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William M. Kurtines

Marilyn J. Montgomery

Lisa L. Arango

Gabrielle A. Kortsch

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Does intervention change anything? New directions in promoting positive youth development

William M. Kurtines, Marilyn J. Montgomery,
Lisa Lewis Arango and Gabrielle A. Kortsch

Abstract

Although a literature on interventions that promote positive development has begun to emerge, important gaps concerning these interventions continue to exist. As part of our program of research, we have made an effort to begin addressing these gaps. An overview of a research project conducted using two sets of multi-ethnic data drawn from the Miami Youth Development Project (Kurtines, Montgomery, Lewis Arango, & Kortsch, 2001) is presented. Though tentative and preliminary, the findings from the project provide preliminary evidence for the success of Changing Lives Program (CLP) in promoting positive qualitative change. Specifically, the results document a relation between participation in CLP and short-term qualitative longitudinal change in life course experiences at the individual developmental level. The basic pattern of qualitative change for participants in the CLP intervention condition tended to be positive, significant, and in the hypothesized direction relative to non-intervention controls, suggesting that intervention does effect positive change.

The literature on promoting positive youth development emerged out of the recognition that interventions targeting troubled (multi-problem) youth need to do more than “treat” problem behaviours (i.e., symptoms) or “prevent” negative developmental outcomes (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). Recent reviews of programs that promote positive youth development (for example, Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins’ 1999 review

of 25 well-evaluated programs) reveal an accumulation of evidence that the programs do have an impact on young people and that studies of these programs made considerable strides, including increased methodological rigour and sophistication. The answer to the question posed by the title of this paper is thus *yes*, but it is a qualified yes.

NEW PROBLEMS AND NEW POPULATIONS: PROMOTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Despite the consistent pattern of overall positive findings in the literature, important gaps in research-based knowledge with respect to the impact of youth development interventions still exist. The Catalano review, for example, reported only relatively short-term (pre, post, + follow-ups) studies with outcomes evaluated in terms of magnitude of short-term quantitative change in continuous variables relative to a comparison or control condition. Indeed, consistent with criteria common to the intervention field, this was a core component of the definition of “well-evaluated.”

The emphasis on short-term outcome studies using quantitative measures and variable-oriented data analytic strategies that characterizes the literature on treatment, prevention, and positive development intervention programs is useful in many ways. However, it places methodological limits on the types of questions that we can ask and the types of answers that we can obtain, particularly in evaluating positive development programs that target troubled youth. We use the term “troubled” youth to describe the population we work with (and develop interventions for) rather than “behaviour problem,” “at-risk,” or “normative” youth because although the youth we work with come to our programs with problem behaviours (indeed, typically with multiple problems) and/or are at risk for multiple negative developmental outcomes, our intervention is not designed to target specific behaviour problems, risk factors, or positive domains. Thus, our programs differ from treatment and prevention programs in that although our programs provide (as needed and available) selected interventions that target specific behaviour problems and risk/protective factors (e.g., substance use/abuse, risky sexual behaviours, etc.), reducing behaviour problems and modifying risk/protective factors is not our main goal. Moreover, our programs differ from universal youth development programs in the USA, such as the Boy/Girl Scouts, 4H, etc., which aim at facilitating development along a developmental trajectory or life course that is already proceeding in a positive direction. In contrast to such universal youth development programs, our programs target troubled (multi-problem youth) in community settings and aim at altering or changing the course of lives that are proceeding in a negative direction.

Employed as a selective intervention, the aim of our program is to alter or change the “negative” direction of the life course or pathway of the youth in

our programs. That is, we aim to change the lives of troubled young people for the better, where “change” means a qualitative change in direction and where “for the better” is understood as positive in ways that are contextually situated (e.g., relative to each individual’s specific life course trajectory at the time of entry into the program) as well as culturally, historically, and developmentally appropriate. Our goal is thus to promote positive qualitative change in participants’ lives in ways that are individually, culturally, historically, and developmentally meaningful and significant. We consequently consider our programs to be open-ended responses that target the intersection of the developmental and historical moment—changing lives in changing times (Lerner et al., 2000).

