Family Disruption and the Transition to Adulthood Among Low Socioeconomic Status Young Adults

by

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ABSTRACT

Young adults are spending longer periods of time preparing for their transitions to adulthood. A changing labor market, increase demand for post-secondary education, and rising cost of living have increased young adult’s reliance on parents and peers to achieve financial well-being. The research on “emerging adulthood” which focuses on experiences of adolescents and young adults has not paid sufficient attention to social position as a precursor to later developmental patterns and its effects on later stages of development (Schulenberg et al. 2012). This research will address this gap by integrating psychological and sociological research to explore how childhood socioeconomic status and relationships with caregivers are connected to experiences during the transition to adulthood. Family context has been linked to child development and well-being. Family disruptions are associated with deficits in academic, social, and emotional functioning throughout the life course. This research examines the experiences of transitioning to adulthood for young adults from low SES families who experienced some family disruption: divorce, foster care, kinship care, or incarcerated parent. Twenty-two young adults were interviewed to gain insight on how low socioeconomic status and linked-lives shape the emerging adulthood experiences. Results revealed that the transition to adulthood for low SES young adults in this study consisted of unstable romantic relationships, superficial friendships, limited emotional and financial supports for family and peers, and economic insecurity. Despite experiences of childhood adultification, young adults in this study expressed feelings of either not yet being adults or being “somewhat” adults. In addition, respondents expressed a persistent feeling of optimism about their future lives in spite of their experiences of adversity during childhood and adolescence.
CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

In the early 2000’s there was an increase in the attention paid to how “Millennials” transition into adulthood. Millennials are individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Pew Research Center, 2018). They gained increased attention in the media because of their unconventional trajectory to becoming adults. For this generation, transitions to adulthood differed from that of earlier cohorts. For the average Millennial, becoming an adult is taking longer and consists of different social markers and tasks accomplished within a wider age range. Previous generations on average experienced more predictable transitions: obtaining employment, moving out of their parents’ homes and forming families. These markers were experienced at younger ages by previous generation. However, variations in these transitions have always existed with socioeconomic status, race, and gender shaping how young adults transition to adulthood. There has been a recent increase in attention to socioeconomic status and the within-socioeconomic group variation that exists in trajectories to adulthood. The literature supports differences in educational expectations and college educational attainment based on socioeconomic status, with those of higher SES maintaining expectations of higher education as compared to low-SES young adults (Johnson and Reynolds, 2013). Young adults from high SES households are more likely to receive substantial financial support (Ross and Schoeni, 2005) and parental investment (Laureau, 2003). For young people from low-SES households who may be responsible for caring for younger siblings, they may experience disruptions in school which can lead to dropping out or not pursuing higher education (Gennetian et al.2004).

Much of the media coverage of the Millennials focuses on a theme of delayed adulthood. In January 2005 Time magazine published an issue entitled “Meet Twixters, young adults who
live off their parents, bounce from job to job, and hop from mate to mate. They’re not lazy, they just won’t grow up.” Similarly, a May 2013 issue of Time magazines headlines “The ME, ME, Me Generation: Millenials are lazy, entitled narcissists who still live with their parents—Why they’ll save us all.” The New Yorker Magazine depicts on its May 2010 cover a doctoral graduate placing his degree on the wall of his childhood bedroom in his parents’ home. In June 2014 the New York Times covered a story on young adults who return to their parents’ home in their late 20’s and early 30’s and described them as “Boomerang Kids.” These headlines reinforce the idea of a prolonged period of “emerging adulthood”: the period of time during which adulthood transitions occur (Arnett, 2000) for Millenials.

Emerging adulthood is the period after the adolescence stage (age 18 through late 20’s) preceding the life stage of adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Transitions to adulthood have become increasingly complex, less predictable, and span over longer periods of time (Arnett, 2000; Cohen et al. 2003). Traditional indicators of adulthood included graduating high school, leaving home, gaining employment, and building a family (Furstenberg et al. 2005; Shanahan, 2000; Hogan and Astone, 1986; Winsborough, 1979). Today, the markers and trajectory to adulthood are not standardized. The markers of adulthood have been found to be different than those in the past. Arnett (2004) found that completing education, obtaining full-time employment, marriage, and having children were the least identified markers of adulthood by young people and they instead identified self-sufficiency: responsibility and independence as markers of adulthood. The trajectory to adulthood is characterized as disordered in the timing and sequence of life course events (Buchmann, 1989; Rindfuss, 1991; Shanahan, 2000) with variability in the median age that life events are experienced (George 1993; Rindfuss et al. 1987). The modal trajectory of emerging adulthood today consists of graduating high school, leaving the home with periods of
returning home (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999), delaying marriage and having a family (Arnett, 2004; Shanahan, 2000; Settersten and Ray, 2010), spending more time on post-secondary educational attainment (Arnett, 2004; Shanahan, 2000; Settersten and Ray, 2010), and changing careers (Wendlandt and Rochlen, 2008). These indicators of adulthood vary based on sociodemographic characteristics. Women, for example are more likely than men to marry and live with their children by the age of 30 (Oesterle et al., 2010; Moen, 2001). Low socio-economic status (SES) has been associated with lower chances of young adults investing in post-secondary education and delaying family formation (Oesterle et al., 2010; Osgood et al., 2005). Family instability such as divorce has been correlated with family formation at earlier ages (Wolfinger, 2003) and being African American has been associated with delayed marriage and having children earlier than Whites and Asians (Macmillan and Copher, 2005; Schoen et al., 2009).

During the transition to adulthood, emerging adults are not only engaged in objective tasks: gaining employment, completing education, having a family, but also subjective tasks such as identity exploration and changing self-perceptions (Arnett, 2000; Lopez et al., 2005). Arnett (2004) introduced 5 features of emerging adulthood: identity exploration, age of instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and age of possibility. In identity exploration, emerging adults explore different lifestyles and options in the areas of work and romantic relationships. Young adults increase their involvement with others to learn about themselves and develop an understanding of the qualities that appeal to them in others (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adults explore the characteristics most desirable to them in a life partner during their transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Young adults also develop a sense of their abilities and interests in careers and explore how to achieve occupational satisfaction (Arnett, 2004). Instability in emerging
adulthood is marked by constant revision of an emerging adult’s plans for their transition into adulthood. During this time young adults will engage in different jobs and consider different academic majors in efforts to identify their career path (Arnett, 2004). They may also experience an increase in residential moves (Arnett, 2004). *Self-focus* increases during emerging adulthood as there are fewer obligations and commitments to others. Emerging adults are learning self-sufficiency during this period in preparation for long-term work and romantic commitment (Arnett, 2004). *Feelings of in between* exist for emerging adults who are no longer adolescents, but also do not yet consider themselves to be adults. Emerging adulthood according to Arnett (2004) is distinct in being an *age of possibilities* during which emerging adults have the opportunity to transform who they have become when they reach the end of their adolescent years.

Other than the fact that there has been an increase in the attention paid to the transition to adulthood, why is it an important area of study? It is during this transitional period that individuals are setting the stage for their adult careers and relationships. They are setting the foundation for financial independence, commitment in long-term relationships, and career/occupational satisfaction. How individuals navigate through this transitional stage may dictate the quality of their adult life.

**Criticisms of Emerging Adulthood theory**

Arnett’s concept of emerging adulthood has been criticized for failing to (a) explain individual transitions across the life course, (b) recognize the processes and mechanisms of developmental change over the life course (Hendry and Kleop, 2002) and (c) consider the diversity in pathways based on the social institutions and cultural contexts of human development (Bynner, 2005). Emerging adulthood does not consider variations across cultures
and social class (Cote, 2000; Hendry and Kleop, 2002). For example, in Chinese culture, Nelson and Badger (2004) found that Confucian doctrine: self-control and obligation to others, were stronger indicators of adulthood for young people in China, than marriage and parenthood. They also found that the majority of 18-25 year old Chinese considered themselves to be adults. In the U.S. Arnett (2003) and Nelson (2003) found 36% and 24%, respectively of 18-25 year olds considered themselves adults.

Similar to other age-based theories of development, Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood has been criticized for being ethnocentric and having a social class bias (Hendry and Kleop, 2002). Emerging adulthood theory regards middle class western society as the norm (Hendry and Kleop, 2002). Arnett (2004) elaborates on his earlier work and argues that variations in cultural beliefs, SES, and life circumstances determine the extent to which a person may experience emerging adulthood, with middle class young people having greater opportunities for delayed timing in the transition to adulthood. Thome and Koller (2014) found that emerging adulthood was more common among 18-29 year olds of higher SES and those of lower SES experienced limitations in their ability to engage in identity exploration. Children of divorced parents were found to grow up faster (Weiss, 1979; Jurkovic et al. 2001), whereas 18-29 year olds of married biological parents reported younger subjective ages compared to those of other family structures (Benson and Furstenberg 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; Johnson and Mollborn, 2009). Poor urban youth were found to enter adulthood sooner (Burton et al. 1996; Kotlowitz 1991). Low levels of education and low SES have been found to often lead to older subjective age due to the increase in responsibilities reflecting those of older age groups (Furstenberg et al. 2003; Settersten 2003; Thome and Koller, 2014).
Arnett (2004) presents emerging adulthood as a life stage marked by freedom and choices to explore various aspects of life, to engage in an “active leisure life” of traveling, concerts, and shopping, the ability to try out “unusual work and educational opportunities”, and engage in identity exploration which is “simply for fun, a kind of play, part of gaining a broad range of life experiences…. (p. 10). However, how inequalities: economic, gender, and intellectual can create challenges for individuals during emerging adulthood received little attention (Cote, 2000). Arnett also fails to consider individual choice and constraints during emerging adulthood (Hendry and Kleop, 2002). Individuals may choose to acquire skills in preparation for adulthood, whereas others may not maximize their productivity and fail to prepare for adulthood. Schoon and Schulengberg (2013) argue Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood “…does not take into account the social and economic conditions that have produced extended transitions, instead offering a psychological model of free choice focusing on the postponement of commitments. . . Transition outcomes are however dependent on structural opportunities and constraints as well as individual resources and capabilities . . .” (p.46). Arnett (2014) addressed criticisms that his research failed to consider economic inequality in the transition to adulthood and engaged in an exploration of the characteristics of emerging adulthood across social class. Arnett (2014) argued that elements of emerging adulthood were not particular to middle-class young adults and extended to low-SES young adults.

Family context and relationships have not been the focus of research on the transition to adulthood. In particular, the implications of family instability during childhood have not been adequately considered. For young adults in a context in which low SES and family instability co-occur, the challenges of transitioning to adulthood are compounded. The economic climate has resulted in young adults becoming increasingly reliant on family and peers to achieve financial
well-being (Tuzemen and Willis, 2013). However, in a family and socioeconomic context of instability and limited resources the transition to adulthood can be further complicated. To address this gap in the literature, the parent-child relationships of low SES individuals and their impact on the transition to adulthood will be explored using the life course perspective. The life course model is an appropriate framework in which to study emerging adulthood concepts for individuals of low SES, as it allows for the consideration of timing (age/transition to adulthood) and linked-lives (family changes/impact on relationships).

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this study the aim is to explore the transitions to adulthood of economically disadvantaged young adults who experienced disruptions in the parent-child relationship. This paper will focus on the emerging adulthood stage of low SES youth of diverse parent-child relationships. Engaging in research on low SES young adults with different experiences with family instability and disruption contributes to an understanding of how the linked-lives of economically disadvantaged youth influence pathways to adulthood in an economic climate that requires increased reliance on family and peers. By family disruption, I mean changing family conditions marked by frequent or lengthy periods in which one or both parents were absent.

The following questions will be answered in this research:

1- How do low SES young adults make sense of family instability?
   a. How do young adults connect family disruption and the trajectory to young adulthood?

2- How do low SES young adults define adulthood?
   a. What is their understanding of the necessary steps to achieve adulthood?
3- What are the different ways in which family disruptions impact economically disadvantaged youths’ transitions to adulthood?

This research will provide insight into how unstable parent-child relationships and low SES impact definitions, timing, and markers of adulthood. This will shed light on how early parent-child relationships shape future relationships and how they impact young adults’ views on the process of becoming an adult.

**Overview of Chapters**

First, I begin by providing a review of the literature on the life course perspective and socialization theory to highlight how the changing labor market, educational requirement, and rising costs of living compounded with the quality of the parent-child relationships in early childhood influences roles children acquire within the family, their transition to adulthood, and adult outcomes. A review of the literature on romantic relationships sheds light on the influence of early attachments on relationship formation, the emotional and social skills acquired through romantic coupling, and how romantic relationships in adolescence influence quality of relationships in adulthood. The literature review incorporates research on the effects of socioeconomic status on parenting styles, life outcomes, relationship quality and transitions throughout the life course.

Following the literature review I discuss the methodology of this research. I introduce the contribution of this research and discuss how it expands on the body of research on the experience of transitioning to adulthood by incorporating an analysis of the impact of social economic status and family instability. I provide a rationale for a qualitative research design which is the most suitable approach to capture the understanding, definitions, and meanings
young adults ascribe to becoming adults. The research questions are presented and a discussion about the site and participant selection process and characteristics of each follows. The methods chapter concludes with the process for data analysis and coding and discussion on ethical considerations and limitations and bias.

The findings section of this research consists of four major themes: definitions and descriptions of transitions to adulthood, parent-child relationships, young adult romantic relationships, young adult peer relationships. The parent-child relationship captures the dynamics and quality of the parent-child relationships for young adults. In this section, I begin with a discussion of young adults’ understanding of how their early relationships with family and low SES impacted their definitions and transition to adulthood. The events leading to family disruptions are presented and a discussion on the consequences of efforts to reconnect or re-establish relationships with parents is provided. In the narratives on young adult romantic relationships the pattern of unstable relationships resulting from efforts to escape family chaos and aversion to monogamy are highlighted. The impact of adverse parent-child relationships during childhood on the experiences of young adults in romantic relationships becomes evident. The findings chapter concludes with an analysis of the experiences of young adult peer relationships. The consequences of residing in low-income communities and experiencing poor socialization are noted as it relates to young adults desire and abilities to develop friendships. An analysis of Arnett’s five elements of emerging adulthood as it relates to respondents in this research concludes the findings chapter.

This research concludes with a discussion on how the experiences of transitioning to adulthood for middle-class young adults and low SES young adults in this study. This chapter highlights the ways in which socioeconomic status impacts the transition to adulthood.
Recommendations for future research in the areas of age identity, subjective age, and pseudo-maturity is provided. A discussion on improvement in social work practice with young adults in foster highlights the needs for supportive services beyond the age of 18.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will cover an overview of the life course perspective and Socialization theory. A discussion of attachment, identity/roles, and development of romantic relationships is also presented in this chapter. This research is framed using the life course perspective. I highlight how the life course perspective is a suitable framework to study the impact of early family structure and low SES on the transition to adulthood. A life course approach offers a framework in which to contextualize the current job market, family/neighborhood context, economic resources, relationships with family and peers, and the process through which young people achieve adulthood.

In my discussion of socialization theory I focus on attachment and the level of warmth and security in the parent-child relationship and how variation in the quality of these relationships impact the development and outcomes of young adults. Socialization theory will shed light on the ways that the parent-child relationship during childhood a): shapes individuals’ perception of the social world b): impacts individuals’ views on other types of social relationships, and c): affects the well-being of individuals as they age. Parenting approaches based on socioeconomic will be also be highlighted and its consequences on young adults’ abilities to navigate institutions in young adulthood will be discussed.

