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Youth mentoring and multiple social support attunement:

Contributions to understand youth social development and well-being

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Introduction

Youth mentoring is well-known to be a complex, hybrid relational context mirroring other interpersonal relationships characteristics. Mentoring blends features of parenting, such as care giving or role modeling, friendships, including mutuality or promoting a sense of belonging, or teaching, when it involves some degree of instruction. Youth mentoring intricacy goes beyond the replication of core attributes of other relational dyads. Youth mentors nurture and sustain their bonds with the mentees in a broader social ecology of co-occurring, interactive, and sometimes competing relationships (Keller, 2005; Varga & Zaff, 2017). The social ecology of relationships as a determining factor of youth mentoring quality is, however, a relatively novel topic. Dominant research efforts in youth mentoring literature have focused on understanding how categories of factors, such as mentees' and mentors' interpersonal history and social competencies to held and sustain a mentoring relationship, the influence of developmental features on youth mentoring quality, relationship traits (e.g. duration), or programs' characteristics and implementation (relationships goals, activities, or closure) affect mentoring processes and outcomes (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).

The present chapter describes a new angle to understand and measure the links between the social ecology of youth mentoring and youths outcomes, based on the concept of Multiple Social Support Attunement (MSSA). MSSA is rooted in seminal lines of research suggesting a systemic standpoint to analyze youth development in the context of supportive relationships such as youth mentoring (Keller, 2005; Keller & Blakeslee, 2013), with an emphasizes on the consideration of complex systems properties (Alarcão, 2000; Keller, 2005) and the web of support model (Varga & Zaff, 2017). The aim of the MSSA notion is to facilitate the examination of the enactment

and impact of intrapersonal patterns of multiple social support delivered by youths'

most significant relationships on their development (Simões, Calheiros, & Alarcão,

2018). The most important relationships, including mentors, are also known as anchors,

which are located at different social cores; cores correspond to clusters of strong ties

between certain members, forming groups such as family or friendships (Varga & Zaff,

2017).

This chapter is organized in five sections. The first one discusses the ties between

the social ecology of relationships and youth positive development, scoping the

contributions of the main theoretical models which have fueled that discussion for the

past decade, with a particular focus on complex systems theory (Alarcão, 2000; Keller,

2005) and the most recent advancements offered by the web of support model (Varga

& Zaff, 2017). The second section brings forward the most usual measurement

approaches to test the impact of multiple social support on youth development, with

references to youth mentoring when the role of mentors is regarded. A third section

states the gaps inherent to the study of the social ecology of youths' multiple social

support and advances the notion of MSSA as an additional conceptual resource to tackle

the problems that are identified. A fourth section includes a summary of findings of an

on-going Portuguese research program which addresses the connections between of

MSSA delivered by the most important relationships from diverse cores, including

mentors, and youths' social development and subjective well-being. Finally, the last

section lists some research, practical and policy-making implications of a MSSA

framework for the youth mentoring field.

1.The ecology of social relationships and youth development

Social relationships are ties fulfilling a wide array of functions such as protection, information/knowledge, or access to tangible resources, which altogether are usually labeled as social support (Sarason & Sarason, 2009). The nature, intensity, and duration of social relationships and social support are dependent of one's personal social ecology (Varga & Zaff, 2017). The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) promoted important breakthroughs in describing an ecological framework for social relationships and support. The central tenet of the bioecological model is that a person's potential is encouraged through continuous exchanges labeled as proximal processes. These interactions balance protective and risk factors operating across multiple levels of the social ecology: at an intraindividual level, between the individual's physical and psychological characteristics (the microsystem); at a relational level, between the individual and significant others (the mesosystem); at an organizational level, by encompassing all formal structures of the society in which the individual is involved (the exosystem); and at a cultural level, due to the influence of prevailing values in a given space and time (the macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Many stories of world class athletes depict to perfection the interplay between proximal processes across the layers of reality proposed by the bioecological model, whether they are protective or not. Many of these athletes show intrinsic physical traits and a temperamental competitiveness to become a world class athlete from an early age (microsystem). When they are interviewed, they sometimes remember how their attributes were dismissed by their parents. Most of them then go on to talk about how a coach or a mentor strongly encouraged them not to give up a sports career (mesosystem). Sometimes, this mentor helped to find a school that offered the child optimal training conditions unavailable in their neighborhood and convinced the parents

to allow the child to move there, for classes and training. What these athletes never knew or often do not remember is that these new school's positive conditions (exosystem) were based on an on-going national policy focused on supporting the development of young talented athletes (macrosystem). This policy paid for local transportation from the child's neighborhood to the school with these great training facilities.