THE MIAMI YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (YDP): THE CHANGING LIVES PROGRAM (CLP)

The *Changing Lives Program* (CLP) is one of the programs currently being developed as part of the *Miami Youth Development Project* (YDP; <http://w3.fiu.edu/ydp/>). The YDP is the result of efforts to create a university-community collaboration based on research-related principles consistent with the outreach research model, i.e., a model that focuses on generating innovative knowledge of effective intervention strategies that is also palatable, feasible, durable, affordable, and sustainable in “real-world” settings (Jensen, Hoagwood, & Trickett, 1999; Lerner et al., 2000). The CLP is school-based counselling intervention that uses a participatory learning and transformative approach to create contexts in which troubled (multi-problem) young people can change their lives for the better by taking responsibility for their lives and their communities.

The CLP, now in its second decade of existence, began as a grass-roots response to an urgent and growing need in the community—the need of young people to find themselves and to be reconnected with their lives and families. It has subsequently evolved into a broad-based community partnership. The partnership now consists of *Florida International University* (FIU) (<http://www.fiu.edu/choice.html>), the public research university in Miami; *Communities in Schools* (CIS) (<http://www.cisnet.org/>), a private, non-profit organization that is part of a community-based national network for delivering community resources to schools; and *Miami-Dade County Public Schools* (MDCPS) (<http://www.dadeschools.net/>), the fourth largest school system in the United States, with community-based alternative public high schools located throughout greater Miami. CLP counselling services provided by the YDP are currently available to all of the MDCPS alternative high schools, serving approximately 200 to 250 students each year. A multi-ethnic population of youth come to the alternative schools with a history of attendance, behaviour, or motivational problems in their

neighbourhood school, and many come from inner city, low-income families who live in disempowering community contexts of pervasive violence, crime, substance abuse, and limited access to resources.

NEW THEORIES AND METHODS: THE CHALLENGE OF EXPANDING HORIZONS

Since the mid-twentieth century, the scientific study of human developmental change has been undergoing a dramatic shift in orientation at all levels. During this period, theoretical approaches to understanding developmental change underwent dramatic change, shifting away from conceptualizing developmental change as general, universal, and unidirectional to a focus on the organism's plasticity, from a holistic or person-centered perspective, and with a view of development as selective age-graded change in adaptive capacity across the life span, from conception to old age.

Theoretical challenges

In this context, as our theoretical framework evolved, the CLP drew its developmental framework (i.e., theory of what changes and how it changes) from both psychosocial developmental theory (Erikson, 1968) and life course theory (Elder, 1998). Thus, we refer to our framework as a "psychosocial developmental life course" approach. From psychosocial developmental theory, this approach adopts a view of adolescence as the developmental stage at which the individual is first confronted with the difficult challenge (and responsibility) of choosing the goals, roles, and beliefs that give life direction and purpose as well as coherence and integration (i.e., a positive sense of identity). From life course theory, it adopts an emphasis on how individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they make within the constraints and opportunities of history and social circumstances. For its intervention strategies (i.e., theory of what to change and how to change it), YDP draws its theoretical framework from Freire's (1970/1983) transformative pedagogy (a pedagogy of dialogue rather than instruction) for empowering marginalized people by enhancing critical consciousness.

Methodological challenges

In our role as practitioners and educators, we work with young people who come to us in need of change. They find their lives moving in directions that they do not necessarily want them to move in, and in desperate need of help to turn their lives around. As practitioners and educators, we work to create contexts in which they can find themselves and reconnect with their lives and

families. Our goal is to help them transform the negative direction of their lives—to get them launched in positive directions—and we often have the sense that we succeed. As researchers, however, we find it difficult to fully document our successes. The measures that we use in investigating our programs capture increases in indices of positive development and decreases in behaviour problems and risk factors, and the data analytic strategies we use to assess the statistical significance of this quantitative change, but providing evidence for the type of qualitative life change that is at the heart of our efforts has proved to be a challenge. Therefore, we added another, related agenda to our program of research: to contribute to advancing the methods that are available for studying developmental change by refining measures for assessing qualitative life course change.

