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Roger J.R. Levesque

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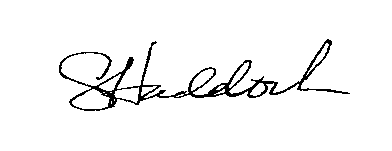
May 17, 2020

Dr. Levesque,

We appreciate the opportunity to re-submit our manuscript entitled, *Does Organizing Mentor-Mentee Matches into Small Groups Enhance Treatment Effects in a Site-Based Mentoring Program for Adolescents? Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial*. We completed a thorough revision based on reviewer and editorial comments.

We appreciate your consideration of our revised manuscript for publication.

Sincerely,



Shelley A. Haddock, Ph.D.

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**Manuscript #JOYO-D-20-00255**

**Response to Reviewers**

**Thank you for the thoughtful comments. We have carefully considered and addressed each comment. See our specific responses below.**

Reviewer #1: This paper reports research assessing whether grouping mentor-mentee pairs into small groups with other pairs (as Mentor Families) enhances the value of a site-based mentoring program. The logic and methods of the paper are well described, and the conclusions are generally reasonable. The paper is also admirable in making a direct and modest empirical claim - that the Mentor Family approach does not seem to significantly add value. This is well contextualized with the more abstract point that mentoring research is at a point of benefitting from more directly assessing the variables that lead to positive effects. I have some general points of feedback that might encourage reframing and minor revisions, but overall am positive about the quality and contribution of the paper.

**Response:** Thank you for your time in reviewing the manuscript.

One general issue I found a bit confusing through the paper was the exact conceptual role of "setting" and "setting quality." At the start of the paper this seems to be framed as an outcome variable, but it is hard to understand how the setting for mentoring (which seems like a relatively fixed variable) could be dependent upon the size of mentoring groups. As the paper proceeds the "setting quality" is phrased more as a mediator variable that depends upon more dynamic variables such as sense of belonging, and that makes a bit more sense. I realize from the paper this is based partially on the Eccles and Gootman characteristics of programs that promote youth development, but the use here is ultimately selective - just belonging and mattering - and doesn't intuitively fit with what most would think of as the 'setting' for a mentoring program or other youth program. In the section of the methods around page 11 where the key variables are described I was not convinced that just measuring mentee perceptions of belonging and mattering really constitute a valid measure of 'setting quality' (since the setting quality for youth programs involves a number of other more tangible components). I wonder, therefore, if that piece could be reconceptualized - could something like 'psychosocial environment' or 'supportive environment' be substituted for 'setting' and 'setting quality'? Or even 'experiences of the setting', since that is really what is being measured? Whatever the terminology, I think this could benefit from some clarification and consistency through the paper. (On page 6, for example, quality of relationships and setting quality are presented as the key 'mechanisms of change' and on page 8 they are presented as 'mediating' the effects of mentoring - but in the abstract and on page 4 they are presented as outcome variables for the research)

**Response.** Thank you for this feedback. First, we updated the manuscript to clearly and consistently present setting quality and mentoring relationship quality as hypothesized mediators.. Second, to clarify, we are conceptualizing “setting” for this study consistent with Eccles’s and Gootman’s characteristics of positive developmental settings. Consistent with Eccles and Gootman (2002) and others (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2006), “setting” here refers to the youth’s interaction with the setting. Indeed, within a developmental framework, it would be inaccurate to discuss setting absent the child and vice versa. We provided additional details of our conceptualization on pages 2-3 and will continue to use setting and setting quality consistent to previous literature. Eccles and Gootman describe 8 features of quality settings. We included measurement of each of these 8 features, in addition to assessing mattering and belonging at the program. Description of our measures starts on page 10.

