



Recognition in Targeted Youth Work: Young Adults' Experiences of Care, Respect, and Esteem

Vesa Välimäki¹ · Hanna-Mari Husu²

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Abstract

This article develops a framework, based on recognition theory, for examining youth work services that target young Finnish adults who are not in education or employment. It complements previous research by examining targeted youth work (TYW) as an institutional context with specific ways of recognising young adults. Drawing upon Axel Honneth's recognition theory and Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory, it explores how the context can provide access to different kinds of recognition-based situations. Thus, the analysis addresses how the three different forms of recognition (care, respect, and esteem) are activated and experienced by young adults in targeted youth work. Examining data drawn from 35 interviews with young adults who have been or are currently outside of education or employment, the findings highlight the potential of targeted youth work to offer social interactions that can help clients to encounter care, respect, and esteem. Findings also reveal the potential challenges of providing recognition in targeted youth work, such as the lack of meaningful opportunities for self-determination and autonomy. This study contributes to research on how recognition theory can be understood and applied in social and youth work services.

Keywords Collins · Interaction · Honneth · NEET · Recognition · Targeted youth work

✉ Vesa Välimäki
vesa.valimaki@tuni.fi

Hanna-Mari Husu
hanna-mari.husu@lut.fi

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, 33014 Tampere, Finland

² LUT University, Lappeenranta, Finland

Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the application of Axel Honneth's recognition theory to youth and social work research (Houston and Dolan 2008; Haikkola et al. 2017; Niemi 2020). While previous research has focused on how social and youth work professionals can engage with their clients, drawing on the ethical framework of recognition theory (Houston and Dolan 2008; Niemi 2020), our article seeks to extend this perspective by focusing more on the institutional context of targeted youth work (hereafter TYW). Drawing on Honneth's (1995) theory, therefore, we explore young adults' experiences of recognition in this environment. In addition, we incorporate Randall Collins' (2004) work to consider TYW as an institutional context that provides young adults access to different kinds of interactional situations where they can experience care, respect, and esteem—the three forms of recognition identified by Honneth (1995).

TYW provides an interesting research case in which the three forms of recognition are supplied. In Finland, TYW assists and guides young adults currently outside of education and employment (hereafter NEET) into education, employment, rehabilitation, or training (Youth Act of Finland 2017), although this article focuses on services, principally outreach youth work and youth workshops. While youth workshops include rehabilitative activities for groups of young adults, outreach youth work generally provides one-to-one and often long-term guidance for young adults who have left educational institutions or who have been concern to the authorities. The TYW services aim to help young adults find a place in education and employment, and cities and municipalities are required by law to provide it (for more on the Finnish context, see Aaltonen et al. 2016; Mäkelä et al. 2021); funding comes from various sources including the Finnish Government and the European Union.

This article concentrates on the institutional context of TYW, which makes certain types of interaction situations possible for its young clients. Here, the term 'institutional context' refers to the structural side of TYW, including legislation, administrative guidelines, and organisational models which shape how professionals in the field carry out their work, young adults are met (Haikkola et al. 2017), and, thus, the kind of interactional situations that exist within these contexts.

The article is structured into three main sections. First, we present our theoretical framework and its implications for TYW. In the second part, we apply this theoretical framework to 35 in-depth interviews with young adults who have a background of being clients in such situations. In our analysis of their experiences, we illuminate how TYW as an institutional context can provide access to different kinds of recognition-based situations. Finally, we discuss and review our findings.

The Recognition-Based Approach to Targeted Youth Work

Axel Honneth's (1995) recognition theory posits that individuals require recognition from others to develop and maintain positive relations with themselves; in other words, such positive relations can only emerge from encounters with others

who hold positive attitudes towards them. Thus, the relationship with oneself is not a solitary process, but an intersubjective one that is the product of encounters with others.

Honneth's theory of recognition emphasises that individuals seeking recognition at the societal level are dependent on the values, norms, institutions, and practices recognised in society: that is, that appreciative and accepting attitudes and treatment are intertwined with conditions of mutual recognition (Honneth 2004, 354). Meanwhile, social conditions can also lead individuals to have problems with forming a positive view of themselves if, for example, their way of being and living is generally regarded by society as reprehensible (Honneth 1992, 191–192), including the unemployed. Without employment, an individual may not be able to participate in the production of the common good, whereby they could receive recognition from others for acting according to their abilities and qualities (Honneth 2010, 229–230). From this perspective, institutional contexts such as those facilitated by TYW services must be considered important sources of recognition because of the impact of attitudes on individuals' self-relations.