MEASURING QUALITATIVE LIFE COURSE CHANGE

With the goal of program evaluation, we made a systematic effort to document qualitative life course change in our school based intervention in terms of the expressed meaning and significance of the life course experiences of participants in the intervention. This has involved the adoption, adaptation, and refinement of the two qualitative performance measures of self-development (both designed for indexing the expressed meaning and significance of participants life course experiences) for use in the YDP:

- The Life Course Interview (LCI) (Clausen, 1998) is an individually administered open-ended unstructured “full” response qualitative performance measure of self-development intended for use in conducting comprehensive qualitative analysis (with relatively small samples) focusing on the meaning and significance of participants’ experiences of identity transformations across the life course; and
- The *Possible Selves Questionnaire – Qualitative Extension* (PSQ-QE), a qualitative extension of the Possible Selves Questionnaire (PSQ; Oyserman, 1987) refined for use as a group (or individually) administered open-ended “brief” response qualitative performance measure of self development. The PSQ-QE is intended for use in conducting qualitative analysis (with large samples) focusing on the meaning and significance participants’ possible future selves.

In addition, we have also developed a framework for the use of relational data analysis in evaluating the CLP. This framework, *Relational Data Analysis* (RDA), evolved out of efforts to develop a practical, ready-at-hand methodological framework for moderating the methodological splits (e.g., subject – object, quantitative – qualitative, interpretation – observation, variation – transformation, nature – nurture, etc.) that have characterized

developmental science (Overton, 2003). Specifically, our goal was to draw on well-established qualitative and quantitative research methods and procedures, and on relational metatheory (Overton, 1998, 2003) and its embodied person-centred approach to unifying the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research traditions.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED? WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We conducted an RDA of qualitative change in life course experiences using two sets of multi-ethnic data drawn from the Miami YDP (Kurtines et al., 2001). The results of this study illustrate what we have learned so far and suggest future directions for research.

Relational data analysis : Life Course Interview

The outcome measure used for the RDA of the first set of data for the Kurtines et al. (2001) study was the *Life Course Interview* (LCI). The adaptation of the LCI that we use for the Miami YDP builds on Clausen's (1998) pioneering work on the use of life reviews and life stories in life course research. The LCI is administered twice a year, once at the beginning of the fall semester as part of a pre-evaluation battery and once again at the end of the spring semester as part of the end-of-year evaluation. The data set consisted of 32 participants—22 high school adolescents who participated in the CLP and 10 control students at the same high school. For the LCI data, the audiotaped interviews yielded a total of 448 codable transcription records (TRs). From these, response data from 64 Personal Identity and 64 Undergoing Turning Point TRs were analyzed using RDA.

The conceptual and theoretical coding phases of RDA for the *Personal Identity* TRs yielded four theoretically meaningful categories (Negative Identity, Diffused–Uncertain, Confused–Moratorium, Self-assured/Secure Identity) and associated subcategories with a moderately complex structure (see Figure 1a), providing evidence for the utility of RDA as a method for identifying theoretically meaningful categories in open-ended and unstructured interview response data.

