

Narratives of Change among Emerging Adults from Marginalized Identities: Perceived Changes in Relationships with Mentors and Parents during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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Introduction

Emerging adulthood

•A unique time period between the ages of 18 - 29 characterized by *identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and positivity/ age of possibilities*.

•Among emerging adults that are not encapsulated by the W.E.I.R.D. experience, critical life events, limited access to resources, and oppression all impact the ability to navigate emerging adulthood (Diaz-Strong, 2021, Haft & Zhou, 2021, Landberg et al., 2019, Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

Interpersonal Relationships

•Baumeister's (1995) "belongingness hypothesis" proposes that meaningful and reciprocal relationships characterized by frequent personal contact and perceived bond continuation.

•The basic psychological needs theory indicates that relatedness, autonomy, and competence are necessary (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

•**Purpose of the Study** To explore the perceived changes in the relationships with mentors and parent relationships during the transition to university among college students from socio-demographic minority groups, within the context of COVID-19.

Participants & Measures

- **N** = 24 university students at Wesleyan
- **Age:** 18-19 years ($M = 20.33$, $SD = 1.30$)
- Analyzed utilizing thematic coding, based on the interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2002).

Question 1: "How do your current relationships with your mentored, professors, and coaches compare to those relationships prior to Wesleyan?"

Question 2: "How has your relationship with your parents/guardians changed since attending Wesleyan?"

Results

1.1 Relationships with High School Teachers Were More Positive, Relative to Relationships with College Professors (8, 33%)

Participants who felt a greater sense of trust within their relationships with high school teachers than their college professors. High school teachers often had insight about students' personal relationships, including romantic and familial relationships

1.2 Hierarchical Transactional Relationships with College Professors (7, 29%)

Participants expressed feelings of a perceived power dynamic that participants expressed characterized their relationships with their professors. The relationships with professors were described as transactional, such that these relationships were limited to academic feedback.

1.3 More Positive Mentor Relationships in College Relative to High School (7, 29%)

Participants expressed feeling more comfortable with being vulnerable; therefore enabling them to build meaningful relationships with their professors more so than the relationships they had with teachers.

1.4 Perceived Quality of Mentor Relationships were Similar for High School and College (5, 21%)

This theme captures the experience of participants who felt that their relationships with mentors in high school and college were similar. The quality of relationships with high school teachers and professors, however, varied.

2.1 Personal Growth and Maturity Within Parent-Emerging Adult Relationships (9, 38%)

Participants expressed the freedom to navigate responsibilities independently, leading to a higher sense of maturity. This change resulted in more complex relationships with their parents/guardians.

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2.2 A Breakdown of Parent-Child Hierarchy Facilitates Mutual Support (8, 33%)

The present theme addresses the emerging adults' perception that their relationships with their parents became less hierarchical and shifted to better support their needs.

2.3 Moving Away for College Improved Relationship with Parents (5, 21%)

Participants expressed that having physical space from their families led to more genuine interactions and helped them to enjoy and appreciate quality time with their families.

2.4 Transition to College Added Challenges to Relationship with Parents (5, 21%)

Participants expressed feeling that additional challenges within parent-emerging adult relationships ensued as a result of attending college.

Discussion

- Relationships with teachers and professors varied depending on boundaries regarding personal information, academic goals, and personal growth.
- Relationships with parents were mostly characterized by the varying degrees of perceived independence.
- **Limitations:** For the future, studies with more participants from each of the marginalized identities, multi-informant approach, and quantitative measures.

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