Whether in the case of an outstanding athlete or of the common mortal, the proximal processes content is informed by the attributes of social entities in interaction, whether they are individuals or groups. According to the systems theory (Alarcão, 2000; Keller, 2005), these entities resemble complex systems. Complex systems are composites of sub-units or sub-systems, connected by a very large number of mutual and repeated exchanges also known as interactive patterns, which feedback and influence each sub-system (Alarcão, 2000). Social entities attributes parallel systems' characteristics that come to influence social relationships and support: they have the ability to spontaneously order themselves to achieve optimal or close to optimal functioning, according to their core values (*self-organization*), tend towards balance in the face of small changes, striving for long periods of time (*robustness*); and are also prone to produce multiple and recursive interactions, in which the result of an interaction becomes a new input for the system (*feedback*). Moreover, two systems may achieve the same goal departing from distinct initial conditions or by following different paths (*unpredictability*) and its development depends on the reciprocity between the system itself and its environment, across time (*coevolution*). Furthermore, a complex system, is more than the mere sum of its sub-systems, because it also includes its interactions (*totality*). Although complex systems are delimited by borders allowing them to be distinct entities, these borders are permeable, enabling a continuous

interaction with other systems (*openness*). All these features of complex systems are integrated in an order whereby a system at one level is a sub-system or supra-system at another (*hierarchy*) (Alarcão, 2000; Keller, 2005).

Families are a classic example of a social entity reflecting complex system properties. They are social groups that connect a variable number of members (sub-systems) through continuous interactions, whether they occur on a daily-basis (e.g. shared meals) or not (e.g. Christmas gatherings). These interactions reflect the family's core values, ranging from more traditional to more progressive ones (self-organization), although these values may be incorporated or even rejected by the different members. Families are still among the most permanent social entities in Western societies, cutting across each of its member's different developmental stages, from childhood to retirement (robustness). However, family stability may be disturbed or even interrupted by unexpected life events (e.g. unemployment, sudden death) meaning that they are also subjected to unpredictability. Still, their robustness allows their members to mutually affect their development in areas such as learning or life decisions (coevolution). Moreover, family members are connected not only on the basis of each one's individuality but also considering the nature and quality of their members' ties (totality). Through their evolution, families are open to multiple influences of other systems, whether they are more tangible (e.g. neighbors) or distant (e.g. media). Furthermore, they can be categorized according to different criteria, such as origin (e.g. rural *vs* urban) or socioeconomic status (hierarchy).

While proximal processes content is informed by complex systems attributes such as families, its structure can be mapped in the form of social networks. These correspond to all persons and interpersonal ties summed by a person (Keller & Blakeslee, 2013). Social networks are defined by their size (number of people included),

density (the degree of interconnection between the network members), tie strength (reflected by the quality of the ties and support fulfilled by a certain connection), and the network composition (in terms of the members attributes, which may lead to more diverse or heterogeneous networks). Altogether, these network features may lead to the formation of cores of stronger and more permanent ties as the ones that, for instance, bring together a family, compared to cores which are less enduring, such as peer groups during adolescence (Varga & Zaff, 2017).

The organization of social relationships across the multiple layers of the social ecology is fluid; changes to its content and structure occur across the different stages of the individual's life-span, which ultimately affect their efficacy. Adolescence, for instance, comprises important challenges to personal social interaction landscape. Adolescence is a long and dynamic transition between childhood and adulthood seeking for the definition of a personal identity. The accomplishment of this developmental task encompasses an increase and diversification of friendships, lesser centrality of parents, and greater openness to the influence of non-parental adults such as teachers and mentors (Cotterell, 2007; Smetana & Daddis, 2011). Altogether, these changes lead to a reconfiguration of social relationships, with implications for youths' development.

