

# Intersectional harms and their impact on narrative identity of young adults in conflict with the law

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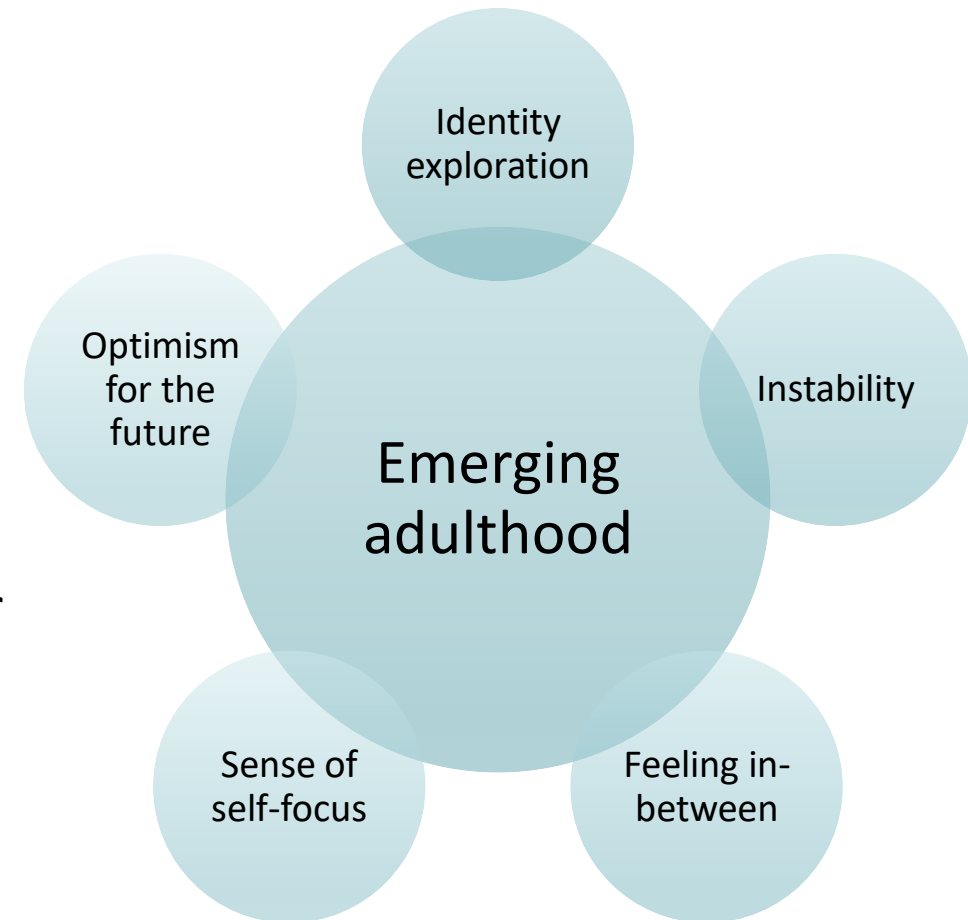
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# The features of emerging adulthood

- For a “successful” entry into adulthood, people are expected to achieve 5 milestones:
  - Complete their education
  - Find full-time employment
  - Leave the family home
  - Financially support themselves
  - Get in a committed relationship and start their own family.

\* Few studies look at the experiences of vulnerable populations in emerging adulthood.



# Objective

- Given the importance of identity development in emerging adulthood and desistance from crime :
  - Further our understanding of the complex interplay between **agential and structural factors** that underlie the **changes in identity** of people aged 18-25 years old that are in conflict with the law





What does emerging adulthood look like for people in conflict with the law?

# Achieving cultural norms and expectations

## Challenges

- Substance use and/or mental health issues
- Lesser academic achievement
- Difficulties finding stable, meaningful, and legitimate employment
- Trauma and losses
- Limited human and social capital
- Feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, frustration, and hopelessness

## Opportunities

- Increase in self-control
- Increase in prosocial attitudes
- Heightened sense of self-efficacy
- Heightened sense of autonomy
- Future orientation
- New social environments/networks

(Re)establishing meaningful social bonds and prosocial actions in everyday life

# Entering adulthood dragging wounds from the past

- Going through the justice system exposes emerging adults to **stigmatization, marginalization, and social exclusion**.
- This adds to the **significant challenges** many of them already faced in their life course:
  - Adverse childhood experiences
  - Behavioral, emotional, relational, and academic challenges
  - Mental health and substance abuse issues
  - Challenges in the family environment
  - Disadvantaged socioeconomic background
- These experiences have a **cumulative effect**, which is likely to impair their **social and community (re)integration** and their **identity development**.
- \* **Structural factors**, such as social inequalities, must be incorporated in our efforts to better understand identity processes (Syed & McLean, 2021).

