

## Pathways to Adulthood for Foster Care Adolescents: Integrating the Insights of Developmental Psychology and Social Work

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### Abstract

*The successful transition to adulthood of youths who had displayed behavioral problems during adolescence is an issue that has begun to command the attention of scientists. In order to increase our understanding of this phenomenon, it would be useful to create links between these two areas of research which, until now, have ignored each other. Recent work in developmental psychology and social work has produced knowledge that is relevant to the subject. However, because of their distinct analytical perspectives and different publication venues, the scientific community is faced with a fragmentation of expertise related to this subject. By focusing on the empirical results of studies recently conducted in these two areas, this article will try to more concretely show that current insights point to the same conclusions: 1) compared to earlier phases of development, the transition phase to adulthood is likely to be characterized by more ruptures and changes and 2) newly emerging experiences and contexts could play an important role in the redirection of life trajectories. It is necessary to not only combine information from the two areas of study but also to consider the strengths and limitations of each. We will thus aim to better understand the specific processes that occur during this phase of transition to adulthood.*

**Keywords:** transition to adulthood – life trajectories – foster care adolescents – juvenile delinquency.

### Introduction

Social work and developmental psychology examine similar issues within similarly vulnerable populations showing problems of adaptation. There is scientific research in the two areas that studies the transition to adulthood of adolescents displaying behavioral problems. This is a recently emergent topic that has been relatively little explored. In social work, this topic has been examined in studies of adolescents preparing to leave the youth protection services (YPS), where the transition to adulthood was imminent. When the YPS intervenes in the life of an adolescent and his family, it is because the development of the adolescent has been compromised and the situation is deemed to require intervention. Psychological hazards in adolescence generally relate to the severity of the behavioral problems manifested and these include ones that are aggressive and illegal. In developmental psychology, it is adolescents displaying specifically illegal behavior that have been the objects of studies on the transition to adulthood. In the two areas of research, few studies focused on the transition to adulthood of adolescents displaying behavioral problems.

The transition phase, covering the years 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000), poses a challenge to researchers who study changes in problems of adaptation. Post-adolescence, or this transition phase, is marked by a generalized improvement in negative emotions (stress, alienation, aggressiveness) leading to a greater sense of well-being (Roberts, Capsi, & Moffitt, 2003). Furthermore, some research has shown that a trend in asocial behaviors is occurring: they stop, diminish or fade during the transition phase and this occurs on a continuous basis, even well into adulthood (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Laub & Sampson, 1993).

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It is especially at the end of adolescence, which corresponds to the beginning of the transition phase, that we see a drastic reduction in asocial behavior (Farrington, 1986). Related to this data, Moffitt (1993) has shown the existence of two developmental sub-types connected to behavioral problems: the first beginning in childhood (aggressive and disruptive behaviors) and continuing through adolescence (delinquent behaviors); the second limited to adolescence (delinquent behaviors). Several later studies confirmed the existence of these two typical trajectories, especially the one showing significant improvement of the situation starting at the end of adolescence (Anguilar, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 2000; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998; White, Bates, & Buyske, 2001). Over the course of the transition phase, the trajectories of those showing difficulties during the teenage years seem to undergo a positive reversal (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004). This suggests that the trajectory of some adolescents is characterized by a change in the patterns of inappropriate behaviors during the transition phase. We do not yet fully understand the factors and mechanisms which facilitate the cessation of these behaviors, whether they start in childhood or adolescence. We don't know how and why the asocial behaviors diminish or end during this developmental transition to adulthood. Empirical research on these propositions is sparse, however, and much more is known about the factors that lead individuals into delinquency and antisocial behaviour than about the factors that lead them out of it.

Studies in developmental psychology which focus on the transition to adulthood are rare and most are oriented towards the idea of a continuity with adolescence (Bergman, Andershed, & Andershed, 2009; Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington & Milne, 2002; Mun, Windle, & Schainker, 2008; Petras et al., 2004). We have only just begun to study the factors which facilitate the significant reduction or cessation of behavioral problems associated with the transition phase. On the other hand, the studies in social work indicate that many of the adolescents recently released from the youth protection system manifest forms of resilience and succeed relatively well in their transition to adulthood, in spite of their difficult pasts. The experiences of these youths thus evade the pessimistic predictions regarding their futures, which transcend earlier behavioral problems. Some studies conducted in the field of social work have attempted to identify the factors of protection or resilience shown by these youths while entering adulthood. These factors seem closely connected to the life contexts that emerged during the transition phase. This time of life is especially rich in contextual changes which may be critical for an understanding of the positive evolution of behavioral problems. Research results in the two areas of study suggest that the interaction between the individual and the environment is a promising perspective for a better understanding of discontinuities in the trajectories of those displaying behavioral problems during the entry into adulthood. A more systematic study of the mutual dynamics and influences governing the individual and his environment would very likely allow us to shed light on this question and identify the processes that can effect a change of trajectory. This kind of knowledge, currently in an embryonic state, might be beneficial from a scientific perspective but might also allow us to direct policies and intervention practices for adolescents soon to leave the youth protection system.