In an effort to better integrate the contributions of metamodels describing the content and structure of social interactions and youth development literature, Varga and Zaff (2017) propose the key notion of webs of support. Following the bioecological model perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), these authors suggest that youth development is defined by the continuous relationship between a person and his/her contexts. The actualization of human potential occurs within complex webs which integrate youth agency and characteristics, the relationships among all adults and peers in the web, the types of support these relationships provide, but also the distinct

importance of each relationship for the individual. Thus, inside each core, some persons may be more important than others. The most relevant ties in each core are designated as anchors (Varga & Zaff, 2017). The coherence between youths' needs and the resources exchanged across social contexts and multiple relationships, especially across the relationships maintained with anchors, will lead to a supportive youth system that increases the probability of positive developmental outcomes.

The web of support approach sustains that the coherence or coordination between youths' anchors is essential for positive developmental pathways. This positioning goes beyond disperse theoretical and empirical findings acknowledging the need to integrate social ecological factors in youth mentoring theoretical models or the importance of the collaboration between mentors and anchor adults such as parents in shaping youth mentoring interactions (Keller, 2005; Simões & Alarcão, 2014; Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011). By doing so, the web of support model also offers a rationale to overcome the idea that the links between youth mentoring and the wider framework of social relationships are fully described by the influence of the existing, new, and potential new ties of social mentees' and mentors' social networks on the mentoring process and results and vice-versa (Keller & Blakeslee, 2013). This idea establishes a theoretical background to assess how multiple social support coherence or coordination between anchors from different relational cores may actually contribute to youth development. The analysis of the impact of significant adults from different contexts is claimed for some time now (DuBois, Doolitle, Silverthorn, & Tebes, 2006). However the support (dis)continuities delivered by these anchors remain understudied, because appropriate measurement models have not been developed (Varga & Zaff, 2017). It is this advancement which a MSSA perspective may add to the growing body

of theoretical and empirical claims and findings linking youth mentoring to its social ecology.

2. Assessment trends in multiple social support and youth mentoring

Multiple social support in the youth development field of inquiry has been analyzed from two predominant angles: *the unique or additive effects* approach and the *interactive effects approach.* The unique effects approach aggregates the majority of the studies in this domain of social developmental sciences by analyzing the influence of each social support source on a given outcome, regardless of the effects of other social support sources (Larose et al., 2018; Rueger, Malecki, & Demaray 2010). According to this standpoint, a given source of support offers a unique contribution to youth development that the support from other adults cannot explain.

The comparison between the unique effects of multiple sources of support has covered youths' health, academic, or social outcomes, but has seldom included youth mentoring as a source of support. In the health domain, for instance, social support provided by family and friends (Cassarino-Perez & Dell'Aglio, 2015) or by mothers and partners (Pires, Araújo-Pedrosa, & Canavarro, 2014), has been linked to an improvement of quality-of-life prospects respectively among clinically vulnerable youths and teenage mothers. Seemingly, lower levels of depression have been associated to the unique effect of family and friends (Patwardhan et al., 2017) or of parents, teachers, classmates, or friends (Rueger et al., 2010). Identical unique contributions of parents, peers, and teachers support have been found to predict lower youth social anxiety (Sahranc, Celik, & Turan, 2017). At least one study shows that natural mentors who provide inspiration for an academic or career path lead to youth

life satisfaction above and beyond perceived support from parents and peers among disabled youths (Pham & Murray, 2016).

Youth positive academic outcomes have also been associated to the unique contribution of multiple sources of social support. For instance, Rueger et al. (2010) found that support delivered by parents and teachers leads to youths' more favorable attitudes towards school across boys and girls; however, classmates support is also decisive in backing more positive school attitudes in the case of boys. The same study depicts that parental support is less relevant for youths' academic adjustment compared to other adults' support, in later adolescence. Elsewhere, teacher support predicts youth academic adjustment (e.g., perceived academic competence, interest in academics, compliance with classroom norms) above and beyond perceptions of support from parents and family (Jiang, Huebner, & Siddall, 2013). At least one study (Farruggia, Bullen, & Davidson, 2013) shows that very important non-familial adults support is uniquely associated with the improvement of literacy and numeracy achievement among ethnically diverse youths', while parent and peer support warmth has no significant association with the same school achievement indicators.

