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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A latent class analysis of cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity: An examination of heterogeneity between profile groups on dimensions of emotional psychological empowerment and social justice orientation among urban youth of color

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## Abstract

Psychological empowerment (PE) encompasses key aspects of youth development and civic engagement. Empowerment scholarship has largely focused on the intrapersonal or emotional component of PE, which considers perceptions of control and self-efficacy, specifically in the sociopolitical sphere. Fewer studies have assessed the interactional or cognitive component of PE. Even less have examined the empirical association aspects of PE, including cognitive empowerment, with conceptually related variables, such as ethnic identity. Those studies that are present have shown that the association between aspects of PE and ethnic identity are complex. The current study of urban high school students of color ( $N = 383$ ; 53.1% female; 75% Hispanic/Latinx) investigates the heterogeneity present between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. Latent class cluster analyses were conducted and five distinct profile groups emerged. Differences were observed on the basis of profile groups of cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity on self-reported dimensions of emotional PE (e.g., leadership and policy control) and social justice orientation.

The majority of study participants were clustered in groups that identified moderate to high levels of both cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. Results provide useful insights for theory and programming.

**KEYWORDS**

cognitive empowerment, empowerment, ethnic identity, social justice, sociopolitical control

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The media has displayed, with greater consistency, examples of empowered youth who are unwilling to sit on the sidelines of United States' society as those with power create policies impacting them, but not necessarily for them. Whether youth are advocating for gun reform following the horrific school shooting in Parkland, Florida or are DREAMers throughout the U.S. advocating for reforms to bring forward a clean DREAM Act, the commonality is their sense of empowerment to engage in social change. These youth are also critically aware of sociopolitical issues, and because they are critical observers of their world, they are unwilling to sit silent while policies are (not) implemented or maintained.

Uncovering the manner in which more critical ways of engaging and understanding occur among youth is important, particularly among those youth of color in disenfranchised and oppressed social conditions. The social isolation and power imbalances that these youth experience promote not only an individualized script of success and upward social movement (Lardier, Herr, Barrios, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2019), but also a way of being and understanding that disconnects and disempowers youth from critically examining social conditions and engaging in outward and upward social change (Lardier, Herr, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018). As Carol Gilligan (2011) notes, challenging authority and engaging in critical counter-narratives concerns "changing the voice of the conversation by shifting the paradigm, changing the frame" (p. 41).

Whether described as civic engagement (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011) or sociopolitical development (Itzhaky & York, 2000; Kirshner, Hipolito-Delgado, & Zion, 2015; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991), youth action is associated with varying developmental outcomes and processes that include achievement in relation to school (Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014), positive mental health outcomes, reduced substance using behaviors (Christens, Byrd, Peterson, & Lardier, 2018), a positive sense of ethnic identity (Lardier, 2018; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018), and overall well-being (Christens & Peterson, 2012). These are also important in the relational process of youth-community development. While these processes do not always function in the same manner for youth of color, who are less likely to feel empowered and engage in broader social and institutional changes, because of the proliferation of significant power imbalances and inequalities within their social system (Lardier, 2018), scholarship does indicate that youth of color who have access to supportive others and feel connected to their ethnic and racial group develop a more empowered sense of self (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Lardier, 2018; Lardier, 2019). Similarly, youth of color who are civically engaged and experience greater connection to their ethnic group are more aware of social and institutional power imbalances (Christens et al., 2018).

The growth of scholarship connecting components of civic or sociopolitical engagement, empowerment, and ethnic identity is increasing (Diemer, Rapa, Voight, & McWhirter, 2016; Gutierrez, 1988, 1995; Lardier, 2018, 2019; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018). Additional research is needed to unpack the processes through which youth come to critically understand their social world, social power, how power is manifested, and the ways in which they can engage in sociopolitical change. Examining how these experiences occur among the collective and in relation to one's sense of their own ethnic group identity is also a useful path of inquiry.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | Empowerment theory and psychological empowerment

