

## YOUNG ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL SUPPORT DURING THE TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY WORK AND EDUCATION

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## Research Questions

- 1) How do vulnerable young adults navigate the social transition of entering a new work or educational situation?
- 2) How do other developmental transitions intersect with these transitions?
- 3) What supports and limitations do vulnerable young adults identify as they make these transitions, and how do these facilitate or hinder the process?

## Design

Multiple semi-structured interviews focusing on the transition of interest as well as personal history, characteristics, and family, friend and personal resources.

5 meetings with each participant over 3-4 months:

Meeting 1: Screening

Meeting 2: Introductory interview - card sort task

Meetings 3-5: Combination of check-in and structured questions

Plus one telephone or face-to-face interview with someone each participant identified as "a person who knows you well"

## Sample

- 11 emerging adults ages 19-23
- All in SF Bay Area: Alameda, Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Francisco, Santa Cruz
- All low-income and making a school or work transition within 2 weeks of first interview
- Diverse in sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, referral source, level of education, living situation

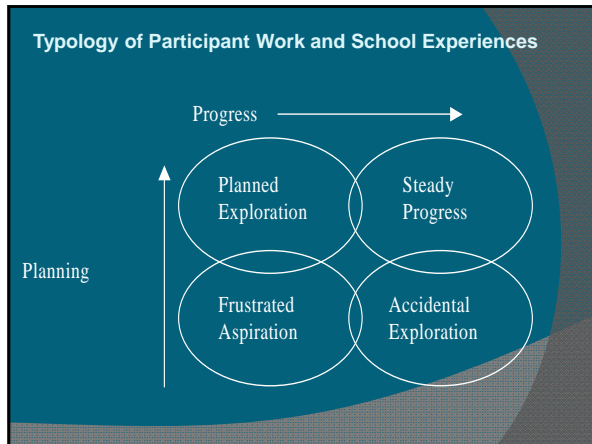
## Categories of vulnerable emerging adults in this sample

- Low-income (11)
- Past or present foster care experience\* (2)
- Past or present mental health system experience\* (7/5 SMI)
- Past or present juvenile/criminal justice experience\* (3)
- Past or present experience with homelessness\* (1)
- Living with disabilities or chronic health conditions\* (2)
- First or second generation immigrant (3)
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (2)
- Teen parent (1)

\* Categories described as *vulnerable youth* in Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth (2005)

## Analysis

1. Organization of data
2. Index coding
3. Within- and cross-case analysis



### Support

- Tangible Assistance
- Teaching and Mentoring
- Developmentally appropriate connection
  - Availability
  - Investment
  - Recognition
  - Interdependence
  - Safety

### Teaching and mentoring

Skills that Young Adults Learned or Wanted to Learn from Adults

- “Soft” skills
- “Hard” skills
- Context of learning

### Availability

*Another thing I wish that County [mental health] had would be a line you could call like a peer counseling line. You could call and say, 'I'm having problems right now; I need to talk to somebody about it...They [county mental health staff] don't think it's a crisis. Every single time I've called, they've never had a crisis with me...They still like me, but they're like, 'This is my off time. I don't want to talk to you right now.'* - Trisha

### Investment

*He talked to me like I was just a person going through a hard time.*  
- Helen

*You know, they didn't really, like they didn't really ask me questions about how my day was or what I want or what do I enjoy doing or encourage me to do what I want to do. They really were just, so, at a typical dinner, it would be like, "So what did you get, what was your test grade? What's your homework? Have you done that yet? And that's the extent of their concern..."*  
- Sylvia

### Recognition

*We ended up graduating. I was so happy. We didn't do nothing afterwards but we ended up graduating. That's all I needed. I was happy. I never graduated from - I mean I've graduated from some places, but not the cap and gown and a tassel and move it to the other side. You get the real certificate that's in the - you know, a diploma kind of thing.*  
- Crystal

## Interdependence

*I was too stubborn and I thought I would do it on my own and show them I can, but there's no one who can do it on their own. People who are rich, they don't do it on their own. They pay people to do it. - Kyle*

*Either overly helping me to where I don't have a chance to grow, or overly judging me, or dropping me completely, meaning not to have any services. Or, to over help or under help. - Helen*

## Safety

*They're still like my parents. They tell me, "Oh, you shouldn't do that or you should do this instead."*

- Stacey

## Support for youth in each category

	Steady Progress n=2	Planned Exploration n=3	Accidental Exploration n=3	Frustrated Aspiration n=3
Availability	+	+	-	-
Investment	+	+	+/-	+/-
Recognition	+	+	+/-	+/-
Safety	+	+	-	-
Interdependence	+	+	-	-

## Negotiating Support

*I think what works best with him – I've tried being a stern parental figure, being a big brother, being a distant mentor – the struggle with being the good buddy – I don't see how that changes his behavior. We have a few laughs and that's it. What I try to do is make him feel secure in our relationship – validate the feelings – acknowledge that he's come from hardship. He can achieve success – he has a myriad of skills that are available to him. I try to treat him with more respect. I haven't always treated him with respect, and I think a lot of people do that with youth – now I meet him where he's at.*

- Kyle's mentor

## Strengths and Limitations

### Strengths

- One of a very few qualitative studies to track vulnerable youth over time
- Rich data collected over time
- 100% of sample completed study
- Diverse sample

### Limitations

- Selection bias
- Small sample
- More women than men
- No participants from Latino communities

## Discussion/Next steps

- Repeat in larger sample with longer follow-up
- Map this model with others
- How do programs and policies provide this support (or not)?
- Applicability of this model to other types of transitions and other life stages.