The overall methodology of the paper seems fine to me, though I'm not an expert on the specific techniques used here. Beyond the concern about the measures for 'setting quality' noted above, the description of methods did raise a few questions for me as a reader. First, the fact that the outcome variables are measured as ending in week 11 of a 12 week program, without any post-program follow-up, does seem like a significant limitation - which the paper acknowledges. But why was there no post-program follow-up to see if the program had any kind of lasting effect? Also around page 10 of the methods it explains that the sessions were randomly assigned as to whether they included Mentor Families - but if I understood correctly, participants were not randomly assigned to sessions? That could be okay, but it seems like it merits some explanation - how were participants assigned to sessions, and how might those groupings have differed? Finally, on the methods, I thought the paper did a nice job explaining the situation with program-dropouts and non-responses to the final survey. But as I understood it the drop-outs were meaningfully different from the rest of the participants, while the non-responses to the final survey were not - yet missing data was replaced for both groups using FIML. This may be a technical point I don't understand, but if the drop-outs were different from non-drop outs and did not really participate in the program then why would their missing data be replaced and used? It makes much more sense to me to replace and include missing data from those who simply didn't respond to the final survey.

**Response**: First, our main purpose of the study was to explore the impact of mentoring groups on positive youth development. Thus, looking at the lasting impact of the mentoring group after the intervention would not properly address our main objective. However, we acknowledge the limitation of this-we were not able to assess the lasting impact of the mentoring program itself due to low response to follow-up surveys (6 months after the program ended).

Second, each semester, eligible youth were referred to the program. At receipt of referral, youth completed an intake meeting, in which youth and parent(s) indicated their availability to attend on specific nights of the week (Mon, Tues, Wed, or Thurs). Scheduling was based on youth’s availability and space on a given night. After youth were scheduled in, small groups were formed. Then, condition was randomly assigned to the sessions. We conducted analyses to determine if mentees' demographic characteristics and their baseline scores differed as a function of condition. We found that the control condition included more White mentees than the treatment condition (p <.05) and mentees in the treatment condition showed lower academic grades compared to mentees in the control condition (p <.05). No other differences were found. Considering possible explanations for these differences, we were unable to determine what may have contributed to these differences and feel it would be inappropriate to offer tenuous speculation. By and large, the groups were similar. We added a description on pages 8-9. In subsequent analyses, we controlled for these variables.

Third, in order to properly account for missing data due to dropout and due to survey non-response, we utilized full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to fit each treatment effects model, an estimator that allows all cases to be retained in the analysis. Collins, Schafer and Kam (2001) demonstrated that FIML can recover the bias caused by predictable reason(s) for missingness when other variables that are related to missingness or predict missingness are included in the model. Given that each of our models include baseline demographic characteristics as well as the baseline version of the outcome, then FIML’s ability to adequately account for missing data is tenable. We explained the missing data approach more clearly on pages 16-17.

As more minor points:

I found both the title and the abstract hard to make sense of during a first read - they make sense after reading through the whole paper, but I wonder if they could be revised to be more explanatory for someone not already in the research. In the title, for example, the capitalized Mentor Families phrasing makes it seem like a trademarked approach - but I don't think it is. In the abstract, as another example, the idea that the study is trying to test "the impact of Mentor Families…on setting quality" is confusing - later in the paper it seems like the suggesting is that setting quality may be a mediator, but throughout there is a bit of confusion as to whether setting is a cause or effect.

**Response:** We now refer to Mentor Families as mentoring groups. We are testing the impact of organizing mentor-mentee matches in small groups on youth outcomes. We further hypothesize the setting quality and the quality of the mentoring relationship will mediate this effect. We updated our abstract, study purpose statement, and current study section to avoid any further confusion about whether setting quality is a meditator.

The literature review of 'Mentor Families' as a modality for mentoring programs is all positive in terms of its potential effects and makes it sound like a bit of a panacea. That does set up the hypothesis that the use of Mentor Families will have positive effects, but it also might be worth presaging why it might not make that much difference. Could Mentor Families, for example, create possibilities for problematic group dynamics or 'peer contagion?' Could they potentially take away from the quality of the individual mentor / mentee relationship? At points in this section of the lit review (around 7-8) it makes it sound like the more people involved in mentoring programs the better - but certainly that is not the underlying logic of most mentoring programs that emphasize the quality over the quantity of relationships and consider direct relationships to be a primary change agent.

**Response:** You are correct that our argument for the use of small groups reads one-sided and we do not want to imply that more people are necessarily better. Indeed, there are potential drawbacks, as you’ve noted. We added mention of these possibilities on pages 6-7.

p. 10 notes creating "ideal Mentor Families" but I didn't understand what it means for them to be 'ideal'? Was there some kind of optimized matching process?