Empowerment theory is important in the purview of today's U.S. society. As both a theory and way of being, empowerment is an orientation for practice and a theoretical framework for understanding the participatory process at multiple ecological levels (Peterson, 2014; Rappaport, Rappaport, Swift, & Hess, 1984). Empowerment involves interdependent processes at the individual or psychological (Lardier, Reid, & Garcia-Reid, 2018a, 2018b; Peterson et al., 2006), organizational (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004), and community levels (Zimmerman, 2000). Numerous definitions exist to explain empowerment; however, as a multilevel concept, empowerment provides an orientation for understanding how individuals and groups obtain resources, gain control, and critically understand the conditions affecting their lives in an ecological context (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000). As Brazilian feminist scholar Sueli Carneiro stated in relation to Brazilian women's empowerment: "we have more to do than just hope for a better future ... What we have to do is to organize, and to never stop questioning. What we have to do, as always, is plenty of work." (1995, p. 17). In this quote, we hear the role of empowerment not only in social movements, but also in pushing toward a critical understanding of social conditions. More important, as an ecological and multi-level construct, empowerment among individuals of color in the U.S. circles within a matrix of domination and social power held by a select few (Collins, 2002; Turner & Maschi, 2015).

The most frequently studied dimension of empowerment is psychological empowerment (PE), a multi-component construct with behavioral, emotional, cognitive (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000), and more recently relational components (Christens, 2012). While often expressed as an intrapsychic variable, which is incorrect (Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b), PE is more accurately a psychosocial variable within — and among — reciprocating relational experiences at the organizational and community levels (Lardier et al., 2018). Zimmerman (1995, 2000) notes that an individual-level analysis of PE ignores the ecological nature of this construct and the cultural influence of PE, highlighting its context-specific nature. A commonly used definition of PE aligns it as a mechanism through which individuals or groups gain control over their lives, take a proactive approach in their community, and work toward a critical understanding of their social environments (Zimmerman, 2000).

The emotional component of PE is the most frequently examined construct (Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b; Peterson, 2014) and defined as perceptions of control and self-efficacy, specifically in the sociopolitical sphere (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). Emotional PE is often studied through sociopolitical control (SPC), which is operationalized via two latent constructs: leadership and policy control. *Leadership* is defined as the skills and confidence to engage in leadership activities within community and organizational contexts (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). *Policy control* is defined as the perception that one is competent and capable of influencing decision in community or organizational contexts (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Together, these two concepts reflect the overarching definition of SPC in the understanding and measurement of emotional PE.

This concept of SPC is measured using the Sociopolitical Control Scale and the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y; Christens, Krauss, & Zeldin, 2016; Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b; Peterson et al., 2006; Peterson, Gilmore Powell, Hamme Peterson, & Reid, 2017; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011). This concept of SPC and emotional PE has been examined among young people as a process (Ozer & Schotland, 2011), an outcome (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Lardier, 2018), and an indicator of well-being (Christens, Peterson, Reid, & Garcia-Reid, 2013; Eisman et al., 2016). Specifically, youth with higher levels of emotional PE, measured through SPC, report stronger psychological sense of community (SOC), engage in more community participation activities (Lardier, 2018; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018), and report lower levels of drug and alcohol use (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Christens et al., 2013; Lardier, 2019). Youth of color with higher emotional PE have too reported increased cognitive empowerment (Christens, Collura, & Tahir, 2013; Christens et al., 2018) and positive ethnic identity (Lardier, 2018; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018). Most recently, emotional PE has been shown to have a

positive relationship with indicators of well-being and both the cognitive and behavioral components of PE, supporting the multidimensional nature of PE (Rodrigues et al., 2018).

