

Social Capital in Transition(s) to Early Adulthood: A Longitudinal and Mixed-Methods Approach

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Abstract

Social capital captures the value of relationships. Although research has examined social capital among adults, comparatively little attention has been paid to social capital among young adults—particularly from a longitudinal and mixed-methods perspective. As social capital predicts educational achievement, employment, and psychosocial well-being, it is an important construct to study alongside youth transition(s). Following a Bourdieusian approach, we define social capital as the resources potentially available in our ties that can be mobilized when necessary. To examine social capital in transition to adulthood, we draw on survey ($n = 1,650$, at ages 17 and 21) and interview ($n = 70$, at age 24) data from a cohort of Portuguese youth. We study the two main dimensions of social capital: bonding and bridging. Survey data were analyzed with latent class modeling, logistic regressions, and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, and interviews with thematic analysis. Findings show that respondents reported receiving more emotional

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support than financial support from their networks, but that both types of support increased over time. Perceived bonding and bridging also changed positively in transition to adulthood. In addition, gender and parental education predicted bonding and bridging. We contextualize these results with qualitative meanings and experiences of social capital.

Keywords

social capital, bonding, bridging, youth transitions, longitudinal studies, mixed methods

Introduction

Social capital captures the value of our relationships, representing the resources that can be drawn from our ties (Field, 2008). Those with higher levels of social capital have more socioeconomic prospects and are less likely to report psychological distress, low self-esteem, and poor health (Lin & Erickson, 2008; Song, 2011). Because of its impact on well-being, educational achievement, and social mobility, social capital has been a useful concept in youth and life course studies (Coleman, 1987; Holland, 2009). Yet, despite its potential role in youth development, research on social capital and youth transitions remains scant. There is also little longitudinal and mixed-methods research to offer both representative and granular data. To begin to address this gap, we combined survey data ($n = 1,650$) with semi-structured interviews ($n = 70$) from a Portuguese cohort study to examine how young people perceive, accrue, and mobilize social capital over time.

As there is no agreed-upon definition of social capital, we focus on the commonalities of different approaches: relationships and resources (Neves, 2013). In particular, we draw on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1980, 1986) to define social capital as *the resources that are embedded in social networks and can be mobilized when needed*. These resources include emotional support, shared identities, financial aid, help in finding a job, and so on. Because Bourdieu conceptualized social capital in relation to other capitals (cultural, economic, and symbolic) and in everyday life contexts (combining agency and structure, *habitus*, and field), his framework provides a dynamic understanding of relationships and resources (Allan, Catts, & Stelfox, 2012). For Bourdieu (1986), the production, reproduction, and mobilization of social capital occur within unequal social structures where dimensions such as social class and gender intertwine. In fact, higher accumulation of social capital is associated with being male and a member of the upper

classes (Lin & Erickson, 2008). Although social class has been central in social capital research, only a handful of studies have analyzed gender within this approach (Burt, 1998; Gozzo & D'Agata, 2010; McDonald & Mair, 2010). These show a gender-based social capital, reflecting social structures of power and privilege: Men have access to more diverse network resources, while women experience more network discontinuity due to life transitions (childbearing, career) and are more vulnerable to socioeconomic changes. This literature highlights the importance of gender as a structural dimension; however, a more intersectional viewpoint—one that considers different structural dimensions—could provide a deeper understanding of social capital. Research focusing on the interplay between social capital, structural dimensions, and human agency is lacking in youth studies. Our study aimed to unpack these multiple, interconnected layers.

Although social capital can account for these layers in capturing the quality of relationships, it is not without criticism. While not a new sociological concept, its recent popularity in social sciences to measure resources at various levels (individual, community, state) led to conceptual-analytical ambiguities as each discipline targeted different forms of social capital (Field, 2008; Portes, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Social capital research has also contributed to an agenda that prescribed conservatism (Coleman, 1987), romantic views of civic organizations (Putnam, 2000), and individual responsibility (MacBride, 2012). Accordingly, the concept has been criticized as a catchall or an ideological construct (Field, 2008; Portes, 2000). To overcome these criticisms, we provide a clear conceptualization of social capital and are critical of its use and effects (as suggested in Field, 2008; Portes, 2000). While social capital is typically seen as a public good, it can perpetuate inequalities and both enable and limit individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin & Erickson, 2008). It is from this critical perspective that we study the relationship between social capital and transitions to early adulthood, considering social capital at the individual level (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social Capital and Youth Transition(s)

Bonding and Bridging

Transitions to adulthood are a critical stage for development/adjustment of social networks, as marked by several changes including labor market entry, end/continuation of higher education, and so on (Pettit, Erath, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2011; Salmela-Aro, 2007). While some studies show that, in this stage, the influence of peers increases and the influence of parents decreases (Salmela-Aro, 2007), others have found that family ties are central

for young people in transition to adulthood (Catts & Allan, 2012). These different findings might be explained by circumstances such as family structures, peer group dynamics, or ethnic backgrounds, as context—alongside type of social networks—affects life course transitions (Bassani, 2007; MacBride, 2012). Social capital helps us understand these transitions by elucidating (a) how social networks make resources available to individuals; (b) how networks facilitate or hinder the use of those resources; and (c) how individual choices and practices affect the availability and mobilization of those resources (Catts & Allan, 2012; Holland, 2009; Raffo & Reeves, 2000; Seaman & Sweeting, 2004).

Despite variability in the measurement of social capital, literature focuses on two main dimensions: *bonding* and *bridging* (Catts & Allan, 2012; Holland, 2009). Bonding corresponds to the resources potentially available in strong ties such as close relatives and friends, whereas bridging relates to resources available in weak ties such as acquaintances or formal networks. Whereas bonding links people with similar backgrounds and identities (inward looking), bridging links to wider networks (outward looking). Thus, bonding social capital is usually associated with expressive resources, such as emotional support, while bridging social capital is typically linked with instrumental resources, such as help securing employment (Lin, 2001).

