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Promoting Identity Development in Marginalized Youth

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This study tested a school-based intervention developed for use with urban minority youth vulnerable to multiple negative developmental outcomes. A quasi-experimental design (pre- and post-follow-up with matched comparison condition) was used to evaluate the impact of the intervention on promoting positive change in four developmental domains (skills/knowledge, attitudes, orientations, exploration/commitment) related to identity development. The final set of participants comprised a matched sample of 92 youngsters, 46 in the intervention and 46 in the comparison condition. Quantitative results indicated that the intervention condition showed positive and significant gains from pre- to posttest on multiple indices, with a tendency toward the “leveling off” of intervention gains at follow-up. A qualitative assessment of the impact of the intervention illustrated positive effects of the intervention as well as the possible obstacles to intervention efficacy.

Contemporary youths have increasingly become alienated from mainstream social institutions that have traditionally provided them with value

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references and normative support (Côté, 1994; Tait, 1993). As a consequence, growing proportions of young people have put little, if any, investment in these institutions. In the United States, a large proportion of young people come from inner city, low-income minority families that exist within a community context of disempowerment, limited access to resources, and daily violence, crime, and substance abuse (Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, & Serafini, 1996; Dahlberg, 1998). Such youth often respond to their marginalization in ways that further distance them from prosocial sources of support. In the context of a culture that has become increasingly more complex, diverse, and pluralistic, confronting challenges and making the life choices that define an individual's sense of personal (i.e., Who am I?) and moral identity (i.e., What do I believe in?) has become a formidable task, even for the most resilient of young people (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Côté & Allthar, 1996).

Erikson and Erikson (1957/1995) foresaw the importance of intervening during adolescence to redirect the energies of young people toward productive styles of living and prevent society's confirmation of, and a young person's commitment to, a socially marginalized identity. Plasticity in development continues throughout life (Lerner, 1995), and for certain areas, adolescence provides a maximally effective point of focus for social programs (Sherrod & Brim, 1986). Consistent with this recognition, there has been a recent upsurge in efforts to promote adolescent competence in diverse aspects of life (Charlton, Minagawa, & While, 1999; Weissberg, Caplan, & Harwood, 1991). Within the field of identity development, there has also been an awareness of the need for intervention programs (Archer, 1994). Pioneering intervention work by Enright, Ganiere, Buss, Lapsley, and Olson (1983); Enright, Olson, Ganiere, Lapsley, and Buss (1984); and Markstrom-Adams, Ascione, Braegger, and Adams (1993) provided evidence that it was possible to enhance processes hypothesized to promote identity development through short-term training.

The growing emphasis on the promotion of youth development has raised questions about important gaps in research-based knowledge in this area, particularly concerning youth who begin life marginalized from mainstream sources of support (Sherrod, 1997). Little is known, for example, about how these young people subjectively experience the challenges they face. Although preliminary efforts to engage this difficult-to-work-with popula-

assistance and guidance. Partial support for this project was provided through funding to the first author from a National Institutes of Health Minority Access to Research Careers Predoctoral Fellowship. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Laura Ferrer-Wreder, School of Behavioral Sciences and Education, Pennsylvania State University—Capital College, 777 W. Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057-4898; e-mail: laf21@psu.edu.

tion have proved promising, there is a need to broaden our existing knowledge to include intervention approaches that specifically target this population (Sherrod, 1997).

This article reports an evaluation of an intervention designed to address this need by integrating existing approaches in ways that may prove useful in working with the young and the marginalized. This intervention evolved as part of an ongoing program of co-constructivist theory and research (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2001; Kurtines, 2001; Milnitsky et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2001; Schwartz, Berman, & Kurtines, in press). The goal of this study was to begin to investigate in a systematic way promising new options for working with these young people—ways that appear to have the potential to promote positive development in general and the process of identity development in particular. To this end, the intervention draws its developmental framework from an Eriksonian (1968) approach. A basic assumption of this intervention, consequently, is that effective identity interventions need to provide opportunities for youth to develop the tools and competencies essential to finding and redefining adaptive identity commitments across the life span (Waterman, 1994).