**Response:** We removed the word “ideal” to avoid unnecessary confusion. Selection of students into mentoring groups was based on age (no more than 1 year or grade difference between mentees) and gender of the mentee (either all-male/all-female or two male and two female mentees).

The text of the results section is very brief - could the paper walk readers through the findings and figures a bit more to make clear what the analysis shows?

**Response:** Some additional text was provided in the results section and in the figures and tables.

The discussion obliquely provides some examples of the types of activities involved in the mentoring program (noting some group activity options for the latter part of mentoring sessions), but through the paper it is not entirely clear what the mentoring program actually does beyond getting people together. Given that much of the paper is about the importance of setting and about theories of change, it would have been useful to me to have more sense of the sessions themselves and what was included - particularly in the earlier parts of the paper.

**Response:** Complete description of the intervention is published elsewhere. We provided the citations to help guide the reader. Having said that, we did add some more explicit statements about the program in the literature review and discussion.

I appreciated Figure 1 being laid out on a standardized 1-10 scale that made it easy to visualize and compare effects. On my first reading, however, I was confused by why many variables seemed to be in the negative direction - with outcomes such as anxiety and anger seeming to get worse over time. In the text it explains that the variables were scaled so that the higher numbers are always 'more' of something. It then makes sense that things like anger/anxiety are actually going down and getting better, but I wonder if that could also be explained very briefly as part of the caption for Figure 1 to avoid confusion?

**Response**: Thank you for this suggestion. We re-created Figures with +/- signs with a caption.

In reviewing the tables and figures, I also realized that it seemed a little strange to not know whether any of the demographic variables (eg, gender, race, class) had a mediating relationship on the key variables? Unless I missed it, it seems the demographics were only reported as related to establishing that the groups were reasonably similar.

**Response**: Yes, we showed the demographics to establish the comparability of the two groups; We also think that the demographics could be moderators, but in the current paper, our focus was to examine the treatment effect (i.e., mentoring group). As you suggest, our future paper will include such moderation/mediation effects.

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Reviewer #3: This study investigated whether grouping mentor-youth pairs into small groups of matches, or Mentor Families, improved youth outcomes within a site-based mentoring program. Findings suggested that there were no noticeable differences across the two conditions for a variety of youth outcomes (although youth outcomes appeared to improve overall in both conditions across the course of the study). This study addresses an important question for the field of youth mentoring and has a number of significant strengths, including a rigorous, controlled design and a relatively large sample of mentors and youth. The paper is well-written and clearly details both the findings and their implications. I note several suggestions for revision below.

**Response:** Thank you for your time in reviewing the manuscript.

Suggestions for revision

With respect to the Introduction and framing of the study, I was curious about the particular approach of using Mentor Families to improve mentoring relationships and support higher quality settings. Aside from the qualitative study within Campus Connections, is this an approach that has been studied in other quantitative or qualitative research? Is there any additional conceptual literature that relates directly to this innovation of creating sub-groups of mentor-mentee matches.

**Response:** Thank you for drawing attention to this oversight. We added additional context regarding group mentoring, specific approaches to group mentoring, and related research on pages 5-6.

Given the importance of program settings and mentoring relationship quality for the authors' hypotheses, I think it could be useful to have an expanded in-text discussion of the particular measures used to assess these constructs of interest (rather than placing all measure information in the tables). It seems that the "quality settings" items were compiled by the Search Institute, but have these items been validated in previous empirical studies? It would also be helpful to have more descriptive information about the particular subscales, along with sample items, for the various measures used. Along the same lines, is there a precedent for examining specific subscales rather than looking at overall scores on these various scales? To what extent are they tapping into different pieces of an overall construct, verses completely separate constructs? A correlational table could also provide useful information in this area.

**Response**: We explained each measure in text starting on page 10 and created a correlation table. We opted to use overall scales for several measures, as suggested, when appropriate. With regard to the Youth and Program Strengths Survey, however, we opted to use separate subscales, as recommended by the survey developers. The Search Institute published their technical report in 2015, which includes some psychometric information. We also added assessments of internal reliability within our sample.