Bonding and bridging are often intertwined, but might affect young people differently depending on socioeconomic factors. For instance, Holland, Reynolds, and Weller (2007) showed that British middle-class youth had both strong bonding and bridging, whereas those from working classes seemed to have mostly bonding—and a type of bonding that perpetuated their social status. Holland's (2009) work in Northern Ireland further indicated that bonding among disadvantaged groups facilitated sectarian divisions and restrictive networks. Similarly, MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, and Simpson (2005) concluded that bonding reproduced social inequalities among British disadvantaged youth, while concurrently giving them psychosocial resources to cope with inequity and exclusion. This coping resource was visible among Caribbean young people in England, who relied on ethnic-specific bonding to access bridging networks (Holland et al., 2007). Although bonding (particularly family-based) can enhance or restrict wider connections, bridging accessed through family is vital for youth aspirations regardless of social class (Catts & Allan, 2012). As such, bonding continues to be the most accessed form of social capital by young people (Catts & Allan, 2012; Holland et al., 2007). Furthermore, Pettit et al.'s (2011) study confirmed that depth of close relationships with family and a best friend was associated with better adaptation to adulthood than breadth of friendships (i.e., number of ties).

Besides bonding and bridging, a few studies on social capital and youth (Catts & Allan, 2012) have explored a *linking* dimension, which refers to ties in authority positions or key institutions (Woolcock, 2001). Although never fully operationalized, it has been measured through group membership, civic engagement, and voting (Neves, 2013). Even in qualitative approaches, linking has been difficult to identify (Allan & Catts, 2012). Hence, we believe that bridging already taps into power differentials and formal networks. Finally, although civic engagement and trust have been used as additional dimensions of social capital (Coleman, 1987, 1988; Putnam, 2000), research warns that they are independent concepts (Catts & Allan, 2012; Neves, 2013; Lin, 2001). For example, social trust is a precursor or effect rather than a social capital dimension (Lin, 2001). Thus, conceptually and analytically, our study is based on bonding and bridging.

Contextualizing Social Capital: Connecting Structure and Agency

Notwithstanding different levels and outcomes of bonding and bridging among young people, research contradicts traditional assumptions about the loss of social capital in adolescence due to structural trends, particularly changing family forms, as suggested by James Coleman (1987; Holland, 2009). Seaman and Sweeting (2004) explored Coleman's (1987, 1988) assumptions regarding the role of families in young people's social capital, namely, the impact of single-parent households, parental work, siblings, and connections between parents from different families. They concluded that contrary to Coleman's postulations, single-parent households compensated for a lower number of adults through kin and nonkin support. It was not the family type, but low economic capital that restricted accumulation of social capital (Seaman & Sweeting, 2004). Networks of disadvantaged young people can offer educational or social opportunities, but cannot overcome insufficient economic resources (Catts & Allan, 2012). In addition, siblings did not reduce the social capital available to children; they were a resource for younger children and parents (Seaman & Sweeting, 2004). Seaman and Sweeting (2004), however, did find evidence of Coleman's (1987) "intergenerational closure," that is, networks that reinforce behaviors: For example, families agreed to monitor and sanction each other's children, reinforcing parenting values.

Also contrary to Coleman's communitarian/structural social capital, Raffo and Reeves's (2000) study of disadvantaged British youth demonstrated that networks are often individualized and managed through practices based on skills and knowledge. Networks are "individualized systems of social capital" (Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 148) that can either support or constrain individual

actions and practices, and are affected by structures such as locality, gender, class, and ethnicity. Social capital is shaped by both human agency and social structure. The authors describe four systems that include different levels of bonding and bridging: weak, strong, changing, and fluid. Weak systems comprise small networks, which do not provide sufficient practical knowledge (e.g., educational/professional advice) and have restricted access to resources. Strong systems provide some opportunities for practical knowledge and job opportunities, even if illegal or temporary positions. Changing systems include ties that change from weak to strong or vice versa, as well as a mix of different ties. Fluid systems are dynamic, flexible, and adapt to changing life paths. Individuals manage these systems according to their needs and skills (Raffo & Reeves, 2000). An example of this management is found in Bottrell's (2009) study with Australian girls: Although different friendships were central sources of social capital, their families were still essential, even when providing a mix of support and adversity. The girls relied on various networks for emotional support and practical help including housing or job applications, food vouchers, and so on. Gender was not a strong differential in their narratives; for instance, they often talked about close friendships with boys and referred to both girls and boys as "we." Ethnicity was also invisible in their discourses, but the author observed complex gender and ethnic identities framed by music, media, and youth activities. While their networks facilitated bonding and bridging, they also exposed them to illicit recreations and truancy—activities that they did not always internalize as negative, because it gave them identity and assets, despite reinforcing stereotypes of "problem youth" and leading to school alienation. When these girls felt excluded at school, they overrelied on bonding (Bottrell, 2009).

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the need to further understand (a) different dimensions of social capital (bonding and bridging) in youth transitions and (b) their interplay with social structures (family background, gender, education) and agency (choices and actions). Furthermore, though young people are sometimes described as active in social capital accrual, their perspectives are usually based on what they have received or captured through their families (Seaman & Sweeting, 2004). Hence, their agency and voices are still missing in the literature.

The Present Research

Bringing together social capital, structure, and agency, we used a mixed-methods design to examine how young people accrue, perceive, and mobilize their social capital over time. Studies on young adults' social capital are either cross-sectional or, if longitudinal, mostly based on one approach (qualitative

or quantitative). Moreover, the few quantitative longitudinal studies on the topic mainly measured social network composition (number of ties or network prestige) and not resources mobilization. Number of ties does not directly equate with resources or their mobilization (Pettit et al., 2011; Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2005). In a Bourdieusian framework, social capital is about quality, not quantity. To further explore transitional processes involved in social capital, we need life course perspectives and different methods to uncover the interplay between structural constraints and individual choices. We must also analyze social capital in its entirety by considering peer and formal networks, which are often overlooked (Bassani, 2007; Bottrell, 2009). The present research draws on a Portuguese cohort study that combines quantitative and qualitative data on access and mobilization of social capital to investigate socioeconomic characteristics, changes, and lived experiences related to bonding and bridging in transition to adulthood. As such, we asked the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which sociodemographic characteristics are associated with perceived bonding and bridging social capital at ages 17 and 21?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does perceived bonding and bridging social capital change in transition to early adulthood (17-21 years old)?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do young people describe and perceive their social capital considering their life transitions (at age 24)?