# Intersectional harms and identity development

- The **intersectionality perspective** supposes that (Potter, 2013, 2015):
  - There are multiple and multiplicative **power differentials** in the ordering of social attributes.
  - “Individual have multiple **intertwined identities** that are developed, organized, experienced, and responded to within the context of social structure and its **dis/advantaged ordering**” (Potter, 2015, p. 76).
  - The multiplicity of systems of oppression shapes **social positions** and how to navigate individual and social structures.
  - Individuals have unique experiences: they have a **differential access to power and resources** depending on their social position.

# Methodology

- **(RÉ)SO 16-35** partnership research program – Axis I
- Semi-structured interviews with people in conflict with the law aged 16-35 years old
  - Themes: identity, delinquency, use of services, mental health, substance use, social relations, judicial and correctional services
- For this presentation : 20 people aged 18-25 years old at the time of the first interview were located and agreed to participate in a second interview
- Subsample ( $n = 11$ ) selected based on the following diversifying criteria:
  - Sexuality (male, female, non-binary); race/ethnicity; mental health diagnosis; substance abuse issues; juvenile justice system involvement; educational attainment; employment
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019)
  - Comparative and iterative process





# Preliminary findings



# Participants' initial position in the social structure

	Sexuality	Ethnicity	Age T1	ACEs	CWS	JJ	Mental health	Substance abuse	School achievement	Job	Incarceration	Social welfare
David	M	Can/W	25	-	-	-	X	X	Prof.	-	X	X
Felix	M	Can/W	25	-	-	X	X	X	Gr. 9	X	X	-
Benoit	M	Can/W	21	X	X	X	X	X	Gr. 10	X	X	-
Victor	M	Russian	23	X	X	-	X	X	Gr. 8	-	X	X
Arthur	M LGBTQ+	First nat.	18	X	X	X	-	X	Gr. 9	-	X	-
Timothé	M	Can/W	18	X	X	X	-	X	Gr. 7	-	-	-
Claudine	F	Can/W	24	-	-	-	-	-	Prof	X	X	-
Patrick	M	Can/W	18	-	X (P)	X	-	X	Gr. 6	X	-	-
Clémence	F	Can Ital/Afr	18	X	-	X	-	-	College	X	-	-
Claude	N-B	Can/W	22	X	X	-	X	X	Gr. 10	-	-	X
Francis	M	Fr/Alg.	23	-	X	X	-	-	Gr. ?	X	-	-

# An evolving sense of self

- We explored participants' sense of self using direct prompts about their qualities and faults (self-perceptions, looking-glass self).
  - Loyal, organized, determined, sociable, altruistic, good listener, good friend, etc.
  - Nomad, ADHD, substance user, parent, etc.
  - Impulsive, hasty, bad character, aggressive, not intelligent, bad at school, etc.
- Throughout the interviews, when narrating various life stories, a more nuanced sense of self emerged.
- Some of them recognized that their “bad” behavior was their choice and thus, they were to blame for the position they currently find themselves in:
  - “Bad kid”; “I was too much to handle”, “I was always looking for trouble”, “It’s my fault – I’m the one who’s responsible”

Sources of  
recognition

Sources of  
misrecognition

# Intersectional harms and identity development

- Their sense of self is still “under construction”, while they are engaged in a meaning-making process of what they went through.
  - *“Of course you feel judged. But you end up there because of choices you made. Whether you made them consciously or not, whether you had a reason to or not. You still made them and you have to own them. When you get really tired of it, you’ll get your ducks in a row and get your life on track.” (Francis, 23)*
  - *“When I was a kid, I told my parents I wanted to be a gangster. I wanted to sell drugs, smoke pot, etc. So I was proud [of going to prison], but at the same time I wasn’t proud... My feet and my hands were chained and I was saying to myself: I’m happy! I am a rebel! But I realized while in prison that maybe it wasn’t such a good thing. [...] I don’t want to go back.” (Victor, 23)*
- Identity conflict oftentimes emerged because participants either minimized the consequences of their actions or blamed actors of the justice/correctional system for overreacting:
  - “If she revokes me for that...”, “If I have a breach, come on, I just...”, “I didn’t kill anyone”, “I know my limits, I drank but I wasn’t drunk when I took the wheel, I would never do that...”