For its intervention strategies, the Making Life Choices Program (MLCP) draws on Freire's (1970/1983) participatory and transformative learning model. The focus of these strategies is not on providing youth with direction but on creating contexts in which young people themselves can discover their own competence for influencing the direction of their lives. The practical implications of drawing on this approach is that, in the program, the participant and interventionist work together to creatively explore and critically challenge potential life choices (i.e., participatory learning activities). Once a young person goes through this process, the next step involves generating plans of action (i.e., transformative activities) to address the identified choices and challenges. By engaging in this reciprocal process, participants come to acquire greater critical understanding, transform their sense of control and responsibility, and increase their proactive participation in defining for themselves who they are and what they believe in.

This intervention approach seeks to promote change in four developmental domains. The skills/knowledge domain focuses on the promotion of critical problem solving and decision making. Cognitive problem solving is a protective factor that is negatively related to various adolescent problem behaviors (e.g., Tolan & Guerra, 1994). There is also growing recognition that various types of cognitive problem solving are related to the process of identity development (Grotevant & Adams, 1984). The "critical" competence targeted by the MLCP draws on Freire's work and includes generating

alternatives for solving problems as well as adopting a critical stance toward life choices.

The attitudes targeted for intervention include increasing one's sense of control over and responsibility for life choices and the consequences of those choices. The issue of control and responsibility has been widely addressed (Bandura, 1989; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998; Sappington, 1990). This study targets the development of "a sense of" control and responsibility, as defined by Erikson (1980), as one's attitude toward life tasks. From such a perspective, accepting control and responsibility of one's life is a core component of moral character and an integral part of adaptive identity development.

The orientations targeted for intervention include the three identity styles described by Berzonsky (1989). These problem-solving orientations were selected for intervention because the degree to which one uses each orientation is predictive of one's overall identity development (Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). The informational style characterizes active explorers; the normative style characterizes those who demonstrate an uncritical acceptance of ways of life from others; and the diffuse/avoidant style characterizes those who typically avoid the active exploration of and commitment to life alternatives. The MLCP targets increases in the use of the informational style and reductions in the normative and diffuse/avoidant styles.

Finally, exploration and commitment were targeted because these processes are indices of proactive participation in the task of defining for oneself a direction and purpose worthy of personal commitment (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). An emerging literature indicates the benefits of engaging in an exploratory identity process in terms of psychological health and lack of involvement in youth problem behaviors (Archer, 1989; Hernandez & DiClemente, 1992; Jones, 1994). This program targeted change in identity processes that are foundational to identity development over time. The possible interplay between changes in identity process and structure was investigated.

METHOD

Design and Procedure

The MLCP was implemented as a selective intervention with a multiethnic sample of adolescents who were evaluated by their school system as being at risk for problem behaviors and were placed in an alternative high

school setting. This study used a quasi-experimental research design (a pre- and post-follow-up with a matched comparison condition) and was offered as part of the school's guidance counseling program. All participants who took part in the study volunteered for either the MLCP weekly group meeting once a week for 9 weeks (Intervention Condition [IC]) or a project that focused on developing a moral education curriculum (Comparison Condition [CC]). The CC activities were not presented through the guidance office, and participants did not meet as a group for any activities other than the assessment sessions. All participants were pre-, post-, and one-month follow-up tested.

Participants

A total of 135 adolescents participated in this study (IC = 55, CC = 80). Fourteen of the participants initially recruited dropped out prior to completion of the study. To compensate for some of the experimental control lost with a quasi-experimental design, a matched comparison condition was used. Because of the potential influence of individual differences in identity development, the participants were matched on identity status (Markstrom-Adams et al., 1993). The instrument used to assign status, Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995), yields results that are reasonably comparable to leading measures in the field (Craig-Bray & Adams, 1986; Grotevant & Adams, 1984). Because of differences in the initial sample size and identity status frequencies, 2 IC and 27 CC participants could not be matched and were excluded from the present outcome analyses.