Less research has examined the cognitive component of PE. Cognitive empowerment is defined as critical awareness or a critical understanding of the sociopolitical system that allows individuals to act strategically and effectively within them (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995). Under this logic, a critical understanding of one's social system leads to more effective, strategic, and critical action (Speer, 2000; Speer & Peterson, 2000). Through this critical awareness, individuals are able to engage in social change within their contexts. Scholars have outlined three dimensions within the cognitive empowerment construct: (a) knowledge of the source of power, (b) the nature of power, and (c) the instruments of social power (Speer, 2000; Speer & Peterson, 2000). Knowledge of the source of social power is characterized as the understanding that social and systemic change occurs through collective action, rather than individual action (Speer & Hughey, 1995). This knowledge manifests into collective action and challenging those in power (Speer & Hughey, 1995). This action is likely to raise awareness of power differentials (Gutiérrez, 1995) and create conflict with those in power (Ledwith, 2011). Awareness of power differentials helps one understand the nature of social power or how social power operates. While limited, studies have supported the dimensions of cognitive empowerment and how social power operates (Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2019; Speer & Peterson, 2000), as well as the association cognitive empowerment has with critical consciousness (Christens et al., 2018; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Watts et al., 2011)

Cognitive empowerment shares some conceptual overlap with critical consciousness (Freire, 1968), with critical consciousness theorized as a multi-component construct with both cognitive and emotional empowerment (Watts et al., 2011). Several studies have highlighted the cognitive processes of critical consciousness (Christens et al., 2018; Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017; Hope & Jagers, 2014). Relatedly, through critical social analysis, a component of cognitive empowerment, youth and young adults are able to define, expand, and refine their social and political points (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) further discussed that critical social analysis concerns awareness of social and structural inequalities, as well as engagement in a deeper understanding between marginalization and sociopolitical circumstances. In addition, Watts et al. (2011) indicated that the promotion of critical social analysis concerns experiencing identity and membership within an oppressed group. Christens et al. (2018) recently examined the intersection of cognitive and emotional PE. Critical and hopeful youth reported more access to social capital and greater mental well-being, psychological SOC, civic participation, and social justice orientation, when compared with uncritical and alienated youth of color. Despite the conceptual overlap between cognitive empowerment and dimensions of critical consciousness, the latter tends to more substantively focus on social power dynamics (Christens et al., 2018).

Although there is growing scholarship drawing connections between cognitive empowerment and critical consciousness, to the authors' knowledge, no published studies have examined the factor structure of cognitive empowerment among adolescents, and more specifically adolescents of color. We also know little about the relationship between cognitive empowerment and other key developmental variables, such as ethnic identity, among ethnic-racial minority youth (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Furthermore, recent discussions have questioned the overarching construct of PE (Peterson, 2014), because of the lack of covariance between components of PE. Others have also put forward that dimensions of PE may be relational in nature (Christens, 2012) and sit on either side of the equation, opposed to simply being part of a higher order construct (Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b). Demographic, sociocultural, and ethnic-racial identities have too been found to relate differently to constructs of PE (Christens et al., 2018; Lardier, 2018; Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018, 2019). For instance, those in more socioeconomically deprived conditions experience increased cognitive empowerment (Christens et al., 2013). Moreover, ethnic-racial identification has been implicated as an important component in youth PE and their perceived empowerment potential (Gutiérrez 1988, 1995; Lardier, 2018; Lardier et al., 2018; Lardier et al., 2019). To build upon such scholarship, the practice of theorizing and testing dimensions of empowerment is needed (Christens et al., 2018), as well as explaining the relationship among components of PE with conceptually associated variables such as ethnic identity (Lardier, 2018, 2019; Lardier et al., 2019).

## 2.2 | Expanding the conceptualization of cognitive empowerment: the role of ethnic identity

A cursory examination of social movements and social action shows that civic action and social movement can be a basis for group membership and solidarity. The lives and identities of individuals of color in the U.S. intersect with experiences and awareness of critical social concerns (Watts et al., 2011). For example, more recent events such as the #BlackLivesMatter movements, DREAMer rallies, and the "Families Belong Together" march, the latter two highlighting detrimental federal policies put forward by the current U.S. presidential administration, are also examples of critical social issues. These complex lived realities, in terms of history, culture, and context, intersect with collective and ethnic-racial identification, or a sense of solidarity, collective efficacy, and shared culture (Gutiérrez, 1989a, Gutiérrez, 1989b, Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Gutiérrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