I also discuss the consequences of disruptions in family structures on the roles of children. Role theory suggests that individuals are socialized into positions within a social structure (Segre, 2012) and those statuses shape their interactions within various structures. Individuals’ conformity in these roles are necessary for the functionality of the structures (Segre, 2012). In this research I focus on the role of children within the family structure and how family disruption and low SES impacts the roles of children. I will also present research on the
transition to adulthood among low-SES children and discuss how financial constraints influence markers of, and the trajectory to, adulthood. Lastly, I engage in a discussion of romantic relationships and how the development, quality, and longevity of these relationships are based on the quality of parent-child relationships. I include a discussion of the consequences of delaying or avoiding romantic relationships and its effects on meeting developmental goals and accomplishing life course transitions.

**The Life course perspective**

This research is guided by the life course perspective which offers a framework for the study of individual development and family life. The life course perspective is a research paradigm in which human development is contextualized within a particular, social, economic and historical context (Giele and Elder, 1998). It consists of four dimensions: socio-historical context (location in time and place), linked lives, human agency, and timing. In this section I will present the context in which this research is grounded. I will show how the changing job market and increase in educational attainment, quality of interpersonal relationships, and availability of social and economic resources shape transition to adulthood for young people from low SES households.

*Socio-historical context: The Job Market and Educational Attainment*

Socio-historical context refers to how location and time affects individual experiences and development (Giele and Elder, 1998). For young people in this research changing job markets and increase demand for higher education help highlight how young people developed and increased reliance on caregivers. In the last 60 years there has been a significant decline in the availability of blue-collar jobs. The increase in foreign made goods, factory relocation, outsourcing of jobs, and technological advances have contributed to this decline (Tuzemen and
Willis, 2013; Cherlin, 2014). The scarcity of manufacturing and technical employment has contributed to the increased difficulty for young adults without a college education to obtain meaningful employment. Consequently, education has become a major factor in determining earnings, with Bachelor’s level education increasing the earning potential of young adults (Cherlin, 2014).

Research has shown that for young black males are faced with barriers in obtaining post-secondary education and access to blue-collar jobs. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that only 5% of the U.S. college population consists of black males. Research on young black men’s participation in blue-collar work suggest that young black men are not able to effectively use institutional connections to gain entry in employment and have networks consisting of other Blacks who also have limited ties to employment unlike their White counterparts who have strong and extensive networks (Royster, 2003). These factors contribute to the plight of young black men’s ability to obtain meaningful employment.

**Linked Lives: Parents, Friendships, and Romantic Partners**

Linked lives in the life course perspective refers to an attention to the interdependence between human lives and their social, cultural, psychological, and institutional environments (Giele and Elder, 1998). The studies of linked lives include dyadic studies of parents and their children and studies of siblings. In this research the relationships of young adults and their caregivers, peers, and romantic partners are explored. The changing economic climate has made it such that young adults are increasingly reliant on their parents. Young adults seek their parents for financial well-being through their early thirties (Smeeding and Phillip, 2002). Parental support in the form of additional income, child care, and housing assist young adults in
becoming financially secure (Smeeding and Phillip, 2002). The Affordable Care Act enacted in 2010 also demonstrates the increase in parental reliance with young adults considered “dependents” on their parent’s health insurance plans until the age of 26 an 8 year increase from previous health care policy in which children lost dependent status at age 18.

Parents are not the only source of support for young adults. Peers and relatives have also become important in young adults efforts to achieve financial well-being. In addition to the decrease in blue-collar jobs and the increase demand for college education, young adults face rising rental costs. The Pew Research center (2016) reports that about 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. lives with a roommate, with millennials as the largest demographic group most likely to be living in someone else’s home in spite of being employed. There has also been an increase in young adults cohabitating prior to marriage, particularly among low SES young adults, who are more likely to enter cohabitation at younger ages than middle class young adults due to economic hardships (Sassler and Miller, 2017).

*Human Agency: Overcoming Family disruptions and economic disadvantage*

Human agency refers to the actions taken by individuals to meet their needs (Giele and Elder, 1998). Different life course patterns are found in the study of human agency as individuals adapt and make different plans and decisions within social and economic constraints (Hutchinson, 2011). Research has shown that decisions around cohabitation, parenthood, and marriage are driven by young adults financial and social resources. Young adults from low-SES homes are more likely to decide to cohabitate as a means to alleviate financial hardships or difficulty in acquiring their own housing (Sassler and Miller, 2017). They are also more likely to decide to delay marriage in the hopes of achieving financial stability and resolving doubts related
to getting married (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005). Parenthood decisions for young adults are also driven by their social and financial context with young adults reporting wanting to wait to achieve some form of financial stability before having children (Sassler and Miller, 2017).

**Timing/Turning points: When do adolescents become adults?**

The last component of the life course perspective is timing. Timing refers to an attention to when events occur in the life span and the sequencing of events (Giele and Elder, 1998). Young adults from low-income household are more likely to experience an accelerated transition through the life course. They may engage in adult experiences and knowledge prematurely (Burton, 2007). Adultification of children, that is premature exposure to adult situations and taking on adult roles and responsibilities, is likely to occur in low-income households (Elder 1974;1999; Mortimer, 2003) and in families that experience various forms of disruptions such as divorce (Jurkovic et al. 2001), foster care (Singer et al. 2015), and substance use (Kroll and Taylor, 2003).

In this research attention to the socio-historical context of human development with a focus on how the changing job market and increasing demands of higher education impacts transitions to adulthood is explored. I explore how age-linked transitions are impacted by the interconnectedness of lives. Specifically, I consider how parent-child relationships and changes in family structures in early childhood shape the timing and trajectories to adulthood. Attention is also paid to the decisions made in the areas of romantic relationships, marriage, and parenthood as young adults adapt to meet their needs within their unique social context, that is from low SES context, with unstable family dynamics, in an economic climate marked by decrease in blue-collar work, increase in educational requirements, and rising costs of living.
Socialization theory

Socialization theory explains how relationships and roles shape children’s understanding of their relational position in a social system. Socialization is a process in which individuals acquire behavioral, social, and emotional skills necessary to successfully interact and function among others (Maccoby, 2014). Socialization occurs throughout various stages of life and is influenced by various individuals and institutions: family, peers, school, religious institutions, employers, and intimate partners (Corsaro, 2005; Maccoby, 2014). Socialization theory assumes that the source of skills and training acquired in the socialization process begins with the parent-child relationship (Corsaro, 2005). Children are introduced to a relational system and mutual obligations in the parent-child relationship (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). In the socialization process parents contribute to the socialization of children through the quality of the relationship. Qualities such as warmth, security, and mutual reciprocity impact how receptive individuals are to the influence of the other (Maccoby, 2014). The quality of the relationship influences the level of motivation (Grusec and Davidov, 2010; Thompson and Meyer, 2007), increases participation in the socialization process (Kochanska et al., 2010), and encourages children to internalize parental values (Thompson et al. 2006). Relational processes in socialization include reinforcement, modeling, sensitive responsiveness, proactive regulation, emotional communication, routines and rituals, and parent–child discourse all of which are controlled by the caregiver (Labile et al. 2014). Parents also influence children’s development of empathy, self-control, and self-regulation (Labile et al. 2014). Children are not passive participants in the socialization process. The effectiveness of the socialization process depends on children’s development of self-image and ability to engage in self-control (Grusec and Davidov, 2010). The ability of parents to influence children in the socialization process is also moderated by
children’s ability to develop self-concept and self-regulation (Grusec and Davidov, 2010). This study examines disruptions in parent-child relationships and the challenges that emerge in the transition to adulthood as a result of family instability. Understanding socialization and the socio-emotional skills developed as a result of healthy parent-child relationships provide a background in which to better understand how poor socialization experiences can lead to underdevelopment of social and emotional skills for young adults. Disrupted socialization experiences as a result of absent or unavailable parents can have consequences for young adults as they develop relationships and interact with institutions.

**Parenting and Socioeconomic Status**

Studies on socioeconomic status and parenting suggest that poverty is linked to more hostile parenting, (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Paxson, Berger, & Waldfogel, 2002; Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997), more use of physical discipline (McLoyd & Smith, 2002; McGroder, 2000), parents lacking warmth and responsiveness (Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, Kohen, & McCarton, 2001), and lacking competence in nurturing (Gyamfi et al., 2001; Jackson & Huang, 2000; LeCuyer-Maus, 2003; (Fuller et al., 2002; Oyserman, Bybee, Mowbray, & MacFarlane, 2002). Neighborhood effects have also been associated with parenting. Parents residing in poor neighborhoods have been reported to show less warmth and less consistency in their parenting (Klebanov et al., 1994).

Annette Laureau’s *Unequal Childhood*, sheds light on the class differences in parenting styles. Laureau’s study revealed two different parenting styles among middle-class and low SES families. Middle class parenting style: “concerted cultivation” was common practice among middle-class families. “Concerted cultivation” consisted of parents focused on the development of their children’s talents and skills through structured activities, close monitoring, and
communication styles in which children are encouraged to negotiate and reason with their parents. Laureau (2011) finds that for these children they develop an emerging sense of entitlement that allows them to navigate institutions as young adults resulting in continued accumulation of skills that are valuable in navigating institutions. Low SES parents encouraged “natural growth” in which children engaged in independent play, are autonomous from adults, and communication consists of parental directives rather than negotiation and reasoning. Laureau (2011) found that “natural growth” fostered a “sense of distance, distrust, and constraints” in their experiences with institutions and in turn lack skills required to navigate institutions.

**Consequences of Parent-Child Relationship on Emerging Adulthood**

*Healthy Attachments and Transitions to Adulthood*

Research on children’s attachment to their caregiver has emphasized the importance of reliable and consistent caregivers in healthy development. Children who develop positive attachments to their parents are better able to develop prosocial skills, have successful transitions into adulthood, and experience positive outcomes in different areas of life (Bowlby, 1991; Mikulincer et al, 2003; Schiffrin, 2014). Positive attachments have been correlated with effective acknowledgement and coping with emotions (Bowlby, 1991), use of partners for comfort and reassurance in difficult situations (Simpson et al., 1992), and use of support seeking strategies to cope with stress (Simpson et al., 1992). Research supports that stable family structures promote positive outcomes in adulthood. Securely attached individuals have positive self-perceptions and above average functioning in different developmental areas (Copper et al., 1998). Healthy coping skills, characteristic of secure attachments, are associated with successful outcomes in educational attainment, life satisfaction, and mental health (Lane, 2014; Valliant, 1993; Snarey et al. 1985). Supportive parents also encourage healthy transitions to adulthood.
Parental support is an important factor in the self-sufficiency of young adults (Swartz et. al, 2011).

*Navigating transitions to adulthood and children with unhealthy/disrupted attachments*

Overly solicitous parents can negatively impact attachment to parents and transitions to adulthood. The concept *Helicopter parenting* has emerged in parenting research to describe overzealous and developmentally inappropriate parenting (Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012). Helicopter parenting, also referred to as over protective parenting, consists of warm, supportive parents who are also controlling and micromanagers, thus restricting the autonomy of their children (Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012). Over parenting has been correlated with anxious and withdrawn traits in children (Bayer et al. 2006; Gar and Hudson, 2008). Helicopter parenting has also been associated with low self-efficacy and isolation from peers (Ingen et al. 2015), dependency on others and ineffective coping (Odenweller. et al. 2014), and lower levels of well-being and increase in depression and anxiety treatment among children (Lemoyne and Buchanan, 2011).

Children who experience anxious or avoidant (insecure) attachments can experience barriers in achieving positive mental health and life satisfaction during their emerging adulthood (Lane, 2014). Attachment and social supports have been identified as two salient protective factors in emerging adulthood (Lane, 2015). Individuals who develop anxious or avoidant representations of themselves and others, as a result of disrupted attachments in childhood, may experience difficulties in identifying and using social supports (Lane, 2015) and can lead to increased distress during transitional stages of emerging adulthood (Ditzen et al. 2008). Individuals with *anxious/ambivalent (insecure)* attachments demonstrate poor self-image, high levels of psychological distress, and high involvement in risky behaviors (Cooper et al. 2004).
They are emotionally expressive, but have poor emotional regulation skills and use coping strategies intended to reduce negative emotional responses (Cooper et al. 2004). *Avoidant* (insecure) attachment patterns are characterized by discomfort in seeking support, failure to acknowledge negative emotions, and limited insight on emotional responses (Cooper et al. 2004). Avoidant individuals withdraw from sources of support when distressed (Simpson et. al, 1992) and use distance as a coping strategy (Mikulincer et. al 1993). Avoidant types however, when compared to anxious/ambivalent types present less hostility, depression, and risky behaviors and exhibit greater academic functioning (Cooper et al. 2004). Overall, both avoidant and anxious/ambivalent types experience difficulties throughout the life course with adjustment to the emotional distress resulting from life stressors (Cooper et al. 2004).

**Consequences of Family Disruption on Life Outcomes**

A large body of research on separation from the family focuses on the effects of disruptions on the life outcomes of individuals. Attachment research has demonstrated that separation from family can result in increased vulnerability in academic, social, and emotional functioning. Disruptions in attachments to caregivers can be attributed to divorce, death, incarceration, deportation, removal from the home, running away, and abandonment, among others. The disruption of children’s parental attachment is associated with adverse effects in a child’s social functioning compared to those who are a part of an intact family. In the divorce literature, the divorce of parents increases the risk of dropping out of high school, lowered cognitive skills, maladaptive psychosocial well-being, and negative social relations (Amato 2001; Amato and Keith 1991). In the literature on the death of a parent or parental figure, children have been found to be more likely to live in poverty, develop substance abuse, and develop mental health disorders such as separation anxiety and depression. Similarly, children
with incarcerated parents account for a large population of children entering foster care or residing with grandparents (Johnson et. al, 2002). They are also more likely to experience more adverse effects than children of divorced parents due to incarcerated parents’ inability to maintain contact with their children (Argys et al. 2006; Tach et al. 2010) and to be involved with daily routines affecting a child’s development (Waller et al. 2006). Incarceration limits the economic resources in the household (Lewis et al. 2007; Western et al. 2001), thus impacting the acquisition of material goods (Schwartz-Soicher et al. 2011) and well-being of children.

In relationships, young adults who experienced unreliable and inconsistent caregivers enter volatile relationships and seek social relationships, but fear rejection (Ainsworth, 1979; Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991; Atwool, 2006). Unhealthy attachment patterns in childhood have been demonstrated to lead to difficulties in identifying and using social supports (Lane, 2015), discomfort in seeking support, withdrawal from sources of support (Simpson et. al, 1992), and increased distance as a coping strategy (Mikulincer et. al 1993). These outcomes highlight the adverse consequences of family disruption, however, socioeconomic variations are overlooked. For children who are from low-income households, the developmental outcomes of experiencing family disruption are compounded by economic disadvantage and social influences such as neighborhood violence. Children from low-SES households who experience family separations are at higher risk for long-term depression (Gilman, 2003), poor emotional well-being (Balistreri, 2015), increased risk of suicide (Chapman et al., 2004), increased risk of substance abuse (Dube, 2002; Melchior et al. 2007), delinquency (Lanza, et al. 2014), and a decrease in academic achievement (Ragnarsdottir et al. 2017). Family context has been linked to improved functioning in school and lower levels of substance use was found among children with adverse childhood
experiences with positive parent-child interactions (Annunziata et al. 2006). These findings contend that accumulation of risk best explains these outcomes.

**Consequences of Family Disruption on Family Roles**

Childhood is a social construct that frames an early life stage in the life course. Childhood as a stage within the life course is defined as a time in which there are no adult responsibilities or behaviors (Corsaro, 2005). However, the definitions and behaviors of childhood vary across historical context (Elder, 1994), class (Laureau, 2011), and culture (Westwood, 2013). Research has shown that children and adolescents from economically disadvantaged homes experience an accelerated life course. Burton (2007) presented a typology of adultification of children from low-income households. Adultified children in the context of economic disadvantages experience premature exposure to adult situations and knowledge (precocious knowledge); take on adult roles with minimal adult guidance (mentored adultification); share same level of power and status as the parent (Peerification/Spousification); or assume parent roles as a child (parentification). Adultification of children is more likely found in families who experience disruptions such as divorce (Jurkovic et al. 2001) and foster care (Singer et al. 2015), in neighborhoods characterized by severe economic disadvantage and high levels of violence (Burton et al. 1996), low income households (Elder 1974,1999); Mortimer 2003), and with families with mothers that are struggling with substance use (Kroll and Taylor, 2003). For women in low-income households, engaging in traditionally female roles such as domestic caretaking, resulted in reports of adultification (Johnson and Mollborn, 2009).

