

Familial Vulnerability at the Transition from School to Work

Julian Valentin Mähring¹

¹ Faculty of Medicine, Department for Child and Family Psychosomatics at the Clinic for General Pediatrics and Neonatology of the University Clinic, Giessen, Germany (Prof. Burkhard Brosig) and Youth workshop Gießen gGmbH [Youth workshop]

Correspondence: Dr. Julian Mähring, Jugendwerkstatt Gießen gGmbH, Alter Krofdorfer Weg 4, 35398 Gießen, Germany.

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Abstract

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, families have not only been seen as a place to recover from the demands of public life, but also as a constitutive element for particular vulnerabilities. Public life in general was greatly impacted by pandemic restrictions, thus, increasing the focus and visibility on dangers of regression and injury in one's own home. The article is based on narrative interviews, with emerging adults (18-27 years) who are hard to reach on their perception of the situation. 10 persons were interviewed initially in winter 2017/2018 and 10 other persons during the pandemic in the first half of 2021. This qualitative data was interpreted using the method of objective hermeneutics.

Under a magnifying glass, it becomes clear how childhood experiences of injury and neglect by one's own family still influence the ability to cope with the demands placed on them during the transition from school to work. This display of vulnerability in the described experiences is interpreted with regard to the visibility and latency of vulnerability. Exploring the link between trust and vulnerability deepens an understanding of how harmful events in childhood still influence vocational opportunities after leaving school. Depending on their age, the interviewees concentrate on the changed position within the family towards their parents. In this interplay between socializing processes of detachment and the rise from a dependent position to one of responsibility, the retrospective evaluation of the family and what was previously familiar in the world of life assumes a central position.

Keywords: vulnerability, trust, familialism, emerging adulthood, social deprivation

1. Introduction

“The pathways of how the situational vulnerability of poverty spills over to so many other areas of life and creates vulnerabilities, sometimes even years or decades after childhood are currently not fully understood.” - Gottfried Schweiger 2019, 292

Close social relationships create a particularly open environment which nevertheless creates its own specific vulnerabilities. The term vulnerability stresses the possibility to become wounded because of the exposure towards others and towards environmental influences. The notion of vulnerability is often conceived in one of two possible ways (Butler 2009, 25, Mackenzie et al. 2014). Vulnerability is both: related to the human condition in general (precariousness, inherent vulnerability) and to a specific context (precarity, situational vulnerability). Based on the narrative interviews, this article explores the role of wounds of the past on future vulnerabilities regarding emerging adults (EAs) with problems transitioning from school to work life. Regarding adverse childhood experiences, families can play different roles. They usually support children with processing disturbing experiences. They can be the cause of adverse childhood experiences and sometimes are both. Childhood traumas happen most often in situations with parents, relatives and reference persons and they are more likely to occur within a milieu of precarity. Even if they took place long ago, traumas can continue to have an effect from childhood into adulthood and also increase a person's vulnerability after leaving school (Schilling et al. 2007). EAs are confronted with their childhood traumas again when they are responsible for themselves and the dependency from their parents. This change of their role in the family structure means that they have to reconsider their relationship to their parents as adults (Arnett 2004). In particular phenomenological approaches are promising for a better understanding of the perception and experience of vulnerability by the felt body (Peter and Strotmann 2021, Huth 2016, 286f., Waldenfels 2013, 123).

The discourse of vulnerability – in difference to sociological works on trust (e.g. Coleman 1994, 118) – does not reflect

enough the importance of emotional attachment enough, for there is a difference if one is harmed by a loved one or by someone he or she doesn't know (well). Emotional *be-longing* (Rowe 2005) to the ones who inflict harm has consequences for the personal estimation of future possibilities to become wounded. The connection between attachment and vulnerability is conceived as "accepted vulnerability" to coin the notion of trust for social relationships (Hartmann 2003). Here vulnerability is only understood as the downside of a cooperative social relationship and not considered as a crucial part of human existence. To shed light on these discrepancies in theories of trust and vulnerability it is useful to take a close look at an empirical example of the social world:

To complete the transition from school to work, trust is needed as a bet on the future. One has to believe that the years of vocational training will secure a future existence and that one is able to prove oneself and his or her capacities to achieve an apprenticeship or an academic degree. The criteria of success during the transition from school to work are often formulated as a combination of school achievement, parents' highest educational degree, their income and profession (BiBB 2020). There is still not enough research on the influence of childhood traumas on the transition into adulthood (Latham et al. 2021, 13). In taking a perspective of vulnerability during these transitions the following article brings to the fore how wounds that were inflicted during childhood and in adolescence can reduce a person's capability to find his or her way into working-life.

The empirical material of this article consists in theme-centered narrative interviews with a total of 20 different EAs from a German vocational training institute. 18 of them were interpreted using the sophisticated, language-sensitive method of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann 2000) because vulnerability is a latent phenomenon which often requires a close reading of the interviews (the sequential analysis of only a few e.g. 8 interviews usually illuminates all possible types in dealing with the topic of a research question [Kramer 2020, 100]).

When it came to tracing back the cause for their problems during the transition from school to work, the interviewees pronounced the severe difficulties with their family of origin even struggles date back to events in their childhood. The subjective view on their situation of everyday life at a vocational training institute includes the role in their family of origin even if they broke up with their parents and/or lived in child care facilities for a long time. This finding even holds true if the questioned EAs became parents themselves. Drastic and harmful events of their childhood play a pivotal role in their narratives. As a result, four different types of coping with this vulnerability during the transition from school to work can be distinguished: 1. Denial and disillusion, 2. Retardation (withdrawal in the event of emotional overload), 3. pragmatic self-assertion, 4. personal utopia. The task in this article is to describe why the individual history of familial vulnerability is important for having success during the transition from school to work. This article is based on a talk, held in the panel "vulnerability in the (post)corona society" (Möhring 2021).