As social capital research has primarily been conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries, literature lacks insights from non-English-speaking countries (Bassani, 2007). Portugal is an appealing case, because while following similar sociodemographic trends to other southern European countries, it transitioned from being one of the European countries with the lowest rate of full-time female work (1960s) to having the highest full-time female labor-force participation (Torres, 2008). This, combined with other trends (e.g., rise of out-of-wedlock births and divorce rates, legalization of same-sex marriage), challenges the label of a “familialistic” country (Torres, 2008; Torres, Coelho, & Cabrita, 2013). Despite changes to family and gender laws in the last 15 years, Portuguese families still play a chief role in welfare provision—contributing, in turn, to gender inequalities regarding work-life balance and unpaid work (Torres, 2008; Amaro & Neves, 2016). Recently, the Portuguese financial crisis (2010-2014) and austerity programs may have reinforced the function of social capital. Portugal, therefore, offers a potentially fruitful context for bonding (due to importance of family networks), bridging

(considering labor market participation and socioeconomic circumstances), and their interplay.

Method

Design and Data

We used data collected as part of the *Epidemiological Health Investigation of Teenagers in Porto* (EPIteen) cohort study, which recruited 13-year-old adolescents born in 1990 and enrolled in public and private schools of Porto, Portugal, during 2003-2004 (see Ramos & Barros, 2007; Araújo, Severo, Barros, & Ramos, 2017). At that time, school education was compulsory until Grade 9, so we expected all 13-year-old adolescents to be enrolled, enabling a representative sample (Ramos & Barros, 2007). At recruitment, 2,159 eligible adolescents agreed to participate (78%). In the second wave (2007-2008), when they were on average 17 years old, we surveyed 1,716 participants (78%) plus 783 adolescents who had moved to schools in Porto. In the third wave (2011-2013), we studied 1,764 participants aged 21 (60%). A fourth wave (2014-2015) was conducted when participants were 24 years old. Data were comprised of self-administered questionnaires, including information on individual and family health history, well-being, and behavioral and sociodemographic characteristics (Araújo et al., 2017). Questions about social capital were only introduced in the second wave (age 17). Semistructured interviews were introduced in the fourth wave to complement the questionnaires. Although questionnaire data from Wave 4 were not yet available for analysis, interview data were available and used for the qualitative analysis presented herein. The interviews were conducted with a socially diverse subgroup of the cohort, selected to represent different educational paths ($n = 70$). Interviews lasted on average 60 minutes, and asked about social networks, education, work, living arrangements, and aspirations. In this article, we present survey results of respondents who participated in both the second and third waves (ages 17 and 21, $n = 1,650$) as these are the only available waves with social capital indicators. When applicable, we also used independent variables from Wave 1 (age 13) to account for possible changes over time. The interview results (Wave 4) are then presented to allow an in-depth understanding of accrual, perceptions, and mobilization of social capital. A research ethics board (REB) approved the study and data confidentiality and protection were guaranteed. Participants received written and verbal information explaining the study's purpose and signed a consent form. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by social scientists trained to engage with vulnerable populations beyond formal REB requirements, which proved crucial when discussing potentially distressing issues.

Porto and the Portuguese Context

Data were collected in Porto, the second-largest Portuguese city and fourth most populated area (INE, 2012). Portugal has 10 million inhabitants, of which 237,591 live in Porto (INE, 2012). In the 2011 census, people aged 15-24 represented 10.9% of the Portuguese population (INE, 2012) and 10.5% of the Porto population (INE, 2012). Between 2001 and 2011, the number of families in Portugal increased but their size diminished (INE, 2012). In 2011, we saw an increase of single-person households (21% of Portuguese families), monoparental families (12%), and families without children (28%; INE, 2012). Portugal was globally characterized by low educational attainment, which has significantly changed in the last two decades (Conselho Nacional da Educação [CNE], 2014). In 2011, of those aged 18-24, 22% completed 9 years of schooling (decreasing from 32% in 2001); of those aged 20-24, 61% completed at least secondary school education (increasing from 44% in 2001; INE, 2012). Amplified by the recent financial crisis, young people struggle to enter the labor market: In 2011, 20% of the active young population was unemployed (Vieira, Ferreira, & Rowland, 2015).

Participants

Table 1 presents the characteristics of our sample. Fifty-two percent of participants identified as female. At age 17, approximately a third (32%) of participants had been retained at school (grade repetition) at least once. At age 21, 7% had less than secondary education, 26% had secondary education, and 66% had higher education. At age 13, 80% lived with their parents, which slightly decreased at age 17 (78%). At 21, most participants were studying (64%), single (94%), and living with one of their parents (92%). More than a third of the households had a monthly income of 1,550 to 3,000 euros. Parents had an average educational background of 10 years of schooling, that is, incomplete secondary education. Most parents were employed during the three waves.

Measures

To measure bonding, we used indicators of informal social capital about economic and emotional support from strong ties (“Do you receive economic support from family, friends, or neighbors?” and “Do you receive emotional support from family, friends, or neighbors?”), answered on a 4-point scale from *never* to *often*. Although these questions were designed and administered to capture strong ties, they aggregate different social ties, limiting a

Table 1. Sociodemographics of Participants Aged 17 and 21 (% , $n = 1,650$).

Gender (female)	52.0
Living with father and mother (age 13, used in regression models)	80.3
Living with father and mother (age 17)	78.1
Number of household members (age 17) (<i>M</i>)	3.9
Up to 2	6.7
3-4	71.3
5+	22.3
Working mother (age 17)	79.9
Working father (age 17)	85.9
Working mother (age 21)	69.8
Working father (age 21)	76.1
Mother's years of schooling (age 17) (<i>M</i>)	10.3
Less than secondary education	47.9
Secondary education	25.6
Higher education	26.5
Father's years of schooling (age 17) (<i>M</i>)	10.2
Less than secondary education	48.4
Secondary education	27.0
Higher education	24.6
Mother's marital status (age 17)	
Married/de facto	82.5
Single	3.0
Divorced/separated	12.2
Widow	2.3
Father's marital status (age 17)	
Married/de facto	86.9
Single	1.1
Divorced/separated	11.7
Widow	0.4
Years of schooling (age 21) (<i>M</i>)	13.4
Less than secondary education	7.5
Secondary education	26.2
Higher education	66.3
Marital status (age 21) (single)	95.4
Employment status (age 21)	
Employed	21.0
Unemployed	12.9
Studying	64.2
Household composition (age 21)	
Living alone	0.8
Living with parents (mother or father)	89.6
Living with partner	4.2
Household income (age 21)	
Up to 1,000€	22.0
1,001-3,000€	60.7
+3,000€	17.3

comprehensive analysis. However, benefiting from our mixed-methods approach, we address these limitations by drawing on qualitative data to provide an in-depth exploration of different ties. To measure bridging, we used indicators of formal social capital based on similar questions about economic and emotional support (“Do you receive economic support from institutions?” and “Do you receive emotional support from institutions?”), also answered on a 4-point scale from *never* to *often*. “Institutions” referred to public institutions and/or charity organizations, including government, schools, private welfare organizations, and so on. These indicators were combined to estimate bonding (aggregating the two questions on emotional and economic support from strong ties) and bridging (aggregating the two questions on emotional and economic support from formal/weak ties) with latent class modeling. The survey did not ask about acquaintances; hence, our bridging dimension is restricted to institutional/collective weak ties. Bonding and bridging are our dependent variables.