Child adultification has been associated with anxiety (Burton, 2007), depression (Burton, 2007; Jankowski et. al, 2011), self-defeating and narcissistic characteristics (Weils et al. 2003), and substance abuse (Stein et al. 1999). In regards to transition to adulthood, adultified children
demonstrated difficulty caring for themselves and required parental support (Roy et al. 2014), while those with limited supports were likely to isolate themselves from family and friends (Roy et al. 2014). Adultified children also expressed feelings of confusion and experienced a “complicated transition” into adulthood (Roy et al. 2014).

**ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

*Romantic Relationships in Adolescence*

For adolescence, exploring love is a transient and tentative process with adolescents focusing on the “here and now” (Arnett, 2014). By engaging in romantic experiences, adolescents acquire emotional regulation skills (Larson et al. 1999) and conflict management skills (Shulman et al. 2006). Adolescent dating is correlated with increased ability to adjust and better mental health in young adulthood (Collibee and Furman 2015; Raley et al. 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Romantic relationships during adolescence are also associated with development of stronger self-image (Connolly and Johnson 1993; Seiffge–Krenke 2003). Variations in the benefits of adolescent romantic relationships exist based on the quality of the romantic relationships. Adolescents with poor relationships with parents and peers are more likely to engage in physical and relational aggression in their adolescent romantic relationships (Linder, et al., 2002). Aggression and dating violence has been linked to depression and suicidal thoughts in adolescents (Exner-Cortens et al. 2013). Adolescents who experienced rejection by a parent are more likely to experience rejection and less satisfaction in romantic relationships (Downey et al., 1999). Rejections and break-ups can cause emotional distress for adolescents (Joyner and Udry, 2000). Adolescent dating violence is also correlated with substance abuse (Temple and Freeman, 2011; Ackard et al., 2007; Eaton et al., 2007; Lomand et al., 2013; Mitra et al., 2013; Parker et
al., 2015), depressive symptoms (Ackard et al., 2007; Baynard and Cross, 2008; Callahan et al. 2003), poor self-esteem (Akard et al. 2003); and, lower levels of life satisfaction (Coker et al., 2000). The timing in which adolescents enter romantic relationships also explains variation in the consequences of adolescent romantic relationships later in the life course. Delayed participation in dating among young adults is associated with lower sense of self-worth and increase in mental distress (Lehnart et al. 2010; Rauer et al. 2013) and low self-esteem and limited competence in romantic relationships (Lehnart et al. 2010; Rauer et al. 2013). Premature dating has been linked to low quality romantic relationships later in the life course (Collins 2003).

**Influences on Romantic Relationships**

Romantic relationships have been found to resemble parent-child relationships (De Goede et al. 2012; Rauer et al. 2013; Weigel et al. 2003) and are best explained by social learning theory in which children model observed behaviors and learn from the consequences of behaviors (Bandura et al. 1963). Young adults with positive relationships with their parents are more likely to experience romantic relationships with higher commitment and satisfaction and less hostility and conflict (Collins et al. 2009; De Goede et al., 2012; Johnson and Galambos, 2014; Weigel et al., 2003). Young adults with positive relationships with their parents are also more likely to rely on, trust, and seek comfort from romantic partners (Black and Schutte, 2006).

Romantic relationships are also influenced by SES and family structure. Young adults from low SES backgrounds (Meier and Allen, 2008), and single-parent homes (Cavanagh et al., 2008; Ivanova et al., 2014; Valle and Tillman, 2014) experience more relationship instability (McLanahan, 2004; Teachman, 2002). Experiencing adversity during adolescence impacts relationship patterns for young adults. Adolescents who are victims of violence experience
psychological and behavioral consequences such as depression, aggression, and anger (Tuner et al. 2006). Adolescents who experience depression more commonly engage in “relationship churning” which is defined as short-term and rapid rotation of romantic partners (Sassler, 2010). Adolescents who struggle with depression may isolate themselves and disengage from romantic relationships and consequently enter emerging adulthood without the necessary skills to engage in more intimate long-term romantic relationships. Relationship churning interferes with their ability to engage in the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood.

**Romantic Relationships in Early Adulthood**

Following adolescence, emerging adults enter romantic relationships to explore the qualities they desire in a partner and learn more about their roles in relationships (Arnett, 2014). During this stage they are seeking long-term and more intimate relationships. However, in order to successfully engage in romantic relationships during emerging adulthood, it is assumed that young adults successfully acquired emotional and social skills during their adolescent relationships. For adolescents who struggled with mental health and substance abuse issues, their relationships in adulthood evolve differently. Adolescents with a history of alcohol dependence are more likely to engage in more relationships during emerging adulthood (Sandberg-Thoma and Dush, 2014). Young adults who struggle with alcohol or depression are less likely to marry and more likely to enter cohabitating relationships (Sandberg-Thoma and Dush, 2014).

For working class adults the transition to adulthood is marked by limited economic resources, unstable employment, and ambivalence about family formation (Silva, 2013). Silva highlights how experiences of “betrayal and confusion” for young adults in navigating institutions, participating in employment, and their family experiences shaped young adults’
sense of loneliness, independence, and self-reliance. Similarly, Anderson (1999) finds that in
eighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage residents experience a “pervasive distrust” towards
the law and towards other blacks which results in “individualistic approaches to handling
conflicts” (Anderson, 1999). Young adults who grew up in poverty, were raised in family
structures with other than both parents, and resided in communities with higher levels of
violence were more likely to report older subjective ages (Johnson and Molborn, 2009). These
young adults were also likely to report participating in intense work in the home or in the job
market (Johnson and Molborn, 2009). Low SES young adults from other family structures
identified having children, being married, and cohabitation as markers associated with feeling
like an adult (Johnson and Molborn, 2009). For young women from low SES neighborhoods
stable romantic relationships are difficult to maintain (Edin and Kefala, 2005). These young
women choose to have children as ways to cope with difficult home life, as a way to secure more
permanent love and intimacy, and as a way to feel “alive” in light of limited economic and
educational mobility (Edin and Kefala, 2005). Young women from low SES backgrounds delay
marriage due to the small pool of marriageable men to choose from (Wilson, 1987), the desire to
achieve some financial stability, and in effect to achieve maturity, both in their relationships and
for themselves (Edin and Kefalas, 2005).

Financial insecurity, lack of financial and cultural resources, individual responsibilities,
and inability to provide emotional or financial support to a partner makes entering a romantic
relationships for working class men and women, particularly Blacks, a precarious endeavor
(Silva, 2013). For Black men their economic disadvantage and inability to meet traditional male
relationship obligations and take care of someone else makes entering romantic relationships a
venture filled with uncertainty (Silva, 2013). For women who experienced economic and family
instability early in the life course, entering romantic relationships means risking their independence for a partner that may not meet their need for safety and emotional security (Silva, 2013).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the study’s research methodology. It begins with my rationale for using a qualitative research design. Then, I proceed with a discussion of the theoretical framework guiding the study, my research questions, criteria for sample selection, and my methods of data collection and data analysis. I conclude the chapter by highlighting the significance and rationale of the study and ethical considerations and its limitations.

Problem Statement

The transition to adulthood for young adults has transformed in such a way that young people are now taking longer to reach adulthood. The research on the transition to adulthood does not pay sufficient attention to the effects of social position and its impact on later stages in the life course (Schulenberg et al. 2012). The theory of “emerging adulthood” demonstrates a class bias with the middle class being the norm (Hendry and Kleop, 2002). This research addresses this gap in the literature. In this research, the experiences of transitioning into adulthood for young adults from low SES families is explored.

This study examines the life course of economically disadvantaged young adults who experienced family disruptions. The focus of this research is to highlight how the transition to adulthood compares to the extant literature which predominantly captures the experiences of middle class college students. This study examines parent-child relationships during childhood, how those experiences influenced other relationships, and what those parent-child relationships mean in the transition to adulthood.
Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is most suitable in studies that seek to understand and explain the meanings people attach to their lived experiences, how those meanings are created, and how they are transformed (Strauss et al. 2015). Qualitative research is a process of exploration and interpretation of things as observed in their natural setting (Denzin et al. 2011). Qualitative interview studies allow for an in-depth study of individuals, events, and processes within a specific context (Weiss, 1994). In this research I am attempting to understand the lived experiences of young adults through their accounts of events. The most appropriate method for data collection is the use of semi-structured interviews. Observations were not considered for this research as it would not capture the early experiences of young adults in this study, their decision-making strategies, and their plans for the future. Observations are best suited to capture events as they occur (Denzin et al. 2011; Creswell, 2013) and in this research I aim to understand a process. Data were collected from open-ended interview questions about parent-child relationships and social/interpersonal experiences that influence respondents’ navigation of the emerging adulthood stage. Respondents had the opportunity to provide detailed subjective descriptions and experiences of family stability/instability and transitions to adulthood. The qualitative interview methodology is appropriate for this study because it allowed me to collect substantial details regarding the transition to adulthood experiences for low socioeconomic status young adults who experienced different levels of family stability. Although there are multiple sources of data, I conducted face-to-face interviews with respondents utilizing semi-structured, open-ended questions that provide us with insight into how early childhood parent-child relationships impact individual transitions to adulthood.
Site Selection and Participation Criteria

My rationale in selecting a local community center for young adults was to ensure a natural setting for young adults to share their stories (Denzin et al. 2011; Creswell, 2013). In addition, the community center provided a safe and private setting in which young adults could tell their stories. The community center provides services to young adults who are from low SES homes. The center offers services for young adults who have dropped out or aged out of high school, as well as young adults who are unemployed and seeking employment. This site contained a population suitable for the specified participation criteria: ages 18-25 from low SES households.

The research site is a community based program located in the basement of a local church. It is open to inner city children and young people ages five through twenty-five, and operates year round. The community center serves residents from a Northeastern rust-belt city with a majority of its members being African-American (85%), Hispanic (13%), and White (2%). In this program respondents must meet eligibility requirements which include residing in a low-income household. The entire population served in this center is economically disadvantaged. The center serves approximately 2000 youth a year. The staff are African American and Hispanic, some enrolled in college or working other jobs. Eligibility for this study is based on respondents’ parent’s level of education and status in the labor force. Respondents met criteria by having a parent with a high school education or lower and working in a non-managerial/low skill job or are not in the work force and recipients of government benefits. The living conditions for most of the young adults was unstable and most were not enrolled in school.

The sample for this research was obtained using purposive sampling in order to identify respondents of unique social characteristics/position (Schutt, 2015; Singleton et al. 2010):
economically disadvantaged, 18-25 years of age, of varying family structures. For the purposes of this research twenty-two young adults participated in the study. The sample was selected based on two dimensions: age and SES. Socioeconomic status was measured using parent’s level of education and employment. Low SES was measured by parent’s level of education and status in the labor force. Low SES in this research was defined as a household in which a parent had minimal education (a high school education or lower) and employment in a position with little or no managerial authority requiring minimal educational skills. Parents who were receiving government assistance (food stamps, cash assistance, social security income, and social security disability) and had limited participation in the labor force also met criteria for low SES. As is characteristic of qualitative research I collected data in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013), my data analysis was a combination of inductive and deductive coding, and I integrated theory to explore my findings. I used the data collected to better understand and construct the meanings and definitions of young adults in this study.

The Study

Data collection began upon receiving approval from the University at Buffalo Investigation and Review Board on 12/16/2016. From then, I conducted and transcribed interviews of twenty-two low SES young men and women. In compliance with IRB guidelines, only respondents who were 18 years of age or older were selected to participate in this study and were interviewed. Data collection and transcriptions went on from March 2017 to January 2018. I completed a total of 50 hours at the research site collecting data based on participant interviews.

The Study Site

My research site was a community center located in the lower level of a local church located in a Rust belt city. The city’s population was 922,835 as of July 2014 (U.S. Census, 2016). The
racial composition of the city is 80% White, 13% Black/African American, 5% Hispanic, and 3% Asian (U.S. Census, 2014). The median household income is $50,050 and about 90% of residents have high school diplomas and 31% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2014).

The Respondents

There were a total of twenty-two respondents in this study. All respondents were identified as economically disadvantaged based on their enrollment in the community program, which requires income documentation to demonstrate eligibility for the program. The respondents all had one or both parent with minimal education (non-college graduates). Some of the respondents’ parents were employed in positions with little or no managerial authority, which required minimal educational skills. Some of the parents were receiving government assistance and lacked participation in the labor force on a continuous basis.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>Race/Ethnic background</th>
<th>MOTHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>FATHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>RESPONDENT LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>RESPONDENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(Dominican/Puerto Rican)</td>
<td>12TH GRADE</td>
<td>HS graduate/some college</td>
<td>HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Did not graduate HS</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS graduate/some college</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Graduated high school</td>
<td>Some HS</td>
<td>HS graduate/some college</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alize</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Graduated high school</td>
<td>Some HS</td>
<td>HS graduate/some college</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rondell</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>HS graduate/some college</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Current Education Level</td>
<td>Graduation Year</td>
<td>Employment Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS graduate/</td>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>some college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS graduate/</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>some college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>HS graduate/</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>some college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Porscha</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>West Indian</td>
<td>HS graduate/some college</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS grad</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
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<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>not-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Haitian/Cuban</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>HS diploma</td>
<td>In GED classes</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
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<td>Did not graduate HS</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>HS grad</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kavon</td>
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<td>African-American</td>
<td>HS grad</td>
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<td>In HS</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Some HS</td>
<td>In HS</td>
<td>not-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>HS grad</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to protect the identity of respondents, pseudonyms were used for the twenty-two respondents in this study. There were 9 women and 13 men ranging from 18 through 24 years of age. The respondents identified as Hispanic (37%), African-American (45%), White (9%) and bi-racial (9%). The education level of the young adults consisted of 13 high school graduates of which 4 reported some college attendance. The remaining 9 respondents were in high school (N=8) or in a GED class (N=1). Those who were in high school reported being 1-2 grade levels behind. The young men and women in this study were unemployed (N=6) or working part-time jobs (N=16). All 9 young women in this study were employed. All 6 unemployed respondents were young men. All respondents experienced some form of family disruption. The forms of family disruption for young adults ranged from domestic violence, incarcerated parent, death of a caregiver, and foster or kinship care.

**Interviews**

The interview schedule for this study consisted of twenty-two open ended questions which allowed for young adults to respond in their own words. I interviewed all respondents in a private interview room at the research site. The interview was semi-structured, however, transformed into conversation rather than questions and answers. During the interview I focused on early parent-child relationship, young adults’ relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners, and the experience of becoming an adult (see Appendix A for interview schedule). The interviews lasted from twenty to ninety minutes. I observed throughout the interview the feelings expressed non-verbally by respondents and noted facial expressions, eye contact, and tone. Respondents were able to express themselves freely and uninterrupted. I created a space that was safe and uninhibited, which made young adults more comfortable while responding to questions.
My interview techniques included incorporating clarifying questions, paraphrasing, prompts, and probing to further elicit responses, however, respondents provided rich narratives and did not require significant efforts to respond to their questions.