Consistent with the unique or additive effects perspective, multiple social support has also been studied in association with youth positive social development outcomes. For instance, evidence shows that friends support has a unique greater impact in school and relational identity development compared to other sources (e.g. parents, teachers) (González, Cuéllar, Miguel, & Desfilis, 2009). Interestingly, the unique effects of youth mentoring on social development indicators compared to other adults unique influence on the same type of outcomes seems to be absent from the literature.

A second angle of multiple social support measurement which has spread more clearly in the mentoring literature focuses on the *interactive effects* between support

sources (Larose et al., 2018). Interactive effects may follow two paths. First, mentor support can make a hierarchical compensatory contribution to youth development. In this case, the support provided by other sources (usually parents or teachers) interacts with mentor support in predicting youth adjustment. As an example of this model, Soucy and Larose (2000) found that in late adolescence, the associations between perceptions of mentoring support and college adjustment were stronger for youth with more secure maternal relationships.

Conversely, the hierarchical conditional model proposes that mentor support may also interact with other relationships support, but in a different way: the positive effect of mentor support may operate only if other support source is rewarding (Larose et al., 2018). This model of interactive effects is well documented by a study demonstrating that youth who perceive relationships with parents, peers, and teachers as satisfactory but not particularly strong benefit more from mentoring in terms of academic adjustment than do youth with profiles of either strongly positive or negative supportive relationships with these sources (Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011).

3. Multiple social support attunement: A brief definition

Two major gaps are evident in the literature focusing on the associations between multiple social support and youth development. A first one is specific of the youth mentoring research field, concerning the fact that mentors are not systematically considered as a key supportive source coming from the community in studies measuring unique effects associated with multiply sourced support. In part, this might be a side-effect of the most outspread available measures of multiple social support, which do not include a scale to assess mentoring. However, and for the most part, the scarcity of unique effects reports including mentoring stem from a prevailing theoretical stand of

considering mentors as adults who compensate for failed or adverse relationships such as inadequate parenting (Rhodes, 2002); this positions has often lead to assessments describing interactive effects of youth mentoring with other relationships.

A second breach identified in the literature, and a major one affecting youth mentoring realm of research and multiple social support studies in general, is that perceived or enacted coherence between meaningful relationships or anchors from different cores has been ignored. Since 2015, a Portuguese research program has addressed these gaps, by systematically integrating natural youth mentoring in the context of the examined multiple social support provided by anchor persons of different cores. The mentioned research program has brought together complex systems theory and the web of support approaches (Varga & Zaff, 2017) with a new measurement approach labeled MSSA (Simões, Calheiros, Alarcão & 2018; Simões, Calheiros, Alarcão, Sousa & Silva, 2018; Mendonça & Simões, 2019). Within this research program, MSSA has been proposed as a complimentary assessment method to the measurement of youth social support according to unique/additive effects or interactive effects.

The definition of MSSA is rooted in the primitive meaning of the verb to attune. In a strict sense, to attune corresponds to bring into musical accord; in a broader sense, it refers to harmonize or adapt to a matter, action or idea (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 2012). The communal sense of attunement has been explored in psychological sciences in recent years. Erskine (1998) synthesizes it as the ability of "going beyond empathy to enable a two-person experience of unbroken feeling connectedness, by providing a reciprocal affect and/or resonating a response" (p. 236). This sense of unity in relationships has grown as a reference to describe the formation of interpersonal contact unity in dyadic relationships, such as in psychotherapy (Erskine, 1998) or youth

mentoring (Pryce, 2012). MSSA proposes a parallel use of the communion meaning of attunement, in terms of the degree of consistency or coordination across youths' anchors coming from different social cores, which may affect a given youth outcome (Simões, Calheiros, & Alarcão, 2018).