Honneth's (1995) conceptualisation of mutual recognition identifies three needs that must be satisfied for individuals to develop positive relations with themselves: love, respect, and esteem. What follows from these three forms of recognition are self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These self-relations allow individuals to see themselves as autonomous and individuated persons, respected and equal citizens, and socially valuable members of their community. Many social work researchers have argued that the aim should be to provide young clients with all three forms of recognition: practitioners should care about young clients (love), respect their rights (respect), and value their specific skills and qualities (esteem), because young adults need all of these forms of acceptance (Salminen 2020, 732–733).

Honneth (1995) suggests that love involves strong affective attachments between family members, friends, and romantic partners; however, while he uses the term 'love', many social and youth work researchers prefer the term 'care'. Expecting youth and social workers to provide recognition in the form of love may be unrealistic (Juul 2009, 406), but they can certainly provide young adults recognition-based professional care (Niemi 2020, 4). This may involve offering young clients proximity, warmth, and emotional support, as well as adopting a more informal and personal role when doing so (Houston and Dolan 2008; Paulsen and Thomas 2018). Moreover, in group settings, social and youth work professionals can promote a sense of care and cultivate friendships among clients (Thomas 2012).

Within the respect dimension, individuals need to be acknowledged as having the same rights as others (Honneth 1995). In this sense, recognition enables individuals to understand themselves as respected and legitimate members of their social community, possessing the same rights as others on an equal footing. Previous studies have emphasised the significance of professionals creating opportunities for young clients to express their opinions and contribute to the development of services (Houston and Dolan 2008; Thomas 2012), as well as actively

listening to them and demonstrating that their voices are being heard (Paulsen and Thomas 2018).

The esteem dimension involves the acknowledgement of an individual's unique contributions to their social communities, which can foster a sense of value and belonging (Honneth 1995). Prior research has emphasised the importance of professionals' recognition of young people's talents, qualities, and interests (Houston and Dolan 2008; Paulsen and Thomas 2018), empowering them to see themselves as part of something greater (Warming 2015) and enabling them to feel proud of their contributions to their communities (Thomas 2012).

In recent years, Honneth's recognition theory has gained popularity in social work and youth work research, particularly when examining how professionals can provide their clients with positive recognition and influence their self-relations (Houston and Dolan 2008; Thomas 2012; Hooper and Gunn 2014; Warming 2015; Paulsen and Thomas 2018; Häkli et al. 2018). However, despite the emphasis on interpersonal recognition, the institutional context that creates the conditions for recognition to occur has been overlooked (Salminen 2020, 733). Previous studies have tended to individualise recognition relationships as the responsibility of professionals, neglecting the potential of institutions to establish the broader conditions for recognitional relationships to develop (Haikkola et al. 2017; Salminen 2020). In this article, we aim to expand the perspective on recognition theory by exploring how the institutional context of Finnish TYW influences the recognition given to young adults in a NEET situation. We highlight the importance of understanding the institutional context that underlies TYW services in shaping recognition situations, because, as Anderson and Honneth (2005) and Ikäheimo (2008) have argued, the institutional level provides the necessary conditions for different forms of recognition to flourish.

To develop the perspective that underscores the impact of the institutional context on the dynamics of recognition, our paper employs sociologist Randall Collins' interaction ritual (IR) theory. As suggested by Sebrechts et al. (2018, 458), Collins' IR theory offers a useful framework to illustrate 'how recognition actually works as a sociological phenomenon, that is, as a social, interactive process in an institutional setting'. Interaction ritual theory emphasises how individuals are affected by the positive or negative outcomes of interactions in the form of emotional energy. Successful everyday interactions produce positive energy as an outcome and sense of connection and meaning and are crucial in terms of flourishing and wellbeing. Collins' (2004) IR theory focuses on situations as the key point of analysis, while recognition theory has been criticised for being excessively subject-oriented, concentrating on individual experiences of recognition or misrecognition (Fraser 2003; Jacobsen 2009). Ritual interaction theory enables us to overcome some of these analytical weaknesses by drawing attention to the dynamics of situations rather than concentrating on the individual. Thus, it looks beyond the issue of the psychologised self, as well as views that stress how recognition is felt or experienced.