Our main objective in this article is to demonstrate that the increase in information about the discontinuities in trajectory of these youths requires an integration of the perspectives of both areas of study : social work and developmental psychology. To achieve this integration, we must create a dialog between these two research fields by identifying what unites rather than separates them on the theoretical level. We believe that these two domains not only share the same preoccupation with individual adaptation/maladaptation, but in their examinations of adaptation problems, also share a psycho-social perspective. This approach will provide us with a frame of reference for understanding the strengths and limitations of the studies produced in these two areas on the transition phase of adolescents with behavioral problems. The analysis will demonstrate the need, in pursuing research on the transition phase of youths displaying behavioral problems, to more fully consider the individual/environmental dynamic, which is a central element in the psycho-social approach,

### **The psycho-social approach : a theoretical perspective common to the two areas of research**

On the one hand, in social work, when analyzing problems of adaptation (Goldstein, 1995), the mediation between the individual and his environment is the focus. On the other hand, in developmental psychology, the concern is with the causes, development and evolution of individual maladaptive behaviors (Sroufe, 1997). In other words, the development of patterns of maladaptive behaviors over time and their continuation or cessation are the focus of interest when analysing problems of adaptation. Social work and developmental psychology differ on the analytical perspectives applied to problems, but their concerns merge around the question of individual adaptation/maladaptation. This question is historically and theoretically linked to the psycho-social approach.

The psycho-social approach is the result of many studies in social work produced over the course of the 1950s and 60s. The one entitled : *Casework : A Psychosocial Therapy*, written by Florence Hollis (1964), represents the best attempt at articulating the psycho-social model. This work succeeded in basing the discipline of social work on renewed foundations which would definitively distinguish it from its psychotherapeutic origins (Goldstein, 1995). The psycho-social approach synthesizes different theories of human behavior within a « transactional » model where the individual is considered to be in a constant interaction with his social environment. The modification of problematic behaviors is conceptualized within the context of an optimal adaptation of the individual. It is this broad objective, rooted in the psycho-social approach, which tends to integrate the analyses conducted in social work and developmental psychology related to questions of individual adaptation/maladaptation.

While social work is a scientific discipline, developmental psychology is more of a sub-discipline of psychology. It was established in reaction to the medical model, more particularly psychopathology, and was meant to give a wide berth to the psycho-social approach (Cicchetti, 1990; Cicchetti & Rogosh, 2002). Psychopathology is thus reframed within a more dynamic conception of human development which considers the contextual and environmental factors with which the individual interacts on a daily basis. Three key concepts define this area of study : competence, developmental tasks and adaptation. These three constructs seem historically connected to the evolution of the field of psychopathology (Masten & Curtis, 2002), but their fields of reference are more social than medical (Sroufe, 1997; Sroufe & Rutter, 1984). The definition provided by the researchers testifies to the social roots of developmental psychology and the importance ascribed to the life contexts of individuals in their development. The idea of « developmental tasks » refers to criteria and norms by which we can evaluate the adaptation of an individual to his environment (Masten & Curtis 2002). More specifically, the developmental tasks relate to activities, social roles or goals that an individual is expected to accomplish at a certain age or period in his life. On the other hand, competence has been measured in different ways, but essentially it refers to the effective and successful adaptation of an individual to his environment (Burt, Obradovic, Long, & Masten, 2008, Clausen, 1991; Masten, 2001). Adaptation is thus considered to be the result of the actualization of the global competence of an individual in the accomplishment of tasks, roles and functions associated with a specific phase of development. From this perspective, an adaptation problem is concretely defined as a failure of behavioral adjustment in relation to norms and social expectations which are current in one or several important domains of activity, according to the development period being considered (for example : school, work, interpersonal relationships).