**Gaining Entry to Sites**

As a social worker in this rust belt city I had established relationships and built rapport with many of the service providers in the community. I had the opportunity to visit various programs in the city and met with the program directors to discuss my research intent. During my visits I provided the program directors with flyers announcing my research which were then distributed to their staff and clients. I also volunteered in a program for inner city youth. There I had the opportunity to network with members of the community who sponsored various programs for economically disadvantaged youth. These individuals assisted me in gaining access to various sites. In the end, I used a community center as the primary research site where young adults frequented to participate in various programs.

**Gaining Approval to Conduct Research**

I gained approval for this research from the University at Buffalo’s Internal Review Board. Flyers of the study were disseminated inviting young adults to participate in the study for which compensation was provided in the form of a $20 gift card. I conducted the interviews in a private classroom at the research site. Respondents were explained the purpose of the study and what their participation entailed. I reviewed the consent forms with each respondent, reading it out loud, while they read the hard copies. Respondents were fully informed of the terms of the study when they signed the consent forms. The names of the respondents were changed to protect their identity.
Data Collection and Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded in English. The data were analyzed using an issue-focused approach to present findings that describe specific situations for all respondents (Weiss, 1994). Concepts and categories were derived from participant responses through the process of coding. The codes that emerged initially during the interviews were mistrust of others and feelings of confusion about adulthood.

Coding

At the first stage of coding I began with an analysis of the interview transcripts. The literature that guided my research was the life course perspective, emerging adulthood theory, and socialization theory. I initially expected to find themes such as mental health disorders, substance use, and criminal behaviors which the literature highlights as consequences of family disruption in childhood on the transition to adulthood. I examined the interview transcripts for concepts and categories from which themes could emerge using Nvivo software to assist with the analysis of recurring keywords and concepts. Some of the codes uncovered were relationships with peers, romantic relationships, childhood trauma, life goals, and interactions with institutions. These codes evolved into themes of social isolation, structural constraints, and weak social attachments. The interview schedule was adjusted in response to the emergence of early themes so that it focused more on relationships with peers, parents, and romantic partners. Relationships with institutions: family, school, and employment were also explored.

Ethical Considerations

In compliance with the Institutional Review Board, I engaged in ethical considerations such as protecting the identity of respondents, protecting the identity of the community center, and safeguarding the data collected. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device.
All interviews were transcribed. All data collected during the interview were transferred to a password protected file and stored in a password protected personal computer to which only I have access. All data were stripped of identifying information, including transcripts, and respondents were provided with pseudonyms. Respondents had full discretion in their participation in the interview and were able to decline to answer any question in the interview. In this study there were no participants wishing to stop the interview or remove their interview from this study. Trusting relationships were built with respondents through transparency in our communication and informed consent. A copy of all signed consents is included in the appendix of this research.

**Limitations and Bias**

There are several limitations with this study. The sample size for this research is a small sample of 22 respondents. The data collection did not include follow-up with respondents after the age of 29, the age at which research suggests the emerging adulthood stage ends. In addition, because of the homogeneity of the sample, little can be said about the difference that exists between respondents in this research and young adults from low SES homes who do not experience family disruption and their experience in transitioning to adulthood. This topic is closely related to my profession which presents a bias in the research (Mehra, 2002). I worked in child protection services in the preventive services division. Some of the respondents in this research were involved with child protective services in various jurisdictions and received interventions for which I was responsible for delivering at one point in my career. I did not have any former clients participate in this study. However, I found that there was bias in the research process as I found myself inclined to ask questions about mental health, clinical interventions, and coping strategies as I learned of some of the trauma the young adults experienced.
Researcher Identity and Positionality

As a Hispanic American woman who grew up in the inner city, I was familiar with some of the experiences shared by young adults in this study. In my profession as a social worker I worked in the inner city and witnessed first-hand the disruptions in family and its effects on the life course of young adults. From 2008-2012 I worked in an inner city as a preventive services social worker. I was responsible for entering the homes of families identified by child protective services to have children at risk of being removed from their home. My role was to provide resources and supports to assist the family remain intact. In my work I provided intervention in cases of parental substance abuse, domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse, and inadequate living conditions and the effects it had on child well-being.

In conducting the interviews, young adults demonstrated a familiarity with me and spoke with an assumption that I understood their experiences and colloquialism. Although I did not disclose any information about myself, young adults demonstrated no apprehension or suspiciousness in discussing their childhood traumas and abuse. Interviewer race effects can best explain the respondents’ level of openness during this study. As a Hispanic woman interviewing African-American, Hispanic, and Bi-racial young adults, interviewer race effects could have played a role in the quality of responses provided by respondents. Research supports that race has significant influence in the interviewer respondent relationship (Davis and Silver, 2003). I shared with respondents that I was a doctoral student and my status as a student in addition to my ethnic background could have contributed to a lower social distance between myself and the respondents. Research on interviewer effects and social distance has found that significant social distance between the interviewer and the respondent can affect responses to questions and may
increase perception of questions as threatening, particularly questions related to race (Anderson et al. 1988).

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter highlights this study’s research methodology. I presented the problem statement and provided rationale for a qualitative research design. In this chapter I also included a discussion of the theories used to frame this study, the research questions, the selection process for both research site and respondents, the data collection and analysis methods, and I concluded the chapter with a discussion of the limitations of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this research I tell the stories of the path to adulthood for twenty-two young adults who experienced unstable relationships with their parents. Their narratives provide insight into how growing up in a low-income household, in which one or both parents is absent, unavailable or inadequate, shapes their understanding of family disruption, the meaning they ascribe to adulthood, and their views and decisions around friendships, marriage, and forming families. In their stories, these young people walk us through growing up in low-income neighborhoods, their childhood experiences with their parents and caregivers, the changes they experienced in family composition, their experiences with relationships in various areas of their lives, and their thoughts on adulthood. The effects of family instability and socioeconomic status cumulated with age, leading to marked disadvantages in the transition to adulthood. A pervasive sense of mistrust translated into their romantic relationships, friendships, and plans for family formation. Experiences of adultification indicated a transition to adulthood, however the lack of social resources and economic security contributed to the uncertainty in their adult status.

This chapter is composed of four major themes: transition to adulthood, parent-child relationships, young adults’ romantic relationships, and young adults’ peer relationships. The chapter begins with a discussion of how young adults experience the transition to adulthood in a economic and social climate that requires young adults to rely on parental and peer support in spite of poor parent-child interactions during childhood, unhealthy romantic relationships, and small peer groups. The discussion of the parent-child relationship elucidates the early socialization experiences for young adults based on their relationship with their parents. This theme emerged from the literature on socialization which contends that the parent-child relationship prepares children for their future social interactions. The disruptive and abusive
experiences during childhood for young adults in this study shaped their perceptions of other relationships. In the discussion of romantic relationships, the impact of poor socialization and consequences of victimization on the young adults’ decisions around romantic relationships is highlighted. Similarly, early parent-child experiences shaped young adults’ ability to be part of peer groups and instead respondents expressed minimal peer supports.

**ADULTHOOD DEFINED**

Arnett (2011) found that across social class and ethnic groups the three markers for adulthood identified most were “accept responsibility for yourself, make independent decisions, and become financially independent.” Respondents in my sample defined adulthood similarly. The young adults defined adulthood in terms of having the right priorities and goals in place. Unlike models of adulthood that are based on role transitions (Furstenberg et al 2005, etc), my respondents did not identify specific role transitions as marking adulthood. Porscha tells me: “You have to put your priorities first. Like you can say, I want to get this pair of sneakers, but you can't because you have to pay a bill.” Robert similarly expressed: “I think to be an adult you have to have your priorities straight. Have that goal set. You can't live life without having a goal or it would just be constantly whatever happens happens. That's not going to get you nowhere.” “Responsibility” was another marker for adulthood. An adult for Peter and Katie means that people assume responsibility for their actions and no longer blame others for their failures and develop “strong morals.” Peter and Katie highlight: “I think that is being an adult, taking responsibility for your actions when you know you're wrong” and “Like I said, to be able to take care of yourself, to be able to take responsibility for yourself and you can't-- because I realized…that you can't blame everything on life on other people.” Chris adds the importance of anticipating consequences and engaging in less impulsive behaviors and for Allen avoiding
“problems” as indicators of adulthood. Sofia and Rondell highlight the importance of paying bills in defining adulthood. Sofia says: “You're not grown until you pay your bills” and Rondell believes: “In the real world you’re a man once your bills are paid on time, your responsibility is taken care of, your home is happy…”

Research tells us that low educational attainment and low SES often lead to older subjective age as a result of responsibilities that reflect those of great age (Furstenberg et al. 2003; Settersten 2003; Thorne and Koller, 2014). This claim is asserted in the stories of Keisha, Porscha, Ruby, and Rebecca as they illustrate the ways in which responsibilities at a young age led to subjective feelings of “maturity” at young ages. Keisha and Ruby reflect on their childhood responsibilities and how it impacted their maturity. Ruby tells me “So everything that I did to help me mature and to be more of an adult was to help my mom out.” Ruby recalls: “I do think that taking care of my little brother and helping my mom out with bills, and things like that, are helping me mature, become an adult…I definitely don't think age has anything to do with that. I think your experiences, who you are around, and how your home life is, definitely has a lot to do with that [becoming an adult]. Porscha believes she was an adult before the age of 18 and explained “I was mature years ago and I'm only 18. I think it's more your surroundings and the way your mindset is. It's not really about age because there's like 40 year olds that still act like they're 15.” For these young people their vehicle to achieving maturity and adulthood was marked by their efforts to achieve economic security.

Most young adults believe that education is the path to better employment and an increase in financial security. However, education for these young people was unstable due to the financial demands and lack of parental supports. Young adults with strained relationships with their parents reported the inability to attend college due to their parent’s unwillingness to provide
supporting documentation for financial aid. Tina expressed: “Because of the situation where me and my mom don't speak, last semester I wasn't able to get into school because she was being very stubborn about giving me information that I need for application… This January I enrolled into [college] for the next semester that is coming up. I really want to finish school… I really want to get the highest degree I possibly can because of more money.” Young adults explained that without financial aid they were not able to continue in college. It was also the case that young adults delayed attending college in order to prioritize work. Ruby expressed taking time off to help bring income into the home: “I want to go back to school. Technically, I took a year off to start working and help my mom with bills.” The young adults in this study discussed having to drop-out of school in order to work to pay their rent and buy food. Others expressed being unable to attend school or not doing well in college due to stressors associated with low economic resources. Young adults expressed not being able to focus on tasks because of hunger and stress related to not being able to meet their basic necessities. Rondell discussed the events leading to him getting placed on academic probation and eventually taking time off from college: “I got on academic probation. And the next semester after that I nearly got evicted and there was three deaths... I was like, "what? You want me to write a paper? I would love to write this paper. I think I have some really good things to say about Haiti's involvement in-- I mean America's involvement in Haiti, but I'm hungry right now and I'm sad and I spent my last little bit of money on weed because I'm stressed and I'm broke."

The young adult in this study define adulthood as the ability to take care of themselves, being responsible, and setting goals. These elements were also identified as defining adulthood among middle-class young adults (Arnett, 2011). Adulthood was not defined by age or role transitions such as graduating high school, cohabitating with a romantic partner, having children,
or getting married. These narratives also shed light on the differences in how low SES young adults view adulthood as compared to their middle-class counterparts. “Maturity” and older subjective ages as a result of adultification during childhood and adolescence contributed to young adults’ definition of adulthood as not being age-based. For low socioeconomic young adults the instability they experience during young adulthood is not a consequence of “exploration”, but rather a consequence of limited financial, social, and parental support. In addition, limited financial resources hindered young adults’ efforts to engage in academic pursuits with issues such as lack of financial resources, hunger, depression, and substance use thwarting their academic efforts. In the following section the narratives of young adults who identify as somewhat adults or not yet adults further highlight the importance of responsibility, independence, financial resources, and life goals in order to achieve adulthood.

**TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

**Adult,“kind of, not really”**

In the stories below we find evidence of what Arnett (2004) referred to in his research as the *Feelings of in between*, when young adults are no longer adolescents, but also do not yet feel they have achieved adulthood. For emerging adults the indicators of adulthood are independent decision-making, financial independence, accepting responsibility for themselves (Arnett, 2004) having a provider role, and responsibility for family (Chaney, 2009), criteria which are gradually acquired. Consequently, we see young adults express feeling “in-between” adolescence and adulthood. Tina knew she became an adult when she became completely self-sufficient, not requiring anything from her parents. Tina was responsible for her food, clothing, and shelter at the age of 16. She worked a part-time job at a café to provide for herself. She tells me: “I didn't call her [mother] or my dad for my own things since I left or anyone else for that
matter.” Even before leaving home Tina tells me she was responsible for her siblings because her mother often did not feed them: “I used my money that I worked for to buy my siblings' food, or learn to cook. I learned to cook.” However, she expressed sentiments of being “in between” due to her lack of consistent employment and continued efforts to earn a college degree. Tina expressed having “bad luck” with jobs and not being able to hold a job for longer than a few months at a time.

Similarly, Isabella age 21 and Porsch age 18 feel they sometimes are adults, but in some ways feel they are not yet adults. Isabella left home to live with her boyfriend, has a part-time job as a stock person, and does not rely on her parents for financial support, however, Isabella tells me she is in between adulthood, feeling that she lacks “career goals.” Porsch lost her grandfather when she was 8-years-old. She felt she was alone ever since despite moving in with her parents with whom she has lived since then. Porsch expressed a different sentiment from Tina and Isabella, whom both reported having adult responsibilities. Porsch feels like an adult in the way she thinks and carries herself, but does not feel like an adult because she lacks responsibilities. Porsch explains: “I don't have my own apartment, I don't have to do all that stuff, I don't have to pay electric and all those bills and stuff. I just feel like once I have done all that, "Well, this is really here. I'm really by myself now." Mentally I feel like I am by myself, but physically I'm still living at home. I don't have to pay bills or anything else so it's totally different.” For Isabella and Tina feeling “in between” consisted of engaging in some “adult-like” responsibilities such as working and paying bills, however, was undermined by not having a plan for the future or having to secure consistent employment and an education.

Rondell is a 24-year-old Haitian American man. His father was incarcerated when he was eight years old, he recalls having a relationship with his father while he was incarcerated. However,
Rondell explained some strain in the relationship which he attributes to his father’s “impulsiveness.” Rondell had a step-father in the home, however explained he too was into “street stuff” and he was also incarcerated. Rondell expressed resentment towards his mother for dealing with men who were “into the streets” and constantly incarcerated. Rondell also expressed anger towards his mother for feeling she loved her boyfriends more than she loved him. Rondell expressed feeling rage towards his step-father and expressed: “a lot of times I feel like, dude, I'll get you beat up. I'll get you shot.” In regards to his biological father, Rondell expressed resentment at the fact that he was not available to guide him in life. Rondell believes his decision to smoke marijuana and join the street life was because of his father’s incarceration. Rondell tells me: “they do this, they hustle and all that kind of stuff, the common theme is there’s no dad. This dude is not my dad, and he does the same thing as all these other people and my dad is away [in prison] so I'm probably going be like that anyway. So I'm going to jump to that road head first. That's how I thought at 12-years-old.”

For Rondell experiencing adult situations at a young age signified a change of status. Rondell recalls: “I lost my virginity at 12, I started smoking at 12, I got into the most fights of my life in the summer between sixth grade and seventh grade and I joined the gang that summer.” Rondell also talks about witnessing his first murder at the age of 13: “I seen him like “what are you doing?” And I see him snatch him and the guy just like “so calm, calm as I’m talking to you right now”. Pham, pham! Two shots, hit him in the back and got in his car, drove off… there was probably nine of us that was gathered around him, and the one who was closer to him, got him like this, “does it hurt”? “It hurt”. And he coughed a big glob of blood. And then I’m at his feet and then it’s just like, it was over, it’s over. The life, there was none. It was crazy to me. And it’s not like an emotional thing, it’s just, “wow, we’re not invincible here.” For
Rondell those experiences shaped his views on adulthood: “… Certain things, I felt like I wasn't supposed to deal with so early. So I feel like there's grown people out here that haven't done what I've done, you know what I mean? I'm kind of grown in that own right but that's like a cultural thing. The street culture is you're a man once you do something that's like super illegal.” In some ways Rondell expressed not being yet an adult. He feels that he “mentally needs some polishing” and elaborates that he feels “immature” about his ability to be in a committed relationship. Rondell expressed cheating on his girlfriend and his inability to maintain a stable relationship makes him believe he is not yet an adult. Rondell also talks about his need to improve his finance and engage in budgeting before feeling he is fully and adult.