The findings also provided clear evidence for the concurrent and construct validity of the LCI when analyzed using RDA. The Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis phases of RDA were designed to be conducted by two independent sets of coders representative of two levels of “theoretical saturation,” *theory neutral* (i.e., *not* representative of any particular theoretical perspective) and *theory laden* (i.e., representative of the theoretical coders' consensual understanding of the particular theoretical perspective that they exemplify). An analysis of the exact match of the

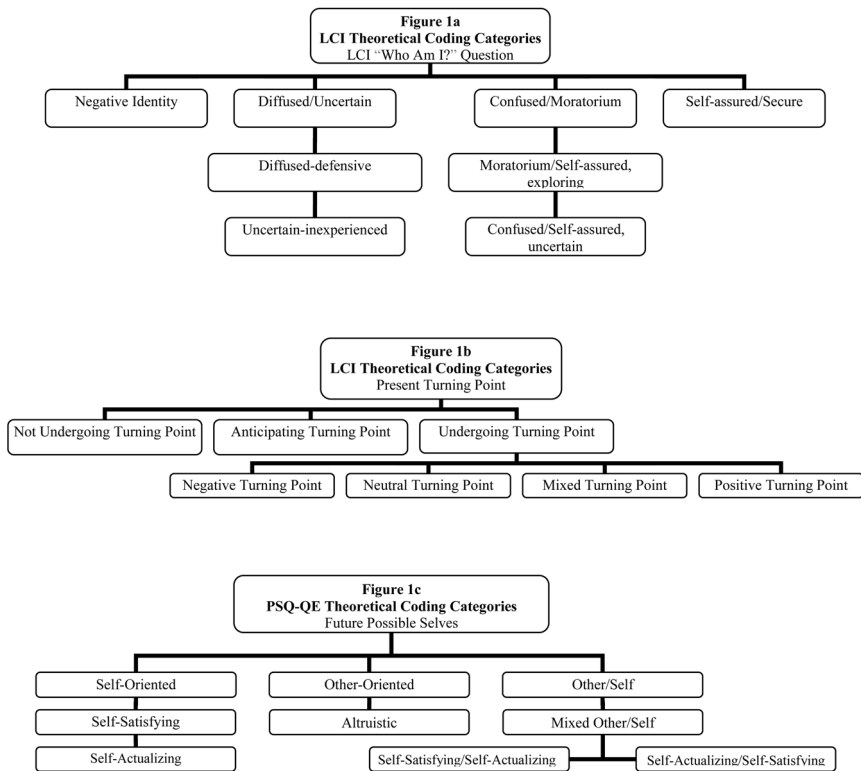


Figure 1. Coding categories for LCI and PSQ-QE.

category classifications by the two sets of independent coders (i.e., the conceptual and theoretical coders) for this data set yielded 100% agreement for the Negative Identity category, 85.4% for Diffused–Uncertain, 85.3% Confused–Moratorium, and 81.6% Self-assured/Secure Identity. The overall agreement across all categories was 88.1%, providing strong evidence for concurrence across types of coders.

Because the data were collected using a mixed (within and between) quasi-experimental comparison control design, it was also possible to evaluate the strength of the association between participation in the CLP intervention condition and qualitative changes in the hypothesized direction of positive development using variable-oriented quantitative data analytic strategies. Because the research hypothesis investigated focused on both between and within group differences (assessments repeated over time), the variable-oriented data analytic procedure selected for use was a mixed design Repeated Measures Multivariate Analysis of Variance (RMANOVA), with

Personal Identity as the dependent variable. An RMANOVA was used to evaluate the magnitude of the association between intervention participation (yes – no) and qualitative change in identity category classification over time (same – different), with and without tests for potential moderating effects of gender and/or ethnicity. The results indicated no significant main effect for the repeated factor time but a highly significant time \times condition interaction in the hypothesized direction and no significant interaction trend for time \times gender and time \times ethnicity. Thus, although there were some differential patterns, the basic pattern of qualitative change for participants in the CLP intervention condition tended to be positive, significant, and in the hypothesized direction relative to non-intervention controls.