The psycho-social approach is frequently used in studies which focus on the development phase of adolescence. Indeed, the studies in the area only very rarely make reference to the universe of psychopathology or employ concepts narrowly associated with it in the study of adolescent development trajectories. In this case, the object of study relates mostly to behavioral problems (Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004) which are also described as asocial behaviors (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). According to the studies, these make reference to a range of different, often interrelated expressions of maladaptation, such as aggressive behaviours, illicit substance use and delinquent offenses against property and people. So, rather than focusing on a psychopathological construct such as conduct disorder (C.D.), the studies in the area of developmental psychology are concerned with problems of behavior (asocial behaviors) which are seen as being adaptation problems of which delinquency is seen as the most significant and studied expression (Dodge & Pettit, 2003; Cicchetti & Rogosh, 2002). Certainly, there are overlaps between the symptoms of this psychopathy (C.D.) and the manifestations associated with problems of behavior, but essentially we are dealing with two different conceptual universes. For example, the presence of behavioral problems in an adolescent does not mean that he is defined clinically as displaying a clear psychopathy. Nevertheless, these behavioral problems may impact global development during adolescence and even beyond. Indeed, the studies in the field have consistently shown how delinquency affects developmental tasks (school performance, peer relations and rapport to authority) and all aspects of the lives of adolescents involved in it.

The historical evolution of these two fields of research has been marked by a distancing from the more medical framework of pathology in favor of the adoption of a psycho-social model. This model considers the interpersonal and contextual elements in the adaptation process. The environment or the living contexts thus emerge as elements of first importance in the analysis of development and the evolution of adaptation problems. Indeed, studies in the two domains of research have consistently emphasized the central role of parental practices as well as the family atmosphere in the etiology of developmental problems. Those are contextual or environmental factors that directly influence the development of behavioral problems (Dodge & Pettit, 2003).

As time passes, other environmental factors enter into the etiology of behavioral problems, such as the influence of peers (rejection by peers during childhood, association with delinquent peers during adolescence) as well as that of the community (including neighbourhood, school, leisure activities, etc.). The family and peers constitute the immediate or proximate living environment of the adolescent and are environmental risk factors widely studied and thoroughly documented in developmental psychology studies (Dodge & Pettit, 2003).

### **The transition to adulthood and asocial behaviors**

We are very familiar with the environmental factors that influence the emergence and persistence of behavioral problems in childhood and adolescence and an impressive amount of work has been done to integrate the relevant knowledge (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). However, we don't know much about the impact of new contexts and life experiences connected to the transition phase in the trajectories marked by adaptation problems during adolescence. Increasingly, we recognize that the transition phase is not simply a continuation of adolescence. It constitutes a particular developmental phase in the same way childhood and adolescence do (Arnett, 2000). The transitional phase to adulthood is a privileged time when normative changes in developmental tasks occur. It qualifies as a major life transition because it demands a significant number of external and internal adaptations by the individual in response to the many changes and challenges that must be faced (Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004). For example, joining the job market or pursuing higher education generally involves a separation from one's family as well as an independence and a greater autonomy (Sameroff, Peck, & Eccles, 2004). Furthermore, the individual is capable of making his own life choices and, coincident with this level of maturity, will have other experiences and face new situations. These all represent possibilities and opportunities and can all alter the course of a life (Schulenberg, Bryant, O'Malley, 2004; Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004; Rutter & Sroufe, 2000). Could this time of life, marked by changes in the nature and type of life experiences, contribute to breaking the patterns of maladaptive behavior of some adolescents? If so, under what circumstances? What are the mechanisms and factors that seem to explain why some youths reduce or cease their asocial behaviors during the transition phase? We will attempt to answer these questions using the results of studies conducted in the two areas of research : developmental psychology and social work.

### **From the developmental perspective**

In the field of developmental psychology, we have identified only six scientific articles relating to the transition phase of adolescents with behavioral problems (Mun et al., 2008; Petras et al., 2004; Roisman, Aguilar, & Egeland, 2004; Sameroff et al., 2004; Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Loeber, & Masten, 2004; White et al., 2001). For the most part, they derive from the same source, a dedicated issue of the journal *Development and Psychopathology* published in 2004. The works of Moffitt (1993, 1996) on etiology and the evolution of behavioral problems from childhood to adolescence significantly inspired these studies. As mentioned earlier, this researcher identified two main types of developmental trajectories for asocial behaviors. The first type, « the persisting », very early on display behavioral problems which continue over the course of their development : aggressive and disruptive behaviors throughout childhood and delinquent acts in adolescence. Members of this subgroup are seen as pursuing a criminal career once they become adults (*life-course-persistent*). For the second group, these behaviors begin later and are transitory: they begin and end with adolescence (*adolescence-limited*). Some authors have identified other types of asocial behavioral trajectories (including those originally identified by Moffitt) during childhood and adolescence (Anguilar et al., 2000; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998) and their work is also used in the studies we have identified.