Victimization during adolescent can disrupt the life course by challenging the norms for that life stage (Johnson et al., 2009) and result in premature transition into adulthood as young adults attempt to adapt to the victimization (Hagan et al., 2001). Young adults who experience victimization are more likely to form greater number of unions, at a faster pace, and at younger ages (Kuhl et al. 2012). They also express older subjective ages and assume parental roles at younger ages (Hagan et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2009). These stories illustrate the sense of independence and self-reliance that is associated with adulthood. As the research on markers of adulthood illustrate, these young adults identify making their own money, buying their own clothes and food, paying bills, working, and living on their own as indicators of their adult status. They also expressed an increase in responsibility and caring for others: siblings or parents, and making “smart decision” as factors that contribute to their adult status.

The qualitative difference in the feeling of “in-between” found between young adults in this research and those in Arnett’s study is highlighted in the life stages they identify to be between. Young adults in this research express being caught between adolescence and adulthood,
whereas Arnett’s highlights some in his sample expressed feeling “childish” in some instances. The feeling of “in-between” for these young adults can best be explained by an accumulation of disadvantage over the life course (Dannerfer, 2003) compounded by early experiences with trauma. For these young adults weak family attachments led to their development of weak romantic relationships as they progressed through the life course. Some young adults experienced unstable family attachments led to their development of weak romantic relationships, weak attachments to their neighborhoods, and fragile friendships. However, these young adults have experienced and survived trauma that has never been experienced by many adults. Their inability to navigate the social world, but their resilience and ability to survive trauma and endure adult experiences during childhood creates confusion in their subjective views of where they stand in the life course.

**Not Yet an Adult**

Jackson, Chris, and Ruby reported not feeling like adults because they lacked “maturity”, were not “self-sufficient”, and had no goals or direction in life of their own. Jackson was jobless at the time of the interview and living with his mother and explained feeling his mother was “overprotective.” He explained “I have much more miles to climb until I'm mature. You have to be mature to be an adult… I just can't function sometimes. I can't follow through, I think that's what it is. I think it's-- To be an adult, you have to able to follow through and to be responsible. Responsibility, I don't have it. My mom tells me all the time, she says, "You're not responsible." Chris explains his parents too were “overprotective” and “forced” him to go to college and he has not engaged in most adult tasks: “Well, because an adult is considered to be financially independent of his or her parent…. I still needed to do various things for myself an adult should be doing getting a job, having an apartment, buying food or what not, necessities. I do not view myself as an adult in that regard.” Ruby believes it is personal attributes that keep her from
becoming adult: “I feel like my mindset right now isn't an adult mindset. I feel like there's a lot of work to be done, for sure…” Ruby explained her mother made efforts to ensure she did not grow up in a neighborhood with drugs, gangs, and violence. Unlike Chris and Jackson, Ruby did not describe her mother as overprotective, but explained her mother “cared” and made efforts to ensure she and her brother were safe. Ruby talks about her mother’s decision to move: “my mom didn't really like it… Drug dealing… The guys would disrespect women. They walked by, not even like, if you didn't give them your number or anything like that, all of a sudden you were a bitch, you were cunt, or they would put their hands on you. My mom did not want my brother to grow up like that, or thinking that was okay. She was like, "We've got to get out of here." I didn't really like it [moving], because coming out the house, we were around a lot of Caucasians, so coming out the house was like, everybody would stare at you as if I'm going to rob my own house. I was taught pretty much that there are certain sacrifices that you have to make. We were okay with dealing with stink eyes, compared to my brother possibly getting beat up…” These narratives support a definition of adulthood consisting of independence from parents, being responsible and mature, in addition to being employed.

**Turning points: From Childhood to Young adulthood**

In the following stories gender difference in the turning points for young adults are highlighted. For the young men turning points often consisted of violence and sexual conquests. Gender research supports that young adolescent males are more likely to engage in sexual intercourse at younger ages than adolescent girls, they are more likely to be sexually active than adolescent girls, and they are more likely to report more sexual partners than young women (Peterson, 2011). The young men in this study are also more likely to engage in violence as a consequence of their violent victimization as children (Tuner et al. 2006). The young women
express their turning points consist of household tasks such as cooking or caring for young siblings. In the transition to adulthood, young women are more likely to have children and get married earlier than men (Oesterle et. al 2010) and attempt to balance the labor force with childrearing and family-related roles (Schoon, 2010).

Experiencing adult situations and adult responsibilities such as moving out of a parent’s homes, having household bills, exposure to drugs, witnessing or partaking in violence: witnessing shootings, seeing dead bodies, joining gangs, and losing their virginity were turning points leading to adulthood for some male young adults. In the previous chapter, some of the young people express not feeling like adults because they felt immature, lacked goals, did not have jobs, and had not achieved independence from their parents. For Tina, Keisha, Rondell, and Robert major life events indicated the point at which they became young adults and were no longer children. Tina recalls she became an adult at age 16 “When I left my mother's house. I felt from there, I had learned to take care of myself. Well, even though I had already mostly learned, because at that age, I was already cooking. When I left her house, as soon as I left her house, I found a job, I was always working. I learned to be responsible for myself.” For Robert it was also at age 15 when he left his mother’s home and believes he became an adult. Robert recounts: “Catching that Greyhound by myself…from Birmingham to New York. To me, I think it was like, you know how people have rites of passage, it was my decision to want to move from Birmingham to New York, so I knew I had to work, I had to save the money…I started making my own decisions since. Ralph and Rondell identify the point at which they lost their virginity age 16 and 12, respectively, the point in time when they believed they were no longer children. Rondell also experienced other life altering events at the age of 12 including witnessing a shooting, seeing a dead body, and joining a gang.
Assuming responsibility over younger siblings was also an event young people used as a point in time when they felt they were no longer children. Keisha highlights this point: “when I was waking up at 3 o’clock ‘cause my brother was crying and I had to change his diaper, I felt like I was an adult….he was born when I was eight.” In this particular case Keisha was caring for her little brother when she 8 years old in efforts to help her mother, who was working up to three jobs at one time, by allowing her to “get rest.” The above narratives highlight experiences of gendered adultification with young women engaging in household labor and young men engaging in activities that provide sense of power.

“Don’t rush it”: Feelings about adulthood

There were two major themes that arose from young adults’ feelings about adulthood: “it’s hard” and “take your time.” Socialization theory tells us that parents serve as role models for children and are the agents through which children are socialized (Corsaro, 2005). The transitions to adulthood for respondents without role models was a difficult and “confusing” process. Rondell illustrates the hardship in becoming an adult due to lack of support and adequate role models to guide him through the process: “…having examples of what to do, instead of examples of what not to do. The adults in my family…they are ex-crackheads, ex-criminals and all kind of stuff like that. You name it, they’ve done it….they were criminals. I’ve seen crack before I was 10 years old…” Rondell explained he did not have positive examples to model as a child and instead learned what not to do from the adults in his family. Another sentiment that came across was the feeling of being “rushed” into adulthood. Thomas expressed the importance of “enjoy life as a young person… don’t rush, just be a kid” as sentiments regarding becoming an adult. Thomas explained his unplanned pregnancy has forced him to become an adult sooner than expected. Thomas also tells of the consequences he believes
growing up too fast lead to: “... eventually it’s going to kill you. Drugs, drinking, any of that...people get addicted...get killed in the club, get hurt, get robbed, or anything like that.”

Childhood is a stage in the life course in which there are no adult responsibilities or behaviors (Corsaro, 2005). However, for respondents in this research they experienced childhood adultification in the form of premature exposure to adult situations, harsh realities, and adult knowledge (Precocious knowledge) and assuming responsibilities such as caring for young siblings or parents, referred to as parentification (Burton, 2007). These young adults expressed having adult responsibilities from a young age and feeling they were not able to experience being children. They found themselves caring for others and involved in adult situations from a young age and were restricted in their abilities to be carefree and happy. We learn of Rondell who witnessed his first dead body at age 12, Keisha who from the age of 8 was taking care of her baby brother, Derek who dealt with the suicide of a relative at the age of 13, and Tina who left her home at the age of 16 and was forced to provide for herself. For these young people their early life required them to deal with depression, anger, abuse/neglect, the loss of loved ones, drug use, and in some cases gang involvement.

We learn from these young people that separation from their parents was a positive experience and necessary for their well-being. Reunification with parents was involuntary, challenging, and resulted in subsequent separations. Unstable childhood experiences with parents and social isolation due to residing in low SES fostered feelings of mistrust which emanated into young adults decisions in friendships and romantic relationships. Young adults formed transient and short-term friendships, however, expressed preferring isolation. Romantic relationships were volatile and contentious. Adversity in childhood forced young adults to become adultified children, acquiring adult knowledge and responsibilities, but left to struggle in their transition to
adulthood with limited financial and social resources. Some young people expressed difficulty securing and maintaining employment, had difficulty completing high school and enrolling or staying in college, and had distant relationships with family, and few friends.

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

“\textit{I can't do this anymore}” Why separation from their parents was necessary

Although research on family disruptions, such as foster care placement, tells us that children who are separated from their families experience increased vulnerabilities in education and in social and emotional functioning, some of the literature highlights ways in which separation from a parent is beneficial to children. The foster care experience for youth who have been abused by their parents has been found to increase feelings of safety in abused children (Burgess, 2010), resulted in beliefs that the foster care experience improved living conditions and made children feel cared for (Buchanan, 1995), and alleviated the stress of the parent-child relationship (Fisher, et al 1986). Children who were abused and in foster care expressed feelings of worry about reunification with their parents (Johnson et al. 1995) and were apprehensive about returning home. The stories of Tina, Isabella, and Katie highlight cases in which separations from parents did not lead to negative consequences. In the cases below we learn how separation had positive mental health and developmental consequences. The stories of Tina, Katie, and Isabella provide insight into why some young adults who experienced separations from their parents expressed it being necessary for their mental and physical well-being. In Tina’s case she illustrates how living in her alcohol dependent mother’s home subjected her to verbal and physical abuse and neglect causing her to feel “terrified” at home. For Katie, leaving her father’s home meant no longer being subjected to his verbal abuse and physical assaults. Isabella escaped the arguing of her parents and tension in her household.
Tina is a 19-year-old Dominican woman with a high school education. She was born in the Dominican Republic and lived with her mother and father until the age of five. Tina’s mother left her with her father to emigrate to the United States. She reunited with her mother at the age of 6 when she too arrived to the United States. Tina lived in a homeless shelter with her mother and siblings and they eventually moved into an apartment. Tina did not see her father again until the age of 12, when child protective services became involved because of her mother’s alcohol use, physical abuse, and neglect. Tina lived with her father for six months and was returned to her mother’s care after she completed parenting classes. Tina describes the physical abuse and neglect: “me and my mom kept getting into big fights and sometimes she would kick me out, or leave me locked out the house…my mom will come home, drink, not even cooks for us…”

Tina’s tumultuous relationship with her mother forced her to leave her home at the age of 16 to live with a boyfriend, she told me how leaving her mother’s house improved her well-being: “It was more good than actually not because it was mostly for my safety and for my mental- I obviously got really dark about it. It was just I got upset because of the things she did. And then she will try to make me the crazy one, and I was like, you're drunk as we're speaking, how can you tell me I'm the crazy one? She was already kicking me out, always telling me leave, I want you to get out of my house, so I would tell her that I'm going to move out and she would be like, No, you are not, if you do I'll call the cops, but then I just left, I was like I can't do this no more, I'm not going to be arguing with somebody every single day, for three more years and then you don't know what is going to happen because it gets really violent and I was terrified, so I left.” At the time of the interview Tina reported she was no longer in a relationship with the boyfriend she moved in with when she left her mother’s home. Tina instead was renting a room. She expressed feeling
stressed about having to pay rent and take care of herself and when asked if she would consider returning to her mother’s home replied “No, no, no, never. I don't even want to be calling her.” Tina explained: “I learned responsibility, how to take care of myself and all that. But it was more of now I don't have to wake up and argue with anyone. I don't go to sleep crying because my mom just beat me.”

Katie, a 19-year-old African American woman, was removed from her mother’s home by child protection at the age of five due to her mother’s alcohol dependence and domestic violence relationship. Katie shared: “My mom wasn't in a good relationship with the person and she had another child on the way and it just wasn’t a good living environment.” Katie went on to live with her father who became physically and emotionally abusive towards her. Katie tells me her experience with abuse at the hands of her father: “He just came in saying, You're a piece of sh--... Would mentally throw words at me and I was like, Enough is enough. I had a knot in my head and my jaw was moved over..... it was out of place…” Katie’s father was verbally abusive towards her often putting her down and referring to her in derogatory terms. Katie’s father also physically abused her: hitting and punching her, dislocating her jaw, and leaving marks and bruises on her body. Katie recalls the moment she knew she had to leave her father’s home for her own well-being: “I was like this is enough. I can't do this anymore. She came [grandmother] with child protection.... and my aunt and that's when I just told everything about what was going on and I didn't go back to the house that day.” Katie was placed in the care of her grandmother and aunt who took care of her. She never returned to the care of her mother or father. At the time of the interview Katie continued to be cared for by her aunt.

Isabella is a 21-year-old Puerto Rican woman who grew up with her mother, father, and younger sister. She shares what is was like living at home with her parents: “[me and my father]
we didn't speak, we didn't speak when we all lived together. We weren't communicating. It wasn't talking, it was arguing…. me and my father and my mom and my dad.” Isabella recalls how her parents’ divorce affected her: “I was just trying to not be in my mother's house. We just don't get along. The environment I was in before, it wasn't healthy so I didn't want to go back home. I feel like it [divorce] did [affect me], but in a good way. I started going out more, learning more. I wasn't so closed in anymore. I could be myself. I don't feel like there was any negative at all. Not in my view.”

Although these young adults express advantages to separating from their parents, their narratives tell a different story. For these young people they believed their separation from their parents increased their sense of security and mental and physical well-being. However, their narratives describe a “negotiation” between types of stressors in which they left one stressful situation for another. In the case of Tina she recounts her abuse at home and feelings that leaving home was necessary for her well-being. However, she shares that after leaving her home she was in violent romantic relationships and “stressed” about having to pay her bills. Similarly, Isabella escaped the arguments in her home by moving in with a boyfriend that was abusive. These young people made efforts to escape one stressful environment only to end up with other stressors.

These narratives highlight how separation from parents and poor communication patterns with parents hindered young adults’ efforts to attain emotional stability and security in their transition to adulthood. In these cases, parents contributed to the struggle young adults experienced as they attempted to navigate pathways to adulthood. In some cases strained parental relationships and lack of parental cooperation and availability created hardships for young adults attempting to pursue higher education. Attending college for most young adults is a means to
financial security and a necessary factor in becoming adults. The current labor market young adults are navigating consists of limited blue-collar employment and higher demand for post-secondary education in order to secure meaningful employment (Cherlin, 2014). Barriers to obtaining a college education only contributes to their delay in achieving financial stability. Parents can also be a source of support as young adults experience unstable housing patterns during their transitions to adulthood. In the following section we learn of how young adults with family disruptions experience returning home and how it creates barriers in their transition to adulthood.