Ethnic identity is a type of social group-based identity (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010) that is part of an individual's self-concept (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Ethnic identity has been labeled a "sense of peoplehood" within a group, on the basis of cultural practices, norms, values, and beliefs (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Contact with one's culture provides a forum for commonality and reinforcing, as well as sharing, cultural practices (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). This group identity also works toward counteracting the negative effects of ethnic stereotypes and discrimination, as well as provides an opportunity for critically discussing one's ethnic-racial minority status, the context of one's social oppression (Gutierrez, 1988), and a space for inspiring collective change (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

In relation to empowerment, and more specifically cognitive empowerment, individuals of color with a strong ethnic identity are apt to center their identity around cultural and political concerns, as well as out-group political identities, focused on issues of power and discrimination (Gutierrez, 1988). In this instantiation of ethnic identity, greater cognitive empowerment or critical awareness of current sociopolitical circumstances may mobilize individuals toward action and change, as well as group membership and identity (Flanagan, Syvertsen, Gill, Gallay, & Cumsille, 2009; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Stepick & Stepick, 2002; Watts et al., 2011), and political self-efficacy (Christens et al., 2018). Theories such as Black Racial Identity Theory (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998), Critical Race Theory (Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos, 2014), and Intersectionality Theory (Collins, 2002; Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016) support the overlap between ethnic identity and cognitive empowerment, or critical social awareness.

Conceptually, youth who have a stronger ethnic group connection, along with an understanding of the social inequalities experienced by their ethnic group, are more critically aware, able to recognize injustices, and have more agency to respond to these injustices (Diemer et al., 2016). Freire (1968), too, observed that as oppressed peoples' thinking and awareness of social injustices developed, so did their understanding of themselves in relation to society; more specifically, their understanding of social structures became more complex and in-turn they developed the agency and capacity to change their conditions. This cycle of awareness is integral to one's ethnic-racial identity development, limiting their sense of powerlessness to enact change (Gutierrez, 1988; Lardier, Garcia-Reid et al., 2019).

Studies have empirically linked ethnic-racial identity with civic engagement and critical awareness, and identified that ethnic identity centers on cultural and sociopolitical concerns, particularly in the face of power and discrimination (Gutierrez, 1988; Gutiérrez, 1989a, Gutiérrez, 1989b; Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Lardier, 2018; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018). For instance, investigations among youth of color have provided evidence on the association between group consciousness and ethnic identity and civic behavior (Flanagan et al., 2009; Stepick & Stepick, 2002), as well as critical consciousness (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Thomas et al., 2014) and sociopolitical engagement (Kirshner et al., 2015; Lardier, 2018). These findings not only point toward the importance of collective action in combatting power and social injustice, but the link between ethnic identity, critical awareness, and social action (Watts et al., 2011). Christens et al. (2018) further noted in their examination

of the emotional and cognitive components of empowerment among urban youth of color that whereas some variation was present among youth subgroups, adolescents who were more critical and hopeful expressed greater civic participation, social justice orientation, and psychological SOC. Most recently, Lardier et al. (2019) examined heterogeneity and membership within subgroups of dimensions of cognitive empowerment on conceptually related variables including emotional PE, psychological SOC, and ethnic identity among urban youth of color. These authors identified that youth with higher overall composite scores in relational power, awareness of the nature of the problem (nature of problem or critical understanding of social inequality), and shaping ideologies or knowledge of resources that can be harnessed to produce social change (i.e., dimensions of cognitive empowerment) had greater mean scores on conceptually related variables (Lardier et al., 2019). Specifically, youth with greater awareness of social injustices were higher in ethnic identity, indicating that a strong connection to one's ethnic group may be related to an equal awareness of oppressive power structures, as well as current and past social inequalities.