Among these six studies, four focus upon the conditions that maintain asocial behaviors during the transition phase to adulthood (Mun et al., 2008; Sameroff et al., 2004, Petras et al., 2004; White et al., 2001). Because they are especially concerned with the factors that maintain these behaviors, they use analytical strategies which do not lend themselves to documenting the end of these behaviors during the transition phase. Thus, they provide explanations for the presence or absence of asocial behaviors, but none regarding their cessation. They have another point in common which merits our attention : the transition phase is not really questioned and researched by these authors. Among the explanatory factors selected, none corresponded to the individual and contextual situations connected to the transition phase (namely the developmental tasks). In their analyses of adolescent delinquency, the authors only consider familiar etiological factors, such as parental supervision, affiliation with deviant peer groups and the neighborhood level of deviant behavior).

The transition phase to adulthood is thus considered to be a simple extension of adolescence, rather than a developmental stage having its own specific developmental challenges which may alter later life trajectories. White et al. (2001) cast doubt on this strategy of selecting etiological factors specific to antecedent periods of development (childhood and adolescence) to explain the continuity of asocial behaviors at the onset of adulthood. Their analyses demonstrate that many of the explanatory factors identified in the studies conducted by Moffitt and her colleagues cannot explain the trajectory beyond adolescence. They thus conclude: “*It is possible that social and environmental factors beyond adolescence, rather than childhood individual and environmental characteristics, may be more important for the persistence of delinquency to adulthood*” (:607). Other studies also demonstrate that the etiological factors conducive to deviant or risky behaviors during adolescence are no longer operative during the transition phase. It is especially the case for peer groups whose negative influences diminish with increases in age and then consequently produce a positive effect on the delinquency trajectories (Monahan, Steinberg and Cauffman, 2009; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). This change might be seen as part of a generalized reduction in the sensitivity to peer influence upon the transition phase, a period reflecting greater autonomy and psychosocial maturation (Monahan et al., 2009). New life experiences, specific to the transition phase, have also been identified as an important component in the reorientation and rerouting of life trajectories of maladapted youths.

Indeed, it seems that the changes in life contexts brought about by the transition phase are connected to the cessation of asocial behaviors and the normalization of behaviors (Roisman et al., 2004; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2004). To achieve this insight, Stouthamer-Loeber et al. (2004) followed the trajectories of youths from the age of 13 until 25 and compared their profiles in terms of whether they continued or ceased their delinquent behaviors between the ages of 20 and 25. Thus, in the beginning, we are faced with an homogenous sample of problematic adolescents whose trajectories differ during their entry into adulthood. Their results show that successful adaptation relative to the developmental tasks specific to this phase (finding work or pursuing higher education) is statistically related to the cessation of delinquent behaviors, even when considering etiological factors present in adolescence. Adopting a similar research design (same type of sample and use of a comparison group) Roisman et al. (2004) also tried to identify the factors associated with positive trajectory changes between the ages of 21 and 23. By considering the past histories of those youths, especially the beginnings and the degrees of severity of their behavioral problems, the authors showed that the experiences associated with developmental tasks successfully completed during the transition phase can predict the level of externalized problems at 23.

More specifically, positive work and romantic experiences are associated with a significant reduction in behavioral troubles for the youth groups displaying them on a chronic and persisting basis since childhood. In the case of these two studies, which focused on cessation factors, we can observe the same results. However, the direction and meaning of the correlation is not specified. The authors don't know whether it is the life experiences that positively influenced maladaptive behaviors or whether it is the reduction in such behaviors which facilitated these positive experiences. Possibly, the shifting of trajectories towards normalized development can be ascribed to the transactional principle between the individual and his new life contexts/experiences. However, we do not yet understand the dynamic of influence between the two and do not know whether other individual factors or life conditions, past or present, encourage this cessation.

### **From the social work perspective**

In the field of social work, we identified six studies on the transition to adulthood of youths considered resilient. In all of them, the researchers examined the factors associated with the successful transition of youths bearing a heavy load of adversity (family or school related problems as well as behavioral problems) which required their supervision, during adolescence, by the youth protection system. In all the studies, the successful transition was defined by the two following indicators at least: 1) having successfully accomplished the tasks and functions related to this period of life and 2) having not manifested delinquent behaviors. In attempting to better understand the factors associated with resilience, the studies in social work simultaneously shed light on the connection between the transition phase and the cessation of delinquent behaviors. Thus, the definition and measure of resilience used in the studies conducted in social work allow us to build bridges and begin a dialog between these two domains of study which focus on the transition phase.