The final sample was comprised of 92 participants (IC = 46, CC = 46) in grades 9 through 12, ranging in age from 14 to 21 ($M_{IC} = 16.41$, $M_{CC} = 16.83$), with both genders equally represented (22 males and 24 females in the IC and 24 males 22 females in the CC). The intervention condition was predominately Hispanic (50%) ($n = 23$) and African American (28%) ($n = 13$), with 22% ($n = 10$) of the IC identifying themselves as non-Hispanic Whites. The comparison condition was also predominately Hispanic (54%) ($n = 25$) and African American (28%) ($n = 13$), with 17% ($n = 8$) of the CC identifying themselves as non-Hispanic Whites. This study was conducted in two data collection phases, fall (IC = 35, CC = 27) and spring (IC = 11, CC = 19). Spring-semester participants did not complete the follow-up testing due to the end of the school year. As a result, a complete set of pre- and post-follow-up data was available for 62 participants who completed the program during the fall semester.

Measures

Life context. Because so little is known about how youth experience the life challenges they face, the two life choices generated by participants for the Personal Responsibility Measure (PRM) (described below) were used to construct an ethnographic description of the youths' life context. Two independent coders classified life choices into categories and identified thematic patterns across categories using procedures drawn from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) method of constant comparative analysis.

Skills/knowledge. The Critical Problem Solving Scale (CPSS) (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, in press) is a performance-based measure that presents participants with two life-choice dilemmas. The CPSS assesses participants' capacity to generate alternatives to the dilemmas, to cognitively decenter and evaluate each alternative, and to select the alternative supported by the "best argument." The CPSS yields four subscales: the Generation of Alternative Solutions (GA) score is the average number of choices generated across both dilemmas, the Decentering Positive Alternatives (DPA) and Negative Alternatives (DNA) scores consist of the average number of "cons" provided for the participant's "best" alternatives and the number of "pros" provided for the participant's "worst" alternatives across the two dilemmas, and the Modification (MO) score is an index of participants' willingness to modify their original "best" choices across the two dilemmas. The CPSS Total (CPSSTOT) score is the average of all of the subscales and provides an overall index of performance on the CPSS. Raters trained in using the CPSS codes scored performance on the CPSS. Interrater reliability for the scoring was 89%. Cronbach's alphas for the CPSSTOT score have been reported as .70 for college students (Berman et al., in press; Bussell, Ferrer, Kurtines, & Lorente, 1996) and was .68 for this sample.

Attitudes. The PRM (Rice, Berman, Ferrer, & Kurtines, 1996) is a self-report questionnaire that asks participants to describe two life choices (one personal, one interpersonal) and to rate, on a 5-point Likert-type scale, the extent to which they feel they have control over and responsibility for their decisions and the possible consequences of these decisions. The PRM yields four subscales: the Control for Decisions (CD) score is the average of the participants' ratings for control over the two decisions, the Control for Consequences (COC) score is the average rating for control over the possible consequences of the two decisions, the Responsibility for Decisions (RD) score is

the average rating for responsibility for the two decisions, and the Responsibility for Consequences (RC) score is the average rating for responsibility for the possible consequences of the two decisions. The PRM Total (PRMTOT) score is the average of all of the subscales and provides an overall index of control and responsibility. Cronbach's alphas for the PRMTOT score have been reported as .78 for college students (Brown, Arrufat, & Ferrer-Wreder, 1997; Rice et al., 1996) and was .73 for this sample.¹

Orientations. The Identity Style Inventory (ISI3) (Berzonsky, 1989, 1992) is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 40 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. This measure yields three continuous identity style scale scores: information-oriented (INFO), norm-oriented (NORM), and diffuse/avoidant-oriented (DIFF) as well as an index of identity commitment (COMMIT). For this study, the sixth-grade reading level adaptation of the ISI3 (ISI-6G) was used (White, Wampler, & Winn, 1998). Because there has been little research that tests the utility of the ISI3 or ISI-6G with noncollege adolescent samples (Wampler & White, 1996), psychometric analyses were conducted using pretest scores for this sample. On the basis of these analyses, 4 INFO items, 2 NORM items, 1 DIFF item, and 2 COMMIT items were not included in the scale scores used in this study. Cronbach's alphas for the ISI-6G scores were INFO = .59, NORM = .64, DIFF = .78, and COMMIT = .72 for college students (White et al., 1998) and were INFO = .59, NORM = .56, DIFF = .71, COMMIT = .61 for this sample.

