

# Promoting Positive Youth Development

## Implications for Future Directions in Developmental Theory, Methods, and Research

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The efforts of the Miami Youth Development Project reported in this special issue illustrate how Developmental Intervention Science (DIS; a fusion of the developmental and intervention science) extended to include outreach research contributes to the development of community-supported positive youth development programs. In the process, the articles further illustrate the general utility of Developmental Intervention Science outreach research in facilitating the use of descriptive and explanatory knowledge about changes within human systems that occur across the lifespan in the development of evidence-based individual and institutional change intervention strategies for promoting long-term developmental change. Additionally, the articles illustrate the considerable implications that the application of DIS outreach research has for future directions in knowledge of human development at all levels (practical as well as methodological, theoretical, and metatheoretical).

**Keywords:** *positive youth development; community supported interventions; developmental intervention science; applied developmental science; multistage longitudinal comparative (MLC) research design*

The Miami Youth Development Project (YDP) had its beginnings in the early 1990s in response to the needs of the community's youth (Arnett, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2008, this issue). The Miami YDP's subsequent evolution illustrates the value of conducting research through university-community collaboration and in accordance with the outreach research model (Jensen, Hoagwood, & Trickett, 1999; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). This article describes some of the obstacles we encountered as we undertook this challenge and some of the ways we succeeded in building university-community collaborations and local partnerships that were able to meet community and university needs at many levels while helping to meet the needs of young people in the community. The article also illustrates how the successful application of Developmental Intervention Science (DIS) using outreach research principles contributes to advancing knowledge with broad-ranging consequences for developmental science at all levels: methodological, theoretical, metatheoretical, and practical (Kurtines, Ferrer-Wreder, Berman, Cass Lorente, Silverman, Montgomery, 2008, this issue).

## **Methodological, Theoretical, and Meta-Theoretical Implications**

### **Rendering Explicit and Intelligible the Subjective Meaning of Life Course Experiences**

At the methodological level, a core contribution of the work described in this special issue involved the development of Relational Data Analysis (RDA; Kurtines, Montgomery, Lewis Arango, et al., 2008, this issue). RDA is a multidimensional, multiphase framework for unifying data analytic strategies across dimensions (quantitative/qualitative, causal/structural, etc.) and phases of analyses (conceptual, theoretical, and research analyses). Although RDA was developed as a generic methodological framework, its application was illustrated using a specific programmatic example, namely, creating a positive youth development intervention that draws on the strengths of a DIS approach and extends this perspective by drawing on outreach

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research principles in the development of community-supported positive development programs. At the methodological level, the qualitative methods that we have been developing for capturing the process of change at the individual level appear to have the capability of identifying and rendering explicit and intelligible the content, structure, and organization of the categories and properties of the subjective meaning and significance of participants' experiences of self and identity (Lewis Arango, Kurtine, Montgomery, & Ritchie, 2008, this issue; Kortsch, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2008, this issue).

At the theoretical level, both the RDA life course interview (LCI) and the Possible Selves Questionnaire—Qualitative Extension (PSQ-QE; as adopted for use in RDA) were able to capture at the individual level a broad spectrum of conceptually and theoretically meaningful categories of subjectively meaningful experiences of personal identity, life course turning points, and future possible selves in the young people in our program. Moreover, narrative expressions of subjective experiences collected using these qualitative measures could be coded and classified with a level of reliability and validity that parallel those of quantitative measures and analyzed with data analysis methods and procedures that draw on the analytic power of statistical methods developed primarily for use with quantitative data.

Our experiences in developing the RDA LCI with participants in our youth development program also helped document the value of the qualitative methods we have been refining in giving voice to the feelings and experiences of young people. Indeed, in the case of the LCI, because the interview is audiotaped and administered one-on-one in an open-ended format that asks young people to talk about themselves and their lives (via the interview protocol), their response was generally very positive. Even when the content of the life course experiences described in their narrative expressions was negative, they frequently were positive about the interview process, often expressing appreciation for the opportunity to talk about the issues. It has thus been our experience that the methods we have been developing not only have the capacity to capture reliably and in real time a moving "snapshot" of the categories of subjective meaning and significance that the youth in our program use in the construction of their sense of self and identity, but also that these are methodologies with the potential to richly reflect rather than reduce the experiences of these young people.