The conceptual and theoretical coding phases for *Present Turning Point* resulted in the identification of three theoretical categories (Not Undergoing Turning Point, Anticipating Turning Point, and Undergoing Turning Point) and four subcategories (Negative, Neutral, Mixed, Positive Turning Point) also with a moderately complex structure (see Figure 1b). In addition, an exact match analysis again also provided evidence for the construct validity of the LCI yielding for this data set the following average percent agreement: 93.6% Not Undergoing Turning Point category; 78.8% Anticipating Turning Point; 87.5% Undergoing Negative Turning Point; 87.5% Undergoing Neutral Turning Point; 93.8% Undergoing Mixed Turning Point; and 90% for the Undergoing Positive Turning Point category. The overall agreement across all categories and subcategories was 88.4%, again providing strong evidence for concurrence across types of coders.

Finally, the LTP RMANOVAs yielded a significant time \times condition interaction in the hypothesized direction with participants in the CLP intervention condition reporting that they anticipated or were undergoing a positive life turning point significantly more often than participants in the control condition. In addition, the results showed no other 2-, 3-, or 4-way interactions, indicating that these results were not significantly moderated by gender or ethnicity.

Relational data analysis: Possible selves questionnaire – qualitative extension

The outcome measure used for the RDA of the second set of data was the PSQ-QE, which builds on the PSQ (Oyserman, 1987). The PSQ-QE is an extension of the PSQ, adapted and refined for use in our program research to provide a method for eliciting the expressed meaning and significance of participants' possible future selves that could be used as a qualitative measure of a core component of self-development. The data set consisted of 96 participants (73 intervention, 23 controls). Of the 96 in intervention, 43

completed a PSQ-QE as part of CLP's core assessment battery during their pre (fall) evaluation, a mid-year (winter) evaluation, and a year-end (spring) evaluation. The RDA analysis included 175 TRs. The findings of the RDA analysis of the PSQ-QE data, like the LCI analysis, provided evidence for the methodological and theoretical utility of the PSQ-QE as an open-ended (unstructured) "brief" response qualitative index of a core component of self-development, only in this case with a measure that can be group administered to relatively large samples.

The conceptual and theoretical coding phases of RDA yielded three theoretical categories (Self-oriented, Other-oriented, Other/Self) and six associated subcategories (Self-satisfying, Self-actualizing, Altruistic, Mixed Other/Self, Self-satisfying/Self-actualizing, Self-actualizing/Self-satisfying) of future possible selves, again providing evidence for the utility of RDA as a method for identifying theoretically meaningful categories in open-ended and unstructured interview response data. The organizational structure of the categories and subcategories was moderately complex (see Figure 1c).

An exact match analysis provided evidence for the construct validity of the PSQ-QE, yielding the following average percent agreement: 95.4% Self-oriented, Self-satisfying category; 87.5% Self-oriented, Self-actualizing; 92.5% Other-oriented, Altruistic; 85.6% Other/Self, Self-satisfying/Self-actualizing; 84.4% Other/Self, and Self-actualizing/Self-satisfying. The overall average percent agreement across all categories and subcategories was 89.1%

PSQ-QE positive intervention gains: Pre – post change (intervention versus control)

Because the PSQ-QE is a "brief" response qualitative index and can, consequently, feasibly be group administered to relatively a large sample across multiple conditions (intervention, control) and across multiple assessment periods (fall, mid-year, year-end), it was possible with this data set to investigate not only participant intervention gains (pre to mid-year) relative to the control condition, but also intervention maintenance (pre, mid-year, year-end) for participants in the CLP intervention condition. In addition, the additional data points also made it possible to explore more fully the complex moderating effects of gender and ethnicity on CLP intervention response in this richly multicultural/multi-ethnic population of adolescents.

An RMANOVA that used PSQ-QE as a dependent variable to evaluate positive intervention gains pre to post yielded a significant time effect, no significant time × condition interaction, and a highly significant time × condition × gender interaction effect ($p < .001$).