It would be helpful for the Discussion to further contextualize these findings given the specific hypothesized role of Mentor Families to mentor engagement (e.g., giving mentors a space to ask questions, feel a sense of belonging) and mentor-youth relationship quality in mediating the impact of site-based mentoring programs. Campus Connections takes a unique approach to recruiting and retaining mentors by using college students who receive training/support/access to health professionals/a sense of belonging within the context of an academic course. The authors do note that the use of mentor families may look different within programs that have less community structure or onsite support, but it could be useful to expand this discussion a bit to specifically address the experience of mentors within this particular program (and the ways in which this may limit the generalizability of the findings). For example, given the difficulty that many mentoring programs have with managing mentor expectations and retaining mentors--particularly when working with at-risk adolescents--to what extent do the authors speculate that their findings may be limited to this unique setting where college course credit discourages mentor dropout? Also, assessments of mentor engagement and experience may be particularly essential to test in the two conditions—to what extent did mentor-initiated dropout (if it existed) or other indices of mentor burnout, positive expectations, etc. (if they were measured) vary as a function of condition?

**Response**: We agree that this warrants further discussion. We provided additional detail about the program experience and noted this as a future direction.

It would be helpful for the authors to discuss and interpret the effect sizes they observed when they are discussing overall program effects. What was the relative size of the change in youth outcomes from pre- to post-intervention, compared to other evaluations of youth mentoring and/or other prevention programs? Although it is difficult to interpret these effect sizes, given the lack of a "no treatment" control group, it may be helpful for understanding whether both of these conditions were resulting in substantial, positive improvements in youth outcomes versus both having a minimal impact.

**Response**: We included the effect sizes compared to other mentoring programs on page 22.

Given the decision to run post hoc analyses exploring the overall impact of the two conditions, I was curious about the decision not to explore whether quality settings and mentoring relationship variables mediated the overall outcomes across conditions. Was this considered? Could it help to provide information about whether the domains hypothesized to be most influenced by Mentor Families are key mediators of overall program impact?

**Response**: In order for the setting variables to operate as mediators, there must be a significant effect of the treatment on the setting variables. However, we found no evidence that treatment condition impacted these variables.

One minor note: when the authors discuss preliminary analyses of dropout and survey non-response, I believe there is a typo. In the "missing data" section, the third paragraph notes that the authors "conducted a chi-squared test of independence to determine if dropout from the program differed…" but they actually are discussing a test of non-completion of the post-intervention survey.

**Response:** Correct; we fixed this sentence on page 16.

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Reviewer #4:

JOYO-D-20-00255

Supplemental comments from the editor:

Both reviewers are supportive of pursuing your manuscript for publication in our journal. Still, both highlight important points for your consideration.

The overall general "criticism" that I have about your manuscript is the narrative. Generally, it needs to be more considerate of the readers who are not familiar with your research, the way you frame things, and even this entire area of research. Reviewers do point to some of this, but I would like to have you pay particular attention to this. As an example, "Mentor Families" is used in the title, abstract, and then throughout. At some point, you define it. But, the problem with that is that researchers who study youth and "families" have conceptions of youth and families. It is going to be challenging for some to get their mind away from your use of "families". I realize that your use of the terms is correct; the point is that it does not translate well to the audience we seek to reach. We need to have you use terms/phrases that are more readily understandable to our audience and stick with it. Try to keep things as simple as possible (e.g., if Mentor Families is just small group mentoring, then it is not clear to me why you just do not use "small group mentoring"). If the point I just made is problematic for you, then we will, regrettably, need to part ways. I hope that is not going to happen, as I obviously like your area of research, the reviewers are supportive, and I do think that your study has the potential to make important contributions to this area of study. I obviously seek to be flexible and am willing to work things through with you; the point is that there are important limitations that we need to consider. The other points that we need addressed are all, as I see them, readily doable and should not be problematic.

**Response:** We agree it would be helpful to use a readily understandable term. We now refer to Mentor Families as mentoring groups and the approach as group mentoring. We updated the manuscript accordingly from title through discussion.

When you resubmit, please do be sure to describe how you have addressed each point raised by the reviewers, starting with the first reviewer and doing one reviewer's comment at a time, including my own comments. Again, please address each point raised. Contrary to what some authors seem to hope, we do take a close look at the authors' comments as well as the manuscript itself; having a close match between those two documents really does help us move forward efficiently and inevitably reduces frustrations all around.