Collins' (2004, 3) perspective on recognition emphasises that interactional situations, rather than individuals, construct the kind of recognition that young adults can gain in interactional situations within the institutional context of TYW. The success

or failure of interactional dynamics can result in individuals experiencing positive or negative emotional states, and our analysis attends to young adults' positive or negative emotional statements about their experiences of interactional situations in TYW. On the other hand, as Thomas et al. (2016, 517) have argued, '[r]ecognition theory offers a powerful tool for normative evaluation of how a social institution [...] should be organised so that everyone enjoys the recognition due to them'. Thus, we investigate how TYW as an institutional context can block or enable young adults' access to interactional situations where they can feel cared for, respected, and esteemed. Our objective is to investigate the potential of TYW by examining the various interactional situations which are made and could be made available for young adults not in education or employment.

Data and Methods

The data utilised in this study are drawn from 35 in-depth interviews, carried out over the course of 2018 and 2019, with NEET experienced young adults; the interviews had an average duration of 2 h and were recorded and transcribed.¹ The interviewees—who were between the ages of 18 and 29 at the time, with a mean age of 24²—were recruited with the aid of Finnish outreach youth workers from four different regions of Finland. A third of those interviewed identified themselves as belonging to sexual and gender minorities.³ All the interviewees had previous contact with TYW. Despite having been categorised as being outside of education and employment at the time of the interviews, their circumstances have since varied, with some recently obtaining employment or starting studies.

The interviews involved open-ended questions on various topics, including well-being, prior experiences with employment and education, hobbies and leisure activities, social relationships, perceptions of their role in Finnish society, and feelings of value and acceptance in their daily lives. The interviewer specifically explored the interviewees' experiences with youth support services, such as outreach youth work and youth workshops. The participants were encouraged to provide constructive criticism and suggestion for improvement, as one of the goals of the interviews was to improve the support provided by public services for their wellbeing (see Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020). It is also important to acknowledge that the interviewees in the dataset were limited to young adults who had contact with TYW. As a consequence, individuals with the most negative views of these services may not have been included.

¹ This article uses qualitative data initially collected for the project *Young people not in work, education or training and their understanding of the future, democracy and public services* (Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020). The in-depth interviews were conducted by Senior Researcher Anu Gretschel Ph.D.

² The Finnish Youth Act defines all those under the age of 30 as young people.

³ This sample does not mirror the NEET group in Finland. The Finnish outreach youth workers were asked to place a special focus on finding young adults identifying as sexual or gender minorities (see Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020). We have chosen to use the pronouns *they/their* throughout the article to avoid making assumptions about the gender of the young adults interviewed.

One aim of the data analysis was to explore how the recognitional approach can illuminate recognitional situations within TYW's institutional context and to evaluate the usefulness of the perspective. Processing the data was inspired by abductive analysis, in which the role of theoretical knowledge is to prompt further understanding through deep engagement with the data (Tavory and Timmermans 2014), and involved two main steps. To make analytical sense of the in-depth interviews, the first author read them closely multiple times, focusing specifically on those experiences wherein the dimensions of recognition (care, respect, and esteem) were particularly prominent. After this first step, the first author wrote theoretical memos (Layder 1998) for each interview, which included summaries and important extracts from the perspective of Honneth's three dimensions of recognition. These summaries were then compared with each other to make analytical sense of variation of the young adults' experiences and to analyse recurring patterns in the data (Tavory and Timmermans 2014).