Exploration/commitment. The EIPQ (Balistreri et al., 1995) is a 32-item, self-report survey rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The EIPQ yields four scale scores: ideological exploration (IDEOEXP), interpersonal exploration (INTEXP), ideological commitment (IDEOCOM), and interpersonal commitment (INTCOM). Because no previous studies using the EIPQ with a noncollege adolescent sample could be located, psychometric analyses were conducted using pretest scores for this sample. On the basis of these analyses, 1 exploration item and 8 commitment items were not included in the scale scores used in this study. Exploration and commitment Cronbach's alphas have been reported as .76 and .75, respectively, for college students (Balistreri et al., 1995) and .69 and .60 for this sample.

Global impact. Narrative histories (NH) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) were used to augment quantitative analyses with an individualized yet outcome-oriented qualitative method for evaluating the impact of the intervention. Narrative histories were derived from the interventionists' case observations and field notes. Strategies recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (1994),

Merriam (1988), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) (e.g., triangulation, multiple-source verification of the narratives, and external validity checks) were used to substantiate the trustworthiness of the qualitative data.

RESULTS

Condition Comparability

Comparisons of sociodemographic variables across conditions were conducted. There was a significant difference between the IC and CC in terms of grade level, $\chi^2(3, 92) = 7.93, p < .05$. The IC showed a greater number of participants in Grade 10 ($N_{IC} = 18; N_{CC} = 8$), and the CC had a greater number of participants in Grade 11 ($N_{IC} = 9; N_{CC} = 17$). There were no other significant differences.

Life context. For this sample, ethnographic analyses of the PRM indicated that the largest number of responses reflected life challenges that were interpersonal in nature ($n = 55$), including dilemmas about family ($n = 38$) (e.g., “I need to stop disrespecting my mom.”), romantic relationships ($n = 12$) (e.g., “getting deeper into a relationship”), and friendships ($n = 5$) (e.g., “I need to start picking better friends.”). The personal dimension ($n = 36$) involved concerns more characteristic of the type of issues that have traditionally been the focus of research on identity development (e.g., “I need to decide to finish school or drop out, I’m gonna start taking school more seriously. I think that I would have a lot more work that I’m not used to, but it will lead to more important choices that I would make.”). A main theme across both dimensions centered on the recognition that something had to change. Many participants indicated that barriers to realization of this change included a lack of connection and a deep sense of distrust of traditional support systems as well as uncertainty about the prospects of affecting real change in their lives (e.g., “If I would try to be more open, people will understand me more or they can use it against me.”).

The low occurrence of concern about crime and violence was noteworthy. An earlier study (Berman et al., 1996) conducted at this school, using Richters and Saltzman’s (1990) Survey of Exposure to Community Violence, indicated high exposure to crime and violence among this population. Ninety-eight percent of the participants, for instance, reported some exposure to crime and violence, with 41% having indicated witnessing a killing. The low occurrence of reference to this issue on the free response measure may reflect the extent to which crime and violence has come to be taken for

granted and may reflect a pervasive sense of powerlessness in the face of this issue in contrast to dilemmas involving school, family, and peers, which may in context be perceived as more manageable.

Impact of the Program on Targeted Developmental Domains.

For the quantitative analyses, mixed-design (between and within) repeated measures ANOVAs and MANOVAs were used to test for the hypothesized interaction effects with respect to intervention gains (pre- to post improvement in IC relative to CC) for the full sample of 92 participants (IC = 46, CC = 46) and for intervention maintenance (pre, post, and follow-up) for the 62 participants (IC = 35, CC = 27) who completed the follow-up assessment.