Our independent variables are sociodemographic factors, collected from three waves:

At age 13: living with both parents and parental education (years). These variables were used to account for possible effects on later levels of social capital.

At age 17: gender, parental education (years), number of household members, living with both parents, working mother, working father, parents’ marital status, and school retention.

At age 21: years of schooling, marital status, employment status, household income, parental education (years), and household composition.

Analytical Procedures

To analyze survey data, we ran descriptive and multivariate analyses using SPSS 21. Firstly, to identify underlying or latent dimensions of social capital, we used latent class models (LCMs) with Latent Gold 3 to estimate bonding and bridging by combining a set of observed indicators. LCM is a robust cluster technique to compute these dimensions, as it considers that responses to conceptually linked questions are latently associated. In addition, LCM does not rely on conventional modeling assumptions (e.g., homogeneity) and works with mixed variables (Neves & Fonseca, 2015). LCM identifies the number of latent classes that best account for response patterns in the observed indicators, and assigns respondents according to their greatest posterior probability of class membership. Secondly, we ran binomial and ordinal logistic regression models to test the association between sociodemographics (independent variable) and the latent variables of bonding and bridging social capital (dependent

variable). As we encountered limitations with Hessian matrices when testing bonding with multinomial logistic regression, we used ordinal regression. The Hessian matrix guides data convergence—when the likelihood maximization algorithm fails to converge, the matrix is rendered singular. When the Hessian matrix is singular, we cannot be certain of the regression goodness-of-fit. This is a common challenge when estimating multinomial logistic models and a result of data patterns; other models, such as ordinal, seem more stable in similar situations (Allison, 2008; Neves & Fonseca, 2015). LCM estimated a bonding variable with ordered categories (low, medium, and high), and the ordinal models preserved that order. But bridging was tested using binomial logistic models because it was estimated as a simpler dichotomous variable (low or high; RQ1). Finally, we used Wilcoxon signed-rank tests to compare differences in social capital at ages 17 and 21 (RQ2).

To analyze interview data, we employed thematic analysis to identify patterns (i.e., themes) within and across interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010). This is a flexible method that supports a rich overall description of interview datasets, inductive and deductive approaches, and a contextualist perspective that is not theoretically bound (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Horrocks, 2010). It acknowledges “the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). Themes were identified based on which/how ties influenced school, professional, and personal lives of interviewees. We also coded key moments of need or when assistance was given to others. The analysis considered type of ties (family, friends, acquaintances, or institutions) as well as levels of support (e.g., motivation, advice, role modeling, value orientation, and provision of opportunities) and their direction (received or given by participants). Themes were coded inductively (identified from the data) and deductively (based on social capital categories). Although we report thematically on the overall interviews, in this article, we use a case study approach to present in-depth material from five participants. This provides a nuanced account of themes and contexts, adding to the thematic description of the 70 interviews. Case studies also help overcome a recurrent challenge with thematic analysis, namely sense of continuity and contradiction within individual narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, we were able to flesh out and contextualize cases to capture the interplay of agency and structure—often missed, as young people are seen as mere recipients of social capital. We selected five cases that thoroughly represent the main themes found in the interviews, while displaying rich “networks of individualized social capital” (Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 148). They illustrate how different social contexts and general themes (family support, friendships,

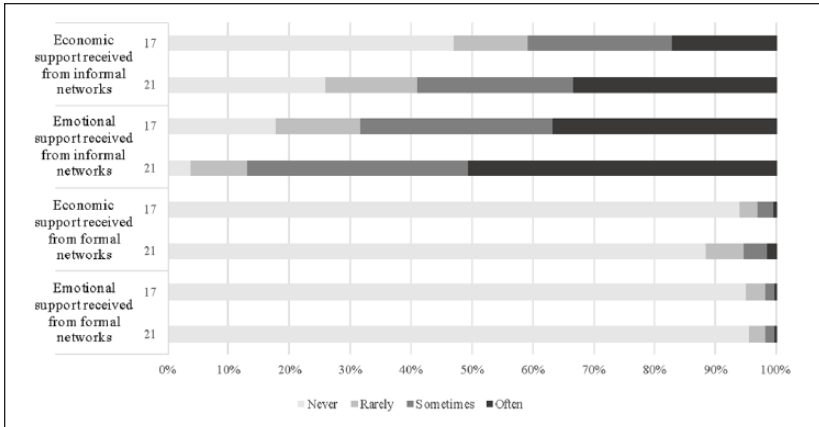


Figure 1. Frequency of social capital indicators (% , n = 1,650).

significant adults, role models, bridges, institutional support, life transitions, resources, and reciprocity) affect perceptions of social capital. Main themes and illustrative cases were identified and analyzed by the first and second author, who coded independently and then collectively tested for convergence (King & Horrocks, 2010). These data address RQ3, illustrate examples of accrual and mobilization of social capital, and help tackle limitations of the quantitative questions in relation to types of ties and embedded resources.

Results

Survey

Descriptive results. Participants reported receiving more support from their informal networks (family, friends, and neighbors) than from formal networks (institutions and organizations). Most responded “never” having received economic or emotional support from institutions at ages 17 and 21 (see Figure 1). Not having received formal support was higher for emotional support at 17 and 21 (95%, respectively) than for economic support (94% and 88%, respectively). Descriptively, economic formal support increased from 17 to 21 years old; formal emotional support showed no clear trend. By contrast, participants reported receiving more emotional than economic support from informal networks. However, both increased from 17 to 21 years old: 87% indicated having received emotional informal support (often or sometimes) at 21 compared with 68% at 17; 59% reported receiving economic support at 21 compared with 41% at 17.

Table 2. LCM Parameters for Bonding and Bridging ($n = 1,436$).

