PERCEPTIONS, UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSE TO VISUALLY MAPPED SOCIAL NETWORKS OF YOUTH WITH COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES

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WHAT IS MEANT BY SOCIAL NETWORKS?

- Not social media/social media use

- Part of the social environment
- Envelopes an individual
- Act on, and is acted on by, the individual to shape attitudes, behaviors, norms…

INTRODUCTION

Youth with disabilities face unique challenges to developing optimal social social networks.

- Diverse & serve as pathways to opportunity – competence, autonomy, self-identity
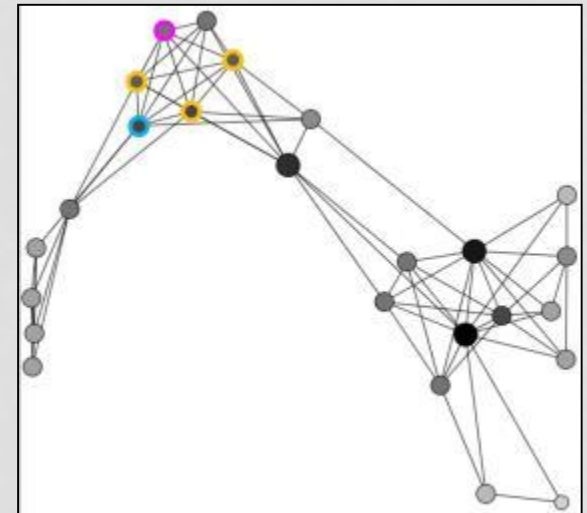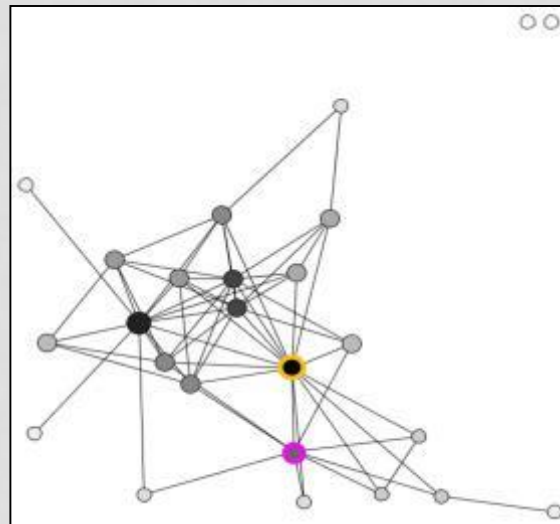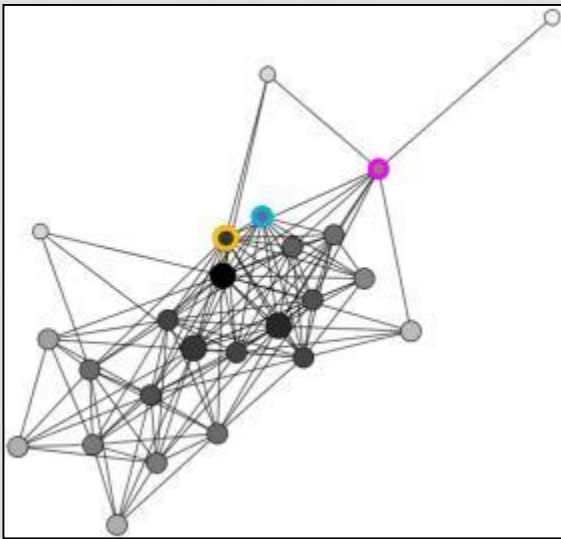- Supportive, safe

Social networks:

- Refers to people and the relationships between the people surrounding an individual ➔ contributes to the social environment

- Shape actions, attitudes, health and developmental trajectories

- Arenas for social participation and activity engagement

- Social functioning more than communication & interpersonal skills

- Navigation of social environment – understanding of surrounding social relationships
  - Who makes up and leads the group?
  - What alliances or loyalties exist?
  - How tight is the group?
  - Who has the what types of influence within the group? Why?

- Understanding group structures

WHAT IS MEANT BY STRUCTURE?

Structure = Patterns of social relationships

- Cohesion: Density, clustering, reachability
- Groups/Sub-groups
- Connectedness to others

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & STRATEGY

Exploratory questions:

1. How are social connections or structures understood and experienced?
2. Can social network maps contribute to understanding of their social worlds?

