Reay, 2005). Students often feel 'othered' by the privileged students who have access to expensive, useful items like cell phones and laptops (Christie, 2009). Many students from under-resourced backgrounds also feel alienated by more affluent students' dress code (Reay, 2005). As such, feelings of exclusion, inferiority and envy plague the identity formation process of students from rural backgrounds (Christie, 2009). This is problematic as new friendships play a critical role in supporting an individual to adapt to new roles (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Without this support, the transition process for rural students is hindered. In addition, an important element of identity formation is interaction with university staff (Briggs et al., 2012). Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) refer to this as interpersonal competence, which they describe as being an influential factor in ensuring academic success. However, for many rural students this experience is avoided. Students worry that academic staff will think poorly of them due to their poor communication skills and inadequate understanding of academic material (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Apart from the emotional alienation that rural students often experience, there is also the stress of moving from a rural area to a big urban city. For many students, the physical environment of the university is exceptionally overwhelming (Petersen et al., 2009). For rural students' navigating a complex urban campus is highly intimidating (Bojuwoye, 2002).

Research also indicates that many students from rural schools express anxiety regarding the academic demands that they are faced with at university (Barac, 2015; Bojuwoye, 2002). This is intensified by the difficulty in having to understand academic material through English as the medium of instruction. Many rural students are taught in their home language for the majority of their secondary school education (Probyn, 2009). Although African languages are valued as home languages, English is perceived as "the language of upward mobility and access" (Probyn, 2009, p. 126), as it is both the language of the South African and global economy. Therefore inadequate language skill has long lasting implications for students from rural backgrounds.

English, in these circumstances, is a major barrier for students from rural schools (Bojuwoye, 2002). According to Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015), language is seen as "one of

the most important factors that is invoked in discussions of academic failure at universities", (p. 32). This has implications regarding students' confidence in participating in group discussions, asking questions, conversing with academic staff and engaging in other social interactions (Bojuwoye, 2002). If a student does not have sufficient communication skills, they will fail to adequately express ideas and feelings to those around them (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). Without language proficiency, academic success is negatively impacted as this leads to poor writing skills, poor reading skills, inadequate comprehension and ultimately a demoralized sense of self (Kariuki, 2006). Nel, Dreyer and Klopper (2004) found that all 62 participants in their research who had not grown up speaking English as their first language, struggled with reading, writing and understanding English at a university level.

It is important that students are provided with support when choosing which career journey to embark on (Briggs et al., 2012). Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) refer to this as 'clear purpose', which they suggest can help positively drive university education. Clear purpose includes having clarity regarding personal interests and aspirations, as this clarity can create increased energy and optimism about academic study (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Many have suggested that when there is an uninformed decision-making process regarding choice of study, there is a higher chance of withdrawal from university (Briggs et al., 2012). Students from rural schools are often not given any career guidance and choose degrees without adequate information (Barac, 2015; Christie, 2009). This adds to the anxiety prior to transition, as students are aware that they have to take responsibility for their career decision (Christie, 2009). Between one and two-thirds of university students change their career paths during the course of study as they discover what interests them and what does not (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Students from under-resourced backgrounds are not afforded this luxury. The stress of transition for students from under-resourced backgrounds is further exacerbated by the tension held in making the most of the presented opportunity and the impeding risk of failure (Christie, 2009; O'Shea, 2014). In her research, O'Shea (2014) found that under-resourced students expressed failure as their biggest fear at the start of the university year. This fear is two-fold; students were scared of the financial implications of failure as well as the personal repercussions associated with disappointment both from self and significant others (Christie, 2009). O'Shea (2014) suggests that this fear was exacerbated by not having a significant other outside the university who had experienced the system and could offer guidance and reassurance. Students go in to university with the belief that failure

to transition successfully will be their own fault (Petersen et al., 2009). The added pressure of failure and financial stress hampers a student's ability to concentrate effectively (Bojuwoye, 2002). Additionally, the pressure for rural students is compounded by the reality that many of their parents were not given the opportunity to pursue tertiary education, and therefore their families' future lies in their hands (Theron, 2016). It is evident that the transition process for South African students from under-resourced backgrounds is loaded with challenge.

The same may be seen in studies of this nature conducted globally that have assessed under-resourced students. A study conducted in Australia looked at nine students in 3rd and 4th year social work degrees. These were all students who had come to Australia as refugees from various countries including Somalia, Malaysia, Ethiopia and Egypt (Testa & Egan, 2014). Through semi-structured interviews, researchers unpacked how factors such as being afraid to speak because of inadequate English skills made the transition difficult for these students (Testa & Egan, 2014). While this study dealt with an extreme scenario where students did not grow up speaking any English, it is evident that language and literacy are nonetheless significant barriers for South African students from under-resourced schools (McKay, 2016). Additionally, research conducted by Stewart, Wells and Ross (2011) found that African American students who had attended under-resourced schools were ill-prepared to manage the demands of tertiary education. Like students in the South African context, this research found that these students frequently lacked the basic skills needed to succeed in university (Stewart et al., 2011).

Ultimately, a turbulent transition can be problematic as Petersen et al. (2009) suggests the first year of university can serve as a foundation upon which the rest of the student's university experiences will be based. Failure to address these stressors can lead to drop out from the university, depression, low self-esteem, drug abuse and in the extreme case, suicide (Bojuwoye, 2002). Feelings of depression, resentment and failure can derail anyone during a transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). However, there are also students from under-resourced backgrounds who manage to tackle the transition process with a sense of enthusiasm and optimism (Christie, 2009). This aligns with the stress model of Lazarus and Folkman who argue that what one person perceives as stressful may not be challenging for another (Goh, Sawang & Oei, 2010). In other words, this model argues that stress is not completely out of the individual's control. Rather, individuals manage stress in an active process that involves choice using available resources (Goh et al., 2010). While it is usually

expected that variables such as poor socio-economic status and an inadequate educational background will mediate this process in a negative way, this is not always the case (Bojuwoye, 2002). This suggests that understanding the narrative of the transition process is complex, as each student has individual agency in his or her choice-making ability. Ultimately, as O'Shea (2014) suggests, it is important to reflect on under-resourced students transition to university as agents of choice, not hapless and powerless victims. It is important to acknowledge that no two transitions are the same and therefore it is critical to give voice to each individual narrative.

1.6 Schlossberg Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition model provides a framework for analysing any type of transition (Schlossberg, 2011). A transition generally refers to some sort of change in the life course of an individual (O'Shea, 2014). According to Schlossberg, a transition refers to "an event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (Anderson, 2012, p. 39). In the context of the current study the transition event refers to the change to a university environment, which is a transition that is known to often significantly impact an individual's life (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Schlossberg (2004) suggests that her transition model "can be used as a framework for conducting research on any group or person in transition" as well as a "guideline for developing interventions with individuals" (p. 7).

For example, Schlossberg's (2009) model was used in her book titled *Revitalizing Retirement: Reshaping your Identity, Relationships and Purpose*. In this book, Schlossberg (2009) looks at how individuals manage the transition of ageing and how they may engage with the changes of a retried lifestyle in a positive way. As a means to demonstrate the adaptability of this model, Schlossberg (2004) explains how an extensive training program was developed using The Transition Model for staff working with offenders and ex-offenders in prison. The model is often used with staff who are dealing with an offender that is about to be released from prison and re-enter mainstream society (Schlossberg, 2004). The training in this context deals with ensuring that prison staff understand the reality that those who are incarcerated face.

Of particular relevance for the current study is Chickering and Schlossberg's (2002) book that focuses specifically on university students' transition. The book is intended to serve as a guide, offering students different strategies for coping with the transition to university, the

experience throughout university and the transition that follows once students leave the university system (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Schlossberg's (2004) model is advantageous as it provides the conceptual framework necessary to understand the transition experience of an individual by assessing the various resources available to them to manage the transition (Schlossberg, 2004).

Schlossberg (2011) suggests that there are three types of transitions. These include *anticipated transitions,* which are normative, major life events; *unanticipated transitions,* which are unexpected, disruptive events; and *non-event transitions*, which are expected transitions that fail to materialise (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 2011). In this study, transitioning to university is regarded as an anticipated transition as it is a major yet expected life event that individuals may presume to happen at some point in their lives (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 2011). In a study conducted by O'Shea (2014) students who came from under-resourced backgrounds said that the choice to go to university was a 'logical step' as it promised superior career opportunities for the future. The decision represented the next step in their lives (O'Shea, 2014). This was echoed in the research conducted by Christie (2009) who found that students generally believed pursuing a degree offered the promise of upward social mobility. Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) suggest that the transition is hardest for students who are leaving home and moving to a new area to reside in a university dorm, which is often the norm for rural students.

Accordingly, even anticipated transitions involve adaption and strain as various roles, relationships and routines are altered in the process of the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Transitions generally require the individual to re-evaluate past decisions, make changes in existing lifestyle patterns and confront new role expectations (O'Shea, 2014). The nature of transition is that is has the potential to alter the roles, relationships and routines in an individual's life (Schlossberg, 2004). It is not only the transition itself that it is important, but the effect that the transition has in altering other areas of one's life. This is why even desired transitions, like going to university, can be upsetting (Schlossberg, 2011). Chickering and Schlossberg (2004) points out that many students they interviewed were confused about feeling sad during the transition process when they had expected to feel happy. Grief, however, may be an expected response during transition as many grieve leaving one setting behind for another (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Schlossberg (2004) suggests that the bigger the transition, the greater its impact upon an individual's life. While students trust the

opportunity that higher education offers, there is also the fear associated with failure in the higher education system and the related being trapped in 'dead-end jobs' (Christie, 2009).

Schlossberg's transition model is especially applicable in this study as it places the uniqueness of individual experience at its centre (Anderson, 2012). As Schlossberg (2004) explains, "no transition is exactly like another" (Schlossberg, 2004, p.3). People will each cope differently with what appears to be an identical transition (Schlossberg, 2004). Previous transition theories have suggested that all people experiencing transitions do so in a similar way (Swain, 1991). These theories used various stages and phases to demonstrate the general experience of transitioning. It was assumed that each individual experience should neatly fit into the transition model used (Swain, 1991). Schlossberg's theory acknowledges that as each individual differs, so too will his or her experience of the transition differ (Anderson, 2012). In their research, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) mention the accounts of three different students transitioning to university and highlight how each student experienced the transition differently. Schlossberg (2011) suggests that transitions often take time; for some the process is smooth and for others, the process is a longer and more challenging one. Although the theory gives room for the individual's subjective experience, the structure that the theory provides for understanding these transitions is stable (Anderson, 2012). The similarities in all transitions are the potential resources or deficits that an individual brings with him or herself upon encountering a transition (Schlossberg, 2004).

Schlossberg's (2011) transition model is made up of three parts. The first is *Approaching transition*, which refers to the identification of the nature of the transition as well as establishing which perspective would be best to deal with the transition in question. In terms of *approaching transition*, it is important to consider if it was an anticipated transition, an unanticipated transition or a non-event. In the context of this research, as mentioned, the transition from rural school to university is an anticipated transition as it is a somewhat normative event. However, even if a transition is anticipated, it is the individual's appraisal of the transition that is important. Therefore, Schlossberg explains that when dealing with transition, it is important to consider the contextual factors that influence an individual's life such as socioeconomic status and geographical location (Anderson et al., 2012). This context can be extended to the larger political and historical arena that impacts how an individual appraises a transition. Once again, it is impossible to understand the rural student's experience without considering the lingering impact of Apartheid's damaging legacy (Sennett

et al., 2003; Soudien, 2008). Both Bojuwoye (2002) and Mackie (2001) note the university experience cannot be understood in a vacuum, separate from society. In other words, an individual's reaction to a transition is likely to be influenced by his or her contextual background. For students from a resource-depleted background this transition is often loaded with stress and anxiety (O'Shea, 2014). Schlossberg (2011) explains that the greater the impact the transition has in altering the participant's life, the more coping resources it generally requires. It is important to keep this in mind when considering the factors involved for a rural student during the *approaching transition* phase.

The second aspect of the transition model is *Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System*. This part of the model refers to the potential resources an individual uses in order to cope with the transition. These include the person's Situation, Self, Support and Strategies (these will be elaborated upon shortly). Lastly, *Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources* is the third part of the model. This applies to how a person uses the new strategies and strengthens their resources going forward in the wake of new transitions (Anderson et al, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011; Wheeler, 2012).

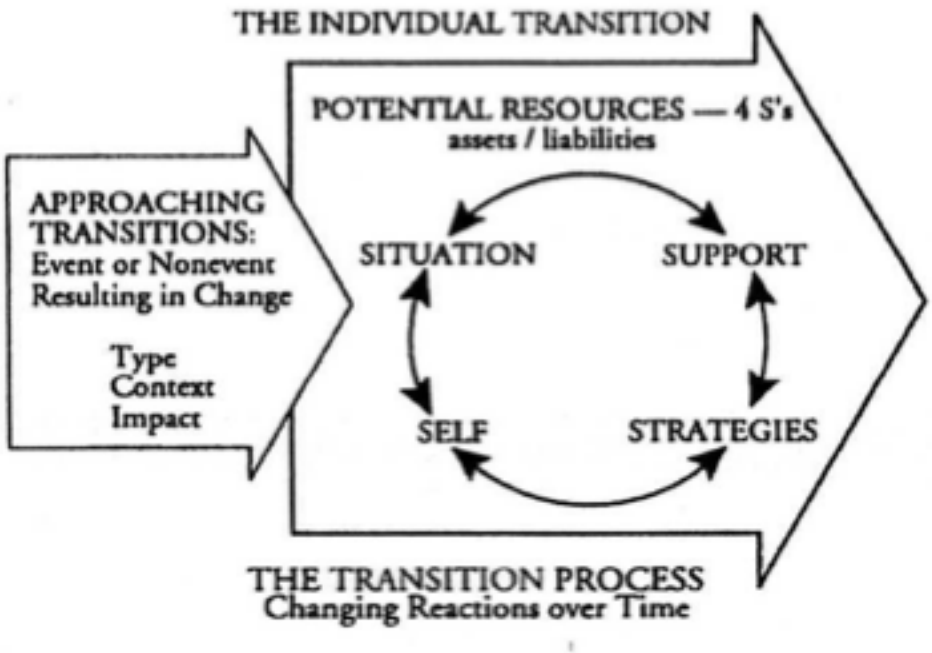


Figure 1: The individual in Transition (From *Counseling Adults in Transition by Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39).*

1.6.1 The 4 S's.

This study focuses specifically on the 4 S System namely *situation, self, support and strategies* as the various resources that an individual uses to cope with a transition. According to Schlossberg (2004), when an individual negotiates a transition, he or she has both resources/assets and liabilities/deficits. During any given transition, there are times when liabilities outweigh assets and vice versa. This explains why different people react in a different way to the same transition, as one person may have more available resources (such as a reliable support system and integrated sense of self) than another (Schlossberg, 2011). In a situation where liabilities outweigh resources, it is expected that the transition will be significantly more difficult. Each of these 4 S's will be explored below. In order to demonstrate the utility of this theory, previous research that utilised Schlossberg's (2011) theory will be interwoven into the description of the 4 S's to follow.

Situation refers to the individual's immediate context when the transition is happening (Schlossberg, 2011). This means considering the time when the transition occurs and looking at whether there are other additional stressors present (Anderson et al., 2012). With this in mind, students who are transitioning to university without additional stressors should have an easier time than students who transition while simultaneously having to cope, for example, with not having funds to buy basic necessities or having a compromised educational background (Bojuwoye, 2002; Dass-Brailsford, 2005). Schlossberg (2004) suggests that an individual's situation during transition will vary depending on a number of factors such as the trigger, the role change, duration, the timing, perceived control and experience with a previous transition.

In every transition there is a *trigger* that sets of the transition process, stimulating the person in transition to look at their lives in a new way. There is also *role change* where transitions often involve tearing away from an old role to embrace something new. Schlossberg (2004) also discusses *duration,* explaining that if an individual has a sense of the time frame of the given transition, it may be more successfully negotiated.

Additionally, there is a *timing* factor, where an individual often questions whether the transition is appropriate for their stage of life (Goodman & Pappas, 2000). A study conducted by Swain (1991) looked at the transition of professional athletes who decided to retire from their sporting career. Ten participants from various sports including horse racing,

football and hockey were included in this study. The process of these athletes choosing to retire happened over time and generally involved acknowledgement of needing an alternative career. The findings suggest that there were both differences and similarities among participants' experience of this transition (Swain, 1991). This study mentions how some of the coping resources from Schlossberg's (2011) model were significant in the athlete's transition process. In terms of *situation,* the exact *timing* of when the athletes decided to retire was important as each athlete wanted to ensure that they withdrew at a time when they felt they had achieved their best and could not achieve beyond that. Research by Goodman and Pappas (2000) that looked at the retirement transition of 60 faculty members at the university of Eastern Michigan found a similar result. Their research demonstrated that the timing of the retirement decision was an important contributing factor to overall satisfaction. Participants needed to be at peace with the timing of their decision (Goodman & Pappas, 2000).

An important element in situation is *control* where an individual assesses the source of the transition; here, the individual evaluates if the initiation of the transition was a deliberate decision or externally imposed. In other words, how much *control* does the individual have over the situation. This is demonstrated in a study conducted by Wheeler (2012) who used Schlossberg's (2011) transition model to assess the transition of army veterans beginning university. It was established that the transition is difficult for veterans as their entry to university is unique and different from regular students. Many have children for whom they are responsible and they have to find ways to financially support themselves. Some also experience the side effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after their military service (Wheeler, 2012). In his research, Wheeler (2012) demonstrated how one of the veterans failed to successfully negotiate his transition to university. According to Wheeler (2012), the primary reason for this was as a result of the individual being forced to leave the army due to injury. Unlike the other veterans whose service ended with a sense of *control* over the decision, this individual felt like due to his injuries, he had no agency in the decision that was imposed on him (Wheeler, 2012). As such, his transition to university was already disrupted based on his *situation* at the time of transition.

