

Transition Programs and Their Effect on Identity Formation in Emerging Adulthood

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Background

- Transitioning individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) report low rates of employment and independent living¹. Transition programs are intended to increase functional independence.
- Emerging adulthood is characterized by critical identity formation.²
- Individuals with ASD navigate conflicting discourse on ASD and have difficulty committing to an identity.^{2,3}
- Occupation serves as the vehicle to maintain and construct identities.⁴

Research Aim: To explore how participation in transition programs affects identity formation in emerging adulthood for individuals with ASD

Methods

Design: Qualitative, phenomenological approach, purposeful convenience sampling

Participants: 3 mothers of sons aged 24-33 with ASD who completed a transition program after high school

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis, member checking

Findings

Confidence

“He saw himself as a student, a dependent, a person under the domain of teachers. Now he doesn’t see himself as under anyone’s domain.”

Connection

“He sees these people as teammates. In that he is trying to speak their language.”

Gradual Realization

“There was a progression because he had to take more and more responsibility. He did less and less with an aide.”

Part of the World

“He’s a part of the life of [the city]. He does what everybody else does.”

Discussion

- Confidence, connection, and gradual realization themes mirror identity formation in typical emerging adults.³
- Engagement in “mundane” occupations fosters a sense of being “part of the world” unique to individuals with disabilities.⁵
- Individuals with ASD require additional supports for identity formation including:

Meaningful job placement	Social engagement
Fading supports	Responsibility
Specific skill training	Experiential exploration

- Identity commitment correlated to increased life satisfaction and wellbeing.³

Implications for OS/OT

- Increased understanding of identity formation in ASD as an outcome of emerging adulthood.
- OT can promote engagement in occupations in emerging adulthood to foster identity formation and wellbeing

References:

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