On the Dimension of Care

While previous research has focused on the practices of social and youth work professionals, we focus on the kind of recognition-based situations TYW services as an institutional context can make available for young adults. At an institutional level, TYW services often reflect a strong individualistic orientation, especially in the form of personal counselling (Aaltonen and Kivijärvi 2019). However, there have recently been calls to focus on young adults' social relationships within TYW, as the clients of TYW often experience more loneliness than average (Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020; Kivijärvi et al. 2020); indeed, previous studies in the field have emphasised the importance of social interaction and the formation of new social relationships through group activities (Wrede-Jäntti 2018; Kivijärvi et al. 2019). For example, Wrede-Jäntti's (2018, 87) research has shown that young adults in youth workshops considered the interpersonal support and sense of inclusion they provide their most important benefits. Consequently, it is important to explore how TYW as an institutional context can offer its clients opportunities for social interaction and the formation of new social relationships. This fits well with the caring dimension in recognition theory which claims that it is essential to protect the conditions that people need to build and maintain loving and caring relationships with each other (Ikäheimo 2008).

In our dataset, the interviewees shared their experiences of how youth workshops and the groups organised by outreach youth workers have helped them to develop new social relationships, including friendships, and the positive impact this has had on their wellbeing. For some of them, the relationships have lasted even though their involvement in TYW services has ended:

I (Interviewee): How does this youth workshop support chances of getting to know each other so that you will continue stay in contact?

Y (Young adult): We actually work together in different projects so it happened that I was lucky because this [person] with whom I started working here

in the same week, I had met them [in school]. And then they started somehow on-the-job-training and they graduated in [field] and they came here on-the-job-training and then got a job here. They worked here, and I attended rehabilitative work activities, then we got to know each other much better in six months [and] we slowly became close friends. And year and a half ago came another person, who was a childhood friend of my friend here and we talked a lot. We did the same work tasks, and we spent a lot of time together, always doing something, and we became good friends. So it was like faith.

This interview excerpt highlights the value of face-to-face interaction and the sharing of common experiences in the formation of new social relationships, as well as the role of TYW as an institutional context that provides young adults with repeated opportunities for social interaction. From this perspective, it can offer young adults who are not part of the institutional contexts of formal education or employment the opportunity to connect with their peers through interactive experiences. Peer relationships are important for young adults and this is something that TYW as an institutional context can offer them; it might not be enough simply to provide social opportunities because social relationships often require repeated interaction and shared activities.

It is crucial to take into account the dynamics of interaction in group-based TYW, and group processes and methods are key skills in which most Finnish youth workers are trained (Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi 2015). As Kallio et al. (2015, 11) have pointed out, the ability of youth workers to give recognition to young adults is important for young adults' experiences of inclusion. This said, most of the interviewees had positive experiences with the social dynamics of TYW, talking about their feelings of being able to be themselves in the groups that were organised, and of being recognised and valued for who they are. They stated that bullying was not tolerated in the TYW groups, rules of behaviour that are enforced by youth workers. Such interactions, where young adults can feel cared for and valued for whom they are, can help them to develop their self-confidence, as the interview quoted below demonstrates:

I: What did you think about the workshop? What was the reason that the things started to kind of change?

Y: Well, I don't know, maybe it was because you cannot bully anyone at the workshop and so on, and maybe people who come here are committed to that and, I don't know, you gain a lot of great experience of other people and being with other people and you become accepted as you are. So you don't have to be afraid or anxious, and you get to be yourself and are able to improve, and then your own personality is free to come out...

While most of the interviewees had positive experiences with the interactional dynamics of TYW, some did not personally find it suitable. They did not want to identify with other young adults and preferred to focus on work rather than making friends—a reluctance to approach others that is an indication of failed interaction dynamics. Collins (2004, 51), for example, sees failed interactions as resulting from the lack of feeling group solidarity and problems in affirming one's own identity, which can lead to disinterest or even deterioration in emotional mood. This may be

because an individual has previously been repeatedly exposed to unsatisfying and negative interaction situations. Problematic and failed interaction may also reference problematic external situational settings—that is, the very nature of TYW itself—which some of the interviewees found uncomfortable and unappealing.

The potential of TYW to help young adults develop and maintain their social relationships is not limited to providing social opportunities and facilitating group processes. The importance of youth workers' support for young adults' social participation should not be overlooked. Previous research has reported that some of the clients in TYW have trouble participating in group activities (Aaltonen and Kivijärvi 2019). From this perspective, TYW services can be helpful in supporting young adults with their social interaction, while an individualised approach can help young adults to participate in more community-oriented activities. This idea also recurs in our data as young adults share their experiences with youth outreach workers who have lowered interviewees' inhibitions about social participation:

I: Could you first describe in concrete terms what the outreach youth work has given to you and still does?