The last factor of *situation* is *previous experience with a similar transition* (Anderson et al., 2012). According to this, individuals who have successfully negotiated a similar type of transition in the past will have a higher chance of managing the current transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Self **r**efers to the individual's personal attributes and ability to cope with the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). This includes a person's optimism, resilience and ability to navigate ambiguity (Schlossberg, 2011). The *'self'* variable takes into account the idiosyncrasies of each person thereby acknowledging that each individual will handle transitions differently (Isa & Rasdi, 2015). In particular, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) note that individuals with high *self-confidence* have a better chance of successfully negotiating transition as there is a strong sense of personal competence. Self-confidence is established based on past successes or failures (Chickering and Schlossberg, 2002). A person whose sense of *self* is associated with continuous failure, will generally struggle with the transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Schlossberg (2011) suggests that there are certain characteristics of *self* that are relevant when an individual deals with a transition. Among these are an individual's personal and demographic characteristics. Schlossberg's (2004) transition model is one that adopts an integrated approach; emphasis is placed on both the societal and individual perspectives. Mackie (2001) suggests that transition studies in the past have been criticised for adopting an oversimplified approach, as opposed to a more integrated multi-level approach. With this in mind, the socioeconomic status of the individual, their gender, ethnicity and age will *all* directly impact the way that they negotiate different situations in life.

Additionally, Schlossberg identifies *psychological resources* as another important characteristic of *self* (Anderson et al., 2012). This refers to the personality characteristics that individuals rely on in order to manage threatening situations. Psychological resources include self-efficacy, resilience, optimism and ascribing to a religious/spiritual value system (Anderson et al., 2012). Dyson and Renk (2006) discuss that individual personality traits such as motivation and resilience as well as an integrated belief system are important resources of which students in transition make use.

An important *psychological resource* is *self-efficacy* which refers to the degree to which an individual believes in his or her own ability (Bandura, 1986). Constructs of the self such as self-efficacy and motivation are important factors to consider for students in transition as they are often associated with academic performance (Human-Vogel & Mahlangu, 2009). According to Alexander (2016), self-efficacy is one of the most under-researched variables

with regards to understanding its impact in the context of students' transition to university. Alexander (2016) notes that there are often barriers that hamper an individual's development of self-efficacy, such as the feeling of inadequate control over one's ability. In the South African context, poverty could potentially affect self-efficacy as students do not have access to the material resources afforded to more privileged students and therefore "these deficiencies can lead to ineffective meaning making of experiences relating to self, their self development and perceptions of their self efficacy" (Alexander, 2016, p. 71)

In reference to Swain's (1991) research, the resource of *self* was relevant, as athletes needed to be autonomous in order to take a stance and make the decision to leave sport and transition to a different stage of their lives. Athletes who did not have an autonomous sense of self may have not taken that initiative. Additionally, in the research conducted by Wheeler (2012), it was established that veterans who were optimistic and light hearted managed the transition better than those who were hindered by anger. Research conducted by Koerin, Harrigan and Reeves (1990) utilised Schlossberg's (2011) model to assess the transition of graduate social work students transitioning to their careers. Their research demonstrated that students who were low on psychological resources were often overwhelmed by the thought of entering full-time employment, and managed the transition poorly (Koerin et al., 1990). These students would find ways to avoid the culmination of the transition, by extending their job search or taking on additional modules (Koerin et al., 1990). In this example, it is evident that the *self* depleted of resources can act as a liability, creating hurdles in the transition.

Support- Schlossberg (2011) suggests that the support an individual has access to at the time of transition is crucial to their wellbeing. This variable considers the type of help that is available for the person experiencing a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). According to Tao et al. (2000) perceived support has been demonstrated to have a positive association with greater life satisfaction as well as lower levels of anxiety and loneliness. There are different sources of support that an individual can rely on during transition (Schlossberg, 2004). These typically include intimate relationships, family support, friends and communities (Schlossberg, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). Goodman and Pappas (2000) found that retiring faculty members made use of all of the above sources of support in their transition to retirement. In the context of student research, Tao et al. (2000) contrasted social support networks of university students in China and North America and they found that both groups of students relied heavily on family and peer support which is indicative of "robustness across cultures"

(p. 141).

Support networks serve two functions for an individual in transition. Firstly, with support, an individual can mobilise their internal psychological resources. Secondly, support systems often act as a resource in terms of providing money, skill and guidance to the person in transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The function of support is to offer the individual *affect*, *affirmation* or *aid*. *Affect* refers to expressions of validation, love or respect for the person in transition. *Affirmation* refers to the degree of agreement with an individual's action. Lastly, *aid* refers specifically to the exchange of matter such as money or time (Anderson et al., 2012).

The majority of the research that has looked at student transition emphasises the importance of family support in cushioning the challenges of transition (Dass-Brailsford, 2008; Harley et al., 2007; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Additionally, Mackie (2001) and Tao et al. (2000) note that social support from peers is equally important during transitions as it is emotionally sustaining and can often buffer the stressful experiences associated with a transition. Lastly, the role of university staff is a third contributor to the student's support systems (Sennett et al., 2003; Tao et al., 2001).

In the veteran research, Wheeler (2012) suggests that support was crucial for the veteran in transition. Unfortunately many of the veterans in that research did not benefit from their support networks fully as they felt family and friends did not share their military experience and would struggle to understand their perspective. Similarly, one would expect that under-resourced students have limited support systems. For example, Schlossberg (2004) notes individuals who have parental support often manage transitions with more ease than those who do not.

One of the cruel policies of Apartheid was the migrant labour system, which is sadly still in place in many South African rural areas (Madhavan, Townsend and Garey, 2008). Still today men often have to leave their hometowns and seek work in urban cities (Madhavan et al., 2008). This is due to the limited opportunities to earn a living in most rural areas (Madhavan et al., 2008). According to Morrell et al., (2012), 40% of rural South African households are female headed. While students in transition can sometimes rely on their fathers for financial support, they often lack emotional support from both parents. Further, the physical distance created by moving from rural to urban often means that rural students have limited access to their support structures at home (Bojuwoye, 2002).

Strategies – This refers to specific coping strategies that a person uses to cope with the changes that come with a transition. Coping is commonly understood as the cognitive or behavioural attempt to actively change threatening circumstances or events (Dyson & Renk, 2006). Schlossberg (2011) suggests that there is no "single magical coping strategy" (p.161); rather, the people who successfully cope with transitions are those who flexibly use an array of strategies (Kendall & Muenchberger, 2009; Schlossberg, 2004). Each individual, with unique characteristics will choose a strategy that works best for them (Dyson & Renk, 2006).

According to Pearlin and Schooler (1978), coping strategies can be grouped into three types (as cited in Anderson et al., 2012). The first refers to *responses where an individual tries to modify the situation*. According to this, the person in transition attempts to alter the source of strain. This could include negotiation in a relationship, self-reliance or actively seeking out advice (Anderson et al., 2012). Wheeler (2012) notes that one of the veterans who successfully negotiated the transition to university was both self-reliant and able to ask professors for help when he needed. This significantly enhanced his transition. The second coping strategy type involve *responses that attempt to control the meaning of the problem, or to neutralise the threat on a cognitive level* (Anderson et al., 2012). Strategies include choosing to ignore certain factors, positive comparisons or substitution of reward (i.e. I will endure an uncomfortable present in favour of what it will bring in the future). The last coping type is *responses that deal with the stress once it has occurred* (Anderson et al., 2012). This refers to finding ways to manage the stress to avoid being overwhelmed by it. This can include withdrawal, avoidance, denial or distracting relaxation techniques. Dyson and Renk (2006) point out that avoidant types coping strategies are often associated with negative outcomes.

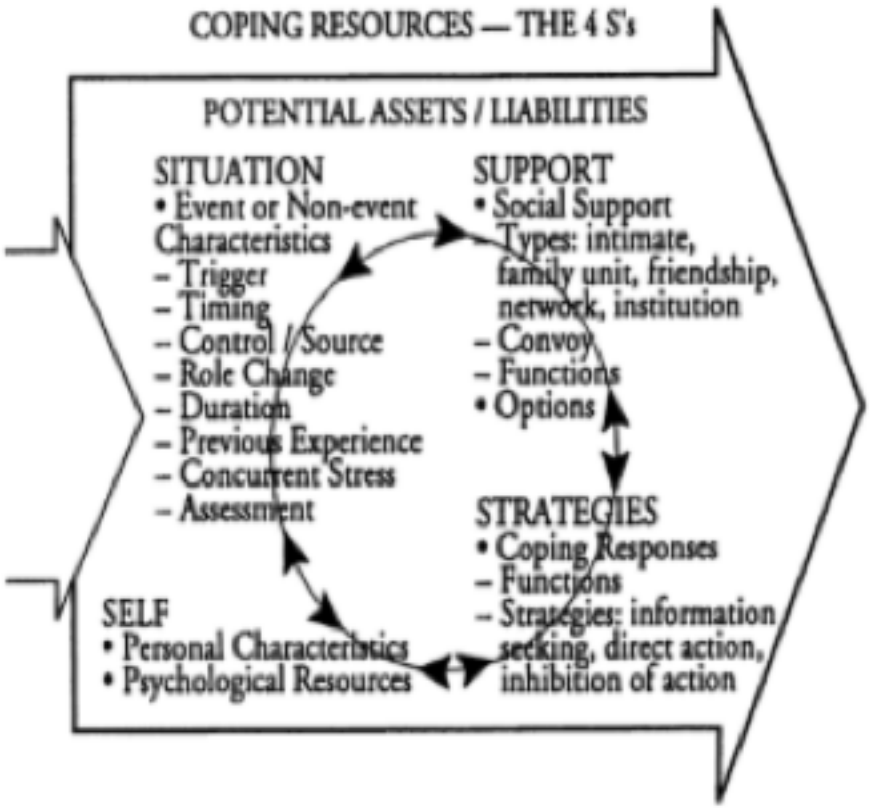


Figure 2: Coping Resources - the 4 S's. (From Counseling Adults in Transition by Schlossberg et al., 2012, p. 62).

A student drawing on the resources discussed above would ask themselves the following questions: "Is my *situation* currently good at the time that I am transitioning?"; "Am I bringing a resilient *self* to the transition?"; "Do I have a resourceful *support* structure that I can count on?"; and "Do I have a strong and diverse repertoire of coping *strategies* available?" Schlossberg (2004) suggests that if all the 4 S's are evaluated positively, a transition is generally successfully negotiated; however, if an individual enters transition with an already problematic evaluation of their *situation*, minimal *support* and an insecure sense of *self,* it is expected that the difficulty of the transition will be exacerbated by these liabilities (Schlossberg, 2004).

1.7 Additional Psychosocial Factors of Transition

Alexander (2016) notes that a large proportion of research that has looked at under resourced students' transition has focused exclusively on the impact of the socioeconomic variables without any consideration of psychological dimensions. In their research, Sennett et al., (2003) found that White students scored higher on personal-emotional adjustments in comparison to Black African students. This is indicative of a difference in psychological wellbeing of the students. It is therefore important to consider multiple factors when looking at a transition.

A model proposed by Petersen et al. (2009) identified numerous psychosocial factors associated with university adjustment and performance in a sample of South African students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. These factors include: motivation, self-esteem, perceived stress, academic overload, and help seeking. These psychosocial factors are similar to the resources/liabilities in Schlossberg's (2011) transition model. Petersen's psychosocial model, therefore, adds additional support to the notion that access to particular resources can enhance the transition process. Petersen et al. (2009) suggest that the effect of these psychosocial factors on a student's academic performance is mediated by the way that they adjust to university. In other words, the transition (adjustment) process can mediate the overall university experience. The psychosocial factors are considered below.

Motivation, is defined as an individual's internal state that encourages engagement in various activities (Brown & Peterson, 1994). Motivation has been demonstrated as being critical for academic success (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). According to Petersen et al. (2009) there are three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation (self initiated), extrinsic motivation (externally regulated) and amotivation (lack of motivation). Petersen et al. (2009) found that students with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation adjusted to university. Similarly, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) suggest that with strong motivation, students will feel encouraged to accomplish what they had initially set out to do. Interestingly, while intrinsic motivation enhanced academic performance, extrinsic motivation did not (Petersen et al., 2009). In terms of Schlossberg's model (2011), motivation relates to an individual's perception of *self*.

Self-esteem (which would again relate to the *self* resource) is loosely defined as the positive or negative evaluation of self (Harris, Donnellan, & Trzesniewski, 2017). In their study, Petersen et al. (2009) found that positive self-esteem was a predictor for successful adjustment to university however, it did not predict academic performance.

In terms of *perceived stress*, Petersen et al. (2009) found that high levels of stress were associated with negative adjustment to university as students experiencing high stress often found it difficult to manage academic, social and personal demands. As mentioned, Schlossberg (2011) discusses the issue of concurrent stressors under *situation.* Like Petersen et al. (2009), Schlossberg (2004) notes that an excess of concurrent stressors hinder the transition process.

Similarly, *academic overload* had negative impact on both the students' adjustment and performance ability (Petersen et al*.,* 2009). Research suggests that inability to manage academic workload is one of the highest causes of stress for students during the transition from secondary to tertiary education (Harley et al., 2007). This is especially significant for students from an under-resourced background (Sommer & Dumont, 2011). This too would align with Schlossberg's (2009) notion of concurrent stressors.

The process of engaging in *help seeking* from peers or academic staff has shown to positively impact a student's adjustment to university as well as their academic performance (Sennett et al., 2003). While this was not the finding in the research conducted by Petersen et al. (2009), this was attributed to methodological issues. When this model was re-tested in a study conducted by Sommer and Dumont (2011), however, it was found that the more that students were willing to seek help (from academic staff specifically), the better their adjustment to university. Similarly, Schlossberg (2009) discusses the importance of having a reliable network of *support* during transition.

Ultimately, Petersen et al. (2009) found that academic performance was significantly predicted by adjustment. This speaks to the importance of transition in ensuring successful student retention at university. Based on the studies by both Petersen et al. (2009) and Sommer and Dumont (2011), it was established that students who feel like they belong at the university and who manage to adjust well to the emotional and academic demands of university will generally achieve higher grades and ultimately graduate. In contrast, students who feel overwhelmed and paralysed by the academic workload generally perform poorly and achieve lower grades (Petersen et al., 2009; Sommer & Dumont, 2011). Through the perspective of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory, this research will assess the influence of psychosocial factors on students' transition process. Importantly, as Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) note, the way that a student manages his or her transition to university will have significant implications for their potential university success.

1.8 Conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated how an already difficult transition from school to university is compounded for a large group of South African students who have to contend with an under-resourced school education. These students have to manage the challenges of the transition from a highly disadvantaged position. Many students struggle with this transition leading to unacceptably high dropout and failure rates. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory may prove very useful in understanding this difficult transition. The sheer scale of the problem in the South African context, renders this study critical.

1.9 Research Questions

The central research questions are:

- What are the experiences of transitioning from under-resourced school to university?
- What strategies and resources do students deploy to manage the transition?

The sub research questions are:

- How do students perceive that their *situation* influences their transition?
- How do students perceive that their characteristics of the *self* impacted their transition?
- How do students perceive that their *support* structures influence their transition?
- What are the *strategies* that students describe making use of to negotiate their transition?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This research used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a broad term which describes a research process that explores participant's personal experiences in a specific context (Fossey, Harvery, McDermott & Davidson, 2002; Maree, 2007). A qualitative methodology was appropriate as this research aimed to explore the individual experience of students from under-resourced backgrounds and their unique transition to university. Therefore, Schlossberg's (2004) transition theory which acknowledges "no transition is exactly like another" (Schlossberg, 2004, p.3) was specifically used as the lens through which to explore the individual transition experience. Schlossberg's theory has previously been noted as being useful for examining the individual's personal and social perspective of transition (Isa &

Rasdi, 2015). Unlike quantitative research, which often assumes an objective reality independent of participants, qualitative research aims to explore and illuminate the individual reality from each participant's perspective (Fossey et al., 2002; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Qualitative research collects a substantial amount of information on each participant's experiences in order to enrich and deepen understanding of a topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). For the reasons stated above, this research used a qualitative method.

2.2 Sample and Sampling

For this study, a non-probability purposive, sampling technique was used. Purposive sampling is a common technique in qualitative research as it allows for the "identification of appropriate participants, being those who can best inform the study" (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 726). Purposive sampling was combined with snowball sampling, which is the process where participants are accumulated through the suggestion of other participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Snowball sampling was necessary as it was difficult to locate participants from a rural background in an urban university. In summary, the researcher pursued first, second, third and fourth year students from multiple faculties at The University of the Witwatersrand who had come from under-resourced backgrounds. While the intention was to initially only include second year psychology students, there was an insufficient number of potential participants, as the university is made up predominantly of students from urban schools. The sample group was accordingly expanded. 'Under-resourced' in this context refers specifically to students who were educated at rural, quintile one or quintile two schools. As qualitative research does not aim to cover quantity in terms of sample, but quality and depth (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), this research included nine participants, all of whom attended rural schools. The choice to include students from quintile one and quintile two schools only was to enhance the transferability potential of the current research. The sample comprised of seven female students and two male students. The age of participants' ranged between 20 - 23, with a mean age of 21.1 years. Participants grew up and attended schools in various rural areas around South Africa. Five participants grew up in rural KwaZulu-Natal, whilst the others came from Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, a rural village outside of the Western Cape and the Northwest province. As mentioned, participants were from a range of faculties in the university. Two were psychology students, three were nursing students, two were social work students, one was an engineering student and the other an LLB student. One participant was in first year (however he was repeating first year, so it was technically his

second year in university), three students were in second year, three were in third year and one was in his fourth year of study. Details of the sample are provided in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1
Biographical information of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Degree	Year	Region
1	22	Female	Social Work	3rd Year	Greytown, KZN
2	21	Male	Engineering	1st Year	Kwalubisi, KZN
3	20	Female	Social Work	3rd Year	Nguthu, KZN
4	23	Male	LLB	4th Year	North West Province
5	21	Female	Nursing	2nd Year	Khombasa, KZN
6	22	Female	Nursing	3rd Year	Malibu Village, Cape Town
7	20	Female	Psychology	2nd Year	Moshate, Limpopo
8	21	Female	Psychology	2nd Year	Queenstown, Eastern Cape
9	20	Female	Nursing	2nd Year	Kwanongoma, KZN

2.3 Instruments

This research was done by conducting semi structured, face-to-face interviews. Semi structured interviews allow the researcher to follow a set of questions yet there is room for probing and clarification of answers to obtain more information where necessary (Barriball & While, 1994). Semi structured interviews were appropriate in this study as this allowed for the "exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues" (Barriball & White, 1994, p. 330). Interviews are a useful instrument, as they grant researchers first hand access to a participant's experience (Fossey et al., 2002). The interview schedule was developed based on thorough analysis of the literature and with the intent of thoroughly exploring each participant's transition experience. As this research is based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2004), many of the interview questions were informed by "The Transition Guide", a self-scoring instrument developed by

Schlossberg (2004) to identify individuals' resources and coping ability during transition. Examples from the guide regarding *situation* include "looking ahead, I see my situation as – totally out of my personal control; totally within personal control" (Schlossberg, 2004, p. 7). Regarding *self*, a question in the guide states "I usually face life as – A pessimist; An optimist" (Schlossberg, 2004, p. 7). The researcher asked all questions orally and responses were recorded. The duration of the interview generally lasted an hour. The intention was to interview until the point of data saturation, where no new information emerged (Fossey et al., 2002). With the aid of recordings, the researcher ensured that there was exact replication of the interview content in the analysis (Barriball & While, 1994), thereby ensuring that each participant's voice was accurately portrayed (Fossey at al., 2002). As this research was a qualitative study, the researcher was a key instrument. Therefore the process of reflexivity was kept in mind, where the researcher acknowledged her personal role in the research process and the potential biases involved. Ultimately, this study was predominantly informed by the data collected rather than preconceived, biased ideas of the researcher (Fossey at al., 2002). To ensure reflexivity, a research journal was kept throughout.