**Response:** We responded to each comment individually for increased efficiency during review.

For manuscripts that have undergone initial review, the journal does NOT have page limits, but please use your pages wisely. Know that I am absolutely fine with having you take the additional space you need. The overall goal is to ensure that readers get the best picture possible of what you studied, why, what you found, and its significance to the developmental understanding of adolescence. The overall standard for acceptance continues to be the extent to which the manuscript makes an original and substantive contribution to the study of adolescence.

**Response:** Thank you. We used the space we needed to adequately address the reviewer's comments.

Title: Please capitalize the first letters of key words (look at a few articles in the journal or check with the APA manual). Ensure that it is the same every time you enter it into the editorial manager.

**Response:** We updated accordingly throughout the editorial manager and elsewhere. Updated title: Does Organizing Mentor-Mentee Matches into Small Groups Enhance Treatment Effects in a Site-Based Mentoring Program for Adolescents? Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial

Author affiliations and research interests: Please edit so we end up with two short sentences for each author. Remove the Dr. before authors' names. Here is an example: Jane Author is an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois. Her major research interests include \_\_\_.

**Response:** Each author’s affiliation and statement of research interests is included in a separate document uploaded to the editorial manager.

Throughout, please remove the first person perspective (I, we, our). [I note this in case you use it in your revisions.]

**Response:** The manuscript contains no first-person perspectives.

THROUGHOUT: use youth instead of youths. We consider youth plural. Thanks. [I note this in case you use it in your revisions.]

**Response:** We use youth instead of youths throughout.

Abstract: please begin with a broad orienting sentence that notes the topic and gives readers a sense of its importance (e.g., the research gap) and then note how you will address it.

Abstract: provide the percent female in parentheses, mean age and range, and other characteristics relevant to the analyses.

Abstract: remove the acronym

Abstract: take the room you need, but use it wisely.

**Response:** We added a broad orienting sentence, updated the sample description, and removed the acronym.

Page 3, (contrary to APA formatting) remove the title and insert this level 1 heading at the top: Introduction

These are the headings that the typesetter can best work with:

Level 1: Centered, Bold, Upper and Lower Case

Level 2: Flush Left, Bold, Upper and Lower Case

Level 3: Flush left, bold, Initial cap/lower case, period. Run in text

Level 4: Flush left, bold italic, Initial cap/lower case, period. Run in text

Level 5 Paragraph indent, nobold italic, Initial cap/lower case, period. Run in text

As a reminder, you need at least two subheadings if you are going to have one.

Also, these are the typical level 1 headings that we need:

Abstract

Introduction

Current Study

Methods

Results

Discussion

Conclusion

Acknowledgments

**Response:** We updated all headings accordingly.

Throughout, please avoid string (and even most double) citations. If your cite is important, you should have more text to go with it; no need for redundancy if it can be avoided. Also avoid dated citations unless it is a classic or central to your arguments. I know that this will be a challenge for you as you are trying to give readers a sense of the field. Please rest assured that I am ok with the overall number of citations (I have no issue with that), it is when you cite multiple citations for the same proposition. A way around this issue is to increase specificity in what you present, and then cite to the appropriate sources. Or, of course, simply deleting some citations also would work. [Generally, do avoid citations from the last century.] Please do see what you can do in this regard.

**Response:** We updated our citations accordingly.

Also, avoid acronyms. Use the full terms/phrases or other ways to identify what you are referring to in the text. The exception to that is widely recognized acronyms like SES as well as the methods and results section as well as tables and figures where abbreviations can help. We need to avoid acronyms because we reach a very broad and international audience.

**Response:** We removed “CC” and other acronyms. Some appropriate acronyms and abbreviations remain in method/results and tables/figures.

Your introduction to the literature asks readers to have too much patience. This is what I now tell authors I need for the introduction to their literature review: For the introduction to the literature review/introduction, I need an introductory paragraph that begins by noting the topic, its importance, the research gap, and a general statement about how you will address the research gap. Then, we'd expect to have you go straight to reviewing the relevant research. Keep the high level of specificity/detail for the literature review.