Y: Well, when I first came in contact with it or those youth workers, they helped me find an apartment so I got help [with that], as I did not know how to find an apartment at all and I was scared. When I had trouble in calling all those places and everything, so I got help and then with Kela [Finland's Social Insurance Institution], when I had to go there, they came along, so they [have helped me] with dealing with money and with bureaucracy and then I have talked a lot to them about my personal relationships and other things. Everything really.

In this section, we have highlighted the experiences of young adults which aptly reflect the caring dimension. Based on our findings, this dimension provides an opportunity to explore how TYW services can create the conditions that facilitate young adults' development and maintenance of caring relationships. As Moensted et al. (2020) have argued, youth programs are well placed to provide contexts for young adults' emotional and social needs, which can be studied by focusing on the interactional settings that TYW services as an institutional context make available.

On the Dimension of Respect

In terms of respect, it is crucial that young adults perceive themselves as possessing control over their lives, with equal rights as others. Recent research on youth policies in Finland has stimulated a critical discourse on activation policies that attribute NEET situation to young adults themselves, rather than recognising it as a structural problem in the labour market (Haikkola et al. 2017; Brunila and Lundahl 2020). From an institutional perspective, this approach can impose unreasonable demands on young adults. Our own findings on the matter were mixed. In this section, we explore how being a client of TYW can serve as both a source of self-respect and a threat to it.

TYW has the potential either to support or undermine young adults' sense of self-determination, an aspect that Petteri Niemi (2020, 3) has examined in the context of applying recognition theory to social work. Niemi underscores how important it is that social workers support self-determination, particularly among service users who tend to blame themselves for their situation and whose confidence in making meaningful life choices is diminished. Offering opportunities for self-determination can facilitate its practice, as young adults gain support from others to attempt tasks and build confidence in their development that can significantly impact on their self-respect and belief in their own competence. In our data, an interviewee highlights the difference between a previously negative experience with public authorities and their current experience with TYW, where their own views on their personal wellbeing received attention. This is a positive example of supporting self-determination in an institutional context:

Y: Maybe it is important that I have been listened to in a different way than before, when I was scared for a long time that they would force me into some activities that I really know I can't do, and when I can't do them, then I'm left without the money and they cut off me from benefits. But now my experience is that I'm able to ensure that no one forces me into anything; if they suggest that I start to study for four or five days a week and I say I can't, they will figure out something else that I am able to do.

This interviewee emphasises the importance of being listened to and having agency over their life decisions. Several interviewees also mentioned how their needs and interests have been heard in TYW. They felt that they were not being forced to do things they did not want to do, as reflected in the following quote:

Y: So you do things like developing everyday skills and things like that... and so if you really do not want to or feel that you cannot, you can say to the instructor that well I do not want to participate in this and so yes they may push a little to participate, but if you are feeling that you cannot now or do not want to, you can stay out then. That and it is just emphasised that nothing is forced and the workshop activities are not so results-oriented, so to speak. It's more like we have personal goals that we've all gone through with the [youth workers] about what I want from the workshop and not what the workshop needs from me.

However, the institutional context of TYW services can also present challenges to supporting young adults' self-respect. Youth policies that prioritise activation may undermine young adults' right to self-determination by pressuring them to transition into education and employment or risk losing benefits. Such policies can pose a significant challenge to young adults' self-respect and autonomy, particularly when there are penalties for factors beyond their control (Niemi 2020). Forcing a young adult to move forward without considering their own opinions and abilities can lead to difficulties with wellbeing, as evidenced in this excerpt:

Y: It was like that I felt the pressure from outside to go to school and that's why I tried every autumn and failed and it hasn't helped my wellbeing at all that I've

had failures. I'm not in the right state to go to school but at the same time I feel that I am under terrible pressure from my parents and from the whole society...