2.4 Procedure

Once ethical clearance was received, the researcher gave a letter of consent to the course coordinator of the second year psychology students requesting permission to go into lectures and introduce the project to students (Appendix B). With permission, the research was presented, requesting students from quintile one or quintile two rural schools to participate. The researcher left participant information sheets (Appendix C) behind with contact details for interested participants. It became apparent that the choice to only include second year psychology students as potential participants for the research was too limiting as the sample has specific requirements that are not commonly found in urban university settings. Therefore, with ethical permission, the sample was extended to include first, second, third and fourth year students across all faculties at the university of the Witwatersrand. Accordingly a letter of consent was given to each of the corresponding course coordinators requesting permission to approach participants (Appendix B). Even with this extension, the process of finding participants was a challenging one. Once participants contacted the researcher, a time was arranged to meet on campus. At the meeting, each participant was given three consent forms and asked to read over and sign each one (Appendix F, Appendix G & Appendix H). The researcher then proceeded to explain how the research will work in terms of confidentiality and reiterated that participants were able to stop the interview at any

point and withdraw from the research, up until final write up of the research report. Each interview was recorded for the entire duration. Once the interview had finished, participants were provided with contact information for CCDU, and SADAG's free telephonic counselling line, should they need further counselling. Participants were also provided with details for following up with the research upon its completion. At this point, the data analysis process began. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher then began looking for themes using Thematic Content Analysis based on the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). This led to the final stage of the research where the themes found from the interviews were integrated into a discussion at the end. Upon completion of the report, this research will be submitted to the faculty.

2.5 Data Analysis

This research was analysed with Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). TCA is an appropriate analytic tool to explore the individual experience of transition as it "can potentially provide rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 5). TCA, which has been described as a foundational method in qualitative analysis, aims to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The intention of TCA is to go beyond just organising and describing data. A researcher should aim to ultimately interpret the meaning within the data. TCA is especially relevant for this study as it a method which reports the reality of each participant's experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ultimately, thematic analysis is a systematic process of exploring data in order to find recurring themes (Burnard, 1991).

Braun and Clarke (2006) have suggested that this analysis should occur in six phases. *Phase One: Familiarising yourself with the data.* At the start of this analysis process, researchers are required to fully immerse themselves in their data, familiarising themselves with the content. This immersion requires repeated reading which needs to be done in an active way, where the researcher constantly searches for meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An important way that one immerses in the data is by transcribing interviews into written verbatim form. Burnard (1991) suggests that immersion is "an attempt to become more fully aware of the 'life world' of the respondent" (p. 462).

Phase Two: Generating initial codes. Once the researcher is familiar with the data, they move on to produce initial codes from the data. A code is where the researcher labels a

section of the data, organising it into meaningful groups (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Through the use of codes, researchers are able to think about the data in a new and different way (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). A researcher needs to identify information that will help answer the research question and organise this data using codes. There should be no limit of the amount of codes generated here (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase three: Searching for themes. Once all the data has been coded and these codes are clearly listed, the researcher begins to sort codes into potential themes. Themes are created with the purpose of linking codes and underlying meanings together into different overarching themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest using visual representations during this phase to make the sorting process simpler. This can include the use of mind-maps or tables.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes. At this point, themes generated during the previous phase are now refined. The researcher may decide to dissolve certain themes, separate some and combine others. It needs to evident that data within all the themes is consistent however there also needs to noticeable difference between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase five: Defining and naming themes. This phase involves both refining and defining themes. This means having a clear understanding of what each theme is and then assessing which parts of the data are represented in each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher needs to write an analysis for each identified theme. Refining the themes also entails establishing sub themes, which helps simplify large, complex themes. During the end of this phase it is suggested that the researcher thinks of appropriate descriptors will be given to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase Six: Producing the Report. At this point, the researcher conducts the final analysis and write-up of the report. It is essential that the write up be done in a convincing way, clearly demarcating the final established themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers need to demonstrate how all the examples selected from the data fit convincingly in each theme (Burnard, 1991). One has made a mistake if the final report is just a description of the data. Rather, researchers need to ensure that the final report presents a clear argument, which answers the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.6 Ethical considerations

Whenever there is interaction with people for research purposes, ethical issues need to be considered (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). As this research involved the analysis of individuals' experiences, very careful ethical consideration was taken into account. In order to ensure this, the present research fulfilled several criteria. Regarding informed consent, it was the researchers responsibility to provide participants with all information pertaining to the study (Stangor, 2014). To achieve this each participant was given a participant information sheet (Appendix C) that provided an explanation of the research and what participation entailed. All this information was relayed prior to each interview.

With regards to informed consent, there were three consent forms (Appendix F, Appendix G & Appendix H), which each participant was asked to sign. The first was consent to be interviewed (Appendix F), the second, consent to be audio recorded (Appendix G) and the third, consent to use direct quotation in the analysis (Appendix H). Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and in no way coerced. Additionally, before the interview commenced, each participant was told that they have the right to refuse to answer any questions that evoked discomfort. The researcher made sure to communicate that withdrawal from the research was permitted up until the final write up, without any negative consequences.

Although face-to-face interviews meant anonymity could not be offered, all information will remain totally confidential. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms as well as by not reporting any direct information that could identify participants. All information was stored in a password locked computer, and audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research. Only the researcher and her supervisor had access to the raw data. Lastly, the researcher took responsibility to evaluate the potential harm that the research could cause**.** It is possible that certain interview questions may have elicited memories of traumatic nature and caused the participant distress. Therefore upon completion of the interview, the researcher provided contact details for CCDU and SADAG where participants could receive further counselling. Participants were also notified that feedback would be made available upon request

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

The literature review highlighted the challenges that students from under-resourced schools face during the transition from school to university. As mentioned, this issue is particularly problematic in the South African context where a disproportionate number of students are from under-resourced backgrounds. Based on the interviews conducted, the researcher is of the opinion that exploring and understanding the unique experience of under-resourced students' transition is vital in addressing this issue. In the section that follows, the results extracted from the data are analysed in the context of previous literature and Schlossberg's (2011) transition model. In general, the data and the literature shared few discrepancies, however there were noteworthy exceptions which will be highlighted. This discussion will be guided by themes which are outlined in the tables below.

Table 2:

Theme 1 – An Under-Resourced Environment

3.2 An Under-Resourced Environment	3.2.1 What is Rural
	3.2.2 Resource Deficit
	3.2.3 Problematic Teachers
	3.2.4 English as a Teaching Medium
	3.2.5 Rural perception of Education
	3.2.6 Failure rates in rural schools

Table 3:

Theme 2 --- Situational Resources

3.3 Situational Resources	3.3.1 School Provisions
	3.3.2 Teachers Who Care
	3.3.3 High Achievers

Table 4:

Theme 3 --- Situation

3.4 Situation	3.4.1 Assessment	3.4.1.2 Initial feelings away for home
	3.4.2 Concurrent Stress	3.4.2.1 University Skill
		3.4.2.2 English barrier at university
		3.4.2.3 Finances for student expenses
		3.4.2.4 Culture shock
		3.4.2.5 Physical environment
	3.4.3 Control	3.4.3.1 Lack of career guidance
	3.4.4 Role Change	3.4.4.1 Sharing a space

Table 5:

Theme 4 --- Self

3.5 Self	3.5.1 Psychological Resource	3.5.1.1 Emotions prior to university
		3.5.1.2 Optimist
		3.5.1.3 Feeling inferior
		3.5.1.4 Engaging in lectures
		3.5.1.5 Feeling in control
		3.5.1.6 Religion

Table 6:

Theme 5 --- Support

3.6 Support	3.6.1 Family Support
	3.6.2 Friends From Home
	3.6.3 Lecturer Support
	3.6.4 Friends at Wits
	3.6.5 Family Pressure

Table 7:

Theme 6 --- Strategies

3.7 Strategies	3.7.1 Responses That Modify the Situation	3.7.1.1 Self reliance
		3.7.1.2 Optimistic action
		3.7.1.3 Advice seeking
	3.7.2 Response That Control the Meaning of the Problem	3.7.2.1 Positive comparisons
		3.7.2.2 Substitution of rewards
	3.7.3 Responses that Help Individual Manage Stress After it has Occurred	3.7.3.1 Emotional discharge
		3.7.3.2 Withdrawal
		3.7.3.3 Avoidance of worry

In order to ensure the confidentiality of participants' identities, names have been removed throughout the discussion and replaced with referencing in the format "P1", where "P" denotes participant and the number represents each participant. Additionally, as noted, Schlossberg (2004) emphasises that no two transitions are alike given that each individual has his or her own unique experience. While all of these participants grew up in rural areas, each participant's experience differed as a result of growing up in different rural areas around South Africa, each with its unique cultures and values. Subsequently, as is expected, the data in the discussion to follow is at times complementary and at other times, it is contradictory. This emphasises the importance of exploring each participant's individual narrative.

3.2. An Under-Resourced Environment

3.2.1 What is rural.

Schlossberg's transition theory emphasises the importance of understanding an individual's context *before* and *during* the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012). It is expected that context will significantly impact the way a transition is managed. More specifically, it is self-evident that access to fewer resources will significantly impair a student's ability to perform (Strassburg et al., 2010; Theron, 2016). Accordingly, this discussion will initially consider

the external circumstances and the context of students' being raised and educated in rural schools and explore how this can and usually does impact upon their transition to university.

> *We don't have services like water, roads and we still have to travel a long journey to school. Electricity, we just got it from last year. Women still have to travel a long journey to fetch water from the river; there is no clinics, there is no… primary school nearby. That is why I'm thinking it is a rural area – P1.*

> *That side there are places that still don't have houses, there are places that don't have electricity – P4.*

The literature describing the destitute state of rural South African areas was reflected in many of the participants' accounts of home. As Pillay (2004) points out, these areas are significantly under-resourced, with an absence of even the most basic necessities. Therefore an individual from a rural background is commonly faced with a structural disadvantage (Theron, 2016). This refers to systematic life barriers that often lead to negative outcomes, over which an individual has limited control (Theron, 2016). Given the devastating effects of Apartheid over an extended period, it is not surprising that there is an alarming deficit of resources at rural schools (Badat & Sayed, 2014). This is manifest in the poor state of the buildings structure and classrooms and the inadequacy of the teachers and their teaching material, which will be discussed in the section to follow.

3.2.2. Resource deficit.

According to Nel, Trotskie-de Bruin and Bitzer (2009) the socioeconomic status of a school will significantly impact how a student transitions to university. Specifically, the access that students have to both physical (namely textbooks and libraries) and human (namely educators and counsellors) resources will impact the learning outcome of students (Strassburg et al., 2010). Sadly, 24 years into democracy, the overall infrastructure of rural schools is deficient in multiple ways (Maree, 2015). The fact that school buildings are run down, there are no plumbing facilities and students are expected to share a desk and textbooks in an already crowded classrooms are all factors that detract from potential student success (Strassburg et al., 2010).

> *My school was just … it had a vey poor standard if I had to say* – P2.

It is important to consider how each of the areas of scarce resources impacted the participants' ability to actualise their potential as school students (and then later as university students). All nine participants described the unpleasant experience of having to use pit toilets, which P1 described as "the one for the hole in the ground". When asked about the toilets, P2 responded:

> *Yoh! For me to use the toilet I had to go home because they were not in very good condition.*

> *It was a village so a lot of like, for you to have plumbing, you have to be like rich –P7.*

According to Makana (2017), a five-year-old pupil named Michael Komape drowned in a pit toilet at his school in Polokwane. Research conducted by Strassburg et al. (2010) indicates that students in rural areas are often absent from school due to sanitation related illness such as diarrhoea and cholera.

The physical environment of the school was also often described as being sub par.

> *You find that some windows, three windows are maybe broken in the class – P4.*

> *Some of the doors were not closing so during the winter it was so difficult… you are not able to focus because you are feeling cold – P5*.

According to Aldridge et al. (2006) this is common for schools in rural areas, where classrooms are often in poor condition. The heat was also problematic as P8 explained:

> *The problem was summer actually because there's like a lot of people inside so it gets very stuffy and hot….you would get tired like you were just not motivated.*

The schools were also often described as being in an unkempt, dirty condition:

> *There is no one who is picking up papers because everyone is writing so during this course it will be dirty -P2.*

"Sometimes we had to bring old cloths for us to mop"- P1.

It is important to note that there were some participants who mentioned that the school building *was* in an acceptable condition, however there were still noticeable resource shortages, as P3 pointed out:

Ja, the building was okay just the resources like libraries, desks, computers…"

Five of the participants mentioned that their schools had no libraries, labs or computers. According to Probyn (2009), 83% of rural schools in South African do not have access to libraries.

Like most of things that were taught it was all theoretical, even the practical things that we had to do, we just kind of like understood only instead. Like we didn't have a lab, we didn't have like libraries. So ja, we just inferred from like what's like normal – P7.

Students expressed how they were expected to often share desks and textbooks. This is common for rural schools which are often simultaneously over-crowded and under-resourced (Pillay, 2004), as P7 noted, "grade 11 there like 70 of us". In her research, Maree (2015) found that one classroom in rural schools often had up to 130 students crammed inside. When classrooms are over-crowded it is problematic as it detracts from the amount of attention that a teacher can pay to each child (Strassburg et al., 2010). Six out of nine participants mentioned that they had to share desks throughout their schooling career.

So you sit four people, two people in a chair sometimes the whole day. You can't concentrate because like me, I'm big, I can't sit with someone else. So the whole time I would be falling…. my brain, I cant concentrate on the teacher because I'm busy thinking, Eish I'm going to fall".

Sharing of textbooks was equally problematic in its impact on students' ability to achieve success. Section 29(1) of the Constitution states: "the right to textbooks is part of the broader right to basic education" (p. 266 as cited in Veriava, Thom & Hodgson, 2017). Therefore, the executive council in each province is responsible to ensure that students in government

schools receive this basic teaching material. The purpose of textbooks is to supplement that which has been learnt in class, and without them, students are compromised (Veriava et al., 2017). Textbooks are especially important when they are needed to supplement the insufficient knowledge of teachers in the classroom or to compensate for inadequate teaching facilities, which is why it is required that each student be able to take a textbook home (Bhuto, 2015).

> *I remember when I was doing grade 11, it was really not easy because you see in rural areas, houses are not close to each other. So your neighbour will be really far and you have to go there to do your homework because you are sharing a book* – P1.

In their research, Strassburg et al., (2010) found that students expressed the same frustration about often having to share textbooks with peers who lived a significant distance away, as the ability to do homework and study is disrupted.

> *No you share, you share. Like you were taking it in like fours, so we needed to share amongst ourselves. Like today I'm using it, tomorrow you are using it, the other day someone is using it* – P2

Therefore, although school is meant to be the place that provides a platform for learning for the future, in a rural environment where there are no toilets, desks and textbooks are shared and classrooms are in tatters, it undermines the learning process significantly (Strassburg et al., 2010).

3.2.3 Problematic teachers.

All nine participants expressed their frustration around the issue of absent teachers at school. In stark contrast, out of all the participants who attended Quintile Five schools in the research conducted by Strassburg et al., (2010), 82% said that teachers were always present. According to Barac (2015), teacher absenteeism is one of the primary obstacles facing rural South African schools. In many rural areas, absent teachers are more common than absent students (Strassburg et al., 2010).

> *At a certain point in time we had, if I'm not mistaken, was it six months that we didn't have a teacher for physics* – P9.

The reason is because we are coming from rural areas, they don't notice us, they don't care about us. So that's why we ended up spending the rest of the year without a physics teacher – P1.

Distressingly, as many teachers are ill qualified, and unable to effectively impart the curriculum material, often having teachers present in the classroom does not resolve the problem (Theron, 2016).

Some were like okay they can't really explain or they don't know what they explaining, then we do self study- P8.

According to Uys et al. (2007) many teachers in rural environments lack the knowledge and skill required to be effective educators. This is problematic as Badat and Sayed (2014) note that one of the most crucial determinants of effective learning is qualified and motivated teachers. Further, inadequate exposure to key subjects such as Math and Science limits the career opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they are often not able to apply for subjects in the fields of science and technology (Nel et al., 2009). Even in situations where students manage to gain access to these technical programs, Mackie (2001) suggests that lack of preparation for tertiary level education often ultimately leads to students' withdrawal from the course. Unfortunately, the responsibility of mastering the school material often falls onto the students themselves:

Even the teacher cannot explain those things because they have you know… they say that I am going to teach physics, so I am going to read the physics book for grade 12. So you are only limited to those answers that are on the book. – P2.

3.2.4 English as a teaching medium.

English was consistently expressed as a barrier to academic mastery both in school and later at a university level.

> *But the only thing I feel was the main main problem with schools there, is that they teach you all the subjects, including English in Zulu* -P3.

Although there are some who advocate for a bilingual learning environment, Rapetsoa and Singh (2012) note that this system is unfair as students are expected to be taught in their mother tongue and then to study and take tests in English.

> *I tried, I tried, but then because of what I told you, they teach you in Zulu, when you get home you have to convert. What does 'diverge' mean, maybe, such small words, words you should be knowing* - P3.

Rapetsoa and Singh (2012) note that due to language barriers many learners struggle profusely with school exams as they battle to understand concepts in the questions and then grapple further to express themselves clearly when answering.