“Boomerang Kids”: In and out of parents’ homes

Leaving the parental home is not always an isolated event. For some respondents there continued to be a back and forth with young people going in and out of their parents’ homes. Arnett (2004) tells us that the instability of emerging adults is evident in their many moves with the first being the move out of their parent’s homes. In this study housing instability is experienced in a rather different way by young adults. For these young people moves from their parent’s home were involuntary, occurred at a young age, and were triggered by family disruptions, victimization, and struggles related to their low-income status. Unlike Arnett’s (2004) argument that young people returned to their parent’s home due to graduation from college, cohabitation that does not lead to marriage, or to start a new job, the return for these young people to their parent’s home was not voluntary and was initiated either by Child Protective Services, a court order, or the death of a caregiver.

In the stories of Derek and Ralph they reconnected with their parents, but their efforts to re-establish their relationships was a challenging process because of the time spent away from their parents and because of the persisting abusive behaviors in the parent-child relationship. Derek is
an 18-year-old African American man, who spent most of his childhood “bouncing” from home to home. Derek explained his mother was involved in a violent relationship with his step-father and she sent him to live with his grandmother from the age of 8 through 15. During that time Derek experienced the loss of two family members. Derek recalls he lost his close cousin to suicide at the age of 13: “…we didn't know where he's at …we had the storage room and it was kind of joined with the bathroom … she went to use the bathroom and she screamed really loud…we'd seen the blood was coming from under the door…she went to see what happened and the door was locked. So, she had to call the cops and stuff. They broke the door down and he was in there…He had shot himself.” Derek recalls he was sent to live with an aunt for a couple of months to help him cope with the loss. Two years later Derek lost his grandmother, who suddenly died of a heart attack. Derek returned into the care of his mother, however, explains his struggle: “she [mother] leaves about two, three weeks on end, doesn't come back. Then she comes back and she'll just sit in her room all day… I'm getting money to help my sister because she just had a baby… and I'm in the middle like I don't know what to do.”

Ralph a 20-year-old Haitian man shares what it was like leaving his aunt who cared for him after CPS removed him from his mother’s care. Ralph lived with his aunt from the age of 8 through 16 and had no contact with his mother during that time. He shares: “Our parents tried to get us back in their lives… next thing I know, I'm living with my mom, but not really knowing who my mom was at the time. It was basically meeting her for the first time. I feel like my mom used me. She got me back to use me for money purposes…. She kicked me out, she was still obviously on the drugs. She kicked me out. I ended up joining a gang and slowly started figuring out that this was probably going to be my life at this moment.” Ralph returned to his mother’s home, but soon realized she was trying to obtain his disability benefits, which he had been
awarded due to his struggle with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder. His mother was seeking to obtain his benefits to sustain her drug use. Ralph remembers his mother’s propensity for physical violence towards him had also not changed and tells me of the incident leading to him getting kicked out of the home: “that night she was off the pills and she started yelling at me. She went to swing at me and I grabbed her arm. She tried to swing at me with the other hand, I grabbed her arm. She started yanking. I just let her go. She fell. Her boyfriend… he tried to get in my face and I punched him.” Ralph tells me he left his mother’s home and went to stay with his girlfriend at the time.

These narratives highlight the qualitative differences in the transitions in and out of the home for young adults in this sample as compared to middle class young adults in Arnett’s study. For middle class young adults, they return to their homes where they receive support to deal with life transitions such as graduation from college, starting new jobs, and break-ups. For the young adults in this research transitions in and out of the home was often abrupt and triggered by some adverse experience. Their return to their parent’s homes complicated their transition to adulthood as they continued to experience victimization and exposure to trauma. For low SES young adults with a history of family instability returning home often leads to persistence of violence and abuse. These dynamics create barriers for young adults and their ability to engage in education and employment and manage responsibilities.

**YOUNG ADULTS ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

**Escaping Home and the Formation of Unstable Romantic Relationships**

*Linked lives* or the interdependence between human lives and their social, cultural, psychological, and institutional environments (Giele and Elder, 1998) shape individual behaviors
and choices. We learn from these young adults that their adverse relationships with their parents influence their views about friendship and romantic relationships. Emotional abuse and neglect during childhood is linked to feelings of dissatisfaction, sense of unworthiness, and dysfunction in social attachment and interpersonal relatedness (Kapeleris and Paivio, 2011). Romantic relationships among emerging adults is characterized as unstable and exploratory (Arnett, 2014) with emerging adults having limited skills in forming and maintaining relationships (Maner and Miller, 2011). Young adults who are casual or volatile daters as in the case of the respondents I discuss below, are more likely to express low levels of satisfaction in relationships, lack skills required to manage conflict, and engage in more non-exclusive dating, dissolutions of relationships, and infidelity (Roberson et al. 2015).

We learn in the following stories that choices in romantic relationships were driven by economic constraints, housing needs, and the quality of respondents’ relationships with their parents. Some respondents sought romantic partners to escape the abusive conditions in their homes. For others, poor quality relationships with their parents meant lowering expectations of commitment or support from a partner. In the stories of Isabella and Tina they highlight how their relationships at home and lack of financial resources influenced their choices in romantic relationships. They share how chaos at home led to them seeking partners they could live with in order to escape the abusive conditions of their homes and avoid homelessness. Isabella was in several romantic relationships and described them as “violent” and “threatening.” Isabella moved in with her boyfriend, however, explained similar dynamic as the ones she tried to escape with constant arguments and threats by her boyfriend. Tina highlights how her household conflicts led to her choices in romantic partners: “So when I was around 14, 15 I met these people and then actually started dating one of the guys. So, when I was around 16, me and my mom kept getting
into big fights and sometimes she would kick me out, or leave me locked out the house. So I would always go stay with him, and then eventually I found myself staying in his house so much that I just decided to get all my stuff one day from my mom's house, and just move in with him. But then eventually, the relationship never worked out, so I had to move out. Last year, I met a new guy and then I moved in with him and it didn't work out again, so now I'm renting a room.”

In the stories of Keisha and Ruby, it becomes clear how not having a relationship with their father or having an abusive father influenced their expectations of commitment and support from partners. Keisha is a 19-year-old woman of Puerto-Rican decent. She grew up in a household with her mother, sister, and an incarcerated father. For Keisha this meant growing up a little faster: “I felt like I needed to help my mom a lot. Growing up, I matured very quickly and to this day I’m still very mature for my age.” Keisha’s father was incarcerated for the majority of her life and she tells me of her experience: “…to be honest with you, my mother married him in jail. That’s how much he’s been in jail. She fell in love with him through visiting my uncle. He’s been in and out of my life for a long time and it definitely affected me… I grew hate for him because growing up, I would see other people and their father and I would get angry…why isn’t my father there for me? I started to grow hate for him and it really was just not healthy because then I started to grow a hate for almost all men.” Keisha shares her memories of having an incarcerated father: “I’ve done long nights, long drives, carpooling. Honestly, my favorite picture with my father is the picture of us at prison…. I was like two or three. I was young. It’s my favorite picture but it was in jail. Letters, I still have letters. Cards, pictures, all of that.” Keisha did not get an opportunity to re-establish a relationship with her father. He passed away from alcohol and drug-related complications. Keisha expressed how she felt about her father’s passing: “I felt like he passed at the wrong time because everything was going so good. For once,
he was actually being my father. Calling me once a week, making sure I visited him, making sure he just said hi. The stuff he should’ve been doing for those 17 years he was finally doing. It’s just like, Dang, now he’s gone.”

Keisha tells us how her relationship with her father affected her decisions to engage in romantic relationships: “It affected my relationship with men, it really did. He wasn't there for me, like y'all not going to be there. In my head I'm just like all boys want to do is have sex.” Keisha explained her mistrust for young boys as a result of having an absent father due to his incarceration. Keisha’s understanding of relationships with young men was shaped by her father’s absence. Keisha shared she sought relationships to replace the attention she lacked from her father: “But yes, my romantic life has been all over the place. My father definitely played a big role in it… If he gave me the love that I was missing from a man my whole life, I probably wouldn't have been caught up like I was. It took me a long time to admit that because my mom used to tell me that. My mom used to be like, don't go looking for the love your father isn't giving you in these guys. I really didn't listen to her. But then it just rang in my head like, damn my mom was right that I don't' like you because I like you. I like you because you show me attention for a time and nobody else is doing it.''

Similarly, Ruby expresses: “I'm like, when my mom and dad were together for years and he still ended up treating her like this. It makes it hard to trust anybody's word. It makes it hard for me to open up to them, it definitely does. It sucks because it's not their fault but, it also makes it hard to be vulnerable with them. How do I show you the real side of me when I feel like, in the long haul, you’re just going to throw it away, or you're just going to overrule that and treat me like crap? I'm bad with opening up to guys. I feel like, in the end, they all reflect my father.”
Sofia is a 21 year old African-American woman, who similar to Keisha and Ruby did not grow up with her father or father figure. Sofia, unlike Keisha and Ruby, managed her decisions about romantic relationships in a different manner. Sofia decided to engage in romantic relationships only if she believed to be emotionally available. Sofia also expressed the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with her mother before becoming involved in a romantic relationship. Sofia shares: “I was going through a hard time with my mom. I was having a hard time expressing my feelings to her. It put me in a really bad depression. It was like I'd come home, go to sleep and go back to school, I wanted to stop that and I had broke up with him [boyfriend] so I could focus all my energy on her.” Sofia reports since the break-up two years ago she has chosen to not date.

The absence of a father affected Ruby and Keisha differently from Sofia. Ruby and Keisha both expressed “hate” and mistrust of men based on their experiences with their absent fathers. Sofia on the other hand does not share the same sentiment and makes decisions in regards to romantic relationships based on her emotional well-being. Ruby and Keisha had different consequences as a result of having an absent father. They experienced adultification and expressed feeling obligated to help their mothers and as a result feeling they grew up too quickly. Sofia on the other hand, recalls “struggling”, however, did not assume any adult responsibilities growing up. The process of adultification may better explain the differences in the young women’s attitudes toward men. Adultification has been associated with weakened capacity to engage in intimate romantic relationships, limited peer relationships, and risky sexual behaviors (Burton, 2007).
“I’m just hitting it and quitting it”: Aversion to monogamy

In this sample, gender differences were noted in the level of commitment practiced in romantic relationships. Some young men in this sample expressed an aversion to monogamy and engaged in romantic relationships with multiple partners within short periods of time. For young men like Joseph and Ralph, romantic relationships are superficial and short-term. Joseph is a 19-year-old Eastern-European man of African descent. He lived in Eastern Europe with his mother, father, and brother. Joseph explained his mother was in a domestic violence relationship with his father and his mother put an end to the abuse by pressing charges against his father. Once Joseph’s father was incarcerated, Joseph’s mother took the opportunity to leave the country. Joseph shared he had no contact with his father since then. He recalls witnessing the domestic violence in the home: “I have seen the shit that my dad used to do to my mom. My mom used to have black eyes and shit. And I was a little kid I couldn't really do nothing… they was arguing and I was sitting on a chair and he was right here. He tried to grab her by her hair… I just reacted, it was just a reaction. He was trying to hit my mom, I just got up and hit him. And I wasn't a little kid no more so I can do it. I'm big enough, I'm strong enough to hurt you. I beat him up and threw him out.”

Joseph describes his romantic relationships: “No, I haven't been in a lot of relationships. I'm just hitting it quitting it.” Joseph described his idea of romantic relationships as casual sexual encounters with young women with whom he develops no real connection. Ralph describes romantic relationships as a “game” he plays. Ralph talks about his difficulties in maintaining relationships and why he engages in them casually: “So I take it into a game and I guess that's the player role….. I wanted a relationship but then it just never goes right. I don't know, it just never goes right. I get tired of people.” Ralph explained feeling he could not relate to young girls
his age and from the age of 16 he began dating older women from whom he felt he was getting guidance in life. Ralph shares that as a teenager he was involved in romantic relationships with women as old as 24-years-old. Joseph and Ralph’s experiences with romantic relationships are consistent with findings from previous research that family disruption during childhood is linked to multiple sexual partners during adolescence (Kirby et al., 2005). For black men, “profound economic disadvantage translates to an aversion to monogamy” an outcome of their inability to meet traditional male responsibilities (Silva, 2013).

Keisha, Ruby, Ralph, and Joseph explain how their family disruptions, absent parents, and abusive parents influenced their ideas and choices in romantic relationships. They describe superficial attachments and unstable romantic relationships from which they sought housing, financial resources, or emotional support. In the cases of Keisha and Ruby, they moved in with their romantic partners to escape abuse, violence, and instability in their homes or to address feelings of loneliness. For these young people structural constraints drove their decisions in romantic relationships. The literature tells us that couples may chose to remain in unhealthy relationships in order to avoid negative consequences such as deterioration of quality of life and loss of economic resources. Young people in this research are preoccupied with meeting their basic needs and their focus is not to engage in a deeper level of intimacy or engage in identity exploration as is proposed by Arnett (2004). Relationships are more driven by their desires to fulfill physiological and safety needs. We do see the instability and volatility of relationships that are characteristic of emerging adults. However, the instability and volatility are rooted in a sense of mistrust in others and violence in the relationships.

**Unstable Relationships and Family formation**
In regards to cohabitation, family formation, and marriage children who experience unstable family structures are more likely to develop negative attitudes towards marriage (Thornton et al., 1987). Young adults from nontraditional families demonstrate positive attitudes toward cohabitation (Bouchard et al., 2016) and forming families is used as an avenue to escape adverse family circumstances and environments (Booth et al. 2008). We learn through the stories of Ruby, Katie, Sofia, Isabella, and Tina that romantic relationships were not an effort to locate a lifelong partner with whom to build a family. These young people share that marriage and children are not in their immediate plans or in their plans at all. Again, “trust issues” influence decisions on marriage and having children. However, I also learn that these young adults do want attachments. They express wanting attachments to children, however, not to a romantic partner.

Ruby talks about fear of opening up and being let down: “once I start getting feelings for someone and I think they are going to screw me over, I'm like, back to the money. That's my mindset….Me and my older sister always say we are going to adopt and keep our babies to ourselves. We don't want nobody. We're going to adopt our kids, live free of any problems.” Katie tells me a similar story of wanting to avoid attachment: “I have trust issues, but I really wanted kids I had set up to get a sperm donor….. Like I said, it's better for me to have a sperm donor and have my kids so I would have no attachment to the father.” Katie shares fears of being “cheated on” and still having to maintain a relationship with the child’s father. Instead she plans “I just feel like, I wouldn't want that attachment of a baby father. I'd rather just either be married to this person or just have a sperm donor.” Sofia has already developed beliefs that she will be alone and lack support after having children: “I don't have any goals when it comes to that [marriage and children]….I kind of do want kids… I don't know how I would deal with an infant
on my own. Isabella is delaying having a family as a result of fearing separation and wanting to accomplish some of her goals: “I want my own family but not anytime soon. I don't like the idea of separation [from romantic partner]. I have to had done a few things off my bucket list. I have to do something education wise. I don't want to have a kid and then use that as an excuse and not get things done.” Tina describes her thoughts on marriage: “That's scary…. marriage is really serious, and it depends who I'm with… It's not a must” and Chris, a 20-year-old young man, shares marriage and children are not even a thought at this time. I learn that marriage for low-income young adults in this study is not at the forefront of their life plans.

Similar to some of the sentiments about marriage in Edin’s *Promises I can Keep*, I found that these young people express an inability to find trustworthy romantic partners, which they attribute to their adverse relationship experiences during childhood. In this study some of the young women share goals similar to those of the young women in Edin’s ethnography, and they express a desire to have children. However, their pervasive sense of mistrust has motivated some young adult women in this study to develop plans for motherhood without a partner as part of the family composition. Instead, these young women share their plans of becoming single-parents in the future. We also see middle class values for some of the young women, expressing a desire to obtain an education or financial stability prior to planning for children and marriage.