2. Theoretical Background

Vulnerability and experience

The issue of vulnerability plays a major role in understanding one's own situation in the transition system. The consequences of experienced extreme situations in and with one's family lead to a latent threat for future possibilities of achieving a decent job. The latent vulnerability comes to the fore in harmful situations which everyone tries to, but cannot always avoid (Liebsch 2015, 49). Current experiences are connected to felt vulnerability in the past and affects future expectations from social relationships. Vulnerability is a latent and relational phenomenon. It is related to the social environment of a person as well as to experienced exposure to potentially harmful situations in the past. Both characteristics aren't visible by themselves and require a professional gaze at the everyday life situation of specific individuals. The connection between inherent and situational vulnerability (MacKenzie et al. 2014) is important as a reflection of the family within its social environment. The universalistic approach of vulnerability as openness to the world in general as a human condition is criticized as far too general, because people who are affected by vulnerability more than average can only benefit from employing the term of vulnerability to describe the social position they are in (for example if they suffer from a bad health condition or do not have access to human rights). This particularist claim points at the dependency on others but forgets about the difficulties to discriminate against social groups alongside the deficits of their members – which of course also have to do with the human lifeform, too. Traumatic events in childhood have to do with the specific family dynamics which are related to the social circumstances, often of poverty. To navigate between a gradually or discriminatory notion of vulnerability requires to distinguish mere events from those which provoke an experience (Peter and Strotmann 2021). If events, even if they were hurtful, do not provoke an experience, they shouldn't be considered to shape a person's vulnerability, considering that vulnerability is deeply rooted in the subjective conception of one's own felt body. The long term outcomes for children who experienced the divorce of their parents as a traumatic event is an example for wounds of the past which shape the future (Sabas 2021, 86). Those experiences become especially relevant when EAs ponder about becoming parents themselves and how they can escape the unconscious reproduction of traumatic situations they experienced themselves.

Adverse childhood experiences

The concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) “originated in the medical literature, the construct has now been studied extensively across disciplines, including psychology and other social sciences” (Portwood et al. 2021). ACEs refer to abuse, neglect and household dysfunction which are measured using 10 categories, e.g. experiences of physical violence and parental mental illness. The study of ACEs aimed from the beginning at estimating the effect of possibly traumatizing experiences in childhood on living as an adult. Researchers found that interviewees often gave multiple ACEs to protocol and that these experiences correlate with health and career problems in adulthood.

The meaning of Trauma refers to the experienced discrepancy between a situational threat and the subjective capacities to cope with such a situation (Hintermeier 2021). The effect of a trauma is psychological and somatoform dissociation. Traumas leave fragmental memories and cause problems with attachment, personal development and behavior. It is easier to cope with traumatic experiences if they are collective, if their cause is accidental and if they can be processed with the help of familial support. It is hard to overcome a trauma if it happened in the first 10 years of life and if a parent or caregiver is the source traumatization. The impact of ACEs on the transition from school to work is still not investigated often. A longitudinal study on labor marked trajectories shows that cumulative childhood traumas correspond with exclusion from labor (Hansen et al. 2021). This is an important finding to point at the importance of the context in which injuries happen. The results of this research show that a feeling of insecurity can set up high hurdles in attempts of mastering the transition from school to work – because people who feel insecure tend to mistrust relationships at their work place and tend to avoid disappointment by setting their expectations too high.

Trust and vulnerability

In these close relationships the relation between trust and vulnerability is also very important. If one conceives vulnerability as a part of the human condition, then the idea of accepted vulnerability only makes sense if it is seen in a way relative to this condition. Allowing more closeness in a personal relationship by trusting someone then means an increase of an already existing vulnerability. But especially in power asymmetric social interrelations (Elias and Scotson 1994) the condition to accept vulnerability is not easy to achieve. For example, trust between parents and their children (Baier 2001, 131) has as a background power asymmetry which changes within the generative architecture of power relations (Waterstradt 2015, 474) as children get older. Power gaps like this can enhance the risk of traumatic experiences during childhood within close social relationships. The theoretical perspectives of care and of figurational sociology agree that interdependencies are crucial to understand vulnerability. Anyway, the multifaceted notion of vulnerability is all too often conceptualized in a shallow and irreflexive way by research on trust. Sophisticated approaches on the concept of vulnerability usually do not find their way into the corpus of trust research. This is a desideratum my own work on trust hasn't addressed yet. It can be added to the finding that not to trust can increase vulnerability too, because one can be left out of networks which are important for personal progress (Möhring 2020, 209). This consideration leads to the conclusion that familiar social relations are strongly connected to vulnerabilities caused by interdependency. Trust based vulnerabilities include a particular emotional component other kinds of vulnerability do not imply. Breaches of trust, for example in a functional family life can also be described with the concept of familial trajectory course (Nölke 2001). Too much ambivalence of trust in the close relationships of early childhood can become a hurdle for developing a vocational perspective in emerging adulthood. But as an interpretation of say a socialization that is shaped by parental addiction to alcohol, we should take into consideration what this kind of exposure means in terms of trusting others and oneself. A future perspective of reliance on others may seem much too risky from the background of experiences with parents who did not care enough for the upbringing of their own children. It is not only about one's own chances to become an alcoholic or to be responsible for traumatic experiences of one's own children. A missing capacity to rely on social relations diminishes chances for a progressive personal development concerning career and education.