In their longitudinal study, Cashmore and Paxman (2006) evaluate resilience using a global score based on external indicators of adaptation (employment, pursuit of studies, completed high school studies, absence of delinquent behaviors, homelessness and drug and alcohol use) as well as internal indicators of adaptation (absence of depression and suicidal ideation). The results demonstrate that the manifestation of behavioral problems (the presence and the severity) during adolescence is not significantly associated with the success of the transition phase. In other words, the level of deviance in adolescence is not predictive of the level of adaptation in adulthood. On the other hand, benefitting from social support is the element having the greatest influence on the probability of success in the transition phase. Those youths having access to the greatest resources are also the ones who had the most stable placements through which they were able to develop feelings of security and well-being.

The correlational study of Daining and DePanfilis (2007) reinforces that result. Resilience is evaluated based on six aspects of the lives of young adults who have received services from the YPS : education, employment, parenthood (becoming a parent), homelessness, drug use and criminal activity. They try to determine whether the variation in resilience scores is associated with perceived stress as well as support from the social network. Regression analyses confirm the authors' hypotheses. Stress is negatively correlated with the resilience scores while the level of social support is positively correlated with resilience.

For their part, Muson and McMillen (2009) explored the impact of mentorship (having the significant support of a benevolent adult) upon the internal and external adaptation of youths during the transition phase. This type of social support has positive effects upon the internal and external adaptation of youths measured at the ages of 18 and 19 years. Those benefitting from adult support (during a minimum of one year) are less likely to commit offences and be arrested at the age of 19. Furthermore, they display fewer symptoms of depression, experience less stress and more satisfaction with their lives than those who do not benefit from similar social support.

Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt (2005) conducted a qualitative and exploratory study (of 14 youths) to better understand the factors facilitating external adaptation (the indicator of which is the pursuit of studies). The authors emphasize that these youths have certain individual attributes (intelligence, self-determination, optimism and self-confidence) which can act as « moderating factors » with respect to the negative effects of adversity they have experienced. These youths, like those in the study by Cashmore and Paxman (2006), would show certain skills and competences. Moreover, most of the youths (10/14) spontaneously mentioned that they already had requested or accepted the help of others and that this situation of « interdependence » with others was part of a whole survival strategy. The narrative of these youths reveals that during their adolescence, competent adults provided positive adult role models. Their ability to establish a good relationship with a healthy adult would be an important element in the development of resilience. The results of another study conducted by the same researchers (but on a larger sample) confirm the importance of social support in its relational dimension (and not its material dimension, such as financial resources). The authors believe that the degree of social support offered by a network of youths is a major contributing factor to their academic success (Merdinger, Hines, Osterling & Wyatt, 2005).

All of the six studies emphasize the contribution of social support (in its relational dimension) to the adaptation of young adults who displayed asocial behaviors in adolescence. More specifically, the results suggest that the cessation of these behaviors as well as the successful completion of developmental tasks could be explained by external resources (social support) and internal ones (competence) from which the youths benefitted at the time of their transition to adulthood. In spite of this convergence of research results, these studies suffer from several methodological limitations: the samples are small (less than 100 individuals), they use a correlational research design rather than a longitudinal one (except that of Cashmore and Paxman, 2006) and do not include a comparison group (except that of Muson and McMillen, 2009).

### ***Discussion***

The research results in the two areas do not conflict and not very remote from each other. Let us first examine those stemming from social work. They show that social support and individual competence are predictive of a positive adaptation in adulthood by youths who have displayed severe problems in adolescence. This relationship was examined with a dynamic and developmental orientation in the work of Masten and his colleagues (Masten et al., 2004).

Their results demonstrate that individuals who were less competent during adolescence could significantly improve their degree of competence during the transition phase and successfully complete their developmental tasks (academic, employment and romantic relationships). In their study, competence is measured by a score in the following dimensions: motivation to plan for and succeed in the future, emotional and behavioral autonomy, the capacity to face stressful situations as well as the ability to rely on an adult for help if needed. This last dimension refers to the concept of social support. According to the definition provided by the authors, we can understand that competence and social support are interrelated: capacity to rely on an adult, or lack of it, can influence the level of competence. As suggested by Hines et al. (2005), the inverse can also be envisaged: that more competent youth are more likely to maintain a positive relationship with a significant adult. However, the question that remains unresolved is whether social support and individual competence emerge specifically with entry into adulthood. These studies have not demonstrated the existence of a direct relation between these constructs and the life events connected to the period of transition.