	Bonding 17			Bonding 21			Bridging 17		Bridging 21	
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 1	Class 2	Class 1	Class 2
	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Class size	0.6148	0.213	0.1723	0.7095	0.2449	0.0457	0.9027	0.0973	0.7474	0.2526
Economic support										
Never	0.4684	0.9867	0.0073	0.3007	0.0033	0.8928	0.997	0.2991	0.9979	0.5463
Rarely	0.1724	0.0126	0.0223	0.2035	0.016	0.0871	0.0016	0.3369	0.0021	0.2309
Sometimes	0.2833	0.0007	0.3021	0.2978	0.1693	0.0184	0.0013	0.2882	0	0.1612
Often	0.0758	0	0.6683	0.198	0.8114	0.0018	0.0001	0.0758	0	0.0616
Emotional support										
Never	0.0522	0.6833	0.0001	0.006	0	0.6366	0.9929	0.4956	0.9995	0.8142
Rarely	0.1535	0.2296	0.0028	0.1131	0.0004	0.3248	0.0068	0.2931	0.0005	0.1123
Sometimes	0.474	0.0809	0.1067	0.4884	0.0438	0.0378	0.0001	0.1747	0	0.0545
Often	0.3203	0.0062	0.8904	0.3925	0.9558	0.0008	0.0002	0.0366	0	0.019

Note. The entries in bold refer to the categories that best characterize each class. LCM = latent class models.

Estimating bonding and bridging. Using latent class modeling, the bonding indicators (financial and emotional support from strong ties) at ages 17 and 21 estimated a three-class bonding social capital (low, medium, and high), whereas the bridging indicators (financial and emotional support from institutions) estimated a two-class bridging social capital (low and high). After defining the optimal number of classes (with Akaike information criterion [AIC] and Bayesian information criterion [BIC] criteria), LCM fit the data into those classes pointing to different levels of bonding and bridging at ages 17 and 21 (see Table 2). Table 2 shows ordinary and conditional probabilities. The ordinary correspond to the probabilities of belonging to each class. For instance, in bonding at 17, the first class corresponds to 61%, the second to 21%, and the third to 17%. The conditional probabilities provide the profile of our variables: For instance, .4684, .9867, and .0073 are the probabilities of “never” having received economic support given that the individual belongs to Classes 1, 2, or 3, respectively. Because .9867 is higher than any of the other values, “never” is a characteristic of Class 2. The distribution of conditional probabilities in different classes points to visible patterns: For bonding, the first class matches a medium level; the second class matches a low level; and the third class a high level (see Table 2).

Differences in perceived bonding and bridging: Association with sociodemographics. Logistic results show that only gender and parental education are significant predictors of bonding at age 17 (see Table 3). At this age, girls are

Table 3. Ordinal Regression Model of Bonding 17.

Variables in the Equation (Cauchit)	Estimate	SE	Wald	df	Significance
Threshold					
[Bonding17 = Low]	-3.857	5.228	.544	1	.461
[Bonding17 = Medium]	0.712	5.217	.019	1	.891
Location					
[Gender = 0]	-.504	.230	4.812	1	.028
[Gender = 1]	0			0	
[EducationFather = 4]	-2.021	.714	8.012	1	.005
[EducationFather = 6]	-1.565	.740	4.470	1	.034
[EducationFather = 7]	-2.228	.836	7.095	1	.008
[EducationFather = 9]	-1.499	.671	4.984	1	.026
[EducationFather = 11]	-1.527	.713	4.591	1	.032
[EducationFather = 12]	-1.394	.614	5.163	1	.023
[EducationFather = 16]	-1.726	.878	3.860	1	.049
[EducationFather = 17]	-1.432	.633	5.115	1	.024
[EducationFather = 18]	0			0	
[EducationMother = 15]	2.421	.965	6.297	1	.012
[EducationMother = 16]	2.699	.893	9.126	1	.003
[EducationMother = 17]	2.510	.863	8.457	1	.004
[EducationMother = 18]	0			0	

Note. Adjusted ordinal model: $-\ln(-\ln(P(Y \leq k)) = \alpha_k - (-0.504 \text{ Gender} + -2.021 \text{ EduFather} + -1.565 \text{ EduFather} + -2.228 \text{ EduFather} + -1.499 \text{ EduFather} + -1.527 \text{ EduFather} + -1.394 \text{ EduFather} + -1.726 \text{ EduFather} + -1.432 \text{ EduFather} + 2.421 \text{ EduMother} + 2.699 \text{ EduMother} + 2.510 \text{ EduMother})$.

$G^2(49) = 102.342; p \leq .001; R_N^2 = .183; R_{CS}^2 = .183$.

significantly less likely to have a high level of bonding ($p < .05$), although this gender difference changes at 21. Both the mother’s and father’s level of education at 17 are associated with bonding, although in opposite directions. Young people are more likely to have a high level of bonding when mothers have between 15 and 17 years of schooling compared with 18 years of schooling. However, there is a higher probability for high bonding when fathers have 18 years of schooling compared with 16 or 17 years of schooling (or less).

Similarly, at age 21, gender, level of education, and parental education are significantly associated with bonding (see Table 4). Contrary to late adolescence, girls are now more likely to have a high level of bonding ($p < .01$). The probability of high bonding ($p \leq .001$) increases with educational levels, as well as with mothers’ ($p < .05$) and fathers’ ($p < .01$) education.

Table 4. Ordinal Estimates of Bonding 21.

Variables in the equation (Complementary log-log)	Estimate	SE	Wald	df	Significance
Threshold					
[Bonding 21 = Low]	-1.068	.547	3.817	1	.051
[Bonding 21 = Medium]	2.855	.537	28.248	1	.000
Location					
Father's education 21 (years)	.032	.012	7.740	1	.005
Mother's education 21 (years)	.023	.012	3.987	1	.046
Education (years)	.111	.028	16.151	1	.000
[Gender = 0]	.200	.072	7.644	1	.006
[Gender = 1]	0			0	

Note. Adjusted ordinal model: $-\ln(-\ln(P(Y \leq k)) = \alpha_k - (0.032\text{EduFatherYears} + 0.023\text{EduMotherYears} + 0.111\text{Edu} + -0.200\text{Gender})$.
 $G^2(9) = 1510.130$; $p \leq .001$; $R_N^2 = .127$; $R_{CS}^2 = .100$.