Skills/knowledge. For the intervention gain analyses, the RANOVA for the CPSSTOT score yielded a significant interaction effect in the predicted direction, $F(1, 73) = 4.18, p < .05$. The RMANOVA for the CPSS scale scores yielded a significant multivariate F (Pillai's Trace) for the Time \times Condition interaction, $F(4, 70) = 2.45, p < .05$, with a significant interaction effect in the hypothesized direction for the GA score, $F(1, 73) = 8.45, p < .05$. The intervention maintenance analysis for CPSSTOT yielded a significant interaction, $F(2, 41) = 6.69, p < .05$. The RMANOVA for the CPSS scale scores yielded a significant multivariate interaction, $F(8, 35) = 3.99, p < .05$, with a significant interaction effect for the GA score, $F(2, 84) = 9.79, p < .001$. Maintenance effects for CPSS scores, although significant, tended to show a loss of intervention gain at follow-up (see Table 1).

Attitudes. For the intervention gain analyses, the RANOVA for the PRMTOT score showed a significant interaction effect in the hypothesized direction, $F(1, 64) = 7.79, p < .05$. The RMANOVA for the four PRM subscales yielded a significant multivariate interaction, $F(4, 61) = 2.47, p < .05$. Univariate analyses indicated change in the hypothesized direction for two (COC and RC) of the four subscales, $F(1, 64) = 4.45, p < .05$ and $F(1, 64) = 9.55, p < .05$, respectively. The RANOVA and RMANOVA for the intervention maintenance sample did not indicate significant interaction effects.

Orientations. The intervention gain analyses (RMANOVA) for the three identity style scale scores yielded a significant multivariate interaction, $F(3, 53) = 3.06, p < .05$. The results of the univariate F tests indicated a Time \times Condition interaction for the NORM score, $F(1, 55) = 3.29, p = .075$, that approached significance. The pattern of means showed a decrease in the

TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and *F* Ratios for Intervention Gain and Maintenance Samples on the CPSS

	<i>Pre</i>		<i>Post</i>		<i>RANOVA</i>			
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>F Ratio</i> *	df		
CPSSTOT					4.18*	1, 73		
IC	1.65	0.63	1.94	.67				
CC	1.51	0.58	1.48	.63				
GA					8.45*	1, 73		
IC	3.76	1.14	4.30	1.31				
CC	3.42	1.09	3.08	1.08				
	<i>Pre</i>		<i>Post</i>		<i>Follow-up</i>		<i>RANOVA</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	<i>F Ratio</i> *	df
CPSSTOT							6.69*	2, 41
IC	1.73	0.65	2.17	0.64	1.73	0.61		
CC	1.72	0.59	1.50	0.39	1.55	0.57		
GA							9.79**	2, 84
IC	3.73	0.99	4.63	1.20	3.87	1.11		
CC	3.86	1.23	3.14	0.70	3.44	1.10		

NOTE: IC = Intervention Condition; CC = Comparison Condition.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

normative style in the IC relative to a CC increase. When the same analyses were conducted for the intervention maintenance sample, the RMANOVA no longer yielded a significant multivariate interaction. RANOVAs using the intervention gain and maintenance samples for the COMMIT score indicated no significant interaction effects.

Exploration/commitment. The intervention gain and maintenance analyses for the EIPQ exploration scores did not yield significant multivariate interactions. The results for the intervention gain analysis for the EIPQ commitment scores indicated a multivariate interaction, $F(2, 86) = 2.97, p = .056$, that approached significance. The results of the univariate *F* tests showed a significant interaction effect for the IDEOCOM score, $F(1, 87) = 5.99, p < .05$. The pattern of means indicated a decrease in commitment for the IC relative to a CC increase. When the same analyses were conducted for the intervention maintenance sample, the interaction effects were no longer significant. Nonparametric tests indicated no significant identity status change in either condition for intervention gain and maintenance (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and F Ratios for Intervention Gain Sample on the PRM, ISI-6G, and EIPQ