> *But when the national paper comes, there is no Zulu there. It is only English, only. And you are seeing words, and this thing affects you for the rest, for the rest…* - P2.

According to Uys et al. (2007) teachers in rural schools often choose to teach in a mother tongue language as their English competence is significantly lacking. It is expected that when there is a foreign language-learning context, English proficiency will be poor amongst learners (Probyn, 2009; Uys et al., 2007).

In their research Rapetsoa and Singh (2012) found that participants in their study would have preferred to be taught in English as opposed to being taught in their mother tongue. The association of English and disappointing performance was demonstrated in the 2011 Performance in International Literacy Study (PIRLS), an international literacy and language benchmark test. The result indicated that 43% of South African learners did not reach the "low international" benchmark standard, with only 4% scoring in the "high international" benchmark (as cited in Badat & Sayed, 2014). Nel and Müller (2010) list factors associated with rural students' poor English ability including lack of access to TV and magazines and poor language teaching in school.

It is expected that when English is not managed at a primary education level, it will be even further challenging at tertiary level. According to Eiselen and Geyser (2003), a lack of English proficiency is one of the factors most commonly associated with "at risk students", where at risk often leads to abandoning university study. Therefore an under-resourced

schooling experience has both long lasting and damaging consequences.

3.2.5 Rural perception of education.

It is worth commenting on people's perceptions of education generally in rural areas. There is often a sense that parents and teachers in rural areas do not believe that students have the potential to succeed in tertiary education (Maree et al., 2011). This is problematic as parental encouragement is a significant predictor for academic achievement (Maree, 2015). Additionally, many parents themselves have low levels of formal education and often feel disempowered and alienated by their childrens' education (Strassburg et al., 2010).

> *Ja, no one sees education as important. People from rural areas are not educated, so others don't see education as important – P1.*

> *And this thing for we are going to save money for my kids so that when they go to university, I wont struggle, no, parents there, they don't do it – P3.*

Three participants mentioned that they never had high aspirations because it was not the norm to pursue a career that required university study.

> *Dreams as big as coming to Wits were not like, they were not like normal you know* – P7.

Many students in rural areas, therefore, are habituated to believe that they can only become cleaners, drivers, teachers or other vocations to which they have been exposed (Nkambule et al., 2011).

> *I was like what is university? By that time [in grade 11], I wanted to be a truck driver because I used to travel and I would get lifts from these truck drivers and the truck driver will tell you listen I am getting a lot of money here, you will find R30 000 to R40 000* – P4.

P8 and P1 described something similar, but from a different viewpoint when they said:

My mum, like they struggled so they make sure that they gonna work hard and motivate us more to go to varsity and have a career that's different from either being a teacher or a nurse because it was always those two things back home, either you're a teacher or a nurse" - P8.

If my father wasn't pushing me to come, to ensure that I get good marks to come to university, I wasn't going to end up in university – P1.

Therefore it appears as if university is a distant and unattainable reality for most pupils in rural areas, unless they are motivated to break away from the status quo.

3.2.6 Failure rates in rural schools.

According to Nel et al., (2009), it is evident that the vast deficiencies in the South African rural schooling system impact upon the results that student achieve. It goes without saying that fewer resources will significantly impact a students' performance ability (Strassburg et al., 2010; Theron, 2016). As P9 pointed out:

Given the chance that we had enough resources and equipment and were really taught from like basics, we would've done a lot more better

This unfortunately translates into the failure rate at rural schools being alarming and cause for significant concern (Aldridge et al., 2006).

Also in grade 11, I think the reasons those classes get so cramped is because a lot of people fail grade 11. So there were a lot of like older people… - P7.

Data from the Department of Education indicated that while the number of Black African students writing grade 12 increased by a significant 46% from 1991 to 2006, the amount of learners who ultimately qualified for university exemptions remained at a paltry 11% (as cited in Nel et al., 2009). Students often have to deal with an under-resourced schooling environment as well as a stressful home environment, which further reduces the prospects of passing (Strassburg et al., 2010).

You know most of your friends have failed in the past and you see how competitive it is, out of maybe 100 students, maybe 30% usually pass, because given the social issues that a person is having – either the child is an orphan or is staying with their grandparents, or maybe the child is staying with the father but the mother is not around, such things– P4.

It is evident that many factors in an under-resourced schooling environment are associated with poor exams and high failure rates (Barac, 2015). This, however, was not the unanimous opinion as some of the participants mentioned that most in their class managed to pass.

Most of them are studying now that's what I know, the fact that they get into the university, I would think that their results are good – P8.

P6 suggested that in her class, "only a few failed". However, she also contradicted herself slightly when she said:

I had to help most of my friends with their school work. So they weren't like pleased, some even changed schools – P6.

Therefore it seems that for majority of students in an under-resourced school setting, achieving acceptable grades posed a significant challenge as many of their environmental settings were not conducive to academic achievement.

3.3 Situational Resources

Despite perceptions of many of these school environments as inherently lacking in resources, there is some progress being made, which will be unpacked in the section below.

3.3.1 School provisions.

All the participants mentioned that the school provided basic stationary and workbooks at the start of the year.

Oh they gave, they provided, the government provides [writing] books for us, ja – P7.

In addition, all participants mentioned that their classrooms had a chalkboard, which was generally visible. It is expected that quintile one schools receive the most funding per learner, and therefore the basics such as pens, writing books and textbooks should be provided (Strassburg et al., 2010). While this may be taken for granted in schools generally, there is reason to be concerned as seen in the example of section 27 court case in 2017 where the Limpopo Department of Education short-delivered over 793 567 text books (Bhuto, 2015). This did not happen as a result of budgetary constraints but due to unethical handling of the country's monetary resources (Bhuto, 2015).

3.3.2 Teachers who care.

Although it has been noted that teacher absenteeism was a significant problem, seven participants noted that were always at least one or two teachers who tried their best to ensure students were prepared.

> *Some of them did, for example my math teacher was amazing, he was more involved that anyone possibly could be, like in that school* – P7.

However, some noted that even if teachers were committed, it was almost impossible to succeed in an environment that did not have the requisite resources.

> *But not all of them [teachers] were like that, some you could see that they have passion for teaching, just like the resources are not there. They try, they bring their own things, but*… - P3.

Two participants mentioned that before exams, all the students moved into their school hall in order to absorb as much information as possible.

> *When I did grade 11 we still had to share books. But we moved in to live in the school hall because it was really far travelling to and from school* – P1.

According to Strassburg et al. (2010) many students in a rural environment are unable to study at home due to issues like noise, violence or chore expectations. Therefore having teachers who cared enough to move students into the school premises partially solved that issue.

You go there and bring your own mattress, you sleep in the classrooms. Because they thought by doing that everyone is forced to study unlike at home, because we are from different homes. So they don't know the situation at home, so you will find that some other kids are not able to study because they have to do some other things – P5.

However, despite the extra effort made by teachers, both P1 and P5 expressed the disappointment associated with low marks.

I don't know, I have never been proud because I remember when I was doing grade 12, I wanted to get higher marks in Physics and Math but I couldn't. I was so sad - P1.

I tried, I tried, but at the end of the day, when exams come, I was not happy – P5.

Therefore despite the occasional positive resources such as the rare caring teacher, this alone was not enough to compensate for the many other resource deficit factors.

3.3.3 High achievers.

According to Sennett et al. (2003), rural students who make it to urban universities are often high achievers in their rural setting. This is usually one of the difficulties in transition, where rural students' status declines from high achievers at school to bottom of the class at university (Nel et al., 2009). However, it is still useful to point out six participants made comments that alluded to persistent hard work during school. One would expect that it is generally these students who are able to transcend the infrastructural barriers of rural education and qualify for university. According to P8:

I just studied a lot [in school] and focused no matter the circumstance but it really depends on the person, if you want to move forward in life.

Both P4 ad P9 mentioned that they had leadership roles in school. Additionally, P7 and P3 mentioned that they would always sit in the front of the class.

P7 noted:

In grade 12 my matric there were not that many students, there were like 30 of us, which was awesome. Grade 11 there were like 70 of us…. But in matric, a lot of us were like super smart, we were like that group – P7.

Therefore, the implication is that the mediocre students are often unable to progress to the next grade, because they are high achieving, driven individuals, a resource deficit environment is debilitating. This is even more apparent as they attempt to progress to a university level, where it appears that only the high achieving rural students were able to make it to university.

3.4 Situation

Participants were asked about their *situation* with regards to the initial moments of transition from rural hometown to university. Given the discussion above, the transition is a drastic shift from one environment to the other which requires significant negotiation. The following sections will unpack the participants' descriptions of their *situation* according to Schlossberg's *situation* factors including assessment, role change, concurrent stress and control (Anderson et al., 2012).

3.4.1 Assessment.

Schlossberg's (2004) description of assessment speaks to the individual's evaluation of the transition. Assessment includes evaluating whether the situation is seen in a positive, negative or neutral light (Anderson et al., 2012). The section to follow explores how students felt in the initial moments away from home, and therefore provides an *assessment* of how they viewed their situation during transition.

3.4.1.1 Initial feelings away from home.

According to Bojuwoye (2002), the beginning experience for students serves as a foundation upon which the rest of all university experiences may be based. When the transition is notably stressful, it is understandable that many students may feel inclined to leave (Petersen et al., 2009; Sommer & Dumont, 2011). P1 expressed, *"*I was feeling lonely for the rest of my first year*"*. In addition to feeling estranged and misplaced in an unfamiliar place, many students from an under-resourced background are not able to maintain constant contact with their families and friends because of the prohibitive costs of communication.

You end up saying I feel like going home, and you call them and tell them, and you can't reach them like always, because you know... of financial constraints – P2.

The initial feelings away from home were generally expressed as feelings full of stress, despair and loneliness. When contrasting the resources that privileged students have access to relative to unprivileged students, Christie (2009) notes that one of the key resources is family. Rural students, who have moved far from their families struggle with feelings of homesickness and longing for the familiarity of home.

I used to cry, I used to cry every night – P3.

It was my first time I left home and it was, it was hard not being home. It is a huge transition - P9.

Separating with my mom [was the hardest thing at first] because I definitely depended on her a lot – P7

Therefore an already stressful situation is exacerbated by the students' feelings of homesickness and loneliness (Mackie, 2001). In comparison, in addition to all his/her other advantages, the privileged student generally lives at home and therefore does not have to dissociate entirely from the familiar home life around them (Sennett et al., 2003). According to Dyson and Renk (2006) feelings of homesickness often cause students to be absent-minded and unable to concentrate on university studies.

It is interesting to note a contrasting experience of P4, an orphan. He said:

I lost my mom and dad when I was quite young and I was staying with my granny… yes, so I didn't really feel homesick.

Therefore in the absence of the security that parents provide, it appears that P4 did not experience the same level of distress as those with a stronger nuclear family and whose transition was compounded by the longing for parental love and assistance.

3.4.2 Concurrent stress.

Schlossberg (2004) suggests that often when an individual is managing a transition there may be other stresses that are triggered in the process. It is important to understand the impact that the transition has on the individual's life and the associated stress it brings. In other words, we would expect that the concurrent stress experienced during an under-resourced student's transition is significantly more debilitating than the stressors faced by a more privileged student (Bojuwoye, 2002, Petersen et al., 2009). In exploring the concurrent stress of participants at the time of their transition, a number of themes emerged.

3.4.2.1 University skill.

All the participants unanimously expressed the severity of the disparity of skill that they possessed when entering university. The inability to meet academic demand is a significant source of stress for students navigating the transition to university (Barac, 2015; Sennett et al., 2003). In their research, Petersen et al. (2009) found that academic overload severely impacted students' adjustment to university. When asked if they felt equipped with skills to manage the university's academic demand, P3 and P6 responded:

> *Zero, zero, maybe what can I say, nothing, nothing*– P3.

> *"No I don't think so; I think that is one of the reasons I failed first year"* – P6.

Unfortunately, this is not surprising, as research conducted by Nel at al., (2009), indicated that 88% of participants (students from under-resourced environments) in their study, felt school had ill prepared them for the academic demands of tertiary education. It is evident from the sections above that an under-resourced schooling background falls woefully short of the type of preparation that students require in order to manage university. As Eiselen and Geyser (2003) point out in their study, the academic skills demanded of a student transitioning to university needs to have been developed at a school level. Therefore when there is a deficient schooling background, it is almost impossible for students to close that gap at a university level (Strassburg et al., 2010).

> *I had to do university which was a very big challenge because of the gap between the university and the matric. To me, there was a very big gap. Its better for those who are you know like [prepared]... P2.*

For many students, this experience is particularly frustrating and disappointing as these students (as mentioned) often used to be the top achievers in their schools and were often exposed to constant external validation (Nel et al., 2009; Sennett et al., 2003). They therefore arrive with unrealistic expectations of themselves as potentially high achieving university students. Unfortunately, Huysamen (2000) notes relatively high marks from under-resourced schools are not guaranteed to be an accurate predictor for tertiary level success. According to Lowe and Cooke (2003), when students have unrealistic expectations regarding their achievement potential, it is known to negatively impact upon their academic success. This was expressed by a few of the participants in the current research.

> *Even the pride you know because during my school days I was the one to explain to the classroom and now they are explaining to me...* P2.

However, it is not just the academic material that is overwhelming, for students from under-resourced backgrounds, even a skill as basic as computer literacy is lacking (Nel et al., 2009).

> *I hadn't learnt the skills, we didn't even have those things back home to begin with, computers – P8.*

Out of nine participants in this research, six recounted how they had never used a computer before coming to university.

> *I didn't have any computer skills when I came here. I had to attend ADP's for Social Work for me to learn how to use a computer, how to press a mouse and all of those stuff because I didn't know how to touch any of those things* - P1

> *We didn't know to, to basically type or use the keyboard because we didn't have computers in our schoo*l – P4.

This illustrates what Schlossberg (2011) describes as concurrent stressors, which will differ for each person navigating a transition. For a privileged student, computers act as an asset during the transition to university, not a liability. However, for students who have never had the

privilege of accessing a computer, the expectation adds another stress to an already stressful situation. As P2 pointed out:

> *You have to use the computer, you have to use sakai, you have to reference which was my first time hearing about all these things.*

Unfortunately, the under-preparedness of students from rural schools significantly impacts the retention rates of these students (Strassburg et al., 2010). It is often impossible for students to get up to university standard because of the backlog that they come with due to an inadequate schooling background (Nel et al., 2009).

3.4.2.2 English barrier at university.

According to Nel and Müller (2010), the transition that students for whom English is not their first language need to make when encountering English as the medium of tuition in higher education is a matter of great concern in the South African context. The issue of English as a barrier to success and integration for rural students has been noted in numerous research projects (Bojuwoye, 2002; Kariuki, 2006; McKay, 2016; Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). This was evident in the current research, where six out of the nine participants described the trauma of dealing with English as the communication medium at Wits.

> *English was a huge, huge, HUGE barrier* – P3.

The stress of an inadequate command of the English language was strongly associated with feelings of inferiority:

> *Getting here you can speak English but you can't really speak it. You find now this inferiority complex* –P4.

> *So I just used to avoid being with my classmates, lets say we are chilling together in a group, because I didn't want them to say, have you heard her when she speaks?* - P3

Research conducted by Kariuki (2006), which looked at students from a disadvantaged rural area of KwaZulu-Natal noted that participants rated the understanding (or the lack thereof) of English as one of the most important aspects of university education.

With everything happening, eish, I will always go back to English. That's why I feel like people don't understand; this thing is super hard, because it messes with your whole life **-** P3.

According to Testa & Egan (2013), only 1 in 10 students who come from a non-speaking English background were able to follow material presented during lectures.

The time you slept at 2am, you tried to read a reading that was actually six or seven pages, and you never really understood the English or understood the argument – P4.

As noted, one of the main issues compounding the language problem is the fact that most students at rural schools are taught in their home language (Sonn, 2016). It is seen as a leading factor that contributes to academic failure in universities (Bojuwoye, 2002; Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). According to McKay (2016) the need for English proficiency at university is more pronounced, as students need an extensive academic vocabulary in order to successfully communicate within the world of academia. Therefore, a subpar level of English is significantly problematic. According to McKay (2016), English proficiency at a university level requires the ability to negotiate the grammatical structure of the language as well as understanding the functional purpose of language.

At school I was used to being taught in my language and when I came here everything was in English. It was really hard to hear what lecturers were saying during the class. And because of that I was asking my peers what was being said and some were like, I don't know… like were looking at me as if I am stupid because how can you not hear someone [the lecturer] talking - P1.

The notion of English as the superior language is entrenched in many students from under-resourced backgrounds minds. (Probyn, 2009). What is interesting to note is a comment made by P3 when she said:

And in my school when you speak English, lets say you say to someone "can you pass me the pen", they laugh at you the whole week. They would say "ahh, so now you think you are better, you are speaking English". So speaking English because of the

culture, I don't know if it is the culture there or what, but when you speak English it was a taboo".

Therefore many students are not afforded the opportunity to practice English at school, as it was often frowned upon by those around them.

However the issue of language communication is not just problematic from an academic perspective, it also affects students' confidence in terms of comfortably engaging with their peers (Bojuwoye, 2002; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). When asked why she had struggled to make friends at university, P8 explained:

Because I don't want to seem off as being needy in the sense because in the conversation a person would just get and understand you're not from here, where are you from? So it's a matter of I don't want to seem too little, it was better to just stick to myself.

This is particularly problematic as friendships play an important role in ensuring a successful transition to university (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Kariuki, 2006). However feeling plagued by inferiority during the friend making process as a result of language barriers is a common issue that students from under-resourced environments face (Christie, 2009; Reay, 2005).

The stereotype of the rural student's English deficiency is unfortunately deeply entrenched in the university environment as P9, who grew up speaking English, noted:

Like language is also a barrier, because I've experienced this with a lot of people where they've felt… at first they *say to me, you don't sound like you're from KZN. And I'm like, what's that supposed to mean? And they're like, people from KZN don't speak English the way you do.*

It is possible that the stress associated with an inadequate command of English was the most pronounced of the concurrent stressors in the current research, as the inability filtered into many areas of the students' transition experience.

3.4.2.3 Finances for student expenses.

Material resources are an integral part of ensuring successful university transition (Mackie, 2001; O'Shea, 2014). For students whose families are unable to assist financially, the burden of the transition is intensified (Bojuwoye, 2002).

> *I made friends with people who went to private schools and what not, and they were fine. They didn't have… I wouldn't say they didn't have struggles but they didn't have the struggles I had, like finances…* – P6

Again, the issue of inadequate finances was strongly associated with feelings of shame and inferiority.