From Figure 2 it can be seen that for the participants in the CLP intervention condition, the basic pattern of intervention gain for the PSQ-QE paralleled that of the LCI, i.e., the directionality of the basic pattern of change was positive with qualitative change for participants of both genders and all three ethnic groups tending to change in a positive direction, in this case, from Self-satisfying to Self-actualizing/Self-satisfying, relative to the control condition. As can also be seen from Figure 2, the directionality of the basic pattern of change in the control condition from pre to mid-year was negative, with the direction of qualitative change trending from Self-actualizing/Self-satisfying to Self-satisfying. Of additional significance from a diversity perspective, however, this basic pattern varied across gender or ethnicity, with participants of both genders and the three ethnic groups displaying differential patterns of change over the semester. For example, the females in the control condition moved in a positive direction (similar to the CLP intervention condition) while males in the control condition moved in a negative direction over the semester. The pattern of change in the control condition also showed a similar pattern of moderated change across ethnic groups. White non-Hispanics and Black/African Americans in the control condition tended to move in a negative direction over the semester while Latin/Hispanic participants tended to move in a positive direction.

Maintenance of intervention gains

A second RMANOVA was conducted using the 43 participants in the CLP condition to determine whether the intervention gains from pre to mid-year were maintained at year-end and to explore whether the maintenance of intervention gains was moderated by gender and ethnicity. Because the analysis of intervention maintenance involved evaluating patterns of change over more than two time points (i.e., pre, mid-year, year-end), tests of within-subject contrasts for the repeated factor time and time \times gender and ethnicity interaction effects were conducted for PSQ-QE. The use of tests of within-subject contrasts allowed for modelling patterns of individual change over time (e.g., within-group change assessed at multiple times). In modelling change, within-subject contrasts for the repeated factor evaluate the curvilinear as well as the linear component of change (i.e., quadratic), allowing for a more complex and complete examination of potential moderators of outcome differences. The tests of within-subject contrasts for the repeated factor time and time \times gender and ethnicity interaction effects indicated that the trends for the direction of qualitative change as assessed by PSQ-QE were: (1) positive from pre to mid-year and maintained at the year-end evaluation; and (2) significantly moderated by gender and ethnicity. An examination of the tests of within-subject contrasts further indicated that while the time \times gender and the time \times ethnicity interactions