Other studies in developmental psychology suggest the existence of a dynamic connection between competence and life experiences at the time of transition. According to Masten et al. (2004), it is probable that individuals acquire new skills to organize, plan and manage their lives at the beginning of adulthood. The new life experiences can act as a major vector of change. Indeed, Clausen's study (1993) shows that people having a high level of competence in adolescence manifest relatively stable personality traits over the course of their lives while those who, on the contrary, have a low level of competence, show significant changes. The author explains that those who have achieved balance and a strong capability to adapt, have less need to change their way of interacting with their social environment. Thus, the new contexts can generate, facilitate and even force changes (on the psychological, cognitive or behavioral level) in the ways an individual habitually interacts with his environment. It is this transactional perspective that is adopted by some authors who claim that new life experiences can significantly alter the perception of self and thus offer windows of opportunity for individual changes (Rutter & Sroufe, 2000).

Along similar lines, the study by Roberts et al. (2003) shows how new life contexts in the transition phase can produce changes on the psychological level, thus facilitating better adaptation. They have suggested the hypothesis that work experiences at the onset of adulthood are likely to modify the aptitudes and personality traits which are nevertheless thought to be a psychological structure that is stable over time. They noticed that work experiences helped to normalize, in other words, to change, in a positive manner, certain behaviors and personality traits (evaluated during adolescence). Between the ages of 18 and 26 years, youths who believe their work is important and feel committed to it become not just more determined workers but become more inclined to adopt conventional social norms and values. Furthermore, by allowing him to achieve financial security and independence, a job has positive effects on feelings of stress, alienation and aggressiveness while facilitating a feeling of social proximity to others as well as a better internal control. It thus seems that life experiences are likely to modify trajectories.

According to Rutter and Sroufe (2002), it is the nature of life experiences themselves, whether or not they reflect continuity with those familiar from the past, which determine the probabilities of change. Thus, the similarity of lived experiences can produce persisting trajectories while their discontinuity can create changes of direction. So, for youths having behavioral problems, the transition phase allows them to have different types of experiences outside the living contexts (family and school) which, during childhood and adolescence, had contributed to the failures in their development.

### ***Conclusion***

In developmental psychology, the studies focused on the transition into adulthood of youths having behavioral problems generally have two significant interrelated characteristics which limit their analyses and results : 1) they rarely consider the transactional principle « individual/environment » as a possible avenue for the exploration of changes in trajectory; and as a corollary, 2) they don't seem to consider the impact of new life contexts connected to the transition phase (developmental tasks). The few studies that have considered these new contexts within which youths evolve during the transition phase have demonstrated the existence of a connection between their positive experiences (success in the accomplishment of developmental tasks) and the cessation of asocial behaviors. This process of change and the mechanisms at work need to be explored in future studies.

As for studies in social work, they have identified the resilience factors of adolescents from the youth protection system who transition successfully into adulthood. On the whole, these studies produced similar results, but they have several methodological limitations and might require more empirical proofs. However, they do provide us with indicators of what can create these breaks or discontinuities in the trajectories of asocial behaviors. Two elements thus become apparent: social support, which reflects a relational dimension, as well as the level of competence of youths. This result elicits more questions than answers, especially about the processes and mechanisms which transform the behavioral trajectories. For example, do the social networks of the youths adjust and normalize around the end of adolescence? Does the lessening of affiliation with and influence of deviant peers (Monahan et al., 2009) result in the development of new relationships with more conventional and supportive people? What is the contribution of new life experiences in this process of change in behavioral trajectories?

All the studies conducted in developmental psychology and social work point to the same conclusion: that the transition phase is a period particularly conducive to breaks and discontinuities in life trajectories and life events; that contexts and opportunities could have an important role in the altered trajectories of less competent and well-adapted youths. To follow up, the developmental perspective should consider the convergent empirical results of studies in social work which suggest the centrality of social support as a resilience and competence factor for the youths within the YPS. This result is very compatible with the transactional model in developmental psychology that emphasizes the mutual influence of the individual and his environment. Until now, the dynamic governing the identified factors has not been explored and the developmental process affecting the normalization of behaviors during the transition phase to adulthood has not been the object of systematic research. In the current state of knowledge, we are left only with research avenues provided by the two areas of research.

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