Table 5. Binomial Regression Models of Bridging at 17 and 21.

Variables in the equation (LR: Forward)	B	SE	Wald	df	Significance	Exp(B)
Bridging (17)^a						
Occupation mother—Inactive	.936	.385	5.921	1	.015	2.550
Lived with both parents at 13	.906	.421	4.624	1	.032	2.474
Constant	-2.983	.239	155.616	1	.000	.051
Bridging (21)^b						
Gender	-.620	.119	27.079	1	.000	.538
Mother's schooling (number of years)	-.080	.013	37.780	1	.000	.923
Constant	2.092	.459	20.816	1	.000	8.101

LR=Likelihood Ratio.

^a $\chi^2(2) = 10.367$, $p = .006$; $\chi^2_{HL}(1) = 0.004$, $p = .948$; $R_N^2 = 53\%$, $R_{CS}^2 = 21\%$; model classified correctly 93% of cases.

^b $\chi^2(2) = 61.209$, $p \leq .001$; $\chi^2_{HL}(8) = 11.017$, $p = .201$; $R_N^2 = 66\%$, $R_{CS}^2 = 49\%$; model classified correctly 60% of cases.

Regarding bridging, participants who did not live with both parents at age 13 ($p < .05$) or who had a professionally inactive mother ($p < .05$) were more likely to have a high level of bridging at 17 (see Table 5). At 21, boys

were more likely to have high bridging ($p \leq .001$). In addition, mothers' higher educational levels decreased the odds of higher bridging ($p \leq .001$).

Does social capital change over time?

Emotional and instrumental support. Emotional support received from informal networks (i.e., relatives, friends, and neighbors) changed significantly in transition to adulthood (17-21 years old), according to Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: $Z = -14.905$, $p \leq .001$. The median frequency score changed from "sometimes" to "a lot of times." However, there was no significant change over time for emotional support received from formal networks (i.e., institutions): $Z = -0.317$, $p = .751$. Regarding instrumental resources, 4 years elicited a significant change in economic support from informal networks: $Z = -13.223$, $p \leq .001$. The median frequency changed from "rarely" to "sometimes." There were also significant changes in economic support received from formal networks ($Z = -4.904$, $p \leq .001$), although the median frequency remained low: "never" to "rarely."

Bonding and bridging. As we cannot quantify the difference between high and other levels, the variables bonding and bridging estimated with LCM were treated as ordinal. Thus, we also used Wilcoxon signed-rank tests to compare scores at ages 17 and 21, considering the 1,436 cases estimated by LCM. Bonding changed significantly in transition to adulthood ($Z = -12.962$, $p \leq .001$), although the median and the 75th percentile show a medium level of bonding. Mean rank changed from 1.97 to 2.22, pointing to an increase (this should be interpreted with caution due to the ordinal variable). Bridging also increased in 4 years ($Z = -21.944$, $p \leq 0.001$). While the median level was similar (low), the 75th percentile changed from low to high.

Interviews: Voices of Young People on Social Capital and Life Transition(s)

The interviews addressed descriptions and perceptions of social capital (RQ3). In particular, we explored how interviewees accessed and mobilized social capital in transition(s) to early adulthood and the meanings attributed to different ties (the latter to overcome some limitations of the quantitative data). The overall results are illustrated with five case studies (using pseudonyms) that show general themes of bonding and bridging, including types of ties, support, and resources. Filipa's story indicates the centrality of family bonding and institutional bridging to navigate adolescence and early adulthood; Paulo shows the importance of bonding through friends when family support is lacking; Julia experiences how bridging can lead to bonding; Alice

exemplifies the relevance of significant adults (nonkin); and Rui demonstrates the weight of bridging and how bonding can lead to bridging. These cases also show rich and diverse combinations of agency, structure, and context in the accrual and subjective effects of social capital over time. The themes and the cases are presented together, following our inclusive approach to the qualitative data.

Two thirds of the 70 interviewees highlighted the importance of family support, particularly of parents, for their personal, academic, and professional trajectories. Parents were a source of motivation and aid during school years, and offered guidance and practical help (e.g., finding and securing employment) during transitions to the labor market. Interviewees ($n = 40$) also identified other family, friends, and romantic partners as ties supporting careers, often acting as role models or bridges. Finally, interviewees ($n = 26$) talked about institutions in their trajectories: Some emphasized the role of schools in networking opportunities (meeting people) and personal development; others described cultural organizations as a source of networking and of expanding interests and skills.

Filipa is an example of the relevance of bonding through her family network and bridging through institutions. She also shows the interplay between bonding and bridging, which is hard to capture in quantitative approaches and often underexplored in social capital research. Filipa had recently finished her engineering degree when interviewed, and talked extensively about family support throughout her life trajectory. Her mother (a store manager with secondary education) assisted her in an international university exchange, her father (a cook with secondary education) supported her internship abroad, and her brother was helping with career decisions. In addition, Filipa emphasized the importance of institutions, namely a Scouts group and dance company. These allowed access to a vast network of acquaintances and resources that led to bonding: "I always had one or two organizations, which then became a group of friends who have a lot of influence on decisions." When she was having problems with her romantic partner, she sought advice from her Scouting friends. Filipa's story highlights not only how bridging can lead to bonding, but also how institutional and individual ties are perceived differently. Globally, institutions were mentioned as a collective tie that provided general and tangible support (e.g., access to new contacts), whereas individual ties, who were part of those organizations, were named (e.g., friends or a teacher) and related to more specific and detailed support. As with the majority of interviewees, Filipa remarked on reciprocity: on how she too helped friends and family.

Participants ($n = 41$) also highlighted the role of friends and peer groups, while acknowledging their ambivalent influence. Friends who excelled at school encouraged learning, whereas others led to "distractions" such as

smoking. When transitioning from high school to university, close friendships meant assistance and identity. When family support was lacking or deemed insufficient, friends were the source of bonding, as seen in one tenth of interviewees and in the cases of Paulo (a graduate without employment) and Julia (an intern with a MA degree).

Paulo emphasized the motivational support of close friends for his studies and career. His father worked in a restaurant, having primary-level education, and his mother in hospitality, having secondary-level education. He talked extensively about how friends helped overcome personal issues. These were emotionally described during the interview, relating to domestic violence he witnessed at home. To cope, he initially counted on relatives but then developed a network of close friends from high school and university. Paulo's case shows how family networks can be a mix of aid and oppression. It also illustrates how young people accrue and negotiate bonding networks and how social capital can increase in transition to adulthood, namely when new ties become available:

largely due to them (friends), they helped me to integrate . . . these people helped me to overcome barriers that I needed to overcome, and it was good because I improved a lot.