Familialism and vulnerability in families

One should not forget the cunning critique of psychoanalysis as a form of familialism (Guattari and Deleuze 1995). From the psychoanalytical perspective, the family as an unconscious structure seems to be pushed underneath conscious thought as an oedipal triad or as generativity. This kind of generative explanation can at its best lead to a guess on the scheme of the life it tries to grasp. Social pedagogy has brought forward strong criticism of familiarity. The renewed familialism gained importance during the 2000s (Oelkers 2012). Many cuts in social services have to be compensated by families themselves. This social process leads to an excessive demand on familial capabilities especially of socially deprived families, because the perspective on families as social units who solve problems by themselves or with the help of social pedagogy is on the rise. The biological family still is the role model for generations who live together. But seen through sociological glasses it is nearly impossible to find one description all families of today fit into, for example due to segmentation of familial relationships. Four segments of parenthood can be distinguished (juridical, social,

biological and genetic). Because of these familial differences, assumptions about socialization should be made carefully. The subjective experience or the existential dimension of biography cannot be explained by a single familial pattern: Instead “the requirements are probably as different as the social situations and familial arrangements” (Oelkers 2012, 150). In the following, the family structure is not seen as the overriding principle determining the actions taken. Beyond stable relations to the family of origin, there are, on the contrary, a lot more social relations which are also formative and relevant for the question of vulnerability. In addition, social processes define important parts of family life, discussed as a growing zone of fragility (Castel 2014) or a society of regression (Nachtwey 2016). Poverty increases the vulnerability in families because it produces difficult life circumstances and is severe in its consequences even for well situated adults who experienced poverty in their childhood (Schweiger 2019, 291).

The difficulty to grasp injuries in families and their consequences from an external view becomes clear regarding the professional actions of the socio educational family assistance in Germany (SPFH). These workers are in the situation of making decisions with the family and about the family on behalf of the youth welfare office. When it comes to borderline cases they are in the position to opt for or against placing endangered children outside the family in a child care facility. A family offers protection from harm of the world outside but it can be the place where injuries happen, too. Not least the interweaving of family with ethnic affiliation, social status and the relationship status of the caregivers makes it hard for outsiders to discriminate “dangerous families” from “protective families”. It becomes obvious that for example the social position matters for what can be identified as familial practice from a subjective perspective and what kinds of behavior are typical for the milieu of an ethnic minority and or a social class (Bauer und Wieszorek 2016, 2020). Blurry family images of social education workers as well as further implications of the notion of family (biological and generative) also influence the imagination of sociologists who interpret scenes of family life described in interviews for qualitative research. This blurriness becomes obvious in irritations, repetitions of what has been stated or in directly addressing misunderstandings in the interview protocol. Nevertheless, there are no promising universal definitions of family because of different forms and constellations of life together. The common sense understanding of family is heterogeneous and blurry, but also an important background to understand why familial vulnerability is at the center of the self-narration of the socially deprived and mal educated EAs we interviewed during the transition from school to work.

What does “emerging adults” mean?

The popular concept of adolescence does not discharge into a mature adult identity anymore. Instead what follows is a new developmental stage (Gilmore 2019, 640). Three interconnected social changes are important for this development. The increase of age of adults at the time of the birth of their first child about 10 years (1), usually no promising vocational perspective in their 20ies (2) and a prolonged education for the requirements of more and more complicated working tasks (3). The result is the recognition of a new stage of life between the age of 18 and (at least) 25, which is called emerging adulthood (Arnett 2004) and is also critically appropriated by sociological approaches on adolescence (King 2020). Traditional signs of transition (into parenthood or from school to work) have been increasingly prolonged since the 1970s. This long period of time can be characterized by five interrelated criteria (Gilmore 2019, 638f.): In this unstable stage of life (1) of identity exploration (2), EAs have a feeling of “being in between” childhood and adulthood in many different ways (3). They face future possibilities which seem to be endless to them (4) and are largely absorbed by themselves (5). The prolonged phase of exploration produces new inequalities by retarding possibilities of individuation in socio economic patterns (King 2020, 359). For example, if young people cannot afford to rent a flat on their own and have to stay with their parents. Possibilities of personal thriving and social mobility of grown up children have to be negotiated within a structure of social positions people of the older generations hold. Exactly this redefinition of one’s own role towards the family structure and towards society is central to biographical narratives of EAs. This finding corresponds with our qualitative research in the transitional field in education.

Familial vulnerability during emerging adulthood

A strong self-centeredness is normal during emerging adulthood (Arnett 2004). EAs are seen by their parents and see themselves more and more as equals due to being less dependent on them (Arnett 2004, 8). After becoming more independent, it becomes possible to talk with their parents about what happened in their childhood in a different way. They don’t have to weigh every word, because structural forces and their daily life do not depend on the fate of their parents directly.

However, the effects of family-related injuries can be so intense that any beneficial relationships in the social support system are rejected or cannot be used because of earlier, disappointing relationship experiences. The American sociologist Jeanette Silva (2013, 109) deduces from her study of EAs in the low-wage sector that this attitude leads to a *hardened self* and that people shaped in this way generally distrust solidarity structures. However, too little expectation of social opportunities increases the chance of not being a part of the labor market. In addition to social disadvantage

and low school qualifications, negative attachment experiences make it more difficult to believe in beneficial contacts, which is important, for example, in order to enter into the dependency relationship of an educational situation at all and to persevere at it (Curth et al. 2014). Such an individual effort requires a fundamental trust in the future.