# Intersectional harms, meaning-making, and identity development

- Some had “fun” during their incarceration:
  - They made friends
  - They had positive interactions with correctional officers
  - They found (illegal) ways to maintain contacts with their families/friends/loved ones
  - They found (illegal) ways to get drunk or use drugs
- Some had not dealt with their past traumatic experiences and still struggled with what they went through. Not addressing these issues has a detrimental impact on their well-being (e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, insomnia) and can hinder the desistance process.
  - *“Honestly, it left a mark, the stress. Now, I have anxiety attacks. Mostly at nights. I have trouble sleeping. I get anxious and have to take a bath to make myself relax. Mostly at nights. During the day too, when I have a big source of stress” (Patrick, 18).*

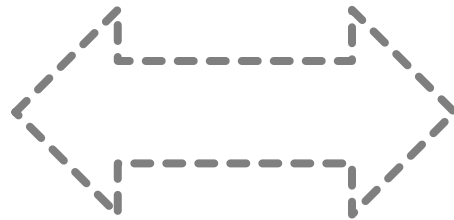
Recidivism/Breaches

Risk of relapsing

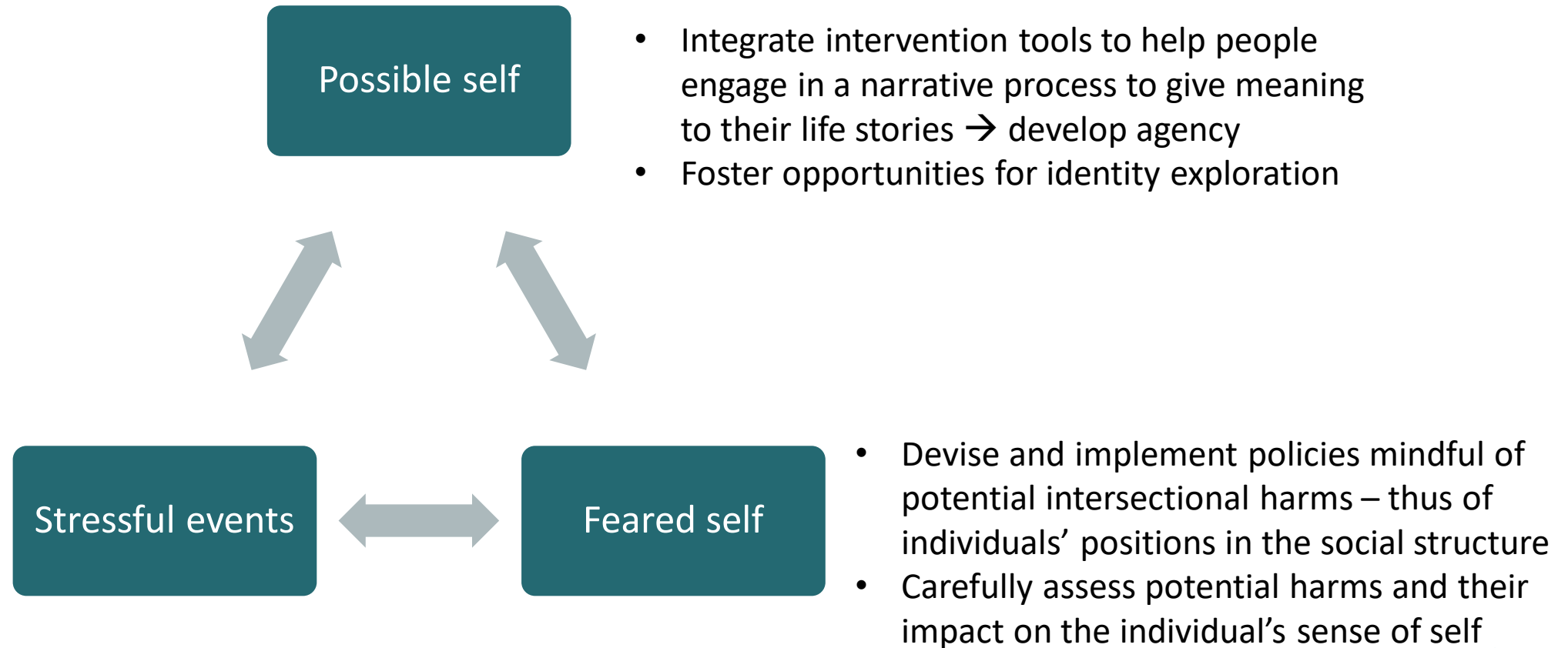
# Intersecting harms and identity development



- Intentional | Fortuitous
- Individual | Relational | Structural
- Family | School | Systemic



# Intersecting harms, the feared self, and the possible self





THANK YOU!

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