Julia compensated for a lack of family support with other informal and formal connections. Her parents had a negative influence on her academic trajectory, as they did not encourage her studies:

If I didn't have that pressure [to work and help at home] maybe I would've applied for a PhD scholarship, a research scholarship . . . I would've taken a different route, but as I had this pressure to help out my father I ended up having to get a job . . .

Her father was a construction worker and her mother was a homemaker (primary-level education). Julia felt more understood by friends, who assisted with work and school. But Julia also highlighted formal ties: A youth center allowed her to meet people and develop skills that helped deal with her shyness. Julia also alluded to academic support she received to secure scholarships.

Regarding bridging, besides general institutional/formal support, one tenth of the interviewees talked about a special teacher who inspired new interests and was critical for educational and professional paths. Some also mentioned acquaintances as examples of what to and not to follow. Alice (MA student) exemplifies the bridging of *significant adults* (nonfamily) in

her description of high bonding: Her family and a friend greatly influenced her academic life. Another friend gave her a job in a cafe, enabling her to gain experience in hospitality. Her parents worked in retail; her mother was a store manager, and father a salesperson (secondary-level education). Friends and her boyfriend were instrumental after her grandmother's death. Although Alice's life story is an instance of high levels of bonding, she also discussed bridging and a teacher's influence:

I had a teacher who ended up helping me a lot. Through her I discovered a professional field, engraving, which I had no passion for and suddenly I discovered it and that was what I really liked to do and she helped me . . .

Experiences in institutions were portrayed as part of personal and professional growth: For example, the time she spent in a hospital with her grandmother kindled her interest in medicine.

Ten interviewees were conscious of the significance of networking and of knowing the right people for professional opportunities. For instance, Rui, a musician, illustrates the centrality of selective networking and how connections are established and maintained. His privileged background facilitated social capital. His parents, both arts graduates, influenced him to embrace the arts. He felt that his schoolmates' aspirations were unappealing, and in his family, theater company found jobs, connections, and a general appreciation for culture. His strong ties were mainly people from his professional field who helped bridge work opportunities, which shows how bonding leads to bridging. Rui also described weak ties as crucial for his professional life:

In these matters, especially of lineups, concerts, and productions, there are people with influence, with whom we usually not even talk to, and which are decisive in even knowing if we will work in a place or not . . .

Discussion

Benefiting from our mixed-methods approach, we integrate the qualitative and quantitative data in this discussion to provide a richer understanding of social capital and youth transitions.

Contextualizing Social Capital

Our survey results indicated that bonding and bridging were strongly associated with gender and parental education. Girls were less likely to have high bonding at age 17 and bridging at 21, but more likely to have high bonding at

21. This confirms a gender-based social capital (Burt, 1998). In the literature, being an adult female is associated with bonding while being male with bridging (Gozzo & D'Agata, 2010). We can hypothesize that, on one hand, girls at age 17 may be still negotiating close networks, whereas at 21 networks and resources are more consolidated. On the other hand, girls might need to mobilize bonding more often at 21 than at 17, be more aware of it, or both. Boys were more likely to have bonding at 17, which may relate to need for support during high school due to lower educational attainment and higher probability of risk behavior (Torres et al., 2015). Their odds of higher bridging at 21 can be explained by access to a wider network—in this case to institutional ties and resources. Contrary to our quantitative data, gender differences were not central in participants' narratives. Bottrell (2009) also found this gender invisibility. This invisibility might be an outcome of structured inequalities that obscure gender as a key dimension in young people's lives (McDonald & Mair, 2010).

Overall, those with highly educated parents were more likely to have higher bonding social capital—results that stress the links between social, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These parents may be in a better position to support and grasp their children's aspirations and achievements. Parents are, frequently, the main source of bonding (Catts & Allan, 2012). Quantitative data showed that although parents' education predicts bonding and bridging, they act differently: The odds of a high level of bonding at age 17 increased when mothers had a bachelor's or honors' degree compared with a master's or PhD (contrary to fathers). At 21, the likelihood of high bonding was associated with higher schooling of both parents. Perhaps highly educated mothers are more time-constrained than fathers in providing bonding to late adolescents. Research shows that women in industrialized countries experience a disproportionate division of household labor even in dual-earner households, often struggling with work-life balance (Torres et al., 2013). Interestingly, only mothers' education was associated with bridging, and negatively: Higher levels of education decreased the odds of higher bridging at 21. Because we measured formal bridging (i.e., support from institutions), mothers with lower education levels might need to mobilize this type of support to assist their children. This can also explain why having a professionally inactive mother increased bridging at 17. Not living with both parents at age 13 was positively associated with bridging at 17—these participants probably required more formal support.

Moreover, interviews also highlighted the importance of parents in life transitions. Yet, parental bonding both facilitates and constrains: It not only provides emotional and material support and opportunities, such as in the case of Rui, Filipa, and Alice, but also restricts prospects and well-being, such as in Julia and Paulo's examples. This ambivalent role of parents was

also found by Holland et al. (2007). What is unique about our findings, however, is how young people try to actively negotiate (successfully or not) those antagonistic forces and forge different ties (from friends to teachers, from individual to institutional) as buffering mechanisms.

The significance of education, gender, and parental education for social capital suggests cumulative and intricate social advantages that can contribute to production and reproduction of social inequalities in the life course (Merton, 1968; Rossiter, 1993). At age 21, participants' education was also associated with bonding—Those more highly educated were more likely to have high bonding. In brief, bonding was positively associated with parental education; education was positively associated with bridging at 21, and boys were better off at 17 (bonding and bridging) and 21 (bridging) while girls at 21 (bonding). Bonding is the principal source of social support, but bridging is an influential resource for instrumental actions, particularly in the labor market (Granovetter, 1974). Even if girls benefited more from bonding at 21, boys have greater odds of accessing diverse networks/resources and tend to experience more continuity in their networks as adults, which can determine labor market integration (McDonald & Mair, 2010). Although those with higher levels of economic and cultural capital have higher levels of social capital (Lin & Erickson, 2008), social capital can also be a form of social resilience as in the case of bridging: Professionally inactive mothers and those with low levels of education predicted higher (institutional) bridging. Parents' education or occupation, and subsequently social class, can mean accessing and mobilizing distinctive types of social capital that can have different effects on social status and mobility. Perhaps because of this, and contrary to what was expected, household income was not statistically significant in relation to either bonding or bridging.