> *The thing that really downed my spirit was res, because they would either deactivate your fingerprint to get in, or your access card would not work. So I experienced a lot of that last year, it was very embarrassing - P8*

Numerous studies indicate that high dropout rates are attributed to financial difficulties that students from under-resourced backgrounds face (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Mackie, 2001; Sommer & Dumont, 2011; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). A student needs funding to pay for (at minimum) fees, textbooks, accommodation, food and clothing (Yorke & Thomas, 2003). The financial strain is exacerbated by the students' awareness of the expectations from family and communities for them to succeed, and they anticipate the disappointment if the opportunity fails (Bojuwoye, 2002; Dyson & Renk, 2006). This strain is even more pronounced when the community has made a significant financial sacrifice to provide the basic resources required to the student (Bojuwoye, 2002).

However there is a difference of opinion in this matter. Some students, while aware that they had access to far less material resources, were able to remain unaffected by this (Theron, 2016). This again points to Schlossberg's (2011) notion of the individuality of managing a transition. When faced with the exactly the same issue, each person may respond in entirely different ways.

No I was never short of things because I have never even... Because where I come from I have never even like wanted luxurious stuff. That's for when you're like, working - P7.

3.4.2.4 Culture shock.

Bojuwoye (2002) notes that for many rural students, coming to university is the first time that they are engaging with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Rural areas are often insular and isolated from urban realities (Nel at al., 2009). Nel et al., (2009) note that one of the challenges that students from rural areas face is that of cultural adaptation.

You know people from rural areas they wear long skirts, they cover themselves and then when I came here I saw people wearing shorts, stomachs are out. Ja I was like… I don't know, I was shocked by the way people were - P1.

It is not only a culture shock in terms of a more western culture compared to rural tradition; many participants also expressed difficulty in dealing with students who spoke different South African languages.

So the whole culture shock was like all these Pedi people, there's Zulu people which is more or less like my language, but there's some words that are different… and Swati, like it was different - P8.

According to Sennett et al. (2003), when students experience the university setting as being a "foreign" place, the adjustment is far more difficult than students who are accustomed to the traditional principles of university style education. The different ways in which adults are treated in rural areas as compared to how they are treated at universities was also experienced as a culture shock (Nel et al., 2009; O'Shea, 2014).

I had a lot of culture shocks if I may put it like that. Like people, the way they give respect to an adult would be very different. I was also shocked by particularly the way people refer to the lecturers by their names – P9.

Ja it is disrespectful and you are disturbed by that, you can no longer concentrate on the lecture – you go, hey! What is he thinking? And you keep on looking at him like

yoh, yoh! Where are you manners? And to find out most of the lecturers are happy that you are calling them by their names… - P2.

In describing the culture shock experienced by students from rural backgrounds, it is clear what Schlossberg means when she suggests that "often transitions in one area stimulate other stressors and transitions" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 72). While students from urban areas are often not perturbed by the university culture or the way that lecturers are addressed, these issues cause discomfort for some of the rural students, thereby adding additional stress.

3.4.2.5 Physical environment.

An additional stressor during the initial transition phase is often the experience of being overwhelmed by the physical environment of a big urban city (Bojuwoye, 2002; Petersen et al., 2009). The grand structure of university is a stark contrast to the simple structures that are found in a typical rural context (Bojuwoye, 2002).

I felt very small and like intimidated because firstly this place is huge -P8.

It was weird at first, when you come from a small space to this big city and there's... its so rushed because in the villages it's a quiet life, everyone is going about their business – P7.

First time ever; I came here to Joburg and I see tall buildings. You see a lot of things are still new to you and you have to find your feet in school, while everything around you is still new -P3.

In this, P3 perfectly expressed how an individual from a rural area managing the transition has a very different reaction to that of a more privileged student. It makes sense that overall the experience is significantly more taxing as the transition is exacerbated by the additional challenges associated with a rural background.

3.4.3 Control.

Regarding control of the situation, Schlossberg explains that the motivation for the transition can vary and will have very different outcomes (Anderson et al., 2012). Sometimes the transition is a deliberate one made by the individual whereas in other situations the transition

is imposed upon the individual by external circumstances. In their research, Goodman and Pappas (2000) found that there was an association between university faculty members' sense of control over the decision to retire and their satisfaction with the retirement. The greater the control, the greater the satisfaction (Goodman & Pappas, 2000). Therefore, consideration needs to be given to how an individual perceives his/her control over the situation.

3.4.3.1 Lack of career guidance.

In order for students to correctly choose which career to pursue, they often need career guidance (Theron, 2016). However, Barac (2015) points out that students from rural schools are rarely offered this assisted direction. Therefore, many make career choices without any 'clear purpose', which can cause decreased optimism about academic study (Sedumendi, 2002). Participants indicated that often careers were chosen purely based on careers that were covered by a bursary.

> *I see a lot of people doing courses because I don't know, the bursary was like in that sphere and you had to just take it because. And they do badly, like they are failing because they struggle* – P7.

According to Theron (2016), participants in her research mentioned that careers were chosen based only on subject choice, without a full understanding of what the entirety of the degree entails.

> *Like the career guidance, yoh, yoh; we really struggled there because we choose when we are doing grade 12. When June is approaching then you go like hey I have to apply. So what am I going to do, what do I want to do. You are not sure, you don't have career guidance*- P2.

The fact that students are not offered career guidance often means that there is a sense that the career being pursued by them is imposed upon them, with little individual choice. Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) note, many students often change their course of study, despite having received career counselling. Students from under-resourced backgrounds, however, are not afforded this luxury (Theron, 2016).

I ended up doing social work, which I didn't like… Ja it's not easy because I wanted to be a physiotherapist – P3.

Therefore, on top of having the pressure of having to choose which career to pursue without any guidance, many also have to endure completing a degree that doesn't interest them (Christie, 2009).

3.4.4 Role change.

It is expected that with any transition, there is some kind of role change involved (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001). The extent of the role change will influence the impact of a transition. What often becomes stressful is that which is encountered in the context of the new role during transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

3.4.4.1 Sharing a space.

In their new roles as students, many have to deal with the demand of sharing a space in university residence (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Sennett et al., 2003). There is also a role change experienced when students transition from living at home to now being a "dormer".

It was difficult. Because it's this person that you don't know who was raised differently from you and doesn't do things the way you do them, you don't do things the way they do them. - P6.

Firstly my roommate was Xhosa and I'm Zulu. She is pure Xhosa and doesn't know Zulu or anything, and I am Zulu, I don't know Xhosa – P3.

According to Nel at al., (2009), students can experience a culture shock in university residences, as they are expected to negotiate living with a stranger. Mackie (2001) lists frustration with university accommodation as a factor that often influences students' decisions to leave university.

However, for some, sharing a room became a space of comfort:

It was very nice because they are all girls… It was helpful because you get to talk to the person when you get to their room – P8.

There is a specific support network that students can form in university accommodation; that students who stay in private accommodation are deprived of (Nel et al., 2009). Sennett et al, (2003) note that many under-resourced students are forced to commute long distances, as their parents cannot afford the university residence fees. Three participants mentioned that they had to stay in townships around Johannesburg, as university accommodation was out of their budget. These students had to spend a significant amount of time travelling to and from university everyday, often waking up at the crack of dawn.

When I looked at accommodation it was expensive, it was like R3500 per month. We'd wake up at 4:00am, so it was like bad – P9.

Students staying in townships are further isolated as living long distances away from university campuses often has implications for both academic and social integration. When asked why she failed first block, P5 responded:

So I didn't have a text book, I only bought a text book for the second part ja, so the fact that I didn't have textbooks and I wasn't staying around campus. Because with my other classmates, because most of them were staying at res, so it was easier for them, they had study groups, they were helping each other.

Therefore, in the role change that comes with either being a dormer in university residence or a dormer at a family in surrounding township areas, there are significant challenges. For some the converse is true in that for them the role change is associated with support and comfort in the context of the university residence.

3.5 Self.

This section unpacks the characteristics of self that each participant brought to the transition. In her research, Dass-Brailsford (2005) noted that participants' concept of 'self' had a bearing on their success at university. This included characteristics of motivation, taking initiative and feeling as if they possessed a sense of agency (Dass-Brailsford, 2008). In order to explore students' perception of self, participants were asked about their feelings prior to

starting university, as well as issues regarding optimism, control and inferiority (Anderson et al., 2012).

3.5.1 Psychological resource.

As discussed in the literature review, different elements of the *self,* such as psychological resources, will directly impact how an individual evaluates different scenarios in life. Additionally socioeconomic status, ethnicity and culture will affect what individuals bring to the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The sections below will discuss the different psychological resources (or liabilities) that participants drew on in order to manage the transition.

3.5.1.1 Emotions prior to university.

Schlossberg emphasises the importance of understanding the context of an individual before and during the transition, in order to get a holistic picture of the individual's sense of self (Anderson et al., 2012). It is therefore useful to get a sense of how participants felt before the commencement of university. Five of the participants mentioned their excitement about the thought of starting university. Interestingly, this optimistic excitement was unanimously linked to the hope that university promised a better life for themselves and their families. This was echoed in research done by O'Shea (2014) and Christie (2009) who both found that students were motivated to pursue tertiary education as a ticket out of a life of poverty.

> *I was feeling excited in terms of you know when you are still in high school and it's not like a better environment, so when you are in high school you're like one day I want to finish school and go to university* –P3.

> *I was so excited. I was so excited. I remember calling my friend because we had this dream, of she wanted to study outside KZN and since grade nine, I've always wanted to be at Wits doing whatever, just being at Wits* – P9.

However, while there were feelings of excitement and hope, this was also accompanied by fear and trepidation. This is expected as Christie (2009) points out that even when the idea of coming to university is one that has been eagerly awaited, many students from under-resourced areas simultaneously experience feelings of anxiety.

I was excited in the sense that this is finally happening, but then I also had fear – P3.

I wanted to basically get a job, and the only way you could basically get a better job is through university…. [however] I didn't really feel excited – P4.

Therefore, it is expected that these feelings of hope combined with apprehension affect the student's sense of *self* during the transition. This will be explored further in the section below.

3.5.1.2 Optimist.

People who possess an optimistic outlook generally feel positive about their ability to control certain elements of their lives (Anderson et al., 2012). Therefore, those with the ability to see the glass half full tend to feel more hopeful about navigating the challenges that a transition typically presents (Anderson et al., 2012). In other words, optimism is a psychological resource of the *self* that certain individuals, who possess this quality, are able to draw upon (Anderson et al., 2012). Seven of the participants described themselves as generally being optimistic people, despite the circumstance.

Me, I always have hope, that's why I am still even here today. I don't know how, but there is just something there always in me - P3.

I can say so [I am an optimist], because ja since I came to university, there were ups and downs. But I managed to do introspection and look at the things that I didn't do good and try to change them - P1.

Although it may seem surprising that some participants remained optimistic, Bojuwoye (2002) explains that despite the odds, there are students from rural backgrounds who manage the transition in a positive way. This is why O'Shea (2014) suggests students from under-resourced backgrounds are agents of choice, they are not powerless victims. Notwithstanding this, Schlossberg points out that it is a mistake to assume that a participant with "an upbeat attitude and a sense of personal power can control the entire transition" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 80). The intention of the model is to show how situation, self, support and strategies *all* play a role in negotiating the transition and therefore it is understandable that even students who were optimistic still struggled with the transition.

However, there were those who willingly acknowledged that their natural inclination was not towards optimistic thought. When asked if he was an optimist P2 responded:

> *Nope, not at all because I ended up going to CCDU a lot of times. Well this is my… I am repeating the first year. I was doing my first year last year, and there were many challenges that I had gone through, that's why I'm doing my first year again.*

> *I feel like whenever I become this optimistic person I jinx things sort of. So I feel like it's better if I expect the worst* – P6

This emphasises how limited resources in the *self* can be problematic when managing transition. This difference of perspective has a material influence on the individual in transition as, in very similar circumstances, optimistic participants experienced a very different outcome.

3.5.1.3 Feeling inferior.

Part of coming to university entails the formation of a student identity (Briggs & Hall, 2012; O'Shea, 2014). Often the expectation to match a 'normative student identity' may create a feeling of isolation when students perceive the expectation not to have been met (O'Shea, 2014). Inevitably, students who feel as if they don't fit in may be insecure and detached (Yorke & Thomas, 2003). According to Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) in the absence of successful identity formation, students' ability to navigate transition is hampered. As mentioned, Soudien (2008) refers to the elitist nature of higher education institutions where there are specific criteria regarding those who are accepted and those who do not qualify. Therefore many students from rural areas may feel alienated, which one would reasonably expect could impact their identity formation process.

> *Most of the other students they are from around the townships and the towns around Joburg. So I am from the rural area, and I felt like I couldn't fit in with them…- P5.*

> *I felt like why did I even apply to Wits? This is for people who come from model C schools, these top schools, not for me… and in my area I am the only one who has ever come to Wits – P3.*

Schlossberg describes the importance of self-efficacy in terms of negotiating transition (Anderson et al., 2012). According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy refers to the confidence an individual has in himself or herself to successfully achieve specific outcomes. Studies demonstrate that feelings of insecurity and inferiority are damaging to a student's sense of self-efficacy (Alexander, 2016). Research conducted by Isa and Rasdi (2015) used Schlossberg's (2011) transition model to assess the transition of individual's choosing teaching as a second career later on in life. Results indicated that teachers who had high self-efficacy were the ones who had the most success in career transition (Isa & Rasdi, 2015). Importantly, when individuals feel that their situation is not controllable, this often leads to a deteriorated sense of self-efficacy (Alexander, 2016).

It is important to note that the feeling of insecurity in terms of not fitting in was often associated with a lack of material resources. Sommer and Dumont (2011) note that it is very apparent that material resources to which privileged students have access (such as phones and clothing) are completely inaccessible to under-resourced students. Christie (2009) explains that this can make under-resourced students feel 'othered' by more privileged students. In her research, Reay (2005) demonstrated how under-resourced students commonly feel alienated by the dress code of students around them.

> *The time I should be studying or doing something, but I would spend time sleeping on top of my bed thinking should I change myself so I fit in. Its worse, I can't fit in in terms of just socializing and now I cant fit in in terms of how I look and what I wear - P3.*

When asked why she felt like she could not fit in, P5 responded:

> *Because firstly I couldn't speak proper English and also they were using expensive cell phones, I didn't, they were wearing expensive clothes, so I was like I don't fit in with that.*

This shows that there are feelings of exclusion, inferiority and envy that haunt the sense of *self* of students from an under-resourced environment (Christie, 2009).

3.5.1.4 Engaging in lectures.

If self-efficacy is understood as one's inherent belief in his/her individual ability (Bandura, 1986), it is expected that self efficacy will play a major role in how any individual approaches the tasks associated with the transition (Alexander, 2016). If a student's self-efficacy is low, it makes sense that they would not feel confident to comfortably engage in lectures (Maree, 2015). All nine participants indicated that they *never* felt comfortable to ask questions during lectures. Again, this reluctance to engage notably overlaps with feelings of inferiority, specifically in relation to the English barrier.

> *I am scared that how can I ask a question when even my peers wont understand me; I remember there was a tutorial and I was confused so I asked a question and my peers laughed at me and I felt so bad* - P1.

> *I didn't, I didn't [engage in lectures], because I was actually afraid of if I ask something, what if I use the wrong tense of English or anything. So that was always at the back of my head* – P8.

As Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) point out, students who do not feel comfortable with the spoken language will be reluctant to engage with those around them. This is why Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015) emphasise that without language proficiency, academic success is almost an impossibility. According to Eiselen and Geyser (2003) one of the means of achieving success at university is through active participation in class. Again, we see how a depleted sense of *self*, whether it derives from low confidence or a language barrier, can be very damaging for students during transition.

3.5.1.5 Feeling in control.

An important factor of self-efficacy is the notion of perceived control that a person feels amidst transition (Alexander, 2016; Anderson et al., 2012). Control in this context refers to the individual's belief that he or she can produce a positive outcome (Anderson et al., 2012). According to Sommer and Dumont (2011), students who felt that their lives were 'controllable' had a smoother and more successful adjustment to university.

Seven participants expressed that they did not feel in control during their transition to university. According to Mackie (2001), often the feeling of homesickness creates a feeling

of absence of control in a new environment. Most expressed feeling overwhelmed by a number of issues which led to the feeling of not being in control. Often students feel increased hopelessness and sadness when they feel that they are not coping effectively (Dyson & Renk, 2006).

> *No no. okay, firstly I didn't feel like I fit in, that is the most, most, most. And then because I feel like I don't fit in, how can you have control when you feel like this? - P3.*

> *I wasn't in control… Because I wasn't coping firstly, I wasn't coping and I felt like everything is just too much. So I wasn't prepared for varsity so to say… - P5.*

Often this feeling of not being in control is what prompted students to consider dropping out of university:

> *I wanted to leave. Because I wasn't managing– P5*

> *For the first few months I felt like I wanted to leave* – P6

This may explain why only 15% of South African students ultimately finish university and graduate (Sommer and Dumont, 2011), and why the drops-out rates are highest for students coming from an under-resourced background (Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015).

However, despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, there were those who felt like they were in control. As P7 said:

> *Ja I was definitely in control, because this is what I want, it was like a plan, I planned. So I was definitely in control.*

It is interesting to contrast this with P6 who had not expected to come to Wits but had hoped to get into Stellenbosch University. She said:

And so my mom called me one morning when I woke up and she was like I'm leaving to Johannesburg tonight, so I have to go and do my hair… I think I was not managing, ja because a lot happened in the first year – P6.

This confirms what Schlossberg says about control, namely, that the more an individual feels that there was deliberate thought in the decision to transition, the more they will feel a sense of control and autonomy (Anderson et al., 2012).

3.5.1.6 Religion.

Schlossberg (2011) explains that an individual's basic belief system is an important factor of *self* when it comes to managing transition. This includes ascribing to a specific religion as well as having a general sense of spirituality, which speaks more to meaning, purpose and a greater good (Anderson et al., 2012). In research that explored the resilience of disadvantaged South African students in university, Dass-Brailsford (2005) found that spirituality was consistently linked to a more resilient outcome among students. This may include both ancestral belief systems and other religions such as Islam, Judaism or Christianity (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Dyson & Renk, 2006).

Four participants in the current research mentioned the impact of religion and spirituality in dealing with the challenges that transition presented.