The vulnerability of socially disadvantaged adults during the transition from school to work increased in the pandemic. The lower contact intensity is associated with fewer chances of an apprenticeship (Dohmen et al. 2021) and results in higher chances to experience personal failure and poverty. The temporal aspect of the injury experience in childhood for future vulnerability is reflected within families in the shift in position from the dependent receiver of care as a child to an equal adult and potential caregiver for the aging parent generation. Even though most EAs aren't parents yet, they have an idea of what they want to teach the next generation (Arnett 2004, 184f.). The change in the generative relationship is geared towards the decisive biographical experiences in childhood. The milieu-dependent prevalence of certain traumatic experiences also reflects changes in the positions taken within the family of origin. Families are considered vulnerable if they find it difficult to create an environment for their children in which they can develop well. How difficult it is to differentiate between normal and vulnerable families is indicated by the difficulties with prejudices that arise from differences in the socialization of potentially vulnerable families and those who evaluate them. However, the reasons for this difference lie in the difficulty of precisely describing family and vulnerability. Out-of-home care, long-distance relationships and parental divorces or difficult sibling relationships all cause different difficulties for family dynamics EAs have to cope with. The everyday social context of the family can be permanently deformed by drastic traumatic experiences and against this background of manifest injuries, the question raised about the protection of or the endangerment of vulnerable families receives a further context. Even in a family environment that seems to be protective, an early trauma can have a strong impact on delaying or preventing opportunities for social development, such as advancement through training. I suggest understanding the situation of a school to work transition, which is based on a background like this, as a corrosive disadvantage (Wolf and de-Shalit 2007), where problematic circumstances add up in a lifetime-perspective and future chances are diminished by a lack of confidence, for example because of failures to succeed in the educational system. My idea of employing a notion of "familial vulnerability" consists in the increased possibility to become wounded in a psychical or physical way because of one's experiences with close social relationships one is familiar with as described in this section.

Transition zone after completion of compulsory school attendance

Adolescents and EAs who do not study and do not take up an apprenticeship are usually led into vocational training measures to prepare for a school to work transition. In 2019 there were more than 255000 new entries into the transition zone (BIBB 2020, 10). Only about 50% of the participants of vocational training measures change their position into an ordinary apprenticeship within one year (Menze et al. 2019). These programs often have a high dropout rate and participants skip courses for weeks. This behavior can be explained by many causes. Participation is forced by sanctions that are put in place if unemployed do not take part in these measures. Staying away shouldn't be misinterpreted as truancy (Euler and Nikolaus 2018, 537). Keeping in mind the social sanctioning of insufficient education and not undergoing or completing formal vocational training, the avoidance of taking part in vocational training measures can be seen as a part of diverse "strategies to conceal and avoid, which are used to evade an anticipated stigmatization or to influence the visibility of a stigma" (Linden et al 2018, 435). The belief to earn social mobility by education is in decline in milieus which are difficult to reach (Silva 2013, 90). Educational institutes in the transition area are oriented at the deficits of their attendants – no matter what approach they are following – because hurdles that stand in the way of being occupied are mandatory for participation in vocational training measures (Hirschfeld 2020). The transitional area originates in an attempt of the German state to cope with increasing rates of drop outs after compulsory school attendance in the 1970s. Social agencies and schools put in place measures to prepare for an apprenticeship because of changes in the labor market, in a time when less unskilled work was needed and the expectations of the education of job entrants increased. Difficulties at school and low educational certificates is what a majority of the participants of vocational training measures share. Especially the biographical narration of EAs with difficulties during the transition from school to work is characterized by tensions in their family of origin and related experiences of harm. The recurrence of injuries that happened in the family of origin by socially deprived EAs and their approaches to overcome these memories cannot be conceptualized solely as a matter of family. In the retrospect of a grown up child on harmful experiences in the past the interviewees pronounce their experiences as a child in the context of their families of origin. Even if they had to leave their family early in their life or were badly mistreated – these experiences were important for their narrative of school to work transition.

3. Method

In the context of a trans disciplinary project of psycho social counseling at a vocational training institute and a ward for psychosomatics of hospital nearby, narrative interviews with a theme centered stimulus were conducted. The project addresses people who take part in the program "Qualification and Employment of young people in Hesse" which is

founded by the European Social Fond (Förster-Chanda et al. 2013). In our research-group, we knew from the professional context of our work as psycho-social counselors that the biographical background and the problems of the EAs in vocational training measures differ a lot. But the sharp differences between the social life world of interviewer and interviewee refer to tacit preconceptions and to codes that separate the persons behind the different roles in the interview and influence the social interaction while the interview took place. Therefore, the visibility of familial vulnerability, reported in the interviews, comes to the fore if the material (the interview protocol) is made resistant against rash generalizations. This is why we applied the hermeneutical method of sequential analysis for our interpretation (Oevermann 2000). This approach is sensitive to lingual nuances, subtleties and contradictions of the singular case against the usual habits of interpretation. But in this analysis we want to end up with claims that go beyond a singular case structure. To aim at a generalization of singular cases the procedure includes two steps. At first the latent structure behind the subjective choices and actions has to be derived from the analysis of a singular case. In a second step a generalization of typical forms of structuration regarding the research question can be derived from the contrasting case analyses with each other (Kramer 2020, 101). Personal Data (name, age, location) were changed slightly to avoid the identification of real persons.