Cognitive interview following completion of a personal network analysis

- Youth respondents
- Parents listened or assisted per youth preference, clarified & interjected

SAMPLE

- N = 19 youth with differences in cognitive processing
  - dx: learning, attention disorder, high functioning autism
- Age: 13.9 ± 1.3
- Gender 16/19 male (84.2%)
- Parent secondary participant
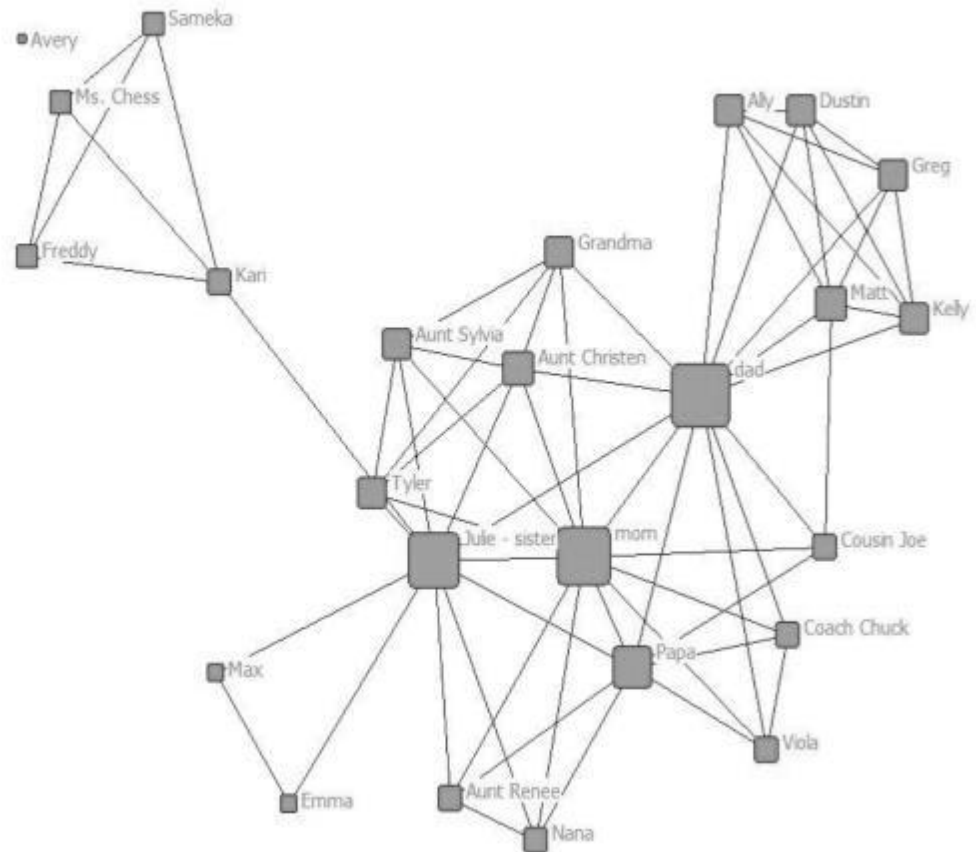- Recruitment
- Institutional Review Board approved

Clinical assessment tool	Count (Percentage)
BOT-2 (motor coordination)	
≥ 25th percentile	2 (10.5)
6th – 24th percentile	13 (68.4)
0 – 5th percentile	4 (21.1)
QNST-3 (neurologic soft signs)	
≥ 25th percentile	7 (36.8)
6th – 24th percentile	6 (31.6)
0 – 5th percentile	6 (31.6)
Beery VMI (visual motor integration)*	
≥ 25th percentile	8 (47.1)
6th – 24th percentile	3 (17.6)
0 – 5th percentile	6 (35.3)
Beery Visual Perception	
≥ 25th percentile	11 (58.0)
6th – 24th percentile	6 (31.6)
0 – 5th percentile	2 (10.5)
AASP (sensory processing)	
0 No difference	3 (17.6)
1 *SD* difference	11 (58.0)
2 *SD* difference	5 (26.3)

* n = 17

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS: NETWORK MAP

Network validation interview

- What do you think? Look as expected?