Thus, though preliminary, the results of the use of RDA in two Multistage Longitudinal Comparative (MLC) Stage II studies reported in this issue (Lewis Arango et al., 2008, this issue; Kortsch et al., 2008, this issue) pointed to promising new directions for advancing the scientific investigation of the subjective meaning and significance of human experiences

and, in the process, helped to overcome the tendency to privilege instrumental action over expressive action and observation over interpretation that characterized the previous century of scientific inquiry (a legacy of the split metatheory of the positivist tradition in the philosophy of science, cf., Overton, 2006; Montgomery, et al. 2008, this issue).

### **Overcoming the Meta-theoretical Methodological Split**

The ways we have modified methods drawn from the qualitative/field tradition (e.g., grounded theory's use of the method of constant comparison, etc.) for coding and classifying responses to our open-ended measures and fused their use with methods drawn from the quantitative/experimental tradition (e.g., the use of psychometric theory in estimating reliability and validity, the use of experimentally manipulated variables characteristic of the psychological research tradition, etc.) has advanced our effort at overcoming the methodological split at the metatheoretical level by challenging the validity of the split at the theoretical and factual level.

Specifically, the results obtained with the particular modifications to the methods and procedures for coding open-ended response data that we have developed and refined, for example, intentionally manipulating the level of theoretical saturation of the coders at each phase of the data analysis—theory neutral, theory saturated—as well as the type of coding, conceptual open coding (COC), theoretical open coding (TOC), theoretical classification coding (TCC), and psychometric analysis of the category coding, provided considerable support for the utility of this type of practical, ready-at-hand relational methodological framework.

In our program of research, for example (see Lewis Arango, 2008, this issue; Kortsch et al. 2008, this issue; Kurtines, Montgomery, Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2008, this issue), the use of an experimental manipulation of three sets of coders (theory neutral, theory laden, theory neutral), each using a distinctly different variant of the method of constant comparison (COC, TOC, TCC), provided multiple independent perspectives on the participants' response data and proved particularly useful when fused with a systematic application of the grounded theory method of constant comparison. Moreover, this systematic variation in the use of the method of constant comparison (conceptual coding versus theoretical coding, open coding versus classification coding) across two measures and three sets of response data yielded consistently high levels of both reliability (intercoder and retest) and validity (construct and concurrent). The average category classification agreement (between independent coders blind to time and condition) was in the high 80s across all

variables and a subset sample of the Personal Identity responses yielded high retest reliability (88%) across the four theoretical categories over a 2 to 4 week retest interval, providing strong preliminary evidence for the reliability of the theoretical categories. The correlation between the theoretical coders' TCC (i.e., the theory laden, TOC condition) and the TCC of an independent third set of coders (i.e., the theory neutral, TCC condition) was high for the RDA LCI Personal Identity categories and Turning Point categories ( $r = .75$  and  $.92$  respectively) and also high for the PSQ-QE future possible selves categories ( $r = .86$ ) providing strong preliminary evidence for high construct and criterion-related (concurrent) validity for the identified theoretical categories.

In addition, we were not only able to capture a broad spectrum of theoretically meaningful categories of subjectively significant and meaningful experiences of personal identity, life course turning points, and future possible selves in the young people in our program; the pattern of qualitative change for participants provided evidence for the short-term efficacy of the Changing Lives Program (CLP), specifically, the pattern of differential intervention response among program participants tended to be positive, significant, and in the hypothesized direction relative to the comparison group participants for the qualitative indicators of personal identity (RDA LCI-PI), life course turning points (RDA LCI-TP), and future possible selves (PSQ-QE).

At the metatheoretical level, our assumption (see Kurtines, Montgomery, Lewis Arango, et al., 2008, this issue) was that the field has advanced to the point where the types of metatheoretical methodological frameworks needed for integrating research traditions are now available (e.g., Overton, 2006), and the next step was to begin to develop practical methodological frameworks for integrating the traditions at the theoretical and factual level in concrete and specific domains of research. In the research reported here, we addressed these methodological (and developmental) issues in the real-life setting of a youth development program for multicultural, multiproblem youth in Miami's alternative public high school and found the results promising. For example, we consider the findings from the MLC Stage II program evaluation studies reported in this special issue to indicate that rather than our scientific investigation being diminished or compromised by the use of participants' reports of their subjective experiences, their use substantially enriched our scientific investigations. Specifically, the use of practical open-ended methods enabled us to capture the subjective meaning and significance of their life course experiences at the intersection of a developmental and historical moment that located them at the leading edge of both developmental and historical change.