Participants

In total, 20 different persons were interviewed. The interviewees were between 17 and 27 years old and most of them received social assistance. The EAs were asked to narrate their experiences of everyday life while they were taking part in the vocational training and to think about what spending their lifetime this way means in terms of a biographical station. We had 10 interviews in autumn and winter 2017/2018 and 10 interviews in spring and summer 2021. Only persons who took part in a vocational training for at least 6 month were interviewed. Many of the interviewees in 2017 argued that this situation feels abnormal and that they came here because of the difficulties they had in their childhood (Möhring et al 2021). These interviews brought to light that private problems are often the cause for missing capacities in forming a lasting relationship at a workplace or at an academic institute. In 2021 another 10 interviews were conducted with different persons who were in a measure at the vocational training institute at the time the interview took place. The new interviews aimed to estimate the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the contact restrictions on the everyday life of the socially deprived EAs. The themes of the interviews were quite similar to the ones we had in 2017/18. In most cases Covid-19 did not have a great influence on the difficulties during the transition from school to work. In the following family related vulnerabilities are in focus, no matter what year the interviews were carried through. For many socially deprived EAs the pandemic adds to other existential problems which were already in place. The talks took place in an office of the vocational training institute and in the interviews which we had under the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic windows were kept open, distance was held and face masks were worn.

Types of familial vulnerability during the transition from school to work

The following section presents four ways of dealing with family related vulnerability – e.g. adverse childhood experiences – during the transition from school to work. Not every interviewee told much about his or her childhood. Some termed personal issues as private, others didn't want to be confronted with events of the past they do not want to think of again. But they all talked about progress and difficulties with caring for themselves in their current life situation. The stimulus intentionally left room to avoid talking about traumatizations. Interviewees were asked for a self-narration and to tell how the past year felt for them. Most of the interviewees experienced a parental separation and about half of them spent years of their childhood in child care facilities. The types presented in this section are built upon an objective hermeneutical analysis of what role family related vulnerability plays for an individual during the transitions from school to work, knowing that our interviewees all share problems with this transition.

1. Denial and disorientation

These interviewees fit into the category of attempting to deal with family related vulnerability by avoiding close contact with their parents. They have no clear orientation towards working life. After achieving their certificate of secondary education, they are stuck in a cycle of loose attempts of exploring without ends and without an anchor in their real possibilities and needs. Missing a perspective that goes beyond their participation in a vocational training measure is something they have in common. In the interview they see a connection between the separation of their parents, aggression and years of their childhood they spend outside their families in youth care facilities. But their biographical narrations aren't consistent, for it is unclear why exactly there were aggressions and why their separated parents couldn't care for them anymore. The narration is as fragmented as their future orientation towards adulthood. The relation to both of their parents is unstable.

<i>Mr. Kahne: Meine Eltern sind getrennt(...) Und dann mit zwölf, weil ich, ja, starke Aggressionsprobleme hatte und auch dagegen Medikamente nehmen musste, und dann,</i>	<i>Mr. Kahne: My parents are separated (...) And then when I was twelve, because yes, I had severe aggression problems and also had to take medication for them, and then when I hit a few</i>
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<p><i>als ich ein paar Kinder geschlagen hatte und dann noch dem Lehrer die Nase, also die Brille von der Nase geschlagen habe mit sechs Jahren, ja, bin ich dann mit so neun ins Heim im Gebirge gekommen.</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Sollner:</i></p> <p><i>F: Und da bist du dann immer mal, als du dann im Jugendheim warst, weggelaufen?</i></p> <p><i>A: Ja. Ich meine, was bin ich für ein, ich bin, ich wäre doch ein kompletter Spast, wenn ich sagen würde, ich höre auf irgendwelche fremden Menschen. Natürlich denke ich mir so, nee, ich höre eher auf meine Eltern. Ich habe, zu irgendwelchen fremden Menschen. Natürlich bin ich - abgehauen.</i></p> <p><i>F: Also wie, wie war das denn bei deinen Eltern? Also was war so der Grund? Kam das eher von außen, also wollten die, dass du zu Hause bleibst, du musstest trotzdem gehen, oder?</i></p> <p><i>A: Meine Mutter hat sich von meinem Vater getrennt. Damals in diesem Frauenhaus-Dingens-Teil, was weiß ich, hat mich da geschlagen. Dann hat die Leiterin gesagt: Ich schalte das Jugendamt ein.</i></p>	<p><i>children and then the teacher's nose, i.e. the glasses at the age of six, yes, I came to the home in the Mountains when I was nine.</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Sollner:</i></p> <p><i>Q: And then, when you were in the youth home, did you always run away?</i></p> <p><i>A: Yes. I mean, what kind of a, I am, I'd be a complete jerk if I said I listen to strangers. Of course I think so, no, I tend to listen to my parents. I have, to some strangers. Of course I'm - gone.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Like, how was it with your parents? So what was the reason? It was more of an outsider, so they wanted you to stay at home, you had to go anyway, right?</i></p> <p><i>A: My mother separated from my father. Back in that women's shelter thingy part, I don't know, hit me there. Then the manager said: I'll turn on the youth welfare office.</i></p>
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Their vocational ideas are vague and they do not have any plans for a future as a worker. They do not find a way to fit in the labor market.