I'm Christian myself, so I also believe in prayer, so it helped me a lot – P9.

Because even though I was failing I used to pray, after praying I would feel much better – P5.

Well um I'm from the indigenous cultural area, so I trust the ancestors and stuff – P2

There is a belief that the ancestors, who are deceased relatives, are constantly watching over their loved ones and therefore many find comfort in communicating with the ancestors and asking for guidance (Dass-Brailsford, 2005).

Therefore, when there are *self*-incorporated notions of spirituality, students' capacity to manage the transition was enhanced. Religion or spirituality provided the opportunity to have

faith in a higher power, which participants said provided comfort during challenging times (Dyson & Renk, 2006).

3.6 Support

Schlossberg (2011) discusses the different types of support that are available to individuals during transition. The section below unpacks the nature of social support available for each participant during transition. Types of support typically include intimate relationships, family, friends and institutions or communities (Anderson et al., 2012, Harely et al., 2007; Nel et al., 2009). Schlossberg (2004) discusses the function of support as either offering affective support, affirmation or aid. The themes below emerged in relation to *support.*

3.6.1 Family support.

The impact of family support is a well-researched phenomenon (Dass-Brailsford, 2008; Harely et al., 2007; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Schlossberg (2011) suggests that having familial support generally ensures a more successful transition. This is specifically apparent with support from parents, whom Nel et al., (2009) refer to as 'key players' in a student's wellbeing. In their research Nel et al. (2009) found that "the support role that parents play in the transition phase is essential to students' successful adjustment" (p. 983).

Similarly, Dass-Brailsford (2008) found that family support was an integral part of student success as it bought a sense of warmth and nurturing amidst hardship. One of the means through which families provide support is through financial *aid* (Anderson et al., 2012). Christie (2000) notes that financial support from families is known to reduce negative outcomes during transition. In the context of the current research, participants did not receive monetary *aid.* However, this did not impact participants' perceptions of the support they received from parents. Seven participants unanimously expressed the importance of having the emotional support that parents offered. When asked whom they spoke to when things were difficult, P1, P7 and P9 all mentioned their moms:

> *My mom, yes. Almost every day* – P1.

> *The only person I connect with is my mom* -P7.

My mom would call me literally almost like every two hours, she'd call and me how you doing, what happened, what did you do – P9.

Through their mothers, participants received *affective support* in terms of feeling loved; they received *affirmation* when their mothers acknowledged their struggles; and they received *aid* through the time and devotion that their mothers gave to them (despite not receiving financial aid). Barac (2015) suggests that under-resourced students attending university often feel that they cannot rely on their families for support, however the current research showed otherwise. Participants seemed to convey an unconditional sense of love and encouragement that they felt from their mothers, despite their adverse circumstances and geographical separation.

It is interesting to point out that most of the participants discussed their mothers as a source of support in the family. As discussed in the literature review, Morrell et al. (2012), note that up to 40% of rural South African households are run by a female family member. When asked if their fathers offered support, participants responded in the following way:

Even my dad, ja financially. But my dad is not used to the talking – P1.

My dad, its like… more… he is one of those traditional dads, like to be there for a child just financially support them, that's all the child needs – P7.

In their research, Madhavan et al., (2008) looked at data from 272 children in rural areas to assess the level of paternal support. Their results indicated that 50% of their sample had not received any type of support from their fathers (Madhavan et al., 2008). The researchers state, "we restrict our analysis to material support because of the dominant cultural expectations that this is a father's primary obligation" (Madhavan et al., 2008, p. 655). Unfortunately, the reality of men having to leave their families to find work is still a common practice in rural areas (Dass-Brailsford, 2008). According to Morrell et al. (2012), in these areas, fathers often have very little to do with their children's upbringing.

This aligns with the hegemonic masculinity described by Morrell et al. (2012) where there is the cultural ideal of "how men should behave and how putative 'real' men do behave" (p. 20). These standards of masculinity are often formed by the culture within which the male

finds himself. Walker (2005) interviewed young Black African men to understand masculinities in a changing South Africa. She found that most participants described a traditional masculinity that was based on patriarchal values where men were encouraged to be repressive and violent (Walker, 2005). Although notions of contemporary masculinities are shifting in South Africa, there are many who still hold onto a more traditional and patriarchal masculine ideal (Walker, 2005). It seems it will take decades, if not generations, for this to change.

It would appear in the current research that despite many participants having absent fathers, the support they received from their mothers compensated for that absence. In addition, Dass-Brailsford (2008) noted that there is still often the presence of kinship bonds in rural areas, where extended families create knitted networks of support. Therefore, often when there is an absent parent, another family member such as an aunt, grandmother or sibling can often compensate for this gap (Dass-Brailsford, 2008).

> *Because its mostly my mom and my aunt. Well my aunt is a teacher and my mom is a nurse. So they've basically been my backbone, ja they've been supportive* – P8.

Five participants mentioned that their siblings were an additional source of support.

> *I used to speak to my brother also because he is at varsity also so he knows most of the things* – P5.

> *I used to call my mom and tell her, and my brothers, that I can't manage* – P3

As noted previously, both P2 and P6 are the only two participants who failed the entire first year course. Both of them mentioned that they did not rely on their parents for support. This notion of the emotionally repressive Black African male was echoed in what P2 said when asked if he called home for support:

> *Well we are from different cultures and you know, we know that when you are a man... just man up you know… I didn't even know that I was depressed; I was undergoing depression because I only saw that when I checked the internet* – P2.

As a result of a culture repressive of male emotion, it seems P2 was unable to use his family as an emotional resource whereby he could safely express his feelings. Chireshe et al. (2009) found that students in transition often felt depressed, disappointed and disillusioned. The transition appeared to be exceptionally difficult for P2, who did not rely on his family for support. Similarly, P6 said:

> *My mom and I didn't speak for the longest time, ja so…it was because of the stipend I got, she felt like she should have gotten something from that, black tax kind of thing… It was hard.*

Completing first year for the second time, this time with a more concrete system of support, P2 noted:

> *I realised that yoh! Actually I needed you know someone to lean on, like the previous [year], I really did need it.*

This aligns with Schlossberg's notion that support systems are instrumental in assisting those in transition, as support provides affirmation and aid for the person in transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Not having this support to rely on can become a liability which hampers the transition process.

3.6.2 Friends from home.

One of the challenges encountered during the transition to university is the renegotiation of existing relationships with friends and family (Mackie, 2001; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). For students from rural areas, one of the difficulties within this negotiation is dealing with the reality that many friends from home were not afforded the privilege of attending university (Sennett et al., 2003). Many students felt they could no longer rely on these past friendships for support.

Schlossberg (2004) discusses how an individual's friend network forms an important part of their support system. Therefore when there is a sense of lost friendship, it can potentially exacerbate the difficulty of transition. According to Schlossberg (Anderson et al., 2012) one of the common ways that friendships are lost is during a residential move (as is the case in the current research). Therefore, the transition disrupts the individual's support system

(Anderson et al., 2012). However, in addition to the change in residence, participants in the current research also described a change in status. There was concern expressed that their newly acquired status as university student would make those at home feel estranged and inferior (Sennett et al., 2003).

> *There were no friends from home who I used to call. Because after high school most of them didn't get the opportunity to go to university so it was difficult because the way I saw, when I said like… they feel like I am gloating to them when I call them and say I am at Wits, I am doing this thing* - P5.

> *Not really because at home as I said before, most of my peers didn't come to varsity and most of them they didn't even finish their matric. So there was not really a thing that I can talk with them - P2.*

This result is similar to what Swain (1991) found in his research on athletes transition to retirement. Swain (1991) suggests that the athletes in his study found it difficult to reach out for support from people who were not athletes, as they felt they could not relate to their experience. Therefore many of them did not fully benefit from the care that social support could have offered (Swain, 1991). Similarly, in a different study, Wheeler (2012) reported that many veterans felt they had to let go of old friendships, as their friends could no longer relate to them after their army service.

Interestingly, the participants who indicated that they were still in touch with friends from home all mentioned that they were friends who had *also* moved from rural areas to university. When asked if they were still in touch with old friends, P8 and P9 noted:

> *Yes because they're also, like went to university some of them… it made me smile each day to just know I'm not going through this alone* – P8.

> *Yes, I do have two or three that we would call each other, because they were also in different universities* – P9.

Therefore, when there is the presence of friends, Schlossberg suggests it can "cushion the sudden shock" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 84) of the transition.

3.6.3 Lecturer support.

One of the psychosocial factors that Sennett et al. (2003) discuss as being associated with easy university adjustment is 'help seeking'. Sommer and Dumont (2011) found that help seeking was especially useful when students sought out support from academic staff. Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) refer to this as 'interpersonal competence'. Koerin et al. (1990) suggest that academic staff often provide students with the opportunity for goal clarification in their studies and ultimately the realisation of these goals. According to See et al., (2013) it is imperative for students from an under-resourced background to have non-parental adults, such as members of staff, as mentors.

Six participants in this research expressed that they did not approach a lecturer for help once during first year. When asked about this interaction, P9 answered:

> *"No, no. I was afraid, like scared… it was intimidating… The feeling for me was you should know this. Lecturers expect you to know this".*

Again this reluctance overlaps with the plaguing feeling of inferiority that rural students experience, especially with regards to language competence.

> *Sometimes even the lecturers, the standard of how they speak and their vocab, even if go and ask a question, you end up being confused because you don't really understand what he is saying* – P4.

> *I was thinking if I go to a lecturer eish, how am I going to put my problem exactly, how am I going to state my problem exactly? Because now I can't speak properly, so then I was like ahh I will just struggle – P3.*

> *Another thing, I don't want to seem as being too needy to a person… Because [lecturers will say] "ah, we always get those people from the Eastern Cape, they struggling and whatever". I don't want to be associated too much with that because I want to overcome that as it is* – P8.

Sadly, this aligns with all the existing literature around under-resourced students' transitions. In their research, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) found that students commonly avoid the

interaction with academic staff out of fear that they will be looked down upon. Unfortunately this perpetuates a vicious cycle as it is the students from an under-resourced background who generally require the most assistance (Thomas, 2002). As P6 noted:

> *In first year, I wouldn't consult… I think by the time I realised that I might fail, it was already too late.*

This reluctance to engage with university staff was also found in research by Kariuki (2006), whose participants (from under-resourced backgrounds) listed engagement with academic staff as one of the five major problems that they faced.

Despite the overall reluctance, there were participants who actively sought out lecturer support as P7 pointed out:

> *Ja, I use the consultation times and I make sure that I go there.*

As indicated by the comments above, an environment where students feel apprehensive about approaching staff is prejudicial to their transition process as it effectively eliminates staff as an essential support resource.

3.6.4 Friends at Wits.

In terms of support, Schlossberg (2011) suggests that individuals need a range of forms of support, such as family *and* friends during transition. This view is supported by Tao et al. (2000) who suggest that relying on familial support alone is often not sufficient for the student in transition. Thus a crucial part of successful university transition is interacting with university peers, as this facilitates the feeling of belonging in a new space (Harvey et al., 2006).

University friends represent a *new* support network on campus as they are in shared context with similar challenges (Nel et al., 2009). P1, who said she didn't have any friends during first year explained:

> *Ja it was really hard because even if I was finding some difficulties, I didn't have anyone who understood what I'm under.*

This underscores the void that exists due to the absence of the "safe space" provided by friends.

According to Reay (2005), rural students are reluctant to make new friends as they feel distanced and often inferior in comparison to the privileged students around them. When P8 was describing her hesitation in making new friends she said:

> *They would talk about places I didn't even know. Like as much as they'd say it's a very famous thing, like I wouldn't know that. So it was very... very hard being in the conversation with a bunch of people because again I would feel small and insignificant and it would just be better to go back to my room.*

Many under-resourced students also struggle with the feeling that they have nothing in common with the people around them (Pillay, 2004). As P9 pointed out:

> *The people that I met in the beginning of the year, they talk about going to parties and drinking and all of that, and that's not my scene.*

Therefore, acquiring new friends, which should alleviate some of the strain of transition, becomes a process where students feel excluded and inferior in comparison to those around them (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). In their research on the adjustment of Black South African students to university, Sennett et al. (2003) found that White students in their study scored significantly higher for social adjustment in comparison to the Black African students in the study. This suggests that there was a difference in how socially integrated students were.

There were however some participants who didn't struggle, finding peers to connect to and whom they felt understood their background and circumstances:

> *It was easier to make friends with them, I don't know, I think mostly because we have so much in common* – P6.

> *There was another girl I used to talk to her a bit… sometimes I talked to her and told her this is what is happening to me and she would motivate me* – P3.

P4 who lost his parents said that he had no issue at all making friends. He also said:

> *So for me what motivated me to actually interact more with people is because I wanted to learn more through their actions and through what they are being taught at home – P4.*

3.6.5 Family pressure.

While the family unit is one that offers support, there is also a significant amount of pressure that students feel from their families to succeed (Bojuwoye, 2002). Participants were split in their responses, with five describing the pressure that they felt from family and four others saying that it was not an issue.

One of the main emotions described regarding transition is fear, and often this fear is around failure and the disappointment that follows (O'Shea, 2014). For under-resourced students, failure is associated with financial strain, as it would require additional funding for a repeated course (Christie, 2009). As P3 noted:

> *So that pressure sometimes because you know I cant fail, if I fail money will be wasted. But it is bad in a way that when someone is always telling you about it [referring to her mom], it is not nice. It's not.*

> *I think for every African child you are pressured, and not only by your family but the circumstance or situation in the household given the financial aspect* – P4.

Many students from under-resourced environments additionally face the pressure of feeling that they are their families' ticket out of poverty (Bojuwoye, 2002). P8 pointed out:

> *It would be a disappointment to them if I were to fail… Because you know when you come from a disadvantaged background you want to study, finish studying, go quick and get a stable job to improve your house back home*.

There is also an element of feeling pressured to show family back home that they could succeed despite the odds. As P7 explained:

If the standards are set so low and you try to take that leap of like faith, you want to make sure that you prove everyone who is doubtful of you, wrong.

This pressure is heightened in light of the fact that the majority of the participants' parents were not afforded the opportunity to attend tertiary education as a result of the Apartheid system. As Bojuwoye (2002) points out, the university is the micro-society of a problematic macro-society attributed to South Africa's past.

My mom would always remind me that they suffered and whatever. But then she always said that because she wanted to motivate us. She [referring to mom] would bring back the whole apartheid how I didn't have this chance to go back, you sort of feel like ok, I'm given this opportunity, let me use it to my disposal – P8.

There were however students who did not feel external pressure from family. Some noted that their parents offered support, without any pressured expectation.

I remember my father when I was doing first year, he was expecting what can happen, I can fail even, because I am coming from… he was judging from the background where I was coming from – P1.

They've never been people to put pressure on me that we expect this from and that and that – P3.

It is evident from the section above that support systems are critical for students in transition. This includes support from family, friends and academic staff. These relationships are not always simple, as often friendships require renegotiation and families simultaneously are a source of support and pressure. Despite this it is clear than in the absence of these support systems, a student's transition process is potentially compromised.

3.7 Strategies

According to Schlossberg (2011), coping strategies are the mechanisms that people apply to avoid or minimise harm in stressful situations. Schlossberg suggests people employ coping strategies in order to prevent, respond to or alleviate a difficult circumstance (Anderson et al.,

2012). As mentioned there are three types of strategies: responses that modify the situation; ones that control the problem; and responses that help deal with the stress after it has already occurred. In order for a student to adapt to the academic, social and emotional demands of university, it is imperative that they develop effective coping skills (Sennett et al., 2003). The type of strategy that is chosen will have implications for the students' ability to successfully transition to university life (Dyson & Renk, 2006). It is important to mention that each student in this research had more than one coping strategy. This is expected as Lazarus and Folkman note most people will use an array of coping strategies when navigating a stressful experience (Kendall & Muenchberger, 2009). According to Lazarus and Folkman the "ability to cope is not a trait but a dynamic process constantly in flux" (as cited in Anderson et al., 2012, p. 90). Some of the strategies in this section have already been discussed in previous sections as the data overlap.

3.7.1 Responses that modify situation.

When it comes to dealing with strategies that modify the situation, these generally refer to something that is done to change the source of strain (Anderson et al., 2012). This can happen through self-reliance, advice seeking or optimistic action, all of which will be discussed below.

3.7.1.1 Self reliance.

Past research has demonstrated that students who use self-initiated coping strategies often adjusted to university with greater success than those who did not (Sommer and Dumont, 2011). Two participants in the current research expressed that their inner sense of self-belief is what helped them cope and ultimately negotiate the transition. This aligns with the results of the study conducted by Petersen et al. (2009) who found that students with high self-esteem generally adjusted to university more successfully.

> *When you go back to your apartment or to your flat, you are still alone at the end of the day. You have to make sure that you push yourself* - P4.

> *I just sat down with myself and told myself that I WILL do this. I will do this. That's when I was feeling negative, because it's all these negative emotions and feelings that impact; but as long as you eliminate those negative thoughts, and then you start seeing things in a positive way – P3.*

In previous research, Petersen el al. (2009) found that students who displayed features of intrinsic motivation generally transitioned better to university. Similarly, in her research, Alexander (2016) noted that participants who displayed self-doubt and low self-efficacy generally were not as successful in managing the demand of tertiary education.

3.7.1.2. Optimistic action.

This refers to when individuals who are facing challenge make a conscious decision to find a solution (Anderson et al., 2012). Instead of feeling paralysed by fear of failure, two participants explained how they used failure as a catalyst for change. In other words, through failure they developed a strategy that was based on commitment to hard work.

> *Um I told myself that now because I failed I had to do an introspection, look at the things that I didn't do right and try to improve on things so that I will be able to pass-* P1.

> *When I got my first marks I was like yoh! 45%, I am not going to survive this. So the next assignment I went to the library, I tried borrowing books, even though they were also confusing me, but I tried –P3.*

According to Soudien (2008), optimism is one the internal factors of self that can moderate reactions to external circumstance.

3.7.1.3. Advice seeking.

An important method that allows for modification of the situation is seeking advice from others (Anderson et al., 2012). According to Dass-Brailsford (2005), advice from families is recognised as one of the key methods whereby family members offer support to students in transition. Additionally, family advice is known to encourage student resilience throughout a student's tertiary education process (Briggs et al., 2012). When asked what their coping strategies were, four participants again mentioned that they would turn to their mothers.