Moreover, the positive and constructive nature of our experience appears consistent with the broader observation (see Lerner, 2005) of an increased

appreciation of the importance of qualitative methods, as valuable tools for the analysis of the life course and as a means to triangulate quantitative appraisals of human development, accompanied by a growth in traditional qualitative methods, along with new qualitative techniques. That is, the use of methods and techniques at the theoretical and factual level draws on the relational ideal of fusing the strengths of each of the traditions at the metatheoretical level (Overton, 2006).

## **The Fusion of Developmental Science and Intervention Science**

The trend toward the fusion of developmental science models of *what* changes and *how* it changes and intervention science models *what to* change and *how to* change it illustrates a similar movement toward unification. Drawing on a conceptual base provided by an applied developmental science perspective and informed by social policy research (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000), DIS is committed to the use of descriptive and explanatory knowledge about changes in human systems that occur across the lifespan in the development of evidence-based individual and institutional change intervention strategies for promoting long-term developmental change.

We adopted a DIS approach as a framework for our program of research and extended it to include outreach research. Doing so allowed us to take full advantage of one of the most important strengths of outreach research, namely, its commitment to advancing knowledge at all levels by drawing on its characteristic long-term commitment to meeting community needs. In doing so, our efforts included refining a fusion of research designs in which randomized clinical trials (RCTs) and longitudinal comparison trials (LCTs) are employed sequentially and complementarily. In this fusion, RCTs and quasi-experimental designs are employed in Stage II comparative evaluations of the intervention's efficacy (i.e., generating differential short-term outcome); LCTs are employed in Stage III comparative evaluations of the intervention's effectiveness (i.e., generating differential long-term outcome).

In the process, we have been refining a type of outreach research design, the structure and format of which is intended for use in evaluating at the individual level the efficacy/effectiveness of intervention change strategies designed specifically to generate long-term life course change in positive developmental domains as well as long-term change in reduction of problem and/or risky behaviors. The recognition of the need for such designs

has emerged as a result of the trend toward a fusion of treatment, prevention, and positive development intervention literatures. The recognition of the need for such designs has also been the result of the emergence of community-supported interventions (i.e., programs that are affordable and sustainable as well as efficacious and effective). From such a perspective, the emergence of community-supported outreach research interventions facilitates the full realization of the potential of comparative and longitudinal evaluation research by extending the current focus on the evaluation of clinical intervention change strategies designed to generate symptom reduction. The logic of outreach research—research that involves a long term commitment of both community stakeholders and researchers to the development of programs that meet community as well as youth needs—renders possible the emergence of new directions in the evaluation of developmental intervention change strategies (i.e., change strategies designed specifically to generate long-term [developmental] life course change).

## **The MLC Program Evaluation Design**

Although the results of RDA LCI and the PSQ-QE MLC Stage II studies were promising, they represent only the second stage in a MLC program evaluation design. An MLC is implemented as a multistage longitudinal and comparative design intended to provide a comprehensive evaluation of community-supported outreach programs in terms of both internal and external validity over the lifespan of the program participants as well as the lifespan of the program itself. Specifically, MLC are designs used in evaluating the efficacy/effectiveness of a program's developmental intervention change strategies in producing long-term life course change in program participants using both RCTs and LCTs and evaluating whether the program itself is affordable and sustainable in real world settings over the long term. The MLC design was modeled after existing recommendations for developing and evaluating interventions (Rounsaville, Carroll, & Onken, 2001); however, in this case for a longitudinal evaluation with respect to the life span of the both the participants and program. That is, the MLC design draws on the multistage approach but adapts it for use in developing and evaluating community-supported DIS positive development programs in an outreach research format.

As part of this process, we have undertaken the task of systematically accumulating a set of MLC data (i.e., a multistage longitudinal and comparative set of data across all the basic stages of program evolution—Formation, Consolidation, Maintenance/Dissolution). The data set is intended to ultimately

represent the entire course of the existence of this specific program within this specific community, thereby opening up the possibility of a new level of program evaluation, specifically, a life-span program evaluation that is cradle to the grave with respect to both participants and programs. In this context, we consider the evolution of MLC types of research designs to have considerable potential to help in rendering transparent the historical sequencing of structural patterns of change in the formation, consolidation, and maintenance/dissolution of real world community programs.