The narratives from the young people in this research support Silva’s argument in *Coming up Short* that the economic insecurity and lack of financial and cultural resources, in addition to the insecurity and risk in the daily lives of working class black men and women, compounded by racism in the labor market transforms committed relationships into risky ventures. But for the young people in this research their upbringing and strained relationships with their parents also contributed to their postponement in having children and entering
marriage. Some young people in this study also did not have examples of ideal marriages or even stable commitments, contributing to their feelings of risk and instability of romantic relationships and building family. These young adults lacked role models to demonstrate to them commitment to relationships (Amato and DeBoer, 2001; Thornton and Camburn, 1987). Therefore, many of these young adults entered less committed relationships and entered cohabitation at younger ages.

Unlike existing literature establishing that parenting for economically disadvantaged men and women serves as a marker to adulthood (Johnson and Molborn, 2009), for these young people, having children will complicate their efforts to fully achieve adulthood. In this study young people do not express an interest in social integration and commitments. For some of the young adults their focus is on gaining financial independence, increasing their level of maturity, and having concrete career goals. However, the young adults in this study did share a similar sentiment of permanence and love in attachment to babies and not in romantic partners and justifies why they have future goals of parenthood, but not marriage. As the young people in Promises I Can Keep, some of the young adult women expressed feelings of insecurity and mistrust in romantic partners and believe that having children outside of marriage will yield attachments that are stable and secure.

YOUNG ADULTS RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

“I really don't care to have people around me”: Ideas on Friendships

For these young people, their adverse experiences with their parents not only influenced their ideas and choices on romantic relationships, but also their definitions of their social relationships and interest in developing friendship. Arnett (2004) presented Identity exploration as one of five elements that describe the transition to adulthood for middle-class young adults.
Identity exploration is characterized by young adults’ increased involvement with others to learn more about themselves and what they find appealing in others including potential romantic partners. For the young adults in this study we see a different experience. They express a desire to be isolated and express difficulty in dealing with other people.

Social isolation and lack of trust in others persists as a theme in the area of friendship for respondents. Sofia explains her thoughts on friendships “I don't like it…I'm not that social, I don't really care for being with other people….I have more fun by myself than I would with other people, I don't know what it is.” Alize tells me “There's always dishonest relationships with friends. Not telling the truth. I've never had a real bad experience. It was just more so like, I can't trust you." Alize views friendships as “temporary” relationships. Rondell, a 24-year-old African-American man tells me of a similar experience as Ralph who engaged in romantic relationships with older women. Rondell shares his experiences with friendships have been with older individuals: “most of my friends now are between 28-30 years old. From my neighborhood.” Rondell shared that his older friends were from his neighborhood and growing up he learned a lot from them. “Because I was exposed to certain things early. When I was exposed to these things I was exposed by kids who were older than me.”

In discussing how they deal with their trust issues, we learn from Katie how she categorized her social relationships: “I only have literally one friend…She is my best friend…. Everybody else I consider acquaintances because I don't really shared deep stuff with them or are just people I have just hanged out with.” Peter defines friends and acquaintances: “a friend is somebody I actually can count on. Associates are once in a while like we're just in a moment of whatever event that's happening. We just happen to have a conversation, but it's nothing more than just talks, small talk, nothing major.” Robert tells of a similar distinction: “Friends is people I'll let come in my
house and I can trust them. If I go to the store, I would know everything will be in my house when I come back. Associates is people I probably wouldn't even let know where I live. If I see them out, I would say, what’s up or something.”

Robert tells me how he chooses his friends and how he determines who will be his acquaintances: “I like to sit and watch people. Some people you can just tell. Some people I can talk to them actually and chill with them and see how they are. There are people who like to talk about if they just robbed somebody, I’d be like, Yes, I'm not hanging with you no more. Because people like to think that stuff is cool and to talk about it.” Joseph tells me how he decides who can come to his home: “…like actions. You see a kid like he stole from his friend, they knew each other for a couple years and he steals from him. I'm just, "Man, what makes you think he's not going to steal from me?” So why am I going to show him and bring him over to my house? You only get one chance, there's no three chances, one chance. You mess it one time, you're done.”

We learn that for these young people developing trust in others is a struggle. In efforts to avoid the emotional consequences of having friends that are dishonest, steal from them, or place them in “bad situations”, they prefer isolation and choose to establish few friendships and instead keep a greater number of acquaintances. Acquaintances are somewhere between intimates and strangers (Morgan, 2009). Their friendships are described as “temporary” and “in an out” and are short-term and transient. For respondents they describe what Morgan (2009) refers to as “Passing acquaintances” in which interactions are “brief and contained.” Acquaintances are defined by these young adults as individuals with whom superficial relationships are developed, with interactions existing in school or in the community, with whom little to no personal information is shared. Acquaintances are not considered reliable supports the extent of communication is limited to “small talk.”
The social isolation expressed by these young adults can be best understood from an individual level by applying Attachment theory and from a community level as explained by the effects of low-SES on social isolation. Relationships experienced by these respondents where the primary caregiver is rejecting and not readily available results in withdrawn children who grow up to engage in superficial relationship due to a developed sense of being unworthy and feeling that others are not available (Ainsworth, 1979; Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991; Atwool, 2006). Social isolation is also more likely to be a characteristic among people of low SES. Limited financial resources create barriers for individuals to partake in social and physical activities (Stewart et al. 2009). Structural constraints such as limited participation in employment and education, limited access to resources, and inability to navigate social institutions also contribute to social isolation (Stewart et al. 2009).

The adverse childhood experiences with their parents and experience with social isolation resulted in difficulty establishing trusting relationships and left these young people feeling they had “no one” to rely on for support or seeking support from gang members. In the case of Ralph we learn how he navigates life with no social supports: “You just figure it out on your own or...not to be doing things that I see all my other friends doing. Basically doing the opposite of everybody else.” Anthony shares how he has learned to search and apply for jobs: “Honestly, myself… the internet. There are certain things- If I have to go to certain places, I go on the internet and look it up.” School guidance counselors were a source of educational support for Chris, Allen, Porscha, and Kavon. They identified their high school guidance counselor as the person who helped them make it through high school, guided them in the college process, and provided them with support even after they left high school.
These narratives highlight the importance young adults place on taking care of themselves in defining adulthood. These young people grew up with limited and superficial social supports and for them being responsible for themselves is key to their successful transition to adulthood. However, in a social context in which there is an increase reliance on peers as a result of decrease in blue-collar jobs and increase demand in education, sentiments of mistrust can further complicate the transition to adulthood for low-SES young adults. Apprehensions about becoming close to and trusting peers can create obstacles for young adults in securing housing with others. Options such as moving in with roommates to improve financial well-being can prove to be a difficult task for these young adults who express trusting no one. The lack of supports can also hinder young adults who are living in a society in which the reliance on others for financial well-being is on the rise.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary on the findings, a discussion of how the findings compare to existing research on emerging adulthood, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of findings

In this research, several themes emerged in exploring the transition to adulthood for young adults from low SES status who experienced family instability as children. The data revealed that as children respondents with unstable and unhealthy relationships with their parental figures resulted in poor socialization and adultification. Parents shape the context in which children grow up (Elder, 1985) and changes in the family environment during childhood have influences that impact well-being during adolescence and young adulthood (Aquilino, 1996). Young adults from abusive households are more likely to experience social isolation and mistrust (Ross and Mirowsky, 2009). Inconsistent parental involvement is associated with conduct disorders (Jewell et al. 2008), eating disorders among young women (Ross and Gill, 2002), and personality disorders in adulthood stemming from perceiving the world as distressing, threatening, and unsafe (Fingerman et al. 2006). Social and economic constraints also help explain socioemotional well-being of young adults.

In terms of socialization, parents are the primary source of information that assists young adults learn their relational positions and roles within systems (Maccoby, 2014; Labile et al. 2014). For the young adults in this research, their early experiences consisted of unstable family structures which in some cases resulted in poor socialization due to the absence of elements such as warmth, security, modeling, and emotional communication which are important in the socialization process (Grusec and Davidov, 2010). This deficit in the socialization process has long-term consequences for young adults as they navigate social interactions, particularly in their
relationships with peers and romantic partners. For these young adults, relationships with their parents, peers, and romantic partners were marked by a pervasive sense of mistrust. Young adults chose to engage in superficial relationships and lacked an interest in intimate relationships, often fearing betrayal or loss of relationships. Socialization occurs in different context during different times in the life course and we see that for these young adults their socialization suffered during adolescence and into young adulthood.

Socialization theory contends that socialization occurs during adolescence by interactions with friends and in romantic relationships (Maccoby, 2014). Some young adults in this research attempted to develop new attachments in intimate relationships in efforts to adapt to life hardships (Kuhl et al. 2012) and to secure financial resources. Some of the young men sought to form attachments in gangs and described their relationship with gang mates as intimate as that of “being like family.” Some of the young women sought to replace their attachment by engaging in romantic relationships. Romantic relationships teach young adults social skills such emotional regulation and conflict management (Larson et al. 1999; Shulman et al. 2006) and allow them to engage in self-exploration and further develop their identity and evaluate others (Arnett, 2004). During adolescence it is typical for romantic relationships to be transient and less committed (Arnett, 2004). However, for young adults who engage in rapid cycling of romantic partners they are not acquiring the skills necessary to enter into more intimate and long-term relationships (Arnett, 2000; Sandberg-Thoma and Dush, 2014). Young adults in this study expressed choosing to not be in long-term relationships out of fear that the same relationship patterns will develop in their romantic relationships. They expressed fear of break-ups and cheating. For them choosing to not engage in romantic relationships appeared to be a way to take control of their emotional vulnerability. The young adults often referred to their experiences with their caregivers to justify
their decisions to not engage in romantic relationships. For young women, their relationship with their caregiver influenced their decision to enter parenthood without a partner. However, this has implications in adulthood, with young adults entering adulthood unprepared to engage in long-term and stable romantic relationships. Others cohabited with a romantic partner in order to cope with the dysfunction of their family life. For young adults who were victims of violence, intimate relationships and cohabitation provide renewed sense of self-worth that is challenged in the victimization process (Kuhl et al. 2012). Limited financial resources also played a role with some young women choosing to enter relationships to secure housing and monetary support from significant others.

The data also revealed that during childhood, many of these young adults assumed roles ascribed to adults. Adultification during childhood was mainly in the form of parentification, in which the young adults took on parental responsibility as children, and precocious knowledge, in which they were prematurely exposed to adult situations. Young adults were forced to enter adult roles at young ages due to their family structures and limited economic resources. A common sentiment that came across in the data was young adults feeling “rushed” into adulthood and they emphasized “just be a kid.” The data also revealed young adult concerns about the consequences of growing up too fast including premature death, substance use, and violent victimization. Research supports that children who prematurely transition to adult roles are more likely to experience long-term mental health effects. Adultification has been linked to mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, personality disorders (Burton, 2007; Jankowski et. al, 2011; Weils et al. 2003) and substance abuse (Stein et al. 1999). Although young adults were exposed to and engaged in adult tasks as children, when they reached young adulthood, they did not yet feel they were prepared for adulthood. Adultification for these young adults did not mean
being prepared for adulthood, but rather these young adults expressed a sense of being “in-between” life stages, despite having lived through traumatic experiences many adults have never encountered. Young adults attributed their feeling of in-between to lacking specific personal characteristics such as maturity, career/educational goals, and financial independence. Although they experienced adult situations prematurely they lacked psychosocial maturity.

Discussion

The five elements of emerging adulthood have been critiqued for not adequately considering social characteristics such as class (Hendry and Kleop, 2002). Arnett (2014) addressed this criticism and engaged in an exploration of the characteristics of emerging adulthood across social class. He found that the five emerging adulthood features were endorsed across all social classes. Regardless of social class, young adults expressed “their lives as free, fun, and exciting…” reported harmonious relationships with their parents, expect to sacrifice careers to work towards family goals, and express goals of obtaining employment that is fulfilling (Arnett, 2014). Young adults in low socioeconomic status expressed different sentiments when it came to their reports of an inability to find sufficient financial support to pursue an education, having higher expectations of more enjoyable lives in the future, and being more likely to report dissatisfaction with their lives and feelings of depression associated with their life trajectory. Across social class and ethnic groups the top three indicators of adulthood were “Accept responsibility for yourself, Make independent decisions, and become financially independent.” (Arnett, 2011). These were the most expressed indicators for young adults in this study who identified themselves as adults based on their ability to take on economic responsibilities such as paying bills, make decisions without guidance, care for siblings or family members and engage in household tasks such as cooking and cleaning. In this section I will
discuss similarities in markers of adulthood and some key areas of divergence in how low SES young adults in this study compare to young adults of higher SES in previous research in regards to their transition to adulthood across the five features of emerging adulthood introduced in Jeffrey Arnett’s research: *Identity exploration, Instability, Age of Possibilities, Feeling in-between, and Self-focus.*

**Identity Exploration**

During emerging adulthood young adults are exploring their options in the area of work and love to learn who they are and what they want for themselves (Arnett, 2014). For young adults employment is generally in service jobs, unrelated to the work they would be doing in adulthood and supports their “active leisure life.” (Arnett, 2014). The young adults in my research worked service job as research suggests, however, employment for them did not support their leisure life. Employment for these young adults meant being able to meet their basic necessities: feed themselves, pay for shelter, and buy clothes. Young adults from low-income and predominantly black neighborhoods experience little economic growth (Wilson, 1987; Quillian, 2003) and without higher education, many will experience limited options in terms of employment and are likely to be limited to low-income jobs during adulthood (Wilson, 2008). We see that socioeconomic status matters for these young adults. They are navigating jobs in order to sustain themselves and do not have the resources or supports to spend their earning on social recreation. In this research, there is also the element of family disruption that impacts availability of economic support and the desire for most of these young adults to engage in a social life. Young adults in this study expressed they are self-reliant with limited to no supports to assist with economic hardships. These young adults indicated being obligated to work in order
to care for themselves and sometimes younger siblings or sick family members. Many young adults in this research also worked multiple jobs simultaneously or attempted to work and go to school. They shared little interest in social relationships and interactions and emphasized their most urgent need was to meet their basic necessities. In addition, their childhood experiences make engaging in social relationships risky and instead they choose to develop acquaintanceships.

In terms of exploration of love, young adults expressed little to no interest in romantic relationships. Economic constraints such as lack of financial resources, racism in the labor market, and unstable employment contribute to aversion in romantic relationships (Silva, 2013). Residing in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage with limited economic and educational mobility (Anderson, 1999) and smaller pool of desirable romantic partners (Wilson, 1987) also contributes to avoidance of relationships. The young adults in this study demonstrated minimal to no interest in engaging in romantic relationships and expressed future goals of having children outside of marriage or on their own. The findings showed that for young adults romantic relationships required them to open themselves up to emotional vulnerabilities for which they are not prepared to manage. Young adults expressed a fundamental sense of mistrust that guides them in all their social interactions. They expressed their experiences with their absent or abusive parents to be the root cause of their ambivalence and apprehension in engaging in romantic relationships. They expressed inability to trust romantic partners and avoided abandonment and infidelity.

**Instability**

Instability is described as a stage of constant change and revisions of plans as a consequence of engaging in explorations (Arnett, 2014). The choices made by young adults as
they explore love, work, and education are expected to reflect an underlying instability. The instability in housing is a characteristic of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2004) contends that for young adults “their first move is to leave home, often to go to college.” In the cases of young adults in this study leaving home was an abrupt response to an adverse condition or motivated by economic hardships. As children, these young adults experienced abuse and neglect in their childhoods and experienced multiple moves, with housing instability becoming part of the context in which they grew up. They were either in foster care or residing with relatives. Others expressed that their low-socioeconomic status meant at times not having electricity in the home and having to stay with other relatives temporarily. For these young people reaching adulthood simply meant a persistence of housing instability. As young adults, housing instability was the consequence of poor quality relationships with romantic partners that resulted in a break-up and move out of the home, a lack of financial resources to sustain housing, and limited family and social supports that were willing to provide housing. The data revealed that some of the young adults were involved in domestic violence relationships that drove them to move out of the homes in which they resided and others could not afford to live on their own and moved in with roommates.