	<i>Pre</i>		<i>Post</i>		<i>F</i> ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>F Ratio</i> *	df
PRMTOT					7.79*	1, 64
IC	3.81	0.59	4.19	0.54		
CC	3.89	0.68	3.80	0.68		
COC					4.45*	1, 64
IC	3.46	1.03	3.81	0.92		
CC	3.66	0.98	3.50	0.85		
RC					9.55*	1, 64
IC	3.82	0.82	4.22	0.74		
CC	4.09	0.73	3.81	0.77		
NORM***					3.29	1, 55
IC	2.86	0.63	2.65	0.79		
CC	2.74	0.75	2.87	0.69		
IDEOCOM					5.99*	1, 87
IC	3.30	0.99	3.12	0.75		
CC	3.20	0.90	3.56	0.83		

NOTE: IC = Intervention Condition; CC = Comparison Condition.

* $p < .05$. *** $p = .075$.

Identity process and structure. To examine the possible interplay between identity and identity process, gain and maintenance analyses were conducted for status by condition interactions. To meet test assumptions, "lower" and "higher" statuses were combined into two groups: lower = diffusion ($n_{ic} = 23$, $n_{cc} = 23$)/foreclosure ($n_{ic} = 6$, $n_{cc} = 6$); higher = moratorium ($n_{ic} = 9$, $n_{cc} = 9$)/achievement ($n_{ic} = 8$, $n_{cc} = 8$). Analyses focused on those domains, which should be directly related to identity structure.

For the ISI-6G identity style scale scores, intervention gain analyses for the lower status group yielded a significant multivariate Time \times Condition interaction, $F(3, 28) = 2.97$, $p < .05$. The results of the univariate F tests indicated a significant interaction for the INFO score, $F(1, 30) = 5.24$, $p < .05$. The pattern of means indicated a pre- to posttest gain for the IC and CC, with the IC showing a greater increase. The intervention maintenance analyses for the identity style scores did not indicate a significant multivariate interaction effect. Intervention gain and maintenance analyses for the higher status group yielded no significant interaction effects. No significant interaction effects were found in either status group on the COMMIT score.

For the EIPQ, intervention gain and maintenance analyses for both the higher and lower status groups yielded no significant interaction effects for

TABLE 3: Status by Condition Analyses for Intervention Gain Sample on the ISI-6G and EIPQ

	<i>Pre</i>		<i>Post</i>		<i>F</i> ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>F</i> Ratio*	df
INFO					5.24*	1, 30
LIC	3.30	0.73	3.99	0.46		
LCC	3.64	0.52	3.81	0.40		
IDEOCOM					4.74*	1, 55
LIC	3.13	0.89	3.04	0.69		
LCC	3.09	0.90	3.57	0.79		
INTCOM					7.26*	1, 30
HIC	4.38	0.53	4.04	0.57		
HCC	4.05	0.59	4.26	0.47		

NOTE: LIC = Low Status Intervention Condition; LCC = Low Status Comparison Condition; HIC = High Status Intervention Condition; HCC = High Status Comparison Condition.

* $p < .05$.

the exploration scores. The intervention gain analyses for the lower status group yielded a significant multivariate Time \times Condition interaction, $F(2, 54) = 3.99, p < .05$, for the commitment scores. The results of the univariate F tests indicated a significant interaction for the IDEOCOM score, $F(1, 55) = 4.74, p < .05$. The intervention gain analyses for the higher status group also yielded a significant multivariate Time \times Condition interaction, $F(2, 29) = 3.91, p < .05$, for the commitment scores. The results of the univariate F tests indicated a significant interaction for the INTCOM score, $F(1, 30) = 7.26, p < .05$. Both status groups showed a commitment decrease in the IC relative to a CC increase. Effect maintenance was not demonstrated for either status group (see Table 3).