The Stage II research reported in this special issue thus represents only one component of the initial phases of our planned multistage longitudinal comparative program evaluation. Many basic issues, both short and long term, were unaddressed by these studies and represent central components of YDP's long-range evaluation plan. A distinct advantage of an outreach research program committed to remain in the community long enough for the realization of community-valued developmental goals for its youth is that this long-term commitment also creates the potential for addressing (in ways not typically available to externally funded short-term studies) long-range research related knowledge development goals for the field.

In our work to date, for example, we have undertaken the challenging task of developing a number of measures for capturing and assessing qualitative change in life course experiences with promising results. The results of our MLC Stage II evaluation (Kurtines, Montgomery, Lewis Arango, and Ritchie 2008, this issue; Kurtines, Montgomery, and Kortsch, 2008, this issue) provided evidence for the reliability and validity of our measures of participants' life course experiences, including their experiences of self and identity, indicators of what we have hypothesized as primary mediators of long-term life course change. We have also undertaken a preliminary evaluation of differential participant response to our current intervention program, the CLP, which has similarly shown promise. The results provided evidence for an association between participating in the positive youth development intervention and positive transformational change in the subjective meaning and significance of participants' life course experiences, including experiences of self and identity, an important finding because it sets the stage for future mediation analysis. We recognize, however, that although results providing evidence for the reliability and validity of our measures and evidence for positive short-term transformational change in participants' experiences of self and identity is a step in the right direction, it is only the first step in evaluating whether positive change in self and identity is a mediator of positive long-term life course change.

A turning point, we noted, is a specific type of state change. It is one characterized by a qualitative directional change (e.g., negative to positive),



and every directional change is potentially either short or long-term change relative to an individual's life course. In this context, the types of turning points we seek to promote are those that result in long-term directional change, which (borrowing from life course theory) we call *life course turning points*. As noted, however, the Stage II designs that we used for the research reported here were not able to determine whether participating in the positive youth development intervention and undergoing positive short-term transformational change in the subjective meaning and significance of life course experiences (including experiences of self and identity) resulted in long-term directional change. They cannot do so because of constraints built into the type of design itself rather than optional and modifiable components of the design (e.g., the rigor of experimental control of the reported studies, the statistical power of the studies' data analytic strategies, or even the number of studies reported in the literature). That is, regardless of how much we might increase the degree and/or specificity of our experimental control, the size of our sample (and its associated statistical power), or the number of RCT (and/or quasi-experimental) replications we conduct, short-term experimental designs cannot be used effectively to evaluate whether our program is successful in achieving its most important outcome, namely, promoting positive long-term life course change (and evaluating whether positive identity development functions as a mediator of positive long-term life course change).

Whether any given turning point is a life course turning point can only be evaluated retrospectively relative to a specific individual's life course through analysis of data collected by means of a research design that includes the type of multistage longitudinal and comparative components offered by an MLC design (i.e., components that yield a multistage longitudinal and comparative set of data). Thus, although well-controlled RCTs and quasi-experimental designs such as those we use in Stage II evaluations provide powerful tools for evaluating short-term differential response to treatment, the utility of such designs tend to be context specific. No research design works equally well in all contexts and, as discussed next, RCTs and quasi-experimental designs have built-in constraints that limit their utility for evaluating differential longitudinal change comparatively. Differential directional change that is long term, however, *is* the goal of positive youth development programs.

## Evaluating Life Course Change: Fusing RCTs and LCTs

Youth who engage in problem and risky behavior challenge the public order in ways that typically not only have a direct and negative effect on

their lives but on the lives of other individuals and institutions as well. In this context, developing interventions that reduce or eliminate problems in the short term and the use of short-term RCTs and quasi-experimental designs in evaluating the efficacy of such interventions has understandably been a high priority for funded research—it is a necessary first step prior to launching long-term effectiveness studies. The result has been that most funded evidence-based research has focused on using short-term wait list RCTs to provide evidence of treatment gain and maintenance (short-term reduction of problem or risky behaviors, e.g., pre-, post-, 1-year follow-up) for interventions for risky or problem behaviors.