In the youth multiple social support field, attunement is a twofold notion, because it addresses both multiple social support process, as well as its results. MSSA process refers to how the enacted coordination between multiple anchors from different social cores occurs, based on a lesser or greater intentionality of anchors to attune their support efforts. In MSSA enactment, anchors will act as sub-systems of their own systems or cores, through a multiple display of complex systems properties (Alarcão, 2000; Keller, 2005). Depending on the mobilization of these properties, MSSA enactment may be classified according to three different stages aligned in a *continuum*:

- *Performance*: in this stage anchors show severe adherence to the values and interactive patterns of their core, minimizing chances for MSSA coordination, especially when their supportive roles depart from very distinct sets of values.

- *Improvisation*: this may be described as a stage of MSSA whereby multiple anchors overlap their efforts, sometimes shifting away from the strict reproduction of their core's self-organized values and interactive patterns, while testing new strategies for support enactment. This attempt may lead to unintentional coordination, because anchors involved in youths' multiple social support can, at times, not be entirely aware of each other's supportive efforts. This unintentional coordination may be partial (when only the efforts of some of the regarded anchors display overlap) or total (when the efforts of all the regarded anchors overlap).

- *Rehearsal*: this stage corresponds to attempts in order to develop shared and coordinated positions between various youths' anchors where common experimental courses of action take place. In the process of experimenting, ways of joint collaboration are proposed, tested, and evaluated just as in a musical rehearsal.

One example can help to better identify different MSSA stages.

> Jonathan is a 14 year old boy at risk of school failure. He lives in a rural area, where school is not acknowledged as a means of social mobility. His father is a farmer and did not succeed at school. He appreciates Jonathan's help on the farm. An extra pair of hands is always welcomed. His class teacher is an experienced educator and has a long record of supporting students at risk of school failure. Over the years, she has earned the respect of other teachers and the school board in her quest to minimize this aspect. Jonathan is very close to Rob, a classmate who is one of the best students in class. Rob and his family have firm aspirations about Rob's education, as he wants to go to college.

In this case, at least three anchors from three different cores may display distinct MSSA configurations, ultimately affecting Jonathan's risk of school failure. MSSA would be organized as *performance* if Jonathan's father, teacher and classmate reproduced their core's standpoints, while enacting their specific social support to address his low school achievement situation. For instance, Jonathan's father could praise and motivate him to help on the farm, even if that meant less time to study. Meanwhile, his teacher would offer to tutor him herself, after classes, exactly when he should be helping on the farm. Moreover, Rob could be less available to help Jonathan

with math, because he wanted to live up to his parents' expectations and improve in other subjects.

One can assume a different scenario. In this scenario, Jonathan's father starts to encourage him to study math, while his class teacher insists on praising his effort in homework assignments and Rob convinces him that they could revise together immediately before each test. This scenario is brought forward without negotiation, with all of the implicated anchors moving towards total overlapping of their support efforts. This situation would correspond to a MSSA *total improvisation* stage. It could also happen that only Jonathan's class teacher and Rob showed non-negotiated efforts to help the young student improve his achievement. This would represent an example MSSA *partial improvisation*. Jonathan's case would reflect MSSA *rehearsal* stage if his anchors negotiated openly to have a common approach to social support enactment and strived to find common ground for their action.

The analysis of MSSA results is focused on how patterns of social support, organized in terms of the degree of perceived consistency between multiple anchors from distinct social cores, based on each anchor's support scores, will affect an outcome. Youths' intrapersonal patterns pertaining MSSA anchors may take one of at least three forms: *low-attuned multiple social support* involves low levels of perceived support from all anchors; *unattuned multiple social support* occurs when the level of perceived support is unbalanced across different anchors, with multiple combinations being possible; and *high-attuned multiple social support* occurs when all anchors offer perceived high levels of support (Simões et al., 2018).These patterns may then be studied as sources of youth development variation. Going back to Jonathan's case, the analysis of MSSA results would focus on how he perceived his father, his teacher and

his friend's levels of support and on how the support consistency across his anchors ultimately affected his school results.

Figure 1 offers a complete graphic display of MSSA and the most expected connections between MSSA enactment and MSSA results.