**Response:** We updated the introductory paragraph accordingly and saved the details for the literature review section.

Make sure that you use pagination, otherwise it is unnecessarily challenging for me to provide, and you to get, specific comments.

**Response:** We updated the manuscript with page numbers.

Page 9, please center the heading.

**Response:** Heading is centered.

The current study section should briefly note the research gap, note aims/expectations/hypotheses/research questions and briefly remind readers of the rationales for them. The rationales should be obvious from the literature review above it (you should not introduce new research/cites in this section).

**Response:** We updated the current study section accordingly.

I realize it is efficient to just use tables to present variables, but I need to have you use the more traditional approach of having a construct for the heading followed by a sense of what it means, how it is measured, and a sense of how effective the measure is. Take the room you need. Also regarding headings, the terms in the tables should be exactly the same as the construct names.

**Response:** We added a more traditional measurement section in the method section. We also updated the terms to be consistent across the manuscript, tables, and figures. One exception is Table 2 (the new correlation table) in which we use abbreviations in the table, but note the full construct name below the table.

From what I gather, your presentation confuses not completing the study with missing data. Please separate each. You note that only a small number of cases were missing data, but we need to do more. We need specifics. This is what I typically ask of authors: We need to know what is missing and how analyses to ensure the robustness of your findings. We also need a sense that what you did to address missingness is appropriate.

**Response**: We enhanced and clarified our descriptions of missing data on pages 16-17.

Results: This is now a comment that I need to ask all authors to consider. Before you end your results section, the journal style now requests that authors report on sensitivity analyses/alternate model analyses. These are statistical checks/internal replications to indicate the robustness of your finding (e.g., if there were coding decisions that could be seen as arbitrary, such as dichotomizing, then a check alternative approaches and their results would seem warranted). Of course, it is important to not go overboard with this; narrow the analyses to important issues that relate directly to hypotheses/research questions. The same goes for alternate models that you may have run. Of course, if this is not relevant to your work, please ignore. Thank you for helping out with this. [I tell this even to authors who already have sensitivity analyses, as a goal is to let them feel free to expand, if needed.]

**Response**: Thank you for the space to do this. We added the sensitivity analyses paragraph on pages 22-23.

Results: related to the above point, this also is now a comment that I give to all authors, in case it is relevant: when readers have finished reading the results, they should end up with a clear sense of what was examined in the study (not just what is reported). If there are analyses that you did and are not reporting for lack of significance (including variables that were considered but dropped, as well as participants that were dropped) we urge you to make a note of it either in the results or wherever appropriate. What we are trying to do is give readers a full sense of what you have done. Some commentators urge, for example, disclosures like this: "We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study" and can be included (when true) in the Method section of all papers (see Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn, 2012). I do not ask for a disclosure statement like that, but I want to encourage authors to take the room they need to give readers a reasonable sense of what was done.

**Response**: The additional analyses that we reported for the sensitivity analysis also addresses this issue.

Results: A last point I try to tell all authors: When I look at the analyses, I should get a sense of which are confirmatory or exploratory (hypothesis based or simply addressing a research question).

**Response**: We clearly differentiate between the first set of a priori models that assessed the treatment condition, and the post-hoc analyses that assess change within each condition.

Discussion:

The first paragraph of the discussion should start more broadly and give readers a good sense of the issues that need to be addressed in this area, as well as highlight the complexities/questions involved and GENERALLY how you addressed them (such as in one sentence at the end of the paragraph). Assume, for example, that readers have skipped much of your study and jumped straight to the discussion section. Readers need to be impressed. Then go to what you found and the importance of your contribution (and limitations and so forth). I apologize for this journal style edit.

**Response**: The first paragraph has been updated to follow this structure.

Have the author names in parentheses. Just state the proposition and have the cite at the end of it; we do not want to focus readers on the names of authors. Also, your analysis needs to be much more integrative; avoid reciting an author's name, their study, and then moving on and doing the same again with another study. We need integrated analyses.

**Response**: We updated accordingly throughout the manuscript. We removed author names from sentences when at all possible and revised our analysis to be more integrative.