An RCT wait-list control involves participant random assignment to a treatment intervention condition(s) or a wait-list control condition (WLC). Because the focus in the treatment literature has been primarily on the short-term reduction of problem and/or risky behaviors with direct and negative impact on self or others, the wait-list RCT has evolved as the normative form of the RCT design in efficacy research. Although a no-treatment control condition is in many respects more optimal for evaluating efficacy, there are considerable ethical reasons why no treatment designs tend to be used relatively infrequently. A no-treatment condition is one in which, by design, participants are designated not to ever receive the intervention under investigation. Ethical considerations regarding the potential risks for negative outcomes for research participants (and others) while randomly assigned to a no-treatment control condition tend to raise ethical concerns for the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) called upon to provide guidelines for research participant protection and safety.

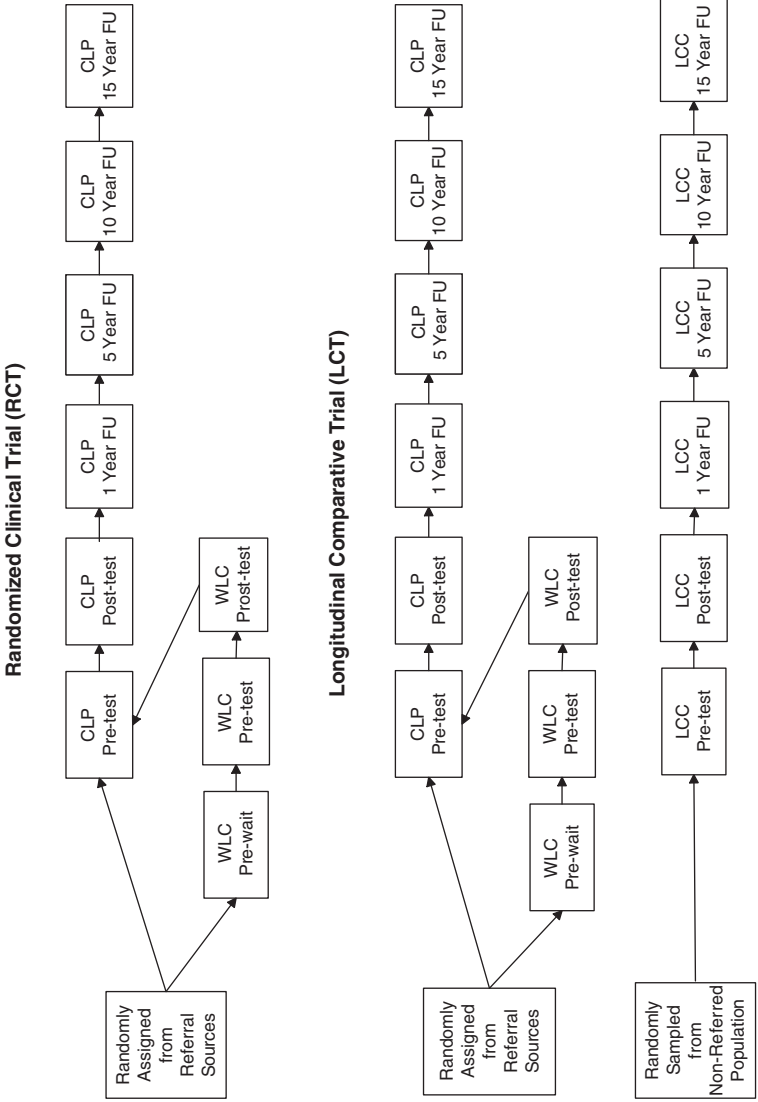
A WLC design, in contrast, is one in which by design all participants who meet inclusion criteria eventually receive the intervention's standard treatment dosage, with the only difference between the treatment and the control conditions being a delay in the onset of receiving the intervention that is generally no longer than the duration of the intervention (this process is similar to what happens when demand for services exceeds operational capacity, i.e., prospective patients are triaged and some patients have to wait until services become available). Moreover, the wait is generally of relatively short duration, usually not more than the duration of the treatment (typically 5 to 15 weeks), which is a main reason why IRBs reviewing treatment intervention studies find the risk of the use of wait list conditions not out of the range of ordinary experience and therefore an ethically acceptable design. Consequently, the RCT with a WLC, which in the treatment intervention literature is considered the gold standard for evaluating treatment interventions, is also used as the gold standard for evaluating youth development interventions (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999).