It is important to note that these outcomes may operate in different ways, wherein, individuals may feel, for example, less ethnic-racial identity, but still respond to social injustices (Lardier, 2018). On the other hand, ethnic identity may be an important component in understanding how social power is manifested, operates, and is maintained (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Lardier, 2018). Nonetheless, as Zimmerman (2011) stated, you cannot "remove ethnic identity and youth culture from the everyday lives" of racially and ethnically marginalized youth of color (p. 438). Furthermore, because identity processes are both ethnic and racial within the U.S., given the historical disenfranchisement and oppression that often narrates youth of colors' collective lives (Candelario, 2007), it is likely that ethnic identity is an important process for both for African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx youth (Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009), and that conceptually there is a link between greater ethnic identity and cognitive empowerment, or critical awareness of social power and how it operates (Christens et al., 2018).

Taken together, the existing research raises numerous questions about the complicated relationship between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. Additional research is needed to investigate these relationships and the role these mechanisms have with dimensions of PE, such as the emotional and behavioral components, as well as related empowerment predictors (e.g., social justice orientation). Such research would provide a deeper and broader image of empowerment and the relationship among and between empowerment dimensions. Numerous techniques have been used to understand the association between multidimensional constructs (e.g., superordinate, aggregate, and profile; Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998). However, profile constructs, which are composed of various combinations of dimensional characteristics, help categorize individuals and uncover complex patterns and subgroups on the basis of several variables (Bogat, Zarrett, Peck, & Von Eye, 2012).

The practice of combining multiple constructs has become more prevalent as researchers have embraced statistical analyses that enable them to model latent factors or classes. Person-centered approaches, which are used in this study, have been used to examine profile conceptualizations of constructs, as well as consider differences among individuals, particularly on how groups of individuals function relative to others within the sample population (Howard & Hoffman, 2017; Laursen & Hoff, 2006). Person-centered analyses that include latent class analysis facilitate answers to questions aimed at categorizing participants within subgroups, while simultaneously examining these subgroups in relation to conceptually related variables, thus generating more theoretically informed outcomes (Howard & Hoffman, 2017; Laursen & Hoff, 2006; Magidson & Vermunt, 2004; Vermunt & Magidson, 2002).

The existing empowerment literature using person-centered approaches has shown that there are groups within any given sample wherein the components of PE manifest distinctively (Christens et al., 2018). Christens et al. (2013) specifically identified latent profile groups according to the two dimensions of the emotional component of PE. More precisely, four distinct profile groups emerged in this study. Recently, Christens et al. (2018) identified latent profile groups according to both the emotional component and cognitive component of PE among youth of color. In this study, these authors found seven distinct profile groups, which displayed significant heterogeneity between psychological SOC, civic engagement, and social justice orientation (Christens et al., 2018).



However, these studies did not solely examine cognitive empowerment, and more specifically the relationship cognitive empowerment holds with ethnic identity.

Limited research exists that has examined profile groups according to the emotional component of PE (e.g., Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2019) and ethnic identity. Similarly, there is little scholarship examining the interactional or cognitive component of empowerment (e.g., Lardier et al., 2019) and the heterogeneity present between these subgroups on conceptually related variables including psychological SOC, school importance, community participation, and perceived substance use risk. Hence, person-centered analyses are useful when examining the empirical association between conceptually related, albeit under-tested, variables.

### 3 | THE CURRENT STUDY

For the current study, we draw on a sample of youth of color from an under-resourced, impoverished, urban community. Building upon the existing research, we hypothesized first that distinct subgroups would form because of the variability present within cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. We also hypothesized that youth in the high critical awareness and high ethnic identity cluster group would generate higher mean scores on conceptually related variables (e.g., leadership competence, policy control, and social justice orientation), drawing a stronger empirical connection between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity.

## 4 | METHODS

### 4.1 | Sample and design

As part of a 2013 Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Minority AIDS Initiative grant program, these data were gathered from a northeastern United States under-resourced, urban school district to inform environmental strategies and prevention-intervention protocols within the target community and school system. A convenience sample of 383 students were recruited through their high school's physical education and health classes in grades 9 through 12 within the largest high school in the focal community. In compliance with university Institutional Review Board and state laws requiring active parental consent, and student assent, those students who returned both parental consent and student assent were eligible to complete the questionnaire over a one-hour period (36.5% response rate). While a seemingly low responses rate for school-based samples, it is within the national response average (Baruch & Holtom, 2008), and must be considered within the legal parameters from the focal state, which require active parental consent.