4. Multiple social support attunement and youth mentoring: Preliminary findings

The following subsections summarize the results of the mentioned on-going Portuguese research project, which intends to untap the connections between MSSA patterns and youths' outcomes. These studies have analyzed associations of multiple social support provided by parents, teachers, and natural mentors, with youths' social development as well as links between patterns of closer familial relationships, mentors, and best friends and youths' subjective well-being. These results are compared with prior parallel research when the same is available.

4.1. Multiple social support attunement and youth social development

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of youths' social support provided by anchors is the promotion of social development. Social development refers to the acquisition of social skills that enable children and youths to become members of families, peer groups, communities, or cultures (Killen & Copland, 2011). The influence of the consistency between the support delivered by adult anchors, namely among parents, teachers, and natural mentors, and its effects on youths' social development has not merited a comprehensive attention from researchers. Two studies integrated in the stated research program aimed at tackling this shortcoming. One explored how support attunement between parents, teachers, and mentors related to five 818 rural early adolescents' ($M = 12.15$; $SD = .81$; 54.2% girls) prosocial behavior, self-

regulation, antisocial behavior, alcohol use, and 1-year substance use intention (Simões et al., 2018). Considering that these youths were in the transition to adolescence, the option was to assess youths' perceptions about anchors' autonomy support. The anchors were selected by the participants based on their opinion about of who was the most important figure in setting norms and rules in the family (father, mother, or other) and in school (most influential teacher in this area). Mentors were targeted as the most important non-familial adult with who the youths met at least once a week for more than 12 months. At the same time, this study compared the total amount of support delivered by these anchor adults with the consistency of support among them in connecting with youths' social development. Three central findings emerged from the study, after controlling for the effect of the participants' age. First, using a cluster analysis approach, a four-group cluster solution in terms of the combination of the parents, teachers, and mentors perceived support was the most accurate and interpretable. Two groups gathered similar support perceptions across the three sources of support (one classified as low attuned multiple autonomy support attunement and the other as high attuned multiple autonomy support attunement). Others, however, depicted unattuned patterns of support, one due to low rates of parent autonomy support and the other due to low rates of teacher autonomy support, when compared to the remaining sources. Second, a pattern of perceived high attuned support among parent, teacher, and natural mentor delivered better prospects for youth's prosocial behavior and self-regulation, as opposed to high levels of perceived total support offered by the same anchor adults. Finally, a cluster of low teacher autonomy support (as opposed to high attunement among parent and mentor) delivered the worst prospects on the selected indicators of social development.

A second study involving 645 rural early adolescents (M = 12.30; SD = .60; 55.35% girls) tested if the connections between autonomy support attunement and youths' antisocial behavior, prosocial behavior, and self-regulation would be different across different socioeconomic (SES) levels. Again, through latent class analysis, four different patterns of perceived social support attunement between anchors were found, but only one of the patterns depicted unbalanced perceived support, based on teachers' low autonomy support. Subsequent analysis demonstrated that the associations between autonomy support attunement and the social development indicators were not distinct across different SES levels. Moreover, highly consistent support between parent, most important teacher, and natural mentor was associated with all the selected social development indicators, irrespectively of youths' SES (Simões, Calheiros, & Alarcão, 2018).

4.2. Multiple social support attunement and youths' subjective well-being

The connections between MSSA and youths' development in terms of their well-being are insufficiently studied. At least two studies in a recent past have reported some relevant findings. For instance, Levitt et al. (2005) found that patterns of high-attuned social support from close family and friends were linked to fewer internalization problems (including depression and anxiety) among early adolescents. The same trend was found among older lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths receiving consistently high support from family, friends, and significant others (McConnell, Birkett, & Mustanski, 2015).

The research program here summarized also looked at how consistency of support among anchor relationships from three cores, family, community, and friendships, would relate with 236 disadvantaged youths' (M = 14.10; SD = 1.78; 60.20% boys)

subjective well-being, measured in terms of quality-of-life, depression, and social anxiety (Mendonça & Simões, 2019). Again, the analysis involved anchor relationships, namely the closest family member, the natural mentor, and best friend. High attuned MSSA proved to be an optimal pattern to promote these youths' subjective well-being in terms of greater quality-of-life, lower social anxiety, and lower depression among disadvantaged youths. These result are coherent with prior reports (e.g. McConnell et al. 2015), showing that greater MSSA contributes to improved adjustment. In this case, the connections between high MSSA and subjective well-being indicators were also more generalized, systematic, and greater than the ones found between gender or age and the same subjective well-being indicators.