As noted, however, the utility of research designs tends to be context specific. All designs have built-in constraints that limit their utility. In this context, although IRBs tend to find WLC designs ethically acceptable when implemented with appropriate safeguards, one important methodological consequence of the use of such a design is that after receiving the standard treatment dosage the advantages of experimental control provided by such designs are lost. As can be seen from Figure 1, treatment and control participants no longer differ in any way controlled by experimental manipulation other than a delay in the onset of treatment—usually of relatively short duration. Consequently, although useful in evaluating short-term change, the necessarily brief delay of treatment renders the WLC participants functionally equivalent to intervention participants when the goal is evaluating change over a life course lasting several decades.

In this context, although providing evidence for short-term gain is an important step for interventions that target problem behavior and risk reduction and for positive development programs, because developmental change is longitudinal change it is only a first step. Providing evidence for long-term change is the critical index of intervention efficacy/effectiveness for programs that aim to promote long-term developmental change. From such a perspective, a fusion of RCTs and LCTs appears a potentially useful future direction for evaluating life course change.

Both types of designs are intended for use in outcome evaluation trials, differing primarily in terms of temporal sequencing. In such a fusion, RCTs are employed in Stage II comparative evaluations of the intervention's efficacy regarding short-term outcome; LCTs are employed in Stage III comparative evaluations of the intervention's effectiveness regarding long-term outcome. Moreover, as noted, a distinct advantage of a community-based outreach research program is that they include a commitment to remain in the community. Consequently, adequately evaluating the efficacy/effectiveness of the longitudinal change intervention strategies of programs that aim to promote long-term developmental change is facilitated by their evaluation in community-based outreach research programs committed to remain in the community long enough for the realization of community-valued developmental goals for its youth. This is so because programs created to include a long term community commitment have the advantage of also creating the potential for evaluating their efficacy/effectiveness in promoting long-term change in positive domains (and long term reduction/elimination of problem and/or risky behaviors as well) in ways not typically available when evaluating programs supported by short term external funding, even when the funding levels are high.

**Figure 1**  
**Research Designs: RCTs and LCTs**



In the case of a positive development program such as our CLP, for example, the critical question of whether any particular turning point is really a long-term directional change in an individual's life course could not be evaluated using RCTs or even by the short-term quasi-experimental design that we used in the Stage II studies (Kurtines, Montgomery, Lewis Arango, et al. 2008, this issue; Kurtines, Montgomery, and Kortsch, 2008, this issue). Whether long-term directional change in participants' sense of self and identity is associated with positive change in other domains (e.g., relational, behavioral, cognitive, affective, etc.) similarly could not be evaluated using randomized wait-list design or short-term quasi-experimental designs because treatment, prevention, and positive developmental intervention gains and maintenance, although important, cannot be assumed to be indicators of long term change—whether they are (or are not) is an empirical question. Thus, the question of whether positive directional change in a participant's experiences of self and identity (as measured by their narrative expressions of positive change in the subjective meaning and significance of the experiences of self and identity) promotes long-term life course change of any type in those participants was clearly not only not answered by the results from the reported studies—the question was not even asked.

Within the framework of an MLC design, Stage II research is an important component of the design in its own right because it includes conducting planned preliminary efficacy evaluation (psychometric evaluation of measures, short term controlled outcome studies, etc.) of an intervention program that provides preliminary reliability, validity, and utility checks as well as the opportunity for midcourse correction in research methods and procedures. Stage II research, however, is not designed to provide an evaluation of the efficacy/effectiveness of longitudinal intervention change strategies in promoting long-term developmental change. That task is part of MLC Stage III research activities.

MLC Stage III research activities include conducting ongoing evaluations of a program's long-term effectiveness (e.g., long-term controlled effectiveness outcome studies over the life span of the participants and the program) with respect to a diversity of outcomes evaluating the association between participation and long-term change. To evaluate such change, we have been collecting a data set for use in a LCT. Specifically, a CLP LCT Stage III feasibility study is currently underway in which longitudinal outcome data are being collected using a 2 X 2 . . . mixed (between and within) design with Condition (CLP versus Longitudinal Life Course Comparison Project [LCP]) as the between factor and Time (since initial entry into the program) as the within factor. For YDP, participants in LCP are comprised

of a sample of students randomly selected (and recruited) from across all the YDP Dade County Public Schools alternative high schools. The LCP data set will be comprised of students who have not requested and/or have not been assigned by the school counselor to receive CLP counseling services. For the Miami YDP, LCP will serve as a no treatment condition, specifically, a nonintervention, nonwait-list longitudinal closely matched comparison control condition.