<p><i>Mr. Sollner: Und ich mehr so: Ja, warum soll ich mich wegen so was kümmern? Interessiert mich nicht. Das hat mich einfach nicht interessiert. (...) Ausbildung und so was mache.</i></p>	<p><i>Mr. Sollner: And I'm more like: Yes, why should I care about something like that? I'm not interested. I just didn't care. (...) Training and stuff like that.</i></p>
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2. Retardation (withdrawal in the event of emotional overload)

The reaction of self-isolation for weeks after an emotional struggle the interviewees could not handle is quite common in the transcripts which were analyzed and constitute the second type I want to describe as follows. The narrated biographies often contain academic success like good grades in the secondary education certificate or long periods of staying in an apprenticeship with good expectations for the future. But when a situation arises that is emotionally challenging the interviewees withdraw from their vocational trajectory and quit their involvement in education. They usually ground their reaction on experiences in their childhood e.g. of neglect after a parental separation. They take a depressive stance towards their everyday life and it often takes them weeks to get back into a daily routine.

<p><i>Mr. Jahn: „(...) war dann knapp ein Jahr da und musste dann die Ausbildung aber leider abbrechen, weil es halt dann wieder anfang mit den ganzen Tiefpunkten und weil zu dem Zeitpunkt hat sich meine Mutter wieder mehr gemeldet, was dann halt auch wieder die, die ganzen Erinnerungen hochgebracht hat, den ganzen Streit und dass sie mich halt damals, ja, so gut wie immer ignoriert hatte, wenn ich irgendwas hatte. Meine Freundin hat zu dem Zeitpunkt mit mir Schluss gemacht.“</i></p> <p><i>„... es kam halt alles auf einmal und das hat mich dann halt erdrückt“</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Kurz: (...)Das habe ich auch erst vor einem halben Jahr, erfahren, warum ich immer, bis zur zweiten Klasse wurde ich immer jeden Tag zur Schule gefahren. Ich hatte auch immer einen Stock dabei, wurde mir erzählt, und zwar aus dem Grund, weil mir meine Mutter im Gericht mit dem Tod gedroht habe, weil ich verraten habe, wo die, wo</i></p>	<p><i>Mr. Jahn: "(...) was there for almost a year and then unfortunately had to break off the apprenticeship, because then it just started again with all the low points and because at that point in time my mother called me more often, what then again, those, those brought up all the memories, the whole argument and that she had ignored me then, yes, almost always when I had something. My girlfriend broke up with me at the time."</i></p> <p><i>"... it all came at once and that just crushed me"</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Kurz: (...) I only found that out half a year ago, why I was always driven to school every day until second grade. I always had a stick with me, I was told, for the reason that my mother threatened to kill me in court because I told where the murder weapon was.</i></p>
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<p>die Mordwaffe lag.</p> <p>(...) und dann hat mir halt meine Oma [es] erzählt (...) ja, muss ich das verdrängt haben.</p> <p>Soweit ich mich erinnern kann, lebe ich im Stress. Ich habe Erinnerungen seitdem, also seit dem zweiten Lebensjahr, waren auch ein paar Vorfälle. Ich hatte eigentlich immer Stress.</p> <p>(...) Für mich fühlt sich das so an, als wenn ich - Wasser aus einem Meer weg schöpfe. Immer, wenn ein Problem kommt und ich das bewältige, kommt das nächste. Das, seitdem ich denken kann - fühlt sich mein Leben so an.</p>	<p>(...) and then my grandmother told me [about it](...) yes, I must have suppressed that.</p> <p>As far as I can remember, I live under stress. I have memories since then, so since the age of two, there were also a few incidents. I was actually always stressed.</p> <p>(...) For me it feels as if I am - scooping water out of a sea. Whenever a problem comes up and I deal with it, the next one comes up. For as long as I can remember - my life has felt like this.</p>
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In the interview with Mr. Jahn, he often describes his experiences with depression as being overwhelmed by too many new things. This vulnerability led to a year of idling until it ended in different vocational training measures. On this path he gained a foothold again and now has a good chance of graduating as a carpenter. In the assisted apprenticeship, too, he sometimes falls into a deep hole and stays away from his work for weeks. As can be seen from the analysis, Mr. Jahn tends to neglect the inner motivation through the reference to the external. This way of thought reflects the helplessness in the face of the parental separation, to which he was also passively at the mercy of.

In the case of Mr. Kurz a step-by-step sequence analysis of the German interview shows that the filler word "halt" he frequently uses, in addition to the colloquial meaning of a reference to shared background assumptions about a well-known practice, in the sense of that's what you do "halt", also in the literal meaning of attachment, "der Halt" and means to stop and not move on "Halt machen" – halt or gridlock. This ambiguity in the meaning of halt essentially points at difficulties in his situation. His social environment does not support his efforts of progression enough. This lack of attachment hinders him to go any further and leads to a mode of regression, where he seems to stand still and becomes disoriented towards his aims for the future and how to reach them.