We need a stronger conclusion, and one that is separate with a level 1 heading: Conclusion

Here is what I typically tell authors regarding what I need: Begin by (briefly) reminding the reader of the topic, the research gap, and how you addressed it. Then go to what you found and its importance. Be sure to state your findings very clearly. The implications can focus on many aspects of the study, such as the practice implications. But, for us, the implications also should include a focus on the understanding of adolescence/early adulthood/emerging adulthood and the contribution to that research. Do try to have it be just one strong paragraph.

**Response**: We updated the conclusion and changed it to a level 1 heading.

We need correlation tables.

**Response**: We created a correlation table (Table 2).

Some of your figures have color. That is fine. When you do the copyright transfer, it will ask you whether you wish to have color in the articles. If you click yes, the publisher will charge you for it and it will appear in the paper and online versions of the articles. If you say no, then it will NOT appear in the hard copy version but WILL appear in the online version. This is just a heads up because color often leads to confusion. What I have just noted is what is currently the publisher's practice; so, when you get the link to transfer copyright, please do read it with care. Thanks.

**Response**: All plots were changed to black and white.

Your acknowledgment page section needs to include more information. Please place materials in the order I have here. [I realize that you have some of these materials at other places, but I need them in this section, contrary to the journal's instructions to authors (instructions that the publisher currently is unable to change).]

This is what I need:

We will need a statement regarding "Authors' Contributions". It will need to have its own heading, separate from other acknowledgements. Please see the journal's instructions to authors. For example, we suggest the following kind of format (please use initials to refer to each author's contribution): AB conceived of the study, participated in its design and coordination and drafted the manuscript; JY participated in the design and interpretation of the data; MT participated in the design and coordination of the study and performed the measurement; ES participated in the design of the study and performed the statistical analysis; FG conceived of the study, and participated in its design and coordination and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. PLEASE END UP HAVING ONLY TWO SENTENCES.

**Response**: We included an Authors’ Contributions section.

We also now request a Data Sharing Declaration. The declaration is in no way intended to require authors to share their data. But, we do request that, if they are available, to let readers know.

Here are some sample declarations:

This manuscript's data will not be deposited.

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article (and its supplementary information files).

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available in the [NAME] repository, [PERSISTENT WEB LINK TO DATASETS].

The data that support the findings of this study are available from [THIRD PARTY NAME] but restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under license for the current study, and so are not publicly available. However, data are available from the authors upon reasonable request and with permission of [THIRD PARTY NAME].

**Response**: We included a Data Sharing Declaration.

As our journal is multidisciplinary and some fields are now moving toward encouraging preregistration, and given that we seek to have authors distinguish between confirmatory and exploratory analyses, we now encourage authors to note whether parts of their study were preregistered. If it is not, then simply ignore. If it is, then please provide the relevant link (URL, DOI or other permanent path to a public, open access repository) and note what was registered (the study design, hypotheses, and target analyses, and so forth).

**Response**: Not applicable

I will need a statement regarding conflicts of interests. It should have this heading "Conflicts of Interest" and, below it, a sentence reporting your potential conflicts. If you have none, please write a full sentence to this effect: "The authors report no conflict of interests." If you do have conflicts of interests, please report them. For guidance, see the journal's instructions to authors that are posted online. The only part that the journal follows that is different from the online instructions is that we require that the statements be presented in the acknowledgment page rather than in the title page.

**Response:** We included a Conflicts of Interest statement.

I also need to have you take a look at what we have online regarding the need to report compliance with ethical standards. [It will state that it should appear before the references; please do add them to the acknowledgment page instead.] We will need, where relevant, at least this information, with the "Compliance with Ethical Standards" being a level 1 heading and the others using level 2 headings.

**Response:** We included this information and provided appropriate headings.

Just so we are clear, the acknowledgment page should have these items addressed:

Acknowledgment (if you have a general one, otherwise do not use this heading).

Authors' Contributions

Data Sharing Declaration

Conflicts of Interest

Preregistration (only if relevant)

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Funding

Ethical approval

Informed Consent

**Response:** Our acknowledgement page contains each of these items except preregistration.

That covers it from my side of things. Know that I am looking forward to reading your revisions.

**Response:** Thank you for your detailed and thorough review. We believe we successfully addressed the comments.