- Tell me about…

- Why are they grouped together? Why on the edge?

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DATA COLLECTION TOOLS: INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Initial starting point – flexible
- Network metrics available to guide on whom to focus questions

Questions & Probes

1. Tell me about ___ (people in various network positions; groups)
2. What are your experiences with ___ (person; group)?
   - What sorts of things do you do with ____?
   - Who decides what you do?
   - What happens when you want to do something different?
3. "Look at how___(person) ___ (is so connected, acts like a bridge between groups, is all alone).
   - What are your experiences with ____ (person)?
   - How would you describe ___ (person)
   - How does he interact with others in the network? How about with others not pictured your network?
   - What sorts of things does this person do with those around him?

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Comfortable setting ➜ intimate discussions: home-like research facility or youth's home

- Thematic analysis – goal: detailed nuanced description

- Trustworthiness
  - Interviews audio-recorded & transcribed verbatim
  - Iterative data collection and analysis
  - Member checking and follow-up clarifications
  - Two independent coders, constant comparison

THEME 1: FORMING NETWORKS

How folks got on network? How get more kids on network?

- Older kids reaching out

- Scripted invitations to be friends; Other grades; New kids; Repeated invitations – despite rejection

- Re: peer acquaintances: re-kindle from special event; *none from network edges* in school

- Parents & Siblings: *"[My brother] never wants us to do something and I'll sort of go 'I need to be a part of this too' because I am sort of, uh, limited in my resources."*

THEME 2: SOCIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Understanding self, others and social rules/norms

- *"I usually…stay in my own little world. I don't mind actually not knowing too many people."*

- *"We both have some kind of mental disorder…issues…Johnny has Asperger's and I have ADD…we can understand each other."*

over-adherence vs. weighing norms

- *"I don't really get involved in other people's social lives…I don't like barging in on what they're doing. It's kind of rude."*

- *"He dressed strangely. He was a bit disgusting. But I ignored that because he was a good friend."*

SOCIAL NEGOTIATION

Active and *passive* strategies used in negotiating interactions

- egalitarian groups: *"kind of like a republic...we all [make] a decision"*

- social avoidance
  - *"even if I wanted to…I wouldn't…I don't want to cause trouble"*
  - *"I just stop talk talking or maybe even move away"*

WORKING HARD SOCIALLY

Process and *reasoning* during group interactions

- social facilitators – forced, awkward:
  - *"I try and talk about something that will make him happy"*
  - *"I just start trying to make conversation...it makes me seem annoying...my fatal flaw"*

- In the moment awareness – socially appropriate interactions
  - *"And I would just listen in and see if I, if anything made sense to me that I would like to talk about."*

PARENT RESPONSES TO NETWORK MAP & INTERVIEW

- Teaching moments
  - To her child, *"to get to know __new__ people you need to get to lighter [referring to shapes on map] people because they're gonna know a whole pile of people you don't know"*

- Insight into youth's social world
  - "Map did help me understand who he felt he was most connected to then not connect or just casual acquaintances. Is interesting how he perceives the people."

- Self-awareness: mom's map = youth's map

Call to Action

- Planned social dates

- Framework for discussion:
  - *"Map…highlighted the attachment issues that were already there…Doing the interview opened the door for a conversation we don't ever have and it was nice."*

"Now that I see it in black and white, I knew it, but seeing it in black and white I know we need to get him further from the family. Doing things with people not in the family and closer to his age. It pushes me to get him out doing things with other people"

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- Identified strategies used in forming & engaging in social groups
  - potentially useful information in clinically guiding youth for participation in social situations

- All but one youth able to verbalize some level of insight into their own social process and functioning
  - Skilled interview plus visually mapped network connections

- Youth Ah-Ha moments (a couple)
  - *"So that's who the instigators are"*

- Parent: **"this is the 'what next' after all that social skills training"**

- Potential for clinical utility
  - Visually mapped social network *plus* skilled interview

  - Vehicle for structuring dialogue of abstract/hard to see social processes
    - Parental interjection of teaching moments
  - Pragmatics:
    - Free downloadable software
    - Can generate map over multiple sessions

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THANK YOU

Questions?

References & resources:

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- http://sourceforge.net/projects/egonet/   [EgoNet website link – network-building tool]