3. pragmatic self-assertion

Participants who follow a clear plan to get back on track to find their way into working-life and try not to let failures of the past get too close to their positive self-image can be subsumed under this category. They show a pragmatic coping with their family background in a situation of uncertainty. These interviewees do not tell much about their childhood but deal with problems they trace back to situations which they had to face long ago. For example Mr. Miller (18) who was threatened to death in his home (where he lived with men as old as him) and couldn't complete school because he had to move into another city. Now he tries to work through his trauma and stays at his parents home who weren't able to care for him when he was a child. At the vocational training institute, he completed his secondary education certificate and reflects his fear when he encounters groups of young men. In the case of Mr. Sanches, he tries to achieve a stable participation to begin an apprenticeship with pedagogical support at the vocational training institute. He explains that he developed a mental illness and that he is able to treat it with the right medication. He is also aware that his migrant background and the insecurity he experienced in his country of origin have to do with his transitional problems, he quit an apprenticeship before he began his participation at the vocational training. Another example is Mr. Ali who was distracted because he couldn't regulate aggressive feelings and therefore quit his apprenticeship. Now he knows how to separate his private issues from his working day and is on his way into an assisted apprenticeship at the vocational training institute.

<p>Mr. Ali: Private Probleme, die haben mich dann <u>so</u> irgendwie da so involviert, wo ich dann dachte so, ich glaube erst, ich eskaliere noch. So. Und ich, und da hat auch der Lehrer gemerkt so, ich bin gar nicht irgendwie da bei der Sache. Und, also im Unterricht. Und da hat das auch im Nachhinein mein Chef gemerkt, weil da gab es so ein Ampelsystem, grün, gelb und rot. Das ist quasi dieser Notendurchschnitt für das erste halbe Jahr und ich war auf Rot. Und ja, dann hat mein Chef halt mit mir geredet. Ich war ehrlich und offen, habe gesagt, ich habe sehr viele private Probleme. Na klar, dass dann der Chef sagt, ja, private, also Privat und ...</p>	<p>Mr. Ali: Private problems somehow involved me, where I thought, at first I think I'll escalate. So. And I, and the teacher also noticed that I'm not involved in the matter at all. And so in class. And my boss noticed it afterwards, because there was a traffic light system, green, yellow and red. That's sort of the average grade for the first six months and I was on red. And yes, then my boss just talked to me. I was honest and open and said I had a lot of personal problems. Of course, then the boss says, yes, private, so private and ...</p>
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4. personal utopia

This last category applies to EAs who seek to overcome their adverse childhood experiences by creating their own personal utopia. There are the cases of Ronja and Tom, my colleagues and I described elsewhere (Möhring et al. 2021). Ronja developed a lesbian sexuality, a masculine habitus and risky health behavior. She cares for her dog and her much older girlfriend and their health issues. Her idea of finishing an apprenticeship is to establish an identity as a worker who is independent of social service. Tom built up a muscular body to step up against the aggressions of his father. Tom began an apprenticeship as a medical assistant after problems with the authorities in the carpentry. Last but not least one can think of Mrs. Grau who tries to complete her assisted apprenticeship at the vocational training institute so that her daughter (who she raises without a partner but with the support of her parents) can be proud to have a mother who goes to work, cares for her and is independent from social support.

<p><i>Mrs. Grau: Dass sie das schon irgendwann später mit Stolz sagen kann, meine Mama hat mich großgezogen, so in der Art. Papa hat mich, Papa und Mama haben sich getrennt. Sie hat, ist arbeiten gegangen, hat ihre Ausbildung gemacht und hat mich noch nebenbei erzogen, war für mich da. Das ist das, was irgendwann - irgendwann eintreten wird, das weiß ich, egal jetzt, was ich mache, ob Ausbildung oder normal arbeiten. Aber ich habe das und ich möchte, dass mein Kind irgendwann mit Stolz das so sagen kann. Ja. Wenigstens einer von ihren Eltern.</i></p>	<p><i>Mrs. Grau: That she can proudly say that at some point later, my mom raised me, kind of. Dad had me, dad and mom broke up. She went to work, did her training and raised me on the side, was there for me. That's what will happen at some point - at some point, I know that, no matter what I'm doing now, whether it's training or normal work. But I have this and I want my child to be able to say it proudly one day. Yes. At least one of her parents.</i></p>
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4. Discussion: On family-related vulnerability in the case reports

A feeling of insecurity, too strong to get along with in childhood or adolescence is connected with the problems during the transition from school to work in every interview. Even though some participants do not fit into dealing with familial vulnerability in a way the type of retardation suggests – in the past the delay of their way into working life came close to what Mr. Kurz and Mr. Jahn report as their current situation. EAs can lose themselves in phases of ruminative exploration (Luyckx et al. 2008, 60) when they aren't anchoring their attempts of exploration in a process of personal development. Ronja, who is now trying to fulfill her personal utopia, for example tells in the interview that she was quite depressed in the past, made up her own world and tried not to face her problems and/or follow her aims in life. In this section I want to lay a focus on withdrawal because of overwhelming emotions because this strategy can easily impede any attempt to help young people with their transition in the field of social work.

Both young men (Mr. Kurz and Mr. Jahn) describe that they withdraw from situations that are too much for them and then don't find their way out of this hole. Mr. Kurz is lead to overtax himself by collapsing from the demands he has set himself due to his upbringing at his grandpernt's home, where there was a lack of discussion with his parent's generation (Laufer 2018). He finds it difficult to accept instructions from others and when problems arise, they not only threaten the context from which they come, but his structure of everyday life as a whole. The frightening family background, which is also marked by neglect, leads to incorrect expectations of the social environment and of himself, which for him is also a reason for not making a successful arrangement in order to master his transition to work. Although he can talk to his grandparents today about a particularly hurtful situation in his childhood, he does not find enough orientation in his close relationships to be able to deal with the imponderables of the transition to work. Above all, there is a lack of a supporting self-design, contacts and knowledge to take up a profession that corresponds to his inclinations.