> *Normally when I felt that everything is just too much, I called my mom and she would calm me down and say you will do it, its going to be fine, try this and that, and ja-* P9.

There were also a few participants who mentioned that they reached out to tutors for help. According to Maree (2015) university tutors often act as mentors for under-resourced students, as they are seen as being more approachable than lecturers.

> *My first assignment it was English literature, I got a 53, I wanted to leave. But I talked to my tutor… I was like what the hell did I do wrong because I know this is not me – P7.*

Lastly, four participants mentioned that having friends around who could be asked for advice was one of their coping strategies. This is expected as Tao et al. (2000) suggest social support is one of the critical coping strategies that university students use.

> *I think I was staying with a third year while I was doing my first year [in residence]. So he actually used to advise us and say listen, you should try and do this here* – P4

> *If I'm ever lost or if I really want to know something then I have someone to like ask* – P7.

3.7.2. Responses that control the meaning of the problem.

This type of strategy refers to responses that cognitively control the threat, or neutralise the problem. Examples of this type of response include positive comparisons and substitution of reward (Anderson et al., 2012).

3.7.2.1 Positive comparisons.

Positive comparison is where an individual uses perspective and creates a temporary frame of reference. Schlossberg suggests that individuals using this strategy would say things like, 'I count my blessings' (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 89). Although none of the participants actively acknowledged that this was a coping strategy, many made comments that alluded to it throughout the interviews.

> *So I started speaking to people and sometimes it helped me realise I am not the only one. Again it is how I found my other friend, because with her I realised I am not the only one; and mine [situation] is a bit better, for her, eish….* - P3.

> *"I had been failing the test but what made me feel a little better was that I was not the only one doing really bad in physics*" – P9.

The reverse is also true, namely that there are often *negative* outcomes associated with social comparison (Alexander, 2016). For example, students commented on the noticeable difference between their experience and the experience of students from a more advantaged background:

> *Because everyone was carrying on with their lives as if everything is fine, and on my side I was feeling like everything is not fine – P1.*

P2 conveyed that when he spoke to his friends at home, the ease of their experience made him feel like he should leave Wits.

> *Like when you call your friends maybe at UKZN they tell you everything is moving fine. You will find most of the people [At The University of KZN] are speaking Zulu because, of course its KZN. And here [In Johannesburg] different languages, you have to swop to English and you know language barriers, its very difficult – P2.*

As noted many times, there is a significant association between language proficiency and academic achievement (McKay, 2016), and therefore P2's friends' ability to cope and succeed academically appeared to be significantly enhanced relative to P2.

3.7.2.2 Substitution of rewards.

This strategy refers to a "hierarchical ordering of life priorities" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 89). This is when an individual makes a conscious decision to accept the hardship associated with a certain situation due to the recognition of the long term significant benefits that would accrue from persisting and overcoming that situation. This was expressed in participants' communication of enduring the hardship of transition, as the difficulty was outweighed by their determination to create a better future. Mackie (2001) suggests students who have a long-term goal are often more motivated and committed to their university course, despite difficulties encountered along the way. P6 said that despite the strenuous transition, she persevered because she said:

I feel like I have to get this degree whether I like it or not.

You know you have to because you want to build a better future for like my mom and for myself so it was more like I need to kick myself in the back for her also – P8.

I have seen that if I am not going to push hard, who is going to help my granny when she cant stand on her own, I actually have to be there to assist – P4.

Often when a situation is loaded with stress, an individual's hope for a better future is what enables resilience (Dass-Brailsford, 2008). When an individual chooses to focus on what is to come, they are often able to endure a distressing present (Theron, 2016). Dass-Brailsford (2008) suggests that students who engage in this type of thinking are able to make a cognitive appraisal of their current situation and make an assessment of their capacity for action and the direction in which it will lead their lives. Both Dass-Brailsford (2008) and Theron (2016) note that economic advancement is a particularly common motivator for students who have come from under-resourced backgrounds:

*I wanted to like be an academic success for one, maybe the fact that my parents didn't have that kind of like pushed me to like want that, to see the jobs that they have. My mom doesn't work, and my dad well he drives, like he is a delivery… So I just wanted to more than tha*t. – P7.

That is the thing that brought me to university, it wasn't the desire of I want to become a lawyer, or I want to become a politician… I wanted basically to get a job, and the only way you get a job is through university – P4.

3.7.3 Responses that help individual manage stress after it has occurred.

This refers to strategies that individuals use to manage the stress once it has already occurred. It refers to methods used to manage the stressful situation without getting totally overwhelmed by it (Anderson et al., 2012). Strategies include emotional discharge, withdrawal and avoidance of worry.

3.7.3.1 Emotional discharge.

Emotional discharge is the process where an individual freely vents his or her feeling. When asked what her strategy was, P6 said, "I think crying helped the most". Even P2, who had previously expressed that his culture was not supportive of male emotion said,

> *Hey, I don't know, I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything but it happened just automatically. Sometimes you go to the shower, you open the shower, you sit down, you cry, you cry and cry.* – P2.

Lazarus and Folkman refer to this strategy as an emotion focused behaviour, which suggests that it is used to minimise the emotional distress of the stressful situation (Goh et al., 2010). Lazarus and Folkman suggest that an emotional response is often employed when an individual feels like the situation cannot be changed, only managed (Goh et al., 2010).

3.7.3.2 Withdrawal.

As the title implies, withdrawal refers to an individual retreating and not pursuing an active strategy to manage the stress (Anderson et al., 2012). Lazarus and Folkman call this strategy an inhibition of action (Goh et al., 2010). In their research, Dyson and Renk (2006) found that students who adopted avoidant coping strategies often had higher levels of depression and increased desire to drop out. There were two participants who mentioned that when they felt overwhelmed, they would sleep.

> *If a day is too hard for me, I would rather sleep and when you wake up your mind is just refreshed… I wont call it a strategy because it was just something that was involuntary that comes out of nowhere, that "hey let me just sleep", you know"- P2.*

Berzonsky and Kuk, (2000) refer to avoidant coping strategies, like the one mentioned above, as self-handicapping, as these strategies do not alleviate the core of the stressor.

3.7.3.3 Avoidance of worry.

Many participants described using different forms of technological devices as a distraction and a way to temporarily escape the stress. Four participants mentioned that they would watch series or a movie to alleviate stress. P3 noted:

I enjoy watching movies. So I just watched movies… calm down a bit.

There were also one participant who mentioned she listened to music and another who said she would play games on her phone. Interestingly, only P9 made reference to drinking alcohol as a strategy to escape from worry. In terms of rural students using alcohol as a stress release, Alexander (2016) found that the consumption rate was generally lower for students with high self-efficacy. Alexander (2016) however notes that her result should be interpreted with caution, as it is possible that the alcohol consumption rate was low due to financial constraints of rural students.

It seems from the participants' perspectives that the use of the aforementioned strategies was useful in effectively dealing with the strain of the situation. It is evident that there was not one strategy that worked for every participant; rather participants engaged in array of strategies to mange the associated challenges.

The objective of this research was to use Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory to understand the experience of the under-resourced student when transitioning to university. The use of the 4S framework specifically provided useful insight into how under-resourced students negotiated the transition. Given the insights gained it is possible to conceptualise interventions that we should utilise, as well as to be cognisant of the research limitations, which will be discussed below.

3.8 Implication of Findings

3.8.1 Introduction.

Given what we know about the experience of students from rural schools transitioning to university, it is useful to demonstrate the utility of the findings from the current research by recommending possible interventions for the future. Importantly, Schlossberg (2004) suggests that her model can be used simultaneously for research on those in transition *as well* as a "guideline for developing interventions with individuals" (p. 7). Therefore, this model is particularly useful in this context.

According to Badat and Sayed (2014) interventions designed specifically for students from under-resourced backgrounds are critically warranted if there are hopes of improving the current retention and graduation rates in South Africa. Maree (2015), who has conducted

extensive research projects on under-resourced South African students (Maree et al., 2011), stressed the importance of taking students' background into account. In a society like South Africa which has been traumatised by a damaging colonial past, it is common to come across students from incredibly depleted backgrounds (Alexander, 2016; Ndebele, 2013). Maree (2012) suggests that it is virtually impossible to expect students from under-resourced backgrounds to succeed at the level required in tertiary education without appropriate intervention. The interventions suggested below have been broken down into two sections. The first set looks at school level interventions and the second set explores intervention options once students are already at university. Importantly, data from the interviews have been incorporated into these intervention suggestions, as students were asked what advice they would offer to future students in the same position as themselves.

3.8.2 Part One: School university links.

As noted, the standard of education students received at school correlates directly with students' ability to navigate the academic demand of university (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Pillay, 2004). Additionally, the classification of schools attended, such as under-resourced or privileged will impact the level of preparedness of students entering university (Maree, 2015). Therefore according to Nel et al. (2009), "if higher education institutions want to improve their retention rates, intensive interventions are necessary at the earliest possible phase" (p. 977). Similarly, Badat and Sayed (2014) suggest that a multi-dimensional approach such as early stage interventions at a school level, are needed in order to tackle the inequality regarding retention rates in South African universities. This section will be modelled on the research conducted by Nel et al. (2009) who present a framework with possibilities for pre-university level interventions. The suggestion is that higher education institutions need to partner with the school sector in order to actively engage them in ensuring all school students are equally prepared for tertiary education (Nel et al., 2009). According to Nel et al. (2009), these interventions need to broken down into academic, social, emotional, cultural, unrealistic expectations and financial factors. The researchers suggest that these factors are interdependent, and impact equally upon students school experience (Nel et al., 2009).

3.8.3 Academic factors.

It is imperative that the foundation of learning and academic skill be established at a school level (Pillay, 2004; Theron, 2016). Whilst universities can introduce some sort of bridging

program once student have entered university, it is almost impossible to make up the back log of twelve years of inadequate education (Nel et al., 2009). As noted in the discussion section, all nine participants expressed frustration regarding absent, unmotivated teachers. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of national education to guarantee that teachers are adequately trained and equally committed, as teachers are one of the most essential determinants of learning (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Maree, 2015). According to Badat and Sayed (2014), "not to do is to trap the poor into vicious intergenerational cycles of poverty" (p. 142). As a result, teachers need to be paid well so that rural schools are able to attract teachers who meet the qualification and are motivated to make a difference (Badat & Sayed, 2014).

Additionally, Nel et al. (2009) note that career guidance needs to be offered to students in rural schools before they decide which subjects to pursue from grade 10 to grade 12, as this determines their future career opportunities. When asked what advice she would give to future students, P7 suggested:

> *Number one, study a course that you really love because when it gets difficult, when the assignments and the test and the exams get difficult at least you still have that to hold onto.*
>
> *Your mark shouldn't make you choose. It must be the love of that thing – P2.*

Unfortunately, in the absence of career counselling, students often choose careers that are not well suited to their interest (Christie, 2009). This detracts from a student's sense of control over their situation (Anderson et al., 2012). Maree (2015) suggests that "this situation can be turned around if the education authorities can succeed in administering present-day, integrated quantitative and qualitative career counselling" (p. 408). Theron (2016) puts forward an interesting suggestion to solve this crisis. She suggests that part of a psychology internship could be reserved for career counselling in disadvantaged areas, provided the Health Professions Council of South Africa approved. This could be particularly relevant for educational psychology students (Theron, 2016). This is an example of how the university can engage at a school level in ensuring student preparedness.

3.8.4 Social factors.

While previous research has suggested that students from rural areas are often unable to rely on parents for support (Bojuwoye, 2002), the current research suggests otherwise. Parental support was a recurring theme in students' accounts of dealing with the transition. As Schlossberg (2004) noted, parental support is often the most heavily relied on source of support during transitions. According to Nel et al. (2009), rural students rely on the resource of parental support as much as students from privileged areas. Therefore Nel et al. (2009) suggests that university preparation should not focus exclusively on students, but rather parents should be included in the process as well. According to Theron (2016), parents from rural areas are often unsure about how to go about providing effective support, as they are often unfamiliar with the world of academia.

> *Ja some they did* [provide encouragement]*, some they didn't, because of the ignorance of their parents, because they didn't see education as important – P1*

Interestingly, Tao et al. (2002) note that while the transition to university is the students' transition, it is also often a transition for parents, who need to become accustomed to living apart from their children and maintaining contact. It would therefore be useful to offer an explanation to parents of how to go about showing interest and providing effective support for the student in transition (Theron, 2016).

3.8.5 Financial factors.

It is no surprise that students from under-resourced backgrounds do not have the financial means to fund a university education (Badat & Sayed, 2014). However, according to Nel et al. (2009), while there are bursaries such as NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Scheme) available for needy students, many are not familiar with the bursary application process. This includes a lack of knowledge regarding which bursaries are available, inaccessible internet usage and insufficient knowledge around bursary application deadlines (Nel et al., 2009).

> *At that time bursaries were a problem. NASFAS, you don't know how to apply, at that time there is no internet. So….- P4.*

I didn't know any bursary that is providing for aeronautical until I was here and I was told there is something called Deniel. – P2.

Therefore, students, parents and school teachers need to be provided with sufficient information regarding various financial aid options (Nel et al., 2009). It is essential that the application procedure be made more user-friendly, especially for those who are unfamiliar with the system (Badat & Sayed, 2014). Bojuwoye (2002) suggests that in addition to information being accessible at schools, this should be included in the orientation program at university, where a session is dedicated to informing students of their options. Without a bursary in place, students from under-resourced environments face significant barriers at university, increasing their concurrent stressors.

Not having a sponsored bursary and NSFAS, that was the biggest challenge. Because I didn't have accommodation, I didn't have money for text books, ja… – P5.

Despite NSFAS's effort to make a considerable amount of funding available, there is an urgent need to increase the budget as many South African students still do not receive the funding that they need (Bojuwoye, 2002; Maree, 2015).

But hey, NSFAS, I'm fed up with those people. They offer no help. The funding is great, it is a great idea, but the way they monitor it, its somehow not right - P2.

Without the provision of effective funding from organisations like NSFAS, the impoverished from under-resourced backgrounds will continue to be compromised, with no way out of their dire circumstance (Bojuwoye, 2002). This issue is one that requires immediate intervention at both a government and university level.

3.8.6 Cultural factors.

This research demonstrated how culture shock is one of the common challenges experienced by rural students in transition. This again was classified as a 'concurrent stressor' in a new situation (Anderson et al., 2012). Nel et al. (2009) suggest that both learners and parents should be introduced to the university world through realistic description, in order to reduce the shock factor. The suggestion is to implement role models in schools who break down any misconceptions about the university experience. This includes encouraging students to be

open to cultural diversity (Nel et al., 2009). Through the explanation of cultural diversity, it would be useful to explain that difference is not equated with inferiority. While this notion is obviously complex and multi layered, it is worth considering. An intervention that might be considered is for alumni who were previously under-resourced university students to return to their hometowns and recount their experience for future university students. In line with this, P1 said:

> *I would like to tell them that even though you are coming from your background, no one here at Wits University will judge you from the background. So ensure that you work twice as hard as other people because you know where you are coming from.*

3.8.7 Expectations.

Another issue that compounded the transition process in the current research was students' disillusionment upon entering university as top achievers, and then suddenly failing multiple courses. As noted, six of the participants in this research made reference to themselves as being high achievers at school. According to Huysamen (2000) unrealistic expectations are common for students who come from rural schools as high marks in under-resourced schools are in no way an indicator for university level grades. Nel et al. (2009) suggest that a way to counter this disillusionment is by ensuring that higher learning institutions move away from marketing themselves in an attractive light only. It is important that universities communicate the realistic academic challenges that students are bound to encounter at a tertiary level so that students will be prepared.

> *My advice to them would be that firstly university is not the same as high school, so they are going to face challenges. You know you are going to face challenges; you should stick to your dreams – P5.*

According to Maree (2015), it is imperative that students have an understanding of goal setting and predicting consequences so that they are able to take on the realistic burden of university education in a sensible way.

It is evident from the section above that it is impossible to tackle the school-university gap through implementing interventions at a university level alone. In order to adequately prepare under-resourced students and thereby mitigate the difficulty of transition, interventions need

to begin at school. Ideally a holistic intervention orientation needs to be adopted, with equal focus on academic, social, financial, cultural and realistic expectation factors.

3.8.8 Part Two: University level intervention.

There are many who advocate that it is not the responsibility of the higher education sector to compensate for poor schooling (Ndebele, 2013). However, "if higher education does not bring about systematic reforms within its teaching and learning system, the status quo will largely remain, to the detriment of development, equity and individual advancement" (Ndebele, 2013, p. 68). If universities refuse to intervene, the current cycle of poor education will only be perpetuated.

As such, the following section will focus on university level interventions. This section will be modelled according to an intervention guideline proposed by Maree (2015) who conducted a project at the University of Pretoria. In her research, Maree (2015) assessed the transition of 100 students from an under-resourced background who were studying to be teachers. The intention of her project was to establish pointers for future interventions to be implemented at a university level (Maree, 2015). These interventions align with the data in the current research. As a result of the interventions implemented, students in Maree's (2015) research went on to successfully graduate. Interestingly, only a small minority of these students went on to graduate as teachers. This happened as a result of the career counselling provided as one of the interventions, as many of the students then realised that teaching was not their ideal career choice, and went on to (successfully) pursue other fields (Maree, 2015).

3.8.9 Orientation.

Maree (2015) suggests that universities need to encourage students to attend university orientation programmes. Importantly, there needs to be clear guidance provided during orientation explaining where students can seek out assistance. With the correct assistance in place, the initial concurrent stressors may be reduced (Schlossberg, 2011). Five participants in the current research noted their regret about not attending orientation.

> *I didn't attend the whole orientation week…. But then it also worked at my disadvantage.*

The first day, because you didn't know the environment, since I didn't come for orientation I didn't know where was east campus, where is my class, the timetable…. -P4.

However, these participants also mentioned that the reason they were unable to attend was often as a result of financial constraints.

At that time I think when we did the orientation, I didn't really come for orientation because now I didn't have the money to basically go, come back and forth. So it was really difficult. It was really difficult – P4.

Within a bursary package, consideration should be given to providing under-resourced students with the opportunity to attend orientation week as this has important implications going forward. When asked what her advice to future students would be, P8 responded:

First thing, attend the first day experience because honestly, ja I noticed that's the platform where you actually meet people. Maybe a person you'll be in the same class with, you make friends easier with that. Ja, just associate yourself, when the resources of the school, get to know where everything is.