**Age of Possibilities**

A remarkable feature of the young adults in this study was the level of optimism they expressed about their futures despite their low SES backgrounds and family instability. Middle-class young adults express optimism about the future that is grounded in their access to social capital, connections in the workforce, and higher levels of education (Arnett, 2014). Emerging adults from low-SES were more likely to report optimism about their future and believed that they will lead better lives than that of their parents (Arnett, 2014). In my research the data
highlights young adults’ belief in the capacity to transform themselves regardless of their family influence. They expressed plans to attend college and earn a degree that will afford them an opportunity at higher-paying employment. Young adults expressed going through “the struggle” in their childhood and having to negotiate which basic needs to meet, however, they are optimistic that they will be able to improve their conditions by attaining an education. They expressed a desire to leave “the hood” and reside in neighborhood that are less violent than the ones in which they grew up. They look forward to having children and in some cases getting married. Some young women express plans of having a family without partners as a way to transform the quality of their relationships into more stable and secure attachments.

**Feeling in-between**

The feeling of in-between refers to young adults feeling like adolescents and not yet young adults. The experience of feeling somewhere “in-between” adulthood was a sentiment found across social class (Arnett, 2004). The young adults in my research, similar to the young adults in Arnett’s research, expressed lacking the self-sufficiency: independent decision-making, financial independence, and assuming responsibility for themselves. However, the qualitative difference found between the two groups of young adults, was that Arnett’s group expressed feeling “childish” in some instances. Arnett quotes one young adult who explains that eating ice-cream from the box creates ambivalence about her adulthood status. In this research the young adults do not experience feeling childish, but rather describe feeling of in-between due to early experiences of adultification in which they felt like adults during childhood and adolescence. Most expressed that in some ways they were adults due to their early exposure to adult situations, life experiences that they believe most have not yet experienced, and enduring harsh childhoods. Young adults who experienced such hardships often reported older subjective ages.
However, because they have not achieved complete self-sufficiency they continue to feel they are not yet fully adults.

In sum, these young adults progressed through the life course with cumulating disadvantage beginning with early economic and family instability. Their transition to adulthood was complicated by their low-SES and experiences of violent victimization, lack of warm and responsive parents, and experiences with disruptions in attachment. Accumulation of disadvantage persisted in these young people’s difficulties in establishing stable relationships, due to their own insecurities and their social isolation as residents in low income neighborhoods. The young adult’s experiences with poor socialization created barriers as they navigated relationships with limited skills in emotional regulation, a pervasive sense of mistrust, limited ability in seeking support, mental health concerns, and perception of the world as an unsafe place. In some cases the unstable financial situation of young adults led to feelings of not fully being an adult, in spite of being tasked with adult responsibilities at early ages, dealing with traumatic situations, and developing strategies to cope like staying with a partner to avoid a stressful family life or joining a gang to develop an alternative family. For these young adults navigating adulthood is marked by cumulative disadvantages and constraints that force them to make choices and do not allow them the freedom to explore options as is assumed in emerging adulthood theory.

**Self-focus**

Self-focus is an element of emerging adulthood marked by a decrease in young people’s obligation and commitment to others and increased focus on themselves with the goal of learning self-sufficiency in preparation for romantic relationships and participation in the labor market (Arnett, 2004). For some of the young adults in this research their obligation to themselves began
early in the life course as they made efforts to self-sustain in the absence of a caring and responsive parent. Some young people express weak ties to family and their neighborhoods and consequently did not experience a decline in commitment to others, but rather lacked commitments to others throughout their early and adolescent lives. In some cases, young adults expressed obligations to their single-mothers in helping maintain the household or obligations to younger siblings which persisted into their young adulthood stage. Overall, self-focus as an element of emerging adulthood was not present in this sample of respondents.

**Recommendation for future research**

Research in the area of age identity, subjective age, and pseudo-maturity and its implications for young adults is needed. Although this research did not focus on the consequences of older subjective ages on the transition to adulthood, it is important to explore the relationship between older subjective ages and pseudo-maturity in young adults’ definitions of adulthood. Adultification across socioeconomic status is also worth some attention. Adultification for low-income children has been associated with negative outcomes and disentangling the effects related to social context and psychosocial development in the life course trajectory is important. Longitudinal research on children with older subjective ages across adolescence, young adulthood, and adulthood can also provide insight into how adultification benefits or hinders successful transitions across life stages.

Another area in need of further research is the transition from high school to college for low-income youth. Higher education is a key factor that contributes to a successful transition into adulthood as it provides the opportunity for higher paying jobs. Low-income young adults with parents who did not attend college do not receive the support or resources they need to navigate the college process (Calarco, 2014; Becker et al. 2017). They also have fewer economic
resources to meet the financial demands of attending college. Exploring the transition for low-income high school students in navigating the college enrollment process, being able to make decisions about the best type of learning environment (community college, vocational, etc.), and learning and preparing for the academic and financial risks of college attendance are areas that can promote increased success in the transition to adulthood for low-income students.

Lastly, exploring the impact of parental and romantic relationships among low-income young adults and young adults with unstable childhood experiences is worth further exploring. This research did not explore the current status or quality of the parent and now-young-adult-relationships. It would be informative to learn the outcome of the strained parent-young adult relationships and its impact the transition to adulthood. There is little data on the reunification of young adults with their parent, particularly, because they are likely to return into care. The literature on reunification contends that children who are placed in foster care due to neglect have an increased risk for re-entry into foster care after reunification (Frame, 2002) and for children in poverty (Courtney, 1995) and black children the likelihood of re-entry into foster care after reunification are higher (Wells and Guo, 1999).

In the transition to adulthood forming families is a characteristic of adulthood. Research tells that marriage is associated with better social, economic, and emotional outcomes than singlehood (Waite and Gallagher, 2000). However, low-income emerging young adults are more likely to cohabit and have children out-of-wedlock (Schoen et al., 2009; Thorsen, 2017; Hymowitz et. al. 2013). Further exploration of what romantic relationships mean to low-income young adults, the risks and benefits of prematurely or superficially entering romantic relationships, and the effects of entering or avoiding romantic relationships can inform us better
on how romantic relationships affect transitions across life stages and in different socioeconomic groups.

**Implications for Practice**

Although this sample of low SES young adults who experiences family instability was relatively homogenous, there was great variation in how they defined adult status. Generalizations about Millennials is not possible due to such variation in a narrowly defined sample. However, this research highlights the importance of consistent and reliable caregivers and demonstrates a need for children from low-income households who experience family instability to receive additional emotional and social supports during their foster care and kinship care experiences. Children can benefit from services that will allow them to enhance their emotional regulation skills, develop their ability to articulate their needs, improve self-esteem, and increase positive social interactions and social skills. For adolescents in foster care, work readiness, college preparation, and networking skills can assist youth in successfully transitioning into young adulthood and facilitate a healthy transition to becoming an adult. This research highlights the importance of an increase in services for families that experiences disruptions and services for children in foster care beyond the age of 18. Reunification can be a challenging process for families and can be mediated by an increase in social service interventions. Social services can assist both caregivers and young adults adjust to their new family environment and learn skills to increase healthy family dynamics. This research demonstrated the sense of unpreparedness expressed by some young people in becoming adults. An extension in after care services to foster children after the age of 18 can also help support the successful transition to adulthood for young people of unstable family context. This research also highlights the struggles young people experience in gaining employment as a result of strained
family relationships, lack of financial resources, and cumulating disadvantage. A decline in real wages of blue collar jobs also contributes to the challenges faced by young adults in their efforts to secure employment. Young people can benefit from aftercare services in the areas of employment, education, and interpersonal skills as they work toward becoming adults.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Transition to Adulthood for Low SES Young Adults

*Interview questions*

**Childhood and Upbringing**

Tell me about your childhood.

1. Who raised you? If other than parent, what were the circumstances?
2. What other family members did you grow up with? Any other adult role models or caregivers?
3. How would you describe your childhood? What childhood experiences are most vivid for you today?

**Education**

4. What is the highest grade you completed in school?
5. How would you describe your experience in school?
6. What are your educational plans now?
7. Who helped you most in your decisions related to education?

**Employment**

8. What is your current employment situation?
9. How important is it for you to be employed?
10. Describe your experience with work thus far in your life.

**Housing**

11. What are your current living arrangements?
12. Who has assisted you with housing? (Locating and maintaining).
13. What have your experience with moving (voluntary or involuntarily) been?

**Relationships**

14. Tell me about your romantic relationships.
15. Do you have children?
   
   If Yes:
   i. How do you feel about being a parent?
   ii. How would you describe parenthood?
   iii. Who helps you with your children?
Adulthood

16. Do you consider yourself to be an adult? Why or Why not?

   IF YES TO Q. 16:
17. When do you believe you became an adult? How old were you? Tell me about that time.
18. How would you describe your steps to becoming an adult?
   i. Who helped you in the process?
   ii. How did you know what you needed to do to become an adult?
   iii. What challenges did you face in becoming an adult?
   iv. What would have made the steps to becoming an adult easier?

   IF NO TO Q. 16:

19. What do believe you need to reach adulthood? How old do you think you will be when you reach that stage?
20. How would you define being an adult?
21. Think of any adult you know, describe what makes them an adult.
22. Do your parents/others consider you to be an adult? Please Elaborate.
APPENDIX B: ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

University at Buffalo Institutional Review Board (UBIRB)
Office of Research Compliance | Clinical and Translational Research Center Room 5018
875 Ellicott St. | Buffalo, NY 14203
UB Federalwide Assurance ID#: FWA0008824

Adult Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of research study: Transition to Adulthood for Low SES Young Adults.

Version Date: 12/15/16

Investigator: Wanda Garcia

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?
You are being invited to take part in a research study because you are between the ages of 18 and 25 and have one or more parent with a high school education or lower.

What should I know about a research study?
- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team: Wanda Garcia (929) 266-8575 or via e-mail at wandagar@buffalo.edu. You may also contact the research participant advocate at 716-888-4845 or researchadvocate@buffalo.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may talk to them at (716) 888-4888 or email ub-irb@buffalo.edu

if:
- You have questions about your rights as a participant in this research
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.
**Why is this research being done?**

Respondents may benefit from the opportunity to tell their stories and explain their experience in their transition to adulthood.

**How long will the research last?**

We expect that you will be in this research study for about 90 minutes.

**How many people will be studied?**

We expect about 50 people to participate in this research study.

**What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?**

If you choose to participate in this study you will be interviewed on one occasion about your experiences in transitioning to adulthood and your ideas on adulthood. The interview will be audio recorded once you provide expressed consent for the interview to be recorded. You will have contact with the principal investigator, Wanda Garcia, during this study. The interview will take place in a classroom at the University at Buffalo Sociology department, the Buffalo Employment center conference room, or a location of your choosing. Any information you share during the interview including contact information, will be transferred to a password protected file and stored in a password protected personal computer to which only the researcher has access. Data from this study will be retained for 5 years.

**What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?**

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to participate in an interview about your experiences in your transition to adulthood and ideas on adulthood.

**What happens if I do not want to be in this research?**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to enroll in this study. You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

**What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?**

You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you.

**Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?**

There is a small risk that talking about your childhood may cause some emotional discomfort as a result of recalling and describing prior experiences and memories related to family dysfunction, poverty, and inequality. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. You may ask to take a break from the interview at any time.

Taking part in this research study may lead to added costs to you. Potential costs for your participation in this study include transportation and parking costs to site where the interview will be completed (University at Buffalo or Buffalo Employment Training Center).
Will being in this study help me in any way?
We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include the ability to share your experiences in your transition to adulthood to an engaged listener.

What happens to the information collected for the research?
Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical or education records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization. Information you provide during this study will be retained for 5 years after the completion of the study. All information you provide will be destroyed after the 5 year mark.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?
The principal investigator of the study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include: if at any time you engage in verbal or physical behaviors that threaten the safety or well-being of the principal investigator.

What else do I need to know?
Respondents will be compensated with a $20 MasterCard gift card upon the conclusion of the interview.

Signature Block for Capable Adult
Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research. By signing this form you are not waiving any of your legal rights, including the right to seek compensation for injury related to negligence or misconduct of those involved in the research.

_________________________________________  _____________________________
Signature of subject                                      Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of subject

_________________________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent  _____________________________
                                       Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
APPENDIX C: IRB approval

University at Buffalo Institutional Review Board (UBIRB)
Office of Research Compliance | Clinical and Translational Research Center Room 5018
875 Ellicott St. | Buffalo, NY 14203

UB Federalwide Assurance ID#: FWA00008824

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

December 16, 2016

Dear WANDA GARCIA:

On 12/16/2016, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Study:</td>
<td>Transition to Adulthood for Low SES Young Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>WANDA GARCIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00001174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND, IDE, or IDE:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Documents Reviewed:
- R-AAS tool.docx, Category: Surveys/Questionnaires;
- Screening tool.docx, Category: Surveys/Questionnaires;
- CITI Training 1, Category: Other;
- CITI training, Category: Other;
- HRP-503-WG Template Protocol-FINAL VERSION.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;
- HRP-211-WG FORM-Initial Review-3.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;
- Interview Questionnaire.docx, Category: Surveys/Questionnaires;
- CITI Training , Category: Other;
- announcement flyers.pub, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Script for recruitment.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;

Page 1 of 3
The IRB approved the study from 12/16/2016.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

The Initial Study materials for the project referenced above were reviewed and approved by the SUNY University at Buffalo IRB (UBIRB) by Exempt Review.

UBIRB approval is given with the understanding that the most recently approved procedures will be followed and the most recently approved consent forms will be used. If modifications are needed, those changes may not be initiated until such modifications have been submitted to the UBIRB for review and have been granted approval.

As principal investigator for this study involving human participants, you have responsibilities to the SUNY University at Buffalo IRB (UBIRB) as follows:

1. Ensuring that no subjects are enrolled prior to the IRB approval date.
2. Ensuring that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date without re-approval by the UBIRB.
3. Ensuring that the UBIRB is notified of:
   o All Reportable Information in accordance with the Reportable New Information Form (HRP-214)
   o Project closure/completion by submitting a Continuing Review Form (HRP-212)
4. Ensuring that the protocol is followed as approved by UBIRB unless a protocol amendment is prospectively approved.
5. Ensuring that changes in research procedures, recruitment or consent processes are not initiated without prior UBIRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
6. Ensuring that the study is conducted in compliance with all UBIRB decisions, conditions, and requirements.
7. Bearing responsibility for all actions of the staff and sub-investigators with regard to the protocol.

8. Bearing responsibility for securing any other required approvals before research begins.

If you have any questions, please contact the UBIRB. Please include your project title and CLICK Project Number in all correspondence with the IRB.
REFERENCES


Roberson, Patricia N. E.; Jessica N. Fish; Spencer B. Olmstead; and Frank D. Fincham. 2015. “College Adjustment, Relationship Satisfaction, and Conflict Management: A Cross-Lag Assessment of Developmental ‘Spillover.’” *Emerging Adulthood* 3(4): 244 - 254


VITA

Wanda Jordan is originally from the Bronx, NY. She received her Bachelor’s degree from John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a Master’s degree in Social Work from Stony Brook University. She taught Research Methods, Mental Health in Children, Criminology, and Criminal Justice Systems at the University at Buffalo. She is currently a forensic social worker working with the mentally ill prison population. She has been a college educator and mental health therapist in the community and within correctional facilities. She currently resides in the Hudson Valley area in New York.