Students ranged from grades 9 through 12, with 29.2% in 9th grade, 45.7% in 10th grade, 6% in 11th grade, and 19.1% in 12th grade. Most students identified as Hispanic/ Latinx (75%), with the next largest demographic group identifying as Black/African American (24.3%). Of those youth who identified as primarily Hispanic/Latinx, approximately 3.5% identified also as Black/African American. Similarly, roughly 10.8% of youth who identified primarily as Black/African American also identified as Hispanic/Latinx. Less than 1% identified as White youth. A nearly equal proportion of students identified as male (46.9%) and female (53.1%), with 50.6% between 13 and 15 years of age and 49.4% between 16 and 18 years of age.

### 4.2 | Measurement

#### 4.2.1 | Cognitive empowerment scale

Speer and Peterson (2000) developed the Interactional Empowerment or Cognitive Empowerment Scale. Through principal components factor analyses, Speer and Peterson (2000) illustrated and confirmed that the measure for cognitive empowerment encompassed three subscales: *power through relationships* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.72$ ;  $M = 18.47$ ,



$SD = 3.83$ ), *nature of problem/political functioning* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.78$ ;  $M = 16.69$ ,  $SD = 4.24$ ), and *shaping ideologies* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.77$ ;  $M = 14.44$ ,  $SD = 2.77$ ). Rodrigues et al. (2018) tested the factor structure of the entire PE construct among 861 Portuguese youth. These authors similarly found that overall cognitive empowerment (overall scale: Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.81$ ;  $M = 18.47$ ,  $SD = 3.83$ ) encompassed the same three broad sub-scales of *power through relationships* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.78$ ), *nature of problem/political functioning* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.76$ ) and *shaping ideologies* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.87$ ; Rodrigues et al., 2018).

For the current study, the four-item measure of *power through relationships* (sample item: The only way I can effect community issues is by working with other teens; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ;  $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) and the four-item measure of *nature of power/political functioning* (sample item: Those with power try to stop teens who challenge them too much; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ;  $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) were combined to create the *source and nature of social power dimension* which had a mean score of 3.84 ( $SD = .84$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ). This is in line with prior conceptualizations of cognitive empowerment dimensions within the empowerment literature (e.g., Christens et al., 2018). The six-item measure of *instruments of social power* (sample item: Those with power can get most teens to believe what the powerful want.) had a mean score of 3.62 ( $SD = .77$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ). The mean score for the overall Cognitive Empowerment Scale was 3.75 ( $SD = .68$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

## 4.2.2 | Ethnic identity

*Ethnic identity* was measured using a six-item scale developed by the federal funding agency (sample items: I have spent time trying to figure out more about my ethnic group. I participate in cultural practices of my own ethnic group). Youth participants responded to each item on a four-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken to establish support for the factor structure of this ethnic identity scale, developed by the federal funding agency. Accepted indicators of model fit were assessed: Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) test, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of fit indices (GFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; West, Taylor, & Wei, 2012). Nonsignificant  $\chi^2$  values indicate acceptable model fit. Second, higher values (i.e., greater than .95) on the Comparative Fit Index and Goodness of Fit Index, and smaller RMSEA (i.e., less than .08) are desirable. Last, RMSEA that are  $\leq .05$  = good fit,  $.05-.08$  = acceptable fit and  $.08-.10$  = unacceptable fit (West et al., 2012).

Results indicate that this six-item scale had adequate model-to-data fit ( $\chi^2 = 7.72$  [5],  $p = .17$ ; CFI = .99; TLI = .98; GFI = .99; RMSEA = .03 [90% CI = .00, .05]), supporting that these questions loaded onto a single ethnic identity latent variable, or that one factor was extracted, with an Eigenvalue of 2.75 and explained 81% of the variance. Scores were averaged and combined and the overall scale had a mean score of 3.62 ( $SD = .85$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ). Prior studies using validated ethnic identity measures (i.e., Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure) have demonstrated similar levels of internal consistency and validity that range from .71 to .92 and showed useful and important findings (e.g., Phinney & Ong, 2007).