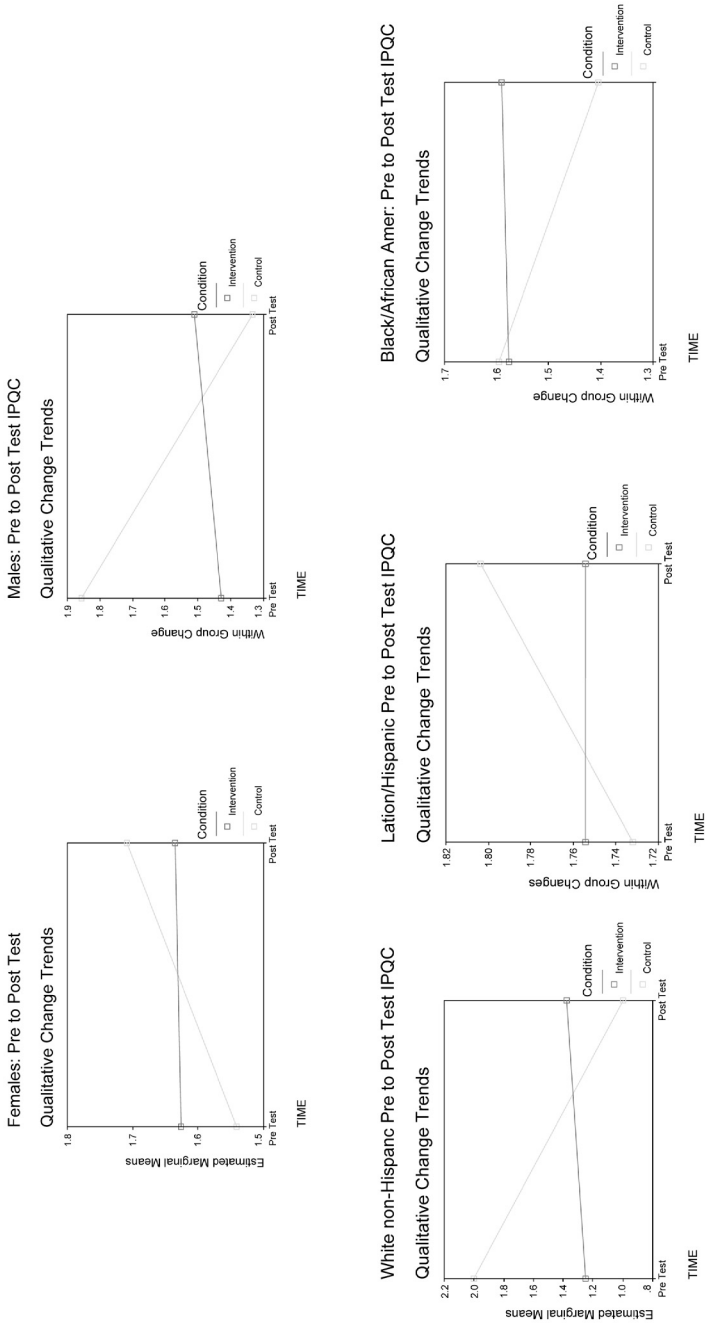


Figure 2. OPQC profile plots of significant four-way interaction effects for time × condition × gender × ethnicity: pre and post.

were not significant, there was a significant linear component for the time \times gender \times ethnicity interaction effect in the hypothesized positive direction. More significant, the quadratic component was *not* significant indicating that there was no significant change in the year-end evaluation from the positive direction of the pre to mid-year change, i.e., that the positive directional change was maintained at year-end evaluation.

An examination of the multivariate tests of significance for the between-group effects revealed the same pattern of change as for the within-group contrasts. Specifically, although the main effect for the repeated factor time was significant, the time \times gender and the time \times ethnicity interaction were not significant, there was a significant time \times gender \times ethnicity interaction effect. Figure 3 presents the profile plots of significant interaction effects for the intervention condition for the three assessment times: pre, mid-year, year-end. From the top left profile plot in Figure 3 it can be seen that for the intervention condition, the positive directionality of the basic pattern of change from post to year-end was maintained. As the figure shows, although the basic trends did not increase from mid-year to year-end, they also did not decrease, i.e., the gains were maintained.

What the remainder of the profile plots show (and the significant time \times gender \times ethnicity interaction effect supports), however, was that this overall pattern was significantly moderated by gender and ethnicity. The main source of the moderation effects of pre to post change was from the differences in the pattern of change by gender and ethnicity. Figure 3 further illustrates the complex nature of this interaction. The top centre profile plot, for example, shows both females and males gain over time and maintain their gains. It also shows, however, that males tended to begin the intervention groups characterizing their future possible selves as Self-satisfying at pre and to undergo greater change in the direction of characterizing their future possible selves as realizing potentials (Self-actualizing) and/or benefits to others (Altruistic) at post.

The top-right profile plot, the time \times ethnicity interaction, similarly shows that all three ethnic groups gain over time and maintain their gains. It also shows, however, that Latino/Hispanic participants tended to begin the intervention least likely to be characterized as Self-satisfying and they were also least likely to make gains over time and that White non-Hispanics tended to begin the intervention most likely to be characterized as Self-satisfying and were most likely to make gains over time.

Finally, Figure 3 further shows how the pattern of change described by the two-way time \times gender and time \times ethnicity interactions were further qualified by the significant three-way time \times gender \times ethnicity interaction effect. The findings represented by these profile plots are also highly suggestive with respect to the issue of amenability to treatment, which concerns the identification of subgroups of individuals who are likely to be