5. A multiple social support attunement framework for youth mentoring research: Roads to be travelled

The research program focused on the links between MSSA and youth development summarized above is a collection of exploratory studies. Moreover, the available studies have focused on potential results delivered by MSSA, but have not investigated MSSA processes yet. This means that there are several questions resulting from a MSSA framework for youth mentoring. A non-exhaustive systematization of these questions according to the web of support model key premises (Varga & Zaff, 2017) can help to set new paths for research.

According to the web of support model, youth agency shapes social support of both weak and strong ties in youths' social network. Thus, social support is a bidirectional process, affecting social support availability and judgements about enacted and perceived MSSA. The attunement between youths' needs and youth mentors support (Pryce, 2012) and how this communion can help to improve relationships with

other anchors (e.g. parents) has been highlighted by some reports (e.g. Spencer et al., 2011). A MSSA standpoint may contribute to understand if dyadic attunement within mentoring is relevant to improve enacted as well as perceived MSSA among the mentee's anchors.

The web of support relies on the consideration of youths whole social ecology as sources of influence of youth development. A systemic approach has addressed the need to understand if youth mentoring is influenced and/or may reshape youths' social networks in terms of dimension, distribution, or density, as well as the social resources or social capital resulting from those potential changes (Keller & Blackslee, 2013). A MSSA framework may add to this broader picture of youth mentoring interactions within the social ecology by enabling to understand how MSSA enactment occurs and if it fits the suggested framework of MSSA stages (performance, improvisation, and rehearsal). It may also inform if different stages of MSSA enactment influence the relational intensity and configuration of mentees' social network and social capital changes.

The remaining web of support premises emphasize the plasticity of youth social support. On one hand, different anchors provide different types of support which may interact between each other. On the other hand, youth support needs and configurations change across time (Varga & Zaff, 2017). This evolutive nature of multiple social support across social cores and time implies different research implications. One implication would be to determine the turning points that increase multiple anchors chances to switch from a given MSSA stage of enactment (e.g. performance) to another (e.g. rehearsal). Considering that the optimal MSSA for youth development seems to be the one in which greater attunement among anchors is achieved (Simões et al., 2018; Mendonça & Simões, 2019), pinpointing the critical moments or actions leading to

greater coordination chances seems warranted. In addition, the identification of those turning points would represent a major contribution to the MSSA research and youth mentoring literature, if they could be described according to youths' specific needs or stressors, facilitating its management by program coordinators and improving support deliverance. Finally, until now, MSSA research has stand as a collection of portraits of meaningful patterns between youth anchor relationships in a given moment. Anchors' influence on mentoring and vice-versa vary significantly form early adolescence to young adulthood. Longitudinal studies may help to specify developmental moments when mentors may be more influential to improve enacted and perceived attunement across meaningful anchors or if mentoring can leverage support deliverance across anchors in particularly stressful moments such as developmental transitions (Cotterell, 2007).

Given the exploratory path of research completed until now, it is certainly a risk to pinpoint solid practical implications of MSSA research for youth mentoring. More consistent research efforts, based on qualitative and longitudinal designs may document some potential breakthroughs for youth mentoring practice suggested by existing research. Nevertheless, these may be organized in, at least, three core features of youth mentoring. A MSSA perspective may lead formal mentoring programs to incorporate anchors' attunement as a program goal. Further research may unveil the developmental moments and situations in which that may seem a desirable aim. Finally, a MSSA approach may help to unveil when attunement is required or useful between mentors and other anchors or when mentors are required to compensate for prior unsuccessful relationships with other meaningful relationships (Spencer et al., 2011).