Global impact. Narrative histories² provided some indications of the impact of intervention on the lives of these young people as well as barriers to implementation. Gustavo, for example, had a long history of school failure and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Gustavo's behavior in the initial sessions was dominated by his "one-sided" and reactive approach to life. However, with time, he displayed a pattern of behavior that indicated that changes were taking place. With a growing sense of mastery, he was able to deal with even the most difficult aspects of his life. For example, Gustavo's father, recently released from prison, was trying to be a part of Gustavo's life once again when Gustavo discovered that he had "gotten" his girlfriend pregnant. What to do next became the focus of critical examination within the

group. Gustavo took the lead in engaging the group in a dialogue on the problem based on their experiences as children of absent parents as well as those who were young parents themselves. Gustavo still has a long way to go, but his narrative history helps document the positive response of these youth to the opportunity to engage in activities to change the pattern of their lives toward engagement and reinvestment. Jack's case, on the other hand, was one in which the program had no apparent effect. Jack's recent loss of one of his parents, coupled with a reoccurring addiction problem, rendered him one of the most difficult youth in the project to try to reach. His case suggests that although the program can be used to work with young people who have very difficult lives, the accumulation of normative and nonnormative risks may require more extensive efforts (Williams, Ayers, Abbott, Hawkins, & Catalano, 1996).³

DISCUSSION

In view of the gaps that exist in our knowledge of how to work with marginalized young people, the goal of this study was to explore and evaluate ways of integrating existing approaches that may prove useful in working with this population. The aim was to expand available options for creating contexts that help young people begin to transform themselves through the development of a critical understanding of their life context, a sense of control and responsibility over their lives, and an increasingly proactive participation in defining for themselves who they are and what they believe in. The ethnographic analyses of the youths' subjective experience of marginalization provided insight into why these young people are difficult to engage and work with. The quantitative results, in turn, documented some of the ways that the intervention had a positive impact on the targeted developmental domains as well as indicating ways in which it may be improved.

The overall pattern of quantitative results was by and large promising. Participants in the intervention condition exhibited significant gains in the hypothesized direction for total and subscale scores in the skills/knowledge and attitudes domains. The most positive and significant gains tended to be from pre- to posttest, indicating the need to focus on maintaining these gains. The results obtained in the orientations and exploration/commitment domains, although more complex in interpretation, also supported a trend of pre- to posttest "gain" for the intervention condition relative to the comparison condition. The immediate impact of intervention on the orientations and exploration/commitment domains lends highly conditional yet provocative evidence to several discussions on the nature of identity.

For example, the pattern of change in these domains was interesting in that the “gain” involved decreases in the normative style and commitment rather than increases. It can be argued that decreases in the normative style are desirable for youth who frequently are the apprentices of those who advocate and engage in antisocial lifestyles. However, the low reliability and the lack of univariate significance on this scale score warrant cautious interpretation of this finding. The pattern of change in the exploration/commitment domain was similar to the change in the normative style in that there was a decrease in ideological commitment rather than an increase in active exploration. The decreases in commitment may represent a gain in the context of longitudinal studies of identity development, which have shown that growth-related forms of identity regression frequently occur (Kroger, 1996; Kroger & Green, 1996). Although longitudinal follow-up was not conducted in this study, available longitudinal research provides evidence that decreases in commitment have been precursors to later proactive forms of identity development. In addition, the finding of increases in critical skills and decreases in identity commitment supports Kroger’s (1996) observation that growth-related forms of identity regression may occur more often when individuals engage in higher levels of dialectical thinking.

The status by condition analysis provided further insight into the nature of change taking place in the orientations and exploration/commitment domains. In terms of orientations, the trend of decrease in the normative style was accompanied by an intervention gain in the informational style in the lower status group. Status by condition analysis of the commitment scales indicated that decreases in commitment occurred in both status groups but in different domains (i.e., lower = ideological; higher = interpersonal).