This highlights how the institutional context of TYW, specifically policies that prioritise activation and transition to education and employment, can actually undermine young adults' right to self-determination. The interviewee feels pressured to go into education, which has negatively impacted their wellbeing and resulted in failure. This highlights a common problem with activation policies, which can put undue pressure on young adults to conform to societal expectations and pursue normative paths without paying attention to their wellbeing. As Aaltonen et al. (2016, 9) argue, '[s]upporting the wellbeing of young people should be given priority; only if a young person feels well can they be steered into education or employment'. Such policies can also undermine young adults' self-confidence and belief in their ability to make meaningful life choices. Prioritising outcomes like education and employment over self-determination may ultimately do more harm than good, particularly for those who face significant challenges or barriers to these outcomes (Niemi 2020).

Another problem related to self-respect raised by TYW was the low financial compensation for rehabilitative work activities, which some interviewees experienced as demeaning (see also Mäkelä et al. 2021), while the work tasks performed in some of the workshops were criticised. Although some found them meaningful, others found them frustrating, as is shown in the following interview extract:

Y: Well, I do generalise a bit again, but work experiments [youth workshops], are like, "Let's build a bird house", kind of thing. Is that like nine euros for a day? Yeah, like fuck that shit. No, no, fuck, really? Who the fuck goes to build bird houses for nine euros a day? There are such things. So, it doesn't work that way, really. Work experiment, do real work. Go to a restaurant and wash dishes or go to McDonalds, or something like that. But not those kinds of workshops, like, well, "Let's make napkins", or you know, like no. They are usually like that. And then the fact that the amount of money is not very motivating either.

Thus, there are certain institutional policies that shape daily interactions within TYW that can demotivate young adults to participate in them (see also Sebrechts et al. 2018). Successful interaction situations within TYW can make young adults enthusiastic and motivated, while unsuccessful ones demotivate (Collins 2004, 108). As with the interviewee above, they can make young people feel they are not respectfully recognised within the institutional context, a lack of recognition that speaks to the need to provide meaningful opportunities that support self-respect and autonomy, rather than simply providing activities that may not be relevant or motivating.

On the Dimension of Esteem

This article explores the potential of TYW as an institutional context for enhancing the self-esteem of young adults by highlighting the role of their contribution to the common good, a perspective that is often overlooked in discussions of social and

youth work. As Niemi (2020, 3) has argued, social work practices often offer limited opportunities for clients to earn esteem; however, the importance of this becomes clearer when considered in the context of the labour market. According to Honneth (2010, 224), 'most people continue to derive their social identity primarily from their role in the organized labor process'. Being unemployed remains stigmatised, and young adults can feel that they are personally responsible for their unemployment (see also Välimäki et al. 2022), leading to lower self-esteem. It is essential that young adults in a NEET situation feel valued, even if they are not actively involved in the organised labour process.

Participation in TYW can potentially enhance young adults' self-esteem because, for some, the opportunity to participate in youth workshops and other structured activities that are offered by such services can provide a chance to feel valued by others. This is particularly important for young adults in a NEET situation, as they may lack opportunities to participate in activities that are seen as acceptable. In contrast, participation in TYW can offer these young adults the chance to participate in structured activities that share some common ground with the normative ideal of being in employment or education. For example, one interviewee observed that participation in TYW has allowed them to move away from 'living at the expense of society'. Thus, for some young adults, participation can be a source of validation from others, as noted in the two following extracts from two different interviews:

Y1: I don't know, I haven't been in real work, but like I have not been like completely dependent on society either...because I have done so much rehabilitative activity.

Y2: Yeah, I really think that when you go to these TE services [job coaching services], courses, and rehabilitative work activities, I think it is good enough. But if you just lie all day in your bed, that I can't accept.

The second excerpt highlights how TYW services as an institutional context can provide young adults with interactional situations that allow them to feel like they are making their contribution to society and thus feel valued. Making no effort to reintegrate into the labour and education market is seen as problematic by some interviewees, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Y: Well yeah, it is like the one question that is first asked is, "What do you study?" And then it is always a little uncomfortable. Of course, it depends on who asks, but it is uncomfortable to start explaining that I don't study and haven't graduated from anything, but now it is a little bit better when I can say that I am [at the workshop] and so on. So that you don't have to be like, "I am on sick leave or I don't do anything at all".