A MSSA framework underlines the role of high MSSA in improving positive social development and well-being among adolescents. This central result may inspire

youth policy decision-making in two different ways. First, youth services deliverance may need to develop interventions that improve the connections and attunement between anchors of different cores. This approach may be particularly relevant for those working in community settings or using (multi)systemic therapeutic approaches, which are often challenged by the need to adjust the efforts of different sources of support. Second, these results show the need to better assess and implicate MSSA in programs and interventions across different sectors of public and private formal support providers. These providers, situated at the exosystem level (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), tend to focus on relevant support providers in their domain. For instance, a health service provider may be overly focused on how parental involvement prevents adolescents' alcohol consumption. However, the attunement of adolescents' best friends or community-based mentors' support may strengthen the targeted outcome.

Figure 1. **Multiple social support attunement framework – graphical summary**
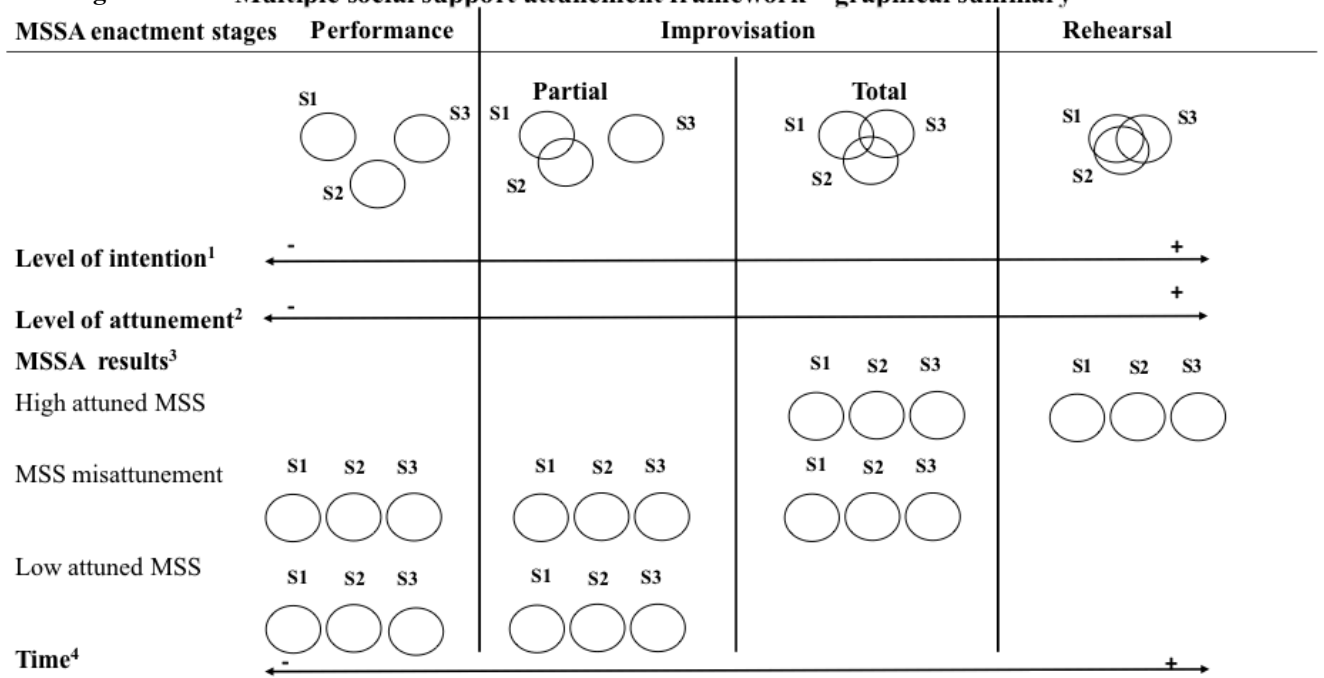
Legend: S1 – source one; S2 – source 2; S3 – source 3; 1. Level of intention showed by MSS sources to attune their support efforts; 2. extent to which MSS sources display similar and/or agreed forms of support (graphically described by áreas of overlap between SS sources); 3 Most likely MSSA results for respective enactment stage; 4. MSSA process and results are dyamic and may fluctuate across time.

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