Overall, these differential gains by condition and status support the position that an individual’s progress in identity work is an essential consideration in the design of identity-targeted prevention programs and psychotherapy (Marcia, 1994; White et al., 1998). Because identity interventions are still in a formative period and much longitudinal research remains to be done, speculation on status-appropriate intervention programs/techniques requires further investigation. In developing identity interventions hierarchical and invariant assumptions that are embedded in models of identity development may need to be reconsidered. A clear goal of intervention work should be the promotion of a resilient sense of self. Individuals may differ in how they accomplish this task (Archer, 1989; Kroger, 1996). The focus of this intervention was not only to produce identity structure and process changes but to also develop methods for promoting basic competencies that individuals can readily draw on in the course of their identity development. Future research should be guided by a view of identity formation as a dynamic and intra/

interindividual life span developmental process (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Kroger, 1996).

The quantitative results of this study were most promising with respect to immediate intervention gains. The general lack of maintenance of effects points to a serious limitation of the current effort. This limitation may be the product of measurement error, program content/duration, and design limitations. In terms of measurement error, many of the instruments used to assess change were not developed as outcome measures and/or have not been extensively tested with the type of sample that was investigated. The aim of this intervention was to bring about change in the quality of the lives of young people who are marginalized with respect to most mainstream markers of performance, including obligatory written or oral tasks. Further modifications of these instruments may be needed to combat the problem of repeated testing and make them more appropriate for the sample. This study contributes to this aim by adding to what is known about the utility of the measures used (i.e., CPSS, PRM, ISI-6G, and EIPQ) with an ethnically diverse, at-risk adolescent sample. The content and duration of the MLCP may have also been a problem. A deeper understanding of identity processes is clearly needed (Grotevant, 1987). Refinement of MLCP components has focused on further exploration of identity processes, including the development of components designed to promote personal expressiveness and identity capital. The duration of the MLCP may also need to be increased to strengthen the long-term impact of the program.

The quasi-experimental design of this study greatly limits the making of causal inferences based on the study's findings. The condition comparability results indicated a significant difference between the conditions in terms of grade level. This difference may have been due to the alternative academic structure of the school where this study was conducted. Despite the lack of differences between conditions on sociodemographic variables and the use of matching procedures, self-selection into condition may have influenced program efficacy. Although the quasi-experimental design resulted in basic limitation, working in a non-research-oriented school-based environment strengthened the external validity of this study (Resnicow & Kirby, 1997) and is in line with efforts to focus not only on demonstrating program efficacy but also implementation feasibility (Tolan & Guerra, 1994). Additional methodological refinements—such as random assignment to condition, longer-term follow-up, the measurement of program efficacy in terms of prevalence rates and related behavioral changes—are essential to provide a stronger evaluation of MLCP. A full-scale randomized trial of the MLCP is clearly needed to provide anything more than conditional evidence of the utility of the program.

In light of these limitations, it should be noted that the use of qualitative methods in this study helped contribute to what is known about how youth subjectively experience the challenges they face in their life context. Specifically, the ethnographic analyses conducted in the current study complements the growing body of quantitative research that documents the properties, developmental course, and impact of risk factors (Jessor, 1998). The use of the participants' free responses in a qualitative format provided direct access to their own personal expressions of their subjective experience of adversity, thereby providing a window into the lives of the young people who are supposed to profit from intervention. In addition, the narrative histories collected provided further insight into the development and evaluation of the MLCP by showing, on an individualized level, how the youth responded to the program itself and how it related (or failed to relate) to their lives. This study explored the ways that quantitative and qualitative methods can be used to provide a broader view of program development and evaluation (Durlak, 1997).

The young people who participated in this study are subject to racism, oppression, and the deleterious effects of poverty. Yet, in our work, we have found that these youths respond positively to contexts that provide them with the opportunity to use participatory and transformative methods in ways that enable them to proactively participate in their lives. Speculation on the ultimate value of this approach is tentative. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of results points to the development of integrative approaches as potentially promising for extending available knowledge for engaging difficult-to-work-with populations.

NOTES

1. Test manuals for the CPSS and PRM are available by request.
2. Complete copies of the narrative histories outlined here are available by request.
3. Complete copies of the qualitative procedures/results and the MLCP action guide are available by request.

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