There is a similar inner conflict with Mr. Jahn, because he also withdraws when he is overwhelmed and appears inhibited in his development. He kept in touch with both parents during his time in transitions, even though he eventually cut ties with his mother. By negotiating his own position in the family vis-à-vis his parents, he can better deal with their direct expectations of him, which makes it somewhat easier for him to recognize progressive and regressive development tendencies in his own biography and finally interrupts his chains of measures towards a good future prognosis for a completion of training.

In both of the cases presented, difficulties in career orientation, which are linked to severe early crises in the family of origin, are predominate. This return to the position as a child within the family of origin can be understood as part of a change in perspective, since both EAs slip into new roles within their family constellation. The relationship between Mr. Kurz and his grandmother is strengthened by revealing the circumstances of his adoption, which he could not see through as a young boy and which were enforced by his grandparents. By moving in with his older sister, Mr. Jahn broke his relationship with his mother and got closer to his father, with whom he now spends his leisure time more often. He tried to

cut the connection between his depressive illness and his relationship with his mother by breaking off the relationship. By negotiating his own position in the family vis-à-vis his parents, he can better deal with their direct expectations of him, which makes it somewhat easier for him to recognize progressive and regressive development tendencies in his own biography and finally interrupts being in measures towards a good future prognosis for an early completion of training. In both of the cases presented, difficulties in career orientation, which are linked to severe early crises in the family of origin, predominate. This return to the position as a child within the family of origin can be understood as part of a change in perspective, since both EAs slip into new roles within their family constellation. The relationship between Mr. Kurz and his grandmother is strengthened by the disclosure of the circumstances. Some details about his adoption (as mentioned above) can now be openly discussed between him and his grandmother. The internal family communication taboo was set aside (Karrer 2015, 31). Despite this progress within the family, both problems remain in the regulation of closeness and distance to promote progressive development – especially towards working life.

EAs in the transition area who need help often only have a few important social contacts. In the pandemic, they are trying to protect them and are particularly vulnerable. Current but also existential threats that have long since been overcome, whether through experienced violence, neglect, threats, financial hardship or serious health problems, lead above all to the fact that the interviewees have little trust in long-term and beneficial social relationships. This applies especially to the close relationships of family. If one's own situation is traced back to chronic family-related problems, there is usually a strategy of withdrawal in the event of emotional overload, with which socially disadvantaged EAs isolate themselves from as many social contacts as possible when they are faced with a situation that they are not up to.

The transition system, designed to compensate for bottlenecks in training places is just as overwhelmed in its deficit orientation as its participants are in finding their way out of its compensatory measures to the labor market. Adolescents and EAs face simultaneous developmental demands with questions about the ability to mentally survive in the social relationships of a training contract and to find a viable way into the profession. Strategies other than retreat to deal with the situation in the transitional system could also be traced back directly to the family history in individual cases, which was also actively undertaken in the biographical interview. In other interviews EAs reported affirmative strategies of pragmatic self-assertion, at least using the few opportunities that arise in the transitional area, no matter how difficult the future prospects may be: as an attempt to break away from the role in the family of origin. Other cases correspond to the attempt to use the vocational training measure for a self-therapeutic purpose in order to get to a point where the EAs, despite experiences of violence in the family, feel capable of personal development as a transition to a job – the creation of a personal utopia. Others cannot be reached in a meaningful way by the attempts to help them with finding their way into working life. The puzzle that has been thrown up is a readjustment of family relationships, which is structurally necessary due to the achieved independence from the family of origin after the end of compulsory schooling (Arnett 2004, 56f.). Only when the interviewee had an appropriate perspective on how (s)he would deal with the role in his or her family of origin, was there room for hesitant attempts at becoming independent.

5. Prospects

The individual orientation after school as well as the venture into adulthood is an important topic in the narration of the EAs we talked to. Formative experiences during their childhood are pronounced in this stage of life because the role of EAs in their family undergoes significant changes. Enough Experiences with the search for support in the family and being thrown back into private life are shared social experiences during the pandemic. Also, experiences of a lack of personal growth opportunities range from school closures to travel restrictions. Deprivation and even neglect form a connecting element between states and classes in this time. The asymmetrical social positions of interviewee and interviewer still are far from balanced and the differences in the effects of the pandemic are enormous, depending on the social situation. Nevertheless, considering this background, there is an opportunity for a better mutual understanding and a more realistic classification of phases of standstill. Such an acknowledgment of being thrown back to the family of origin due to particularly difficult external circumstances can counteract the stigma of an educational biography riddled with breaks. A better understanding of the situation of EAs during the transition between school and work also contributes to recognizing the required change of position within the family, the demands on oneself as an adult and the demands of the labor market. Even if the family has had a hurtful or disadvantageous effect on childhood, it is usually important for EAs to find a position within the family with which they can be satisfied (Bertogg and Szydlik 2016). Even if it seems adequate to break with family beliefs, they form an important foundation of behaving as an adult.

Therefore it is important to consider (early) family trauma as shaping vulnerabilities and capacities to trust for estimating the possibilities of a transition from school to work for EAs for whom experiences with poverty, parental divorce and neglect in their childhood left emotional scars which hinder them to transition smoothly into a career path after school. Not trusting other people or one's own abilities can lead to deficits in social behavior and place hurdles for succeeding in an apprenticeship or in establishing vocational contacts. The experience of being vulnerable as well as the capacity to trust is deeply rooted in the subjective feeling for a situation shaped by the conditions of socialization.

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