Analyzing Social Capital Over Time

The survey findings suggest that expressive resources (e.g., emotional support) are more available and mobilized by young people than instrumental resources (e.g., financial support) in transition to early adulthood. Yet, both resources increased significantly over time. Likewise, perceived bonding and bridging also changed over time, although our mixed data captured that bonding was more present in participants' lives. These results are consistent with studies reporting that bonding is accessed more than bridging in adolescence and young adulthood (Catts & Allan, 2012). We could argue that young adults need to mobilize more of their social capital when transitioning from late adolescence to early adulthood, due to life changes that require growing emotional and financial support, such as leaving university or entering the labor market.

However, our participants might have been more aware of their social capital at age 21 than at 17. It could also be a mix of increased awareness and necessity. In addition, our bridging variable is restricted to institutional/collective ties, limiting our analysis of a broad bridging dimension that would include acquaintances (despite the challenges of mapping weak ties). In fact, our qualitative data suggest that bridging may be underreported in the survey because, first, interviewees mostly talked about institutions (clubs, churches, etc.) as a useful source of networking and general assistance, which did not seem to be understood as emotional or financial support (as asked in the survey) but as tangible or “practical” resources (e.g., information) and, second, the survey asked about public institutions or charity organizations, and the latter might have been seen as stigmatizing, thus affecting responses. But it was clear in the interviews that institutions were perceived differently from individual ties associated with institutions, such as teachers or new friends. Institutions were referred to as collective ties and provided general support, whereas individual ties associated with/resulting from institutions were named and linked to specific support.

Furthermore, we were able to capture the interplay of bonding and bridging over time. Although the literature suggests that bonding can help bridge networks in adolescence and early adulthood (Holland et al., 2007), in our qualitative data, the opposite was also true. Bonding facilitated bridging, as seen in the various accounts of our interviewees, but through institutions or bridging, most interviewees accessed new ties that became close friends. Although bonding is mostly connected with strong ties and bridging with weak ties (Neves, 2013, 2015; Lin & Erickson, 2008), interviews showed that strong ties can provide bridging and weak ties can provide bonding. This interplay may be more prominent in societies that combine high labor market participation with a core role of families in welfare provision, as in Portugal, which brings together socioeconomic factors of southern and northern European regions (Torres, 2008; Amaro & Neves, 2016). Alternatively, it may be a form of resilience in specific socioeconomic circumstances (e.g., during financial crises).

Finally, although “networks of individualized social capital” (Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 148) are observable across interviewees, we cannot isolate groups of weak, strong, changing, or fluid social capital; rather, participants portray networks of social capital that include simultaneously weak, strong, changing, and fluid systems, particularly when talking about life transitions and the circumstances of their childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. This variety emphasizes the importance of analytical approaches that contextualize social capital and its structural and agentic dimensions, such as a Bourdieusian and a life course perspective (McDonald & Mair, 2010).

In sum, this article adds to our understanding of social capital and youth transitions by confirming the higher mobilization (or awareness of mobilization) of expressive resources and bonding from late adolescence to early adulthood (Catts & Allan, 2012). In addition, it shows the importance of education and gender for both bonding and bridging, illustrating accumulated advantage and social stratification—which is central knowledge for a critical perspective on social capital and its potential effects (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin & Erickson, 2008). But data also demonstrate that social capital can be a form of social resilience for working classes. Lastly, it highlights the agency of young people in negotiating social capital over time as well as its interplay with structure.

Conclusion

Taken together, our findings show the relevance of social capital in transition(s) to early adulthood and how it is mobilized and construed over time—adding to the scant longitudinal and mixed-methods research on youth and social capital. We also contribute to social capital research with data that fleshed out how resources are seen, accrued, and used by young people in different life stages. In particular, our study demonstrates the intricate relationship between bonding and bridging, suggesting the need to develop instruments to capture its pathways. Results also bring to the forefront the agency of young people in trying to manage their social capital and its ambivalent resources for personal (psychosocial) and professional (academic and nonacademic) purposes.

Limitations

As common in longitudinal studies, we were limited by attrition. In our study, loss to follow-up tended to be differential and found in relation to parents' education: Participants from highly educated families were more likely to drop out. Despite the representative sample, attrition bias might have affected our results; as parental education was a predictor of social capital (suggesting social inequality in access and mobilization of resources), the associations found may be underestimated. We were also limited by a cohort that was not representative of young Portuguese people, and by restricted quantitative indicators such as an all-too inclusive bonding and a formal bridging. We tried to overcome the latter with qualitative data. Extra variables on bonding and bridging, namely the resources generator (Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2005), would have broadened and deepened our findings. To ensure we were capturing participants' voices, we combined methods to analyze the interviews by

focusing on general patterns (thematic analysis) and on personal and nuanced accounts (case studies). The underlying goal of empowering young people by displaying their perceptions and aspirations was a guiding ethical and axiological concern. Yet, even qualitative research “cast through voices” can expose participants to sensitive issues and “involves carving out . . . evidence that we select and deploy to border our arguments” (Fine, 1992, p. 218). Having qualitative interviews in each wave would have allowed for a wider “giving voice” approach. Finally, more research is needed to examine factors that contribute to the gender and educational patterns identified in this study. Exploring psychosocial abilities and personality traits to mobilize resources could also expand our understanding of social capital and youth.

Implications

Findings are valuable for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers working with adolescents and young adults on social inclusion, social skills development, and relationship education. Firstly, recognizing the link between social capital and inequality gives us another avenue to tackle intersectional forms of inequity that affect individuals across the life course (e.g., gender, social class). Secondly, as social capital emerged as a critical element in transitions to adulthood, understanding its accrual, negotiation, and mobilization is essential to support successful transitions. This research can inform efforts to promote inclusive forms of social capital within educational and professional contexts. For instance, schools can create networking activities that (a) support positive bonding and develop wider bridging (e.g., exchanges, peer mentoring, etc.); (b) help students recognize and build upon their social capital skills; (c) facilitate school transitions, as these affect social networks; and (d) assist with the process of identification of problematic contexts and skills that can affect individuals’ psychosocial development.

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