3.8.10 Academic skill bridging program.

Maree (2015) proposes that students from an under-resourced background need to be involved in skill development programmes in order to compensate for their insufficient skill. The results and discussion section in the current research highlighted the concurrent stress associated with inadequate skill, where all nine participants experienced this a significant challenge. Although it is advisable that skill interventions begin at a school level (Nel et al., 2009), it is imperative to offer this at a university level as well. According to McKay (2016), if an under-resourced student begins university without the provision of academic support, their chances of success are significantly impaired.

It is important that there is considerable attention paid to the language issue, as without adequate English skill, students are unable to effectively engage both socially and academically (Nel et al., 2009). Language intervention programs should not only focus on equipping students with colloquial language skills; additionally students need to be

accustomed to comfortably engage with academic discourse (Maree, 2015; McKay, 2015). Additionally, a bridging program needs to include the provision of basic skills such as computer literacy and referencing skills (Maree, 2015). While these programmes are often available to first year students, the programmes have not been appropriately designed to cater for the students who arrive with a severe resource deficit. Accordingly, these programmes need to be adapted and made easily accessible for students in need.

Maree (2015) suggests that one of the ways to provide academic skill guidance is through the mentorship of university tutors. Interestingly, at least five of the participants in the current research mentioned that they relied on the assistance of tutors.

> *In first year I never went to a lecturer, only the tutors – P5.*

Perhaps going forward it is important that the university ensures tutors are cognisant of the contextual backgrounds of students attending tutorials. This provides a kind of informal bridging program for students who are struggling with academic material.

> *My first assignment it was English literature, I got a 53, I wanted to leave. I wanted to leave. But I talked to my tutor, I went to… I was like what the hell did I do wrong because I know this is not me - P7.*

An alternative solution is to follow the suggestion of McKay (2016), where the first year of a degree is extended over a two-year period. This sentiment is echoed by Ndebele (2013), who suggests that the current duration of academic programs needs to be lengthened. McKay (2016) suggests that the purpose of this extension is to spread out the academic workload, give students more time to appropriately adapt to the university demand and allow students to complete academic tasks in a less pressurised time frame. However, while this type of intervention is useful in increasing success, and therefore one to consider, it is not enough to solve the high-drop out rates alone (McKay, 2015).

3.8.11 Support systems.

In line with Schlossberg's (2004) emphasis regarding the importance of support systems during transition, Maree (2015) suggests that rural students need have access to support from lecturers, peers and significant others. Therefore in addition to a program that enhances

academic skill, Maree (2015) proposes universities offer complimentary support programs. This can include career counselling, emotional counselling, various life skill workshops, and events that facilitate peer interaction (Maree, 2015). Six participants expressed that they would encourage future students to engage in interaction on all these levels in order to enhance their transition process.

> *Instead of struggling, talking is the key, consulting, going to places like CCDU, not just closing yourself in a corner. I feel like it is the only way – P3.*

> *They should be determined and be hard workers and try to interact more with people and interact more with lecturers. I think once you isolate yourself, and isolate yourself from lecturers, isolate yourself from tutors, isolate yourself from friends… it hurts you – P4.*

3.8.12 Financial aid.

Without repeating that which has already been stated above, according to Maree (2015), the issue of funding is critical. According to Ndebele (2013) the current funding demand far outweighs the supply, which means that many students are still unable to access higher education all together. Funding needs to be provided for students to pay registration fees, cover clothing, stationary and textbooks costs as well as some additional pocket money (Maree, 2015). Once again, this will significantly decrease the concurrent stress expressed by all participants associated with inadequate funding.

3.8.13 Conclusion.

In the absence of a holistic intervention program, we can expect the following cycle to be continually perpetuated. Poor school preparation and an under-resourced upbringing leads to an inability to successfully transition to university, which leads to an inability to find suitable employment, which leads to stunted economic growth and the likelihood of greater socio-political instability (Maree, 2015). Through the lens of Schlossberg's (2011) theory, this research has demonstrated that individuals require specific resources to successfully negotiate transition. For students who come from an under-resourced background, there is an obvious scarcity of available resources, which is why interventions are required at both a school and university level. These issues need to be addressed as a matter of urgency if there is any hope in transforming the current state of South Africa's socio-political status.

3.9 Limitations of The Study

There are some limitations associated with the method in this research which need to be addressed. While the inclusion of only nine participants allowed the researcher to engage in a rich analysis of the data, it poses issues in terms of the transferability of the results (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Therefore the results from this research may not be said to be representative of all rural South African students. Additionally, as this research relied on snowball sampling, the researcher was unable to include participants from every faculty at the university which again poses issues in terms of transferability.

Interviews can pose problems, as they are a self-report method (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). This means that while everything remained confidential, it was impossible to achieve anonymity, which could lead participants to give socially desirable answers (Stagnor, 2014). However, as the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewer attempted to clarify any points which seemed to be misleading.

In addition to the aforementioned concerns of transferability, the researcher, who acts as the primary instrument in qualitative research, was aware of reflexivity (Kleinsasser, 2000). This implies the acknowledgement of researcher bias based on background influences and preconceived bias ideas (Kleinsasser, 2002). Researcher bias could have been an issue in terms of how interviews were conducted as well as the identification of themes, as the researcher might have pushed personal points of interest, which perhaps over shadowed aspects which participants wished to foreground. For this reason, the researcher kept a reflexive journal in order to keep check of stereotypes and perceptions. Additionally, with the use of semi-structured interviews, the researcher gave room for participants to interject when required.

Due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to go back to participants and assess whether the codes were an accurate representation of their experiences. This poses issues of credibility, where the researcher may have failed to accurately represent the personal reality of the participant (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The demographics of the interviewer may have altered participants' responses. The researcher is a White female in her mid twenties. Participant's perceptions of the researcher's race and status as a post graduate student may have meant that participants did not feel totally

comfortable to openly engage. However, the researcher attempted to create an open, relaxed and non-judgmental environment during interviews. Additionally, a few of the participants expressed their gratitude in having the opportunity to discuss their transition experience (the first time for many of them), so it is hoped that there was a desire on the participants' behalf to authentically share experience.

There is also a conceptual limitation relating to the strong framing of the project within Schlossberg's (2004) model of transition which could cause a minor restriction. This may have resulted in the manipulation of data to fit within the theory. The researcher consulted her research journal prior to the generation of codes to make sure that each analysis reflected the individual participant's words and not the researcher's appraisal. Despite the limitations mentioned above, the researcher has demonstrated that Schlossberg's (2004) theory of transition, which explores the individual in transition as well as their resources used during transition, is a particularly useful framework in the context of the current study.

3.10 Future Recommendations

It has been noted that there is a dearth of research exploring under-resourced students transition to university. Therefore, further research in this area is warranted, with specific focus on the recommendations below.

Given the time constraints of the current research resulting in a relatively small sample, future research should aim to incorporate a larger sample. A larger sample would be more representative of the university student population and therefore have greater transferability potential. Furthermore, this study only included two male participants. It would be useful for future research to include a more balanced gender ratio as well as assessing if gender moderates the under-resourced students transition.

When looking at the background of participants in the study, the researcher focused on rural areas generally, without noting the difference between each area. As such, further research exploring the material conditions and experiences of individuals that acknowledges local manifestations of poverty and deprivation appears warranted. An interesting finding that consistently emerged throughout the research was participants' experiences of inferiority during transitions. Future studies could focus entirely on this issue, understanding what is at the core of rural student's perceived inferiority. In addition, research aimed at the efficacy of

the interventions designed to mitigate the causes and consequences of this perceived inferiority is justified. While this research suggested possible interventions, it would be useful for future research to conduct both quantitative and qualitative analyses on the merit of the suggested interventions in enhancing the under-resourced student's transition.

Concluding Remarks

Ensuring the successful outcome of students' transitions and ultimately student graduation rates, will contribute substantially to the vibrancy of South Africa's economy and redress some of the structural disadvantages caused by Apartheid (Badat & Sayed, 2014). Through the accounts of under-resourced students' experiences, this research has demonstrated that the negotiation of transition from school to university requires an array of resources. When a student comes from an under-resourced environment, the transition process is significantly challenged due to a lack of resources (Bojuwoye, 2002; Briggs et al., 2012). It was evident that the participants' appraisal of their *situation* was often fraught with apprehension and anxiety as a result of the concurrent stressors associated with their transition. Further, many students had a compromised sense of *self* due to feelings of inferiority and low self-efficacy.

However, while the challenges of the under-resourced student's transition are incomparably more difficult to that of a privileged student, this research demonstrated that students are not powerless victims of their circumstances. In line with Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory, which posits that each person will cope differently during transition, this research portrayed how students managed to stay motivated, self-sufficient and engage in constant optimistic search for effective strategies.

However, no participant's experience was without challenge. Despite some participants utilising resources such as a resilient sense of *self* and social *support*, it was impossible to completely offset the difficulties associated with an under-resourced transition. Without effective intervention at both the pre-university and peri-university phases, the divide between privileged and poor students is unlikely to be significantly reduced (Soudien, 2008; Strassburg et al., 2010). Accordingly, it is imperative that the issue of challenging transitions remain a central focus of research and intervention initiatives, with the hope that it may alleviate the transition process for under-resourced students in the future. This would have the benefit of unleashing the huge latent potential that exists in our population.

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Appendix A

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Letter to the Registrar

Dear Registrar

My name is Shira Gutnick and I am currently studying for my Masters degree in Organisational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. In order to complete my degree, I am required to conduct research. My topic focuses on the experience of students from under-resourced schools and their experience in transitioning to university. This research aims to explore the subjective experience of each student's transition. This exploration will be grounded in Schlossberg's transition theory. I am conducting the research under the supervision of Mr. Ian Siemers. I would like to ask for your permission to approach the second and third year course co-coordinator and students, to ask for their participation in my study.

With your permission, those who agree to participate in the study, will be interviewed, at a time and place that is convenient. The interview will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. In order to accurately incorporate the interview into my research, it will be recorded with consent. I would like to emphasise that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and if at any time, participants wish to withdraw from the study they can do so, up until the final write up of the research. Further, any questions which cause discomfort, do not have to be answered. As this is a sensitive topic, if answering these questions elicits painful memories for participants, free counseling will be available at CCDU, as well as telephonic counseling from SADAG. Confidentiality is a guarantee in this study and participants' identities will be kept confidential. The data will be confidential, meaning there will be no mention of participants in a manner which can or will reveal who they are. I will be the only person to process both the recordings and transcripts. After the transcription of the interviews the recordings will be destroyed. Anonymous transcriptions will be kept in a password locked computer and accessible to only my supervisor and myself.

If you are comfortable to give me permission to approach the course coordinator as-well as second year and third year students, kindly fill in your details in the consent form below.

For further information please feel free to contact me. Your participation will be sincerely appreciated. The research will contribute towards informing readers about the importance of understanding the transition experience for students from under-resourced schools, as this has implications for the university, the effected students and society. If you require, a summary of the results will be made available on request. Should you require this, you can contact me telephonically or via e-mail.

Kind Regards,
Shira Gutnick
Email: shirazagnoev@gmail.com
Phone: 0736830655

Supervisor
Mr. Ian Siemers
Lecturer in the Psychology Department
Email: ian.siemers@wits.ac.za

Appendix B

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Request for Access

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Shira Gutnick and I am currently studying for my Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. In order to complete my degree, I am required to conduct research. My topic focuses on the transition process of students from under-resourced schools to university. The intention is to explore the subjective experience of each student. This exploration will be grounded in Schlossberg's transition theory. I am conducting the research under the supervision of Mr. Ian Siemers.

With your permission, I would like to approach your students prior to a lecture, and ask for participants to join my research. Those who agree to participate in the study, will be interviewed, at a time and place that is convenient. The interview will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. In order to accurately incorporate the interview into my research, it will be recorded with consent. I would like to emphasise that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and if at any time, participants wish to withdraw from the study they can do so, up until the final write up of the research. Further, any questions which cause discomfort, do not have to be answered. As this is a sensitive topic, if answering these questions elicits painful memories for participants, free counseling will be available at CCDU, as well as telephonic counseling from SADAG. Confidentiality is a guarantee in this study and participants' identities will be kept confidential. The data will confidential, meaning there will be no mention of participants in a manner which can or will reveal who they are. I will be the only person to process both the recordings and transcripts. After the transcription of the interviews the recordings will be destroyed. Anonymous transcriptions will be kept in a password locked computer and accessible to only my supervisor and myself.

If you are comfortable to give me permission to invite your students to participate prior to the lecture, kindly fill in your details in the consent form below.

For further information please feel free to contact me. The research will contribute towards informing readers about the importance of understanding the transition experience for students from under-resourced schools, as this has implications for the university, the effected students and society. If you require, a summary of the results will be made available on request. Should you require this, you can contact me telephonically or via e-mail.

Kind regards,

Shira Gutnick
Email: shirazagnoev@gmail.com
Phone: 0736830655
Phone: 0736830655

Supervisor
Mr. Ian Siemers
Lecturer in the Psychology Department
Email: ian.siemers@wits.ac.za

Appendix C

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Participant information form

Dear prospective participant

My name is Shira Gutnick and I am currently studying for my Masters degree in Organisational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. In order to complete my degree, I am required to conduct research. My topic focuses on the experience of students from under-resourced schools and their experience in transitioning to university. This research aims to explore the subjective experience of each student's transition. This exploration will be grounded in Schlossberg's transition theory. I am conducting the research under the supervision of Mr. Ian Siemers. I would like to invite you to participate in the research.

If you consent to participate in the study, I will go on to conduct an interview, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. In order to accurately incorporate the interview into my research, it will be recorded with your consent. I would like to emphasise that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and if at any time, you wish to withdraw from the study you can do so without any consequences, up until the final write up of the research. Further, you do not have to answer any questions which make you uncomfortable. As this is a sensitive topic, if answering these questions elicits painful memories, free counseling will be available at CCDU (0117179140), as well as telephonically from SADAG (0112344837). Confidentiality is a guarantee in this study and your identity will be kept confidential. The data will be confidential, meaning there will be no mention of you in a manner which can or will reveal who you are. I will be the only person to process both the recordings and transcripts. After the transcription of the interviews the recordings will be destroyed. Anonymous transcriptions will be kept in a password locked computer and accessible to only my supervisor and myself.

If you choose to participate in the research, kindly fill in your details in the consent form below.

For further information please feel free to contact me. Your participation will be sincerely appreciated. The research will contribute towards informing readers about the importance of understanding the transition experience for students from under-resourced schools, as this has implications for the university, the effected students and society. If you require, a summary of the results will be made available on request. Should you require this, you can contact me telephonically or via e-mail.

Kind regards,
Shira Gutnick
Email: shirazagnoev@gmail.com
Phone: 0736830655

Supervisor
Mr. Ian Siemers
Lecturer in the Psychology Department
Email: ian.siemers@wits.ac.za

Appendix D

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Registrar Consent Form

I (the registrar) have been given the letter requesting permission to approach the second and third year course coordinators and students, for the study being conducted by Shira Gutnick and supervised by Mr. Ian Siemers. I have read this letter and I understand that I am granting the researcher permission to approach the course-coordinator and students and request their access in the study being conducted.

Please accept my signature as my granting permission for the above.

Registrar signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Request For Access Consent Form

I (the lecturer) have been given the request for access sheet for the study being conducted by Shira Gutnick and supervised Mr. Ian Siemers. I have read this sheet and I understand that I am granting the researcher permission to approach my students and request their access in the study being conducted.

Please accept my signature as my consent to approach my students prior to the commencement of a lecture.

Lecturer signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Interview Consent Form

I (the participant) have been given the participant information sheet for the study being conducted by Shira Gutnick and supervised by Mr. Ian Siemers. I have read this information sheet and I understand its contents.

I understand that:

☐ My participation in this research is entirely voluntary, as I am free to choose to participate or not to participate.

☐ I may decide to stop participating at any time during the interview, since there is no penalty for withdrawing or refusing to participate.

☐ I may choose not to answer specific questions and there is no penalty for refusing to address these questions.

☐ All identifying information will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

☐ No names will be recorded on the interview transcription.

☐ If I agree to participate, I need to sign this form as proof of my acceptance.

I understand the conditions and accept to participate in this study voluntarily.

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Audio Recording Consent Form

I (the participant) have been given the participant information sheet for the study being conducted by Shira Gutnick and supervised Mr. Ian Siemers. I have read this information sheet and I understand that the interview will be audio recorded.

Please accept my signature as my consent to being audio recorded in this interview.

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

]

Appendix H

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Direct Quotation Consent Form

I (the participant) have been given the participant information sheet for the study being conducted by Shira Gutnick and supervised Mr. Ian Siemers. I have read this information sheet and I understand that parts of my interview will be used in direct quotation for the analysis of this research.

Please accept my signature as my consent to use direct quotation in the analysis at a later stage.

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I

Interview Schedule

Exploring students school experience

1. Tell me about your high school, what were your teachers like?
2. Tell me about your class and size?
3. Did your school give you books and paper to write on?
4. Was there a blackboard? Could you see it?
5. What was your school building like? Did it have intact windows?
6. Tell me about the bathrooms at your school?
7. How did you feel about your exam results?

Looking at the students *situation*

8. Are you the first person in your family to be going to university?
9. When you started first year, what other pressures did you have besides for university?
10. Did you feel like you had the skills you needed when you came to the university? Please elaborate.
11. Where did you live when you first started university?
12. How comfortable were you in communicating in English when you started university?

Exploring the Self

13. How did you feel about entering university and making it work?
14. Did you feel hopeful about making things work at university?
15. How did you cope with dealing with things that you weren't familiar with?
16. Overall, did you feel like you were managing, or did you want to leave?

Exploring form of Support drawn on.

17. What was your relationship with your family like when you first started university?
18. Did you feel pressured by your family to succeed?
19. Who would you speak to when things felt hard?
20. Were there friends that you discussed things with?
21. If not, why not?
22. Did you feel comfortable to ask lecturers for help? Please elaborate.

Understanding Strategies

23. When you were having a hard day, what would you do to help yourself manage with the challenge of the day?
24. Were there situations that you felt you couldn't manage?
25. Were there situations where you think you did well? If so, what makes you think that they went well?

Appendix J

Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MORG/17/013 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	Transitioning from under-resourced schools to university: an application of Schlossberg's transition model to the South African context
INVESTIGATORS	Zagnoev Shira
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	27/06/17
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 27 June 2017

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Colleen Bernstein)

cc Supervisor:

Mr Ian Siemers
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2019

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES

Turnitin Report