Participation in youth workshops can be an opportunity for young adults to show others that they are taking steps towards education and employment and are therefore worthy of the same esteem as everyone else. It can also help young adults to understand that their integration into society is possible in the future. Some interviewees said that their participation in TYW had enabled them to apply for further education, to continue their studies, and to seek employment, giving them potential

for future integration. Thus, targeted youth work services can give young adults a sense of purpose and counter the narrative that they are somehow inferior to others. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt, in which the interviewee expresses how they find their life more meaningful and valuable when they have something to do during their days. This interviewee takes part in rehabilitative work activities 3 days a week for several hours a day, where they do ‘everything creative like painting pictures and creative writing’ and discuss their wellbeing with youth workers.

Y: I have noticed that if you have something to do during the day, it kind of brings a kind of like... value, or something like that you want to be able to wake up in the morning. That the days have meaning, in that sense. Then if you are with mental health problems alone at home and have no friends and no such social circles, always alone, always within four walls, it gets quite a lot of the internal things in your head to strengthen, so that...

As this extract suggests, TYW services have the potential to provide young adults with daily interactions that enhance their sense of self-esteem (see also Moensted et al. 2020), giving structure and meaning to their daily lives. It should also be noted that integration into traditional paid work is not the only source of self-esteem (Niemi 2020). Being part of social communities and volunteering, for example, can also be rewarding in this respect. Indeed, some interviewees said that they had volunteered or wanted to volunteer. TYW services can support young adults’ belief in their own ability to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others, and this is something that could be further developed in the context of TYW services. Furthermore, it should also be taken into account that focusing solely on the personal characteristics and skills of young adults underestimates the structural factors behind young adults’ unemployment (Haikkola et al. 2017; Brunila and Lundahl 2020). It is important that such structural factors are also discussed in the context of TYW services, so that young adults do not place blame on themselves over which they have limited or no control (see Sharone and Vasquez 2017).

Discussion and Conclusions

This article contributes to the ongoing discussion of recognition theory and its application to youth and social work. Yet rather than focusing solely on how professionals can help their clients feel socially recognised, this article has examined how recognition is manifested institutionally and interactively in TYW. Utilizing Honneth’s triad (care, respect, and esteem), attention was drawn to the different possibilities and shortcomings of TYW in terms of the recognition of young adults. Collins’ work, on the other hand, makes it possible to understand how the institutional context influences interaction situations to produce either positive or negative experiences of TYW services among young adults. With Collins’ IR theory, it was possible to illuminate how recognition takes place situationally and concretely in the daily situations dealt with by TYW. Specifically, the article explored how, through

recognition situations, TYW as an institutional context can provide young adults with care (by allowing them to feel cared for), respect (as individuals), and esteem (for their contributions).

Firstly, in terms of the care dimension, TYW at an institutional level is often individualistic and focuses on one-to-one counselling. Yet, alongside this individualistic orientation, group activities are important to enable young adults to feel recognised and valued as themselves. Face-to-face interaction and shared interactional activities are important for the formation of new social relationships, and TYW can provide young adults with repeated occasions for both. Secondly, in the dimension of respect, youth policies that prioritise activation and transition into education and employment can undermine young adults' right to self-determination. Young adults should not be penalised for something over which they have limited or no control. It is important to consider young adults' needs and circumstances. Furthermore, the low financial compensation for work activities and the degrading nature of some of the work tasks carried out in workshops can challenge young adults' self-respect. Thirdly, in terms of esteem, participation in TYW can provide a sense of worth. In addition, it can help young adults to perceive that their integration into society is possible in the future, as evidenced by interviewees' experiences of how their participation in TYW has enabled them to apply for education, continue their studies, and seek employment. However, attention should also be paid to how it might be possible to develop alternative ways for young adults in TYW services to feel important to other people.

TYW as an institutional context can enhance young adults' self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, but it can also undermine them. A better understanding of what kind of interactional situations are and can be made available for young adults in TYW services can help youth and social workers to be sensitive about situations wherein young adults can gain recognition; it can also help to identify institutional constraints on young adults' recognition. We hope that our development of Honneth's theory of recognition, alongside Collins' interactional focus, as an analytical framework will provide resources for such work.

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Declarations

Informed Consent This article uses qualitative data which were initially collected for the project Young people not in work, education, or training, and their understanding of the future, democracy, and public services (see Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2020). All interviewees were informed about their rights in the data collection phase. Participation was voluntary, and the interviewees signed a consent form.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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