## 4.3 | Conceptually related variables

The *Emotional Component of PE* was measured through the SPCS-Y (Christens et al., 2016; Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b; Peterson et al., 2011; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991), using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Through confirmatory factor analysis, Peterson et al. (2011) illustrated and confirmed the SPCS-Y (overall scale: Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ) as a two-factor measure that examined *leadership competence* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ) and *policy control* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ). For the current study, the eight-item measure of *leadership competence* (sample items: I am a leader in groups. I can usually organize people to get things done; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ;  $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) and the nine-item measure for *policy control* (sample items: My friends and I can really understand what's going on with my community or school. There are many ways for me to have a

say in what my community or school does; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ;  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) were combined. The overall scale had a mean score of 3.30 ( $SD = .62$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ).

### 4.3.1 | Social justice orientation

Justice oriented citizenship is defined as an orientation to civic life and social issues that stress collective action to reduce injustices (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This study used a four-item measure (sample items: After high school, I will work with others to change unfair laws. I think it is important to challenge things that are not equal in society) to assess identification as a justice-oriented citizen (Flanagan et al., 2009). Youth participants responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Scores were combined, and the overall scale had a mean score of 3.76 ( $SD = .68$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

## 5 | RESULTS

Before conducting main analyses, missing data were examined. Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) Test was used to assess the level and type of missingness (Little & Rubin, 2014). Little's MCAR test revealed that only 5% of data were missing for any given variable and that the Chi-square result was significant ( $\chi^2 = [df = 23] 43.23$ ,  $p = .006$ ) or that these data were most likely not MCAR (Little & Rubin, 2014). Although numerous missing data techniques are available, missing data for this study were handled using a chained imputation approach (White, Royston, & Wood, 2011). A chained imputation approach is preferable to other imputation approaches. This imputation method assumes that the data are missing at random (MAR) or MCAR and that the probability a value is missing depends on observed values (those included in the imputation procedure) and not on unobserved values (Schafer & Graham, 2002).

Latent class cluster analysis was used to examine heterogeneity among participants on observed indicators of cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. Two dimensions were created from the three subscales for cognitive empowerment: (a) a critical understanding of the source and nature of power; and (b) critical awareness of the instruments of power. This modeling strategy of the three cognitive empowerment subscales is in line with previous empowerment scholarship using LCA (e.g., Christens et al., 2018). Ethnic identity was maintained as a continuous measure. These indexes were transformed into quintiles, and data retained ordinal response scales for the purposes of latent class modeling. Analyses were conducted using Latent GOLD v 5.1 (Vermunt & Magidson, 2013) statistical software. Multiple latent clusters were examined (one through 10). All ten models were assessed. The fit for each model was examined to assess the most parsimonious and best fitting-model, using several fit indices. We used the likelihood ratio chi-squared statistic ( $L^2$ ), the percentage of change in the  $L^2$  for each successive model (diff  $L^2$ ), the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC).

See Table 1 for latent class model fit statistics. Results indicated that the five-cluster model provided the best fit to the sample data. Next, bootstrap procedures were performed to identify optimal fit estimates (Vermunt & Magidson, 2013). For the five-cluster model, fit statistics were:  $L^2 = 115.57$  (110), bootstrap  $p$  value = .35; BIC = 3590.64; AIC = 3476.53. The standard  $R^2$  value of .73 indicates that the five latent classes account for a large proportion of the variance in the subscales for cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity.

Individual cases from the sample were assigned using modal classification – a standard classification procedure in Latent Gold v 5.1. See Figure 1 for the profile plot of the means on the subscales of these two components of cognitive empowerment and the single component of ethnic identity. A total of 209 participants (54%) were classified in cluster one, which is labeled “Moderate Critical Awareness and Moderate Ethnic Identity”, reflecting moderate or average scores on the Cognitive Empowerment measure (CE scale group mean = 3.46;  $SD = .36$ ) and ethnic identity measure (Ethnic Identity scale group mean = 3.31;