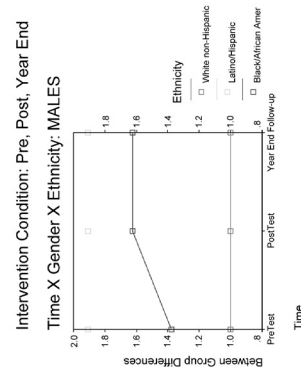
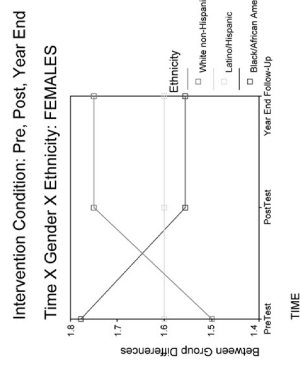
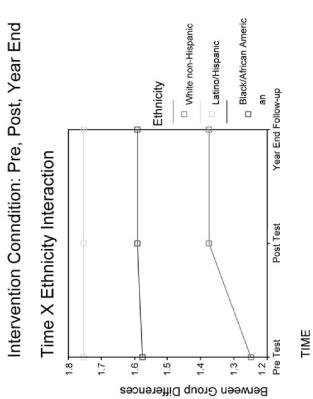
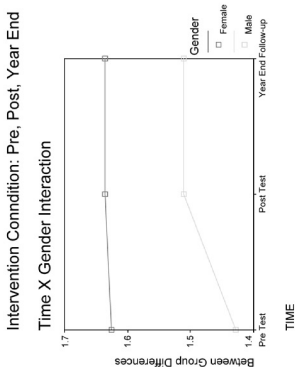
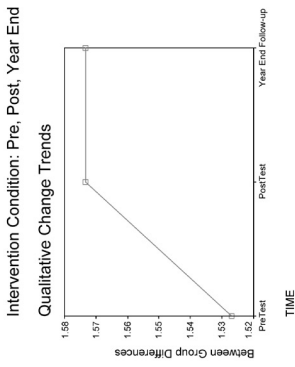


Figure 3. OPQC profile plots of significant interaction effects for time \times gender \times ethnicity: pre, post, year-end, follow up.

the most amenable or responsive to a treatment, an issue that has recently come to the foreground in the literature on the development of interventions that target young people.

DISCUSSION

We began by noting that the answer to the question posed by the title of this paper, “Does intervention change anything?” is yes, but we can now add that it is a multiply qualified yes. Young people in our intervention did change in ways that we think are positive, and RDA appears to make an important potential contribution as a data analytic framework that can detect such change (and with the potential for unifying the long-standing methodological split that has characterized the study of human development).

One result of the traditional focus on short-term variational (quantitative) change rather than transformational (qualitative) change is that our knowledge about how interventions are related to the reduction of risky or problem behaviours far outstrips our knowledge of how they are related to the qualitative change in the life course prospects of the individual. That is, little is known about whether such interventions increase the likelihood of qualitative change in the life course experiences, and even less is known about the types of intervention strategies that might facilitate qualitative life course change. As part of our program of research, we consider our work on CLP a contribution to the evolution of positive youth development programs that target changing the lives in troubled youth, and our work on the LCI and PSQ-QE a contribution to the development of measures for documenting qualitative change in the expressed meaning and significance of the life course experiences of young people.

Although the data presented here are preliminary, the findings provide evidence for the success of CLP in promoting positive qualitative change. Across both measures the basic pattern of qualitative change for participants in the CLP intervention condition tended to be positive, significant, and in the hypothesized direction relative to non-intervention controls. Although our preliminary results are qualified by indications that young people may respond differently to interventions, depending on their gender and their ethnicity, there are general trends of change that seem to be the result of our intervention. Specifically, the results document a relation between participation in CLP and short-term qualitative longitudinal change at the individual developmental level with respect to their life trajectories. With respect to the way they characterized their visions of themselves in the future, most youth initially portrayed Self-satisfying goals but tended to portray their future

possible selves as realizing potentials (Self-actualizing) and/or or benefiting others (Altruistic) after intervention. Intervention also appeared to foster positive changes in identity (from negative and diffused toward self-assured and secure). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, intervention was also associated with the self-perception of a positive change in life course trajectory for many youth, who had sought our assistance in turning their lives around.

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