The LCP comparison condition is a matched condition at multiple levels. At macro systemic level, participants in the CLP intervention condition and the LCP nonintervention condition both meet exactly the same inclusion criteria in effect during their birth cohort years for entry into the manipulated macrosocial educational intervention implemented by the Miami Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) School Board (i.e., regular high school versus alternative high school) within which CLP constitutes a macro nested intervention. That is, all students in MDCPS are initially assigned by MDCPS school board's defined criteria to one of two intervention conditions—either regular high school or alternative high school. Within the MDCPS alternative high school condition, participants in all the alternative high schools that are self or counselor referred for counseling are subsequently randomly assigned by CLP program staff to one of the YDP CLP research conditions: the CLP intervention or the WLC. A subset of the pool of participants in the alternative high schools who are not self or counselor referred for counseling are subsequently randomly assigned by CLP program staff (in consultation with school staff) to the LCP comparison control.

The YDP LCP is thus an integral component of the planned YDP MLC design; it is the Stage III longitudinal comparison condition for the LCT. It provides for the longitudinal accumulation of outcome data on a sample of nonintervention control participants (developmentally appropriate and cohort matched) drawn from the same set of alternative high schools as intervention participants but not participating in the CLP. The findings from the Stage III LCT outcome data thus has the potential to contribute to our knowledge of the long-term results of our specific intervention efforts relative to a sample randomly drawn from a cohort matched, developmentally appropriate pool of participants assigned to the same macrointervention but not specifically referred to the in-school intervention condition. In this respect, the LCP represents as close an approximation of a longitudinal no-treatment control condition as currently available and consistent with prudent consensually based research ethics. The data from these two YDP projects are being archived in an LCT data structure that will allow planned

longitudinal comparative outcome analyses of differential long terms symptom reduction, long term positive transformative change in self and identity, and associated positive (or negative) change in other domains (e.g., relational, behavioral, cognitive, affective, etc.).

## **Back to the Future: Restoring the Research Value of the Subjective Meaning and Significance of Life Course Experiences**

We also consider the work we have undertaken in developing a number of measures for capturing and measuring qualitative change in the subjective meaning and significance of life course experiences to make a broader contribution to current knowledge development in the field at a metatheoretical level. As discussed above (and Kurtines, Ferrer-Wreder, Cass Lorente, Silverman, Montgomery, 2008, this issue), the research value of reports of the meaning and significance of the life course experience (and other categories of subjective phenomena) underwent challenge during the first half of the 20th century and shifted out of the mainstream of scientific investigation in the psychological and developmental sciences in favor of objective (i.e., interpretation-free) behavioral observations.

As philosophical justifications for this shift have been rendered problematic, there no longer appears to be any substantive philosophical (metatheoretical), theoretical, methodological, or factual reason to rule out in advance the potential value of the scientific investigation of subjective experience to developmental and intervention science. In this context, we have undertaken an effort to reevaluate the relevance of reports of the meaning and significance of subjective phenomena. We have, however, not undertaken this reevaluation at the level of philosophical analysis; choosing instead to undertake it at the level of scientific analysis, specifically, at the level of factual and theoretical discourse rather than at the level of metatheoretical discourse. We have done so in the context of our particular research problem and population; of our theoretical need to capture in real time the temporal dimension of developmental and historical change (i.e., changing lives in changing times). We have also done it in the context of our need for measures, methods, and data analytic strategies capable of not only capturing developmental change in individuals' subjective meaning and significance of life course experience of potentially functionally important latent constructs such as self and identity in the raw and in real time, but also capable of rendering the content of the meaning and significance of these

experiences explicit and intelligible as well as theoretically meaningful. With respect to this issue, we consider the results of the empirical research reported in this article (e.g., high reliability, validity, utility, etc. of our measures and methods) to also be a step in the right direction—in this case the direction of contributing to the recognition of the research value of subjective experience in developmental and intervention science.

## Forward to the Future

The YDP MLC data discussed above will provide an opportunity to address the complex issue of the relation between the individual and society at a historical level, at least for the first half of the 21st century. In this context, our goal is to contribute to the broader prospective understanding of the process by which “. . . individuals direct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the constraints and opportunities of history and social circumstances” (Elder, 1998, p. 961). For the sample of troubled youth participating in the Miami YDP, this is especially the case with respect to knowledge of the means and methods by which they will overcome obstacles and challenges in the process of directing their life course as the first half of the 21st century unfolds.

There is of course no way to know in advance how the first half of the 21st century will unfold or what obstacles and challenges these youth will encounter. A primary focus of life course theory, however, is on the ties between history and lives, the process of constructing one's life, and the implication of timing in one person's life for the relationship between people and trajectories. Having readily available relational methodological, theoretical, and metatheoretical frameworks has considerable potential for facilitating the process of empirically working out the implications of this complex network of theoretical relations. Timing in the study of historical influence centers especially on life stage as a contingency. The same historical change has different consequences for people of different ages and developmental stage. In this context, the focus of the long-term longitudinal analysis of data from CLP and LCP will be on how contemporary adolescents, as members of the first birth cohort to enter the transition to adulthood during the first decade of the 21st century, are working out their individual life courses in the context of the existing or established social pathways awaiting them. Birth year indicates historical time, and chronological age acquires the meanings of social timing and life stage. Birth cohorts provide a link between historical change and the life course of individuals. Birth year or date of entry



into a system (e.g., school, work, counseling program, etc.) locates the individual according to historical time and related social changes; with age peers in the cohort, this person is exposed at a particular segment of historical experience as he or she moves across the sequence of age-graded roles (Elder, 1998, p. 948).

In extending life course theory and linking it to grounded theory, the methods of data collection that we have been developing and are putting into place for our planned longitudinal and comparative (MLC) program evaluation (i.e., a methodologically and developmentally appropriate array of open-ended structured and unstructured measures) will be capable of capturing the impact of the event history of the first half of the 21st century on the life course event history of this cohort in whatever way it unfolds. More important, the open-ended nature of our measures and methods will provide the opportunity to capture and render intelligible the unfolding historical events in terms of the richness of their meaning and significant as life course experiences to the participants in our study.

## Practical Implications

From its beginnings in the early 1990s, the evolution of the YDP as a response to the needs of troubled youth has exemplified the practical value of conducting research through university-community collaboration and in accordance with the outreach research model (Jensen et al., 1999; Lerner, et al., 2000). Now in completing its second decade, YDP is a community-supported program that not only exemplifies the practical value of outreach research, it passes the tests (i.e., feasible, affordable, and sustainable in real world settings) with flying colors. To date, no external public funding (e.g., federal or state grant or contract funding) has been used to support the project—all of the support needed for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the project and its programs was drawn entirely from public and private resources locally available to the community.

The project's success, however, does more than document the time/cost effectiveness of outreach research at the local level; it also illustrates the potentially enormous time/cost effectiveness of such an approach if successfully transported to the national level. Our project worked and has been effective, we noted, because Miami is a community that cares and is willing to give of itself. In this way, however, it is not unique. Other major urban communities are similarly concerned about their multi-problem youth and the direction their lives have taken. More important, they too

have local resources that are untapped and people who care enough about the community to make a commitment to its youth. In this respect, the future for DIS outreach research and the development of community-supported programs appears to point in promising new directions.

Finally, consistent with the tradition of effective outreach research, we consider knowledge dissemination both a bottom-up and a top-down activity. Consequently, in addition to traditional scholarly knowledge dissemination formats (e.g., papers, presentations, books, etc.), YDP's knowledge dissemination efforts also includes exploring practical, hands-on ways of sharing knowledge about how to draw on these resources, to not only meet such community needs but also about how to put them to use in knowledge development efforts at all levels (e.g., with new and/or experienced researchers and community practitioners). These efforts involve a community service commitment that includes consultation, training, and support in the development, implementation, and evaluation of outreach research and service programs in a variety of publicly available formats. These include on-site or on-campus consultations; clinical training and implementation workshops; research and evaluation workshops, including both qualitative and quantitative methods; and community service internships for local and national high school and college students.

Our efforts, however, have implications that extend well beyond the potential time/cost effectiveness of such an approach at both the local and national levels, however significant that may be. The community partnership that has emerged out of this effort not only illustrates the practical value of university-community collaborative models in addressing pressing community needs, but also points to the conceptual utility of a learning collaboration between scholars and community partners in participating in the knowledge generation process (Eccles, 1996; Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). As the results reported in this special issue indicate, the evolution of the Miami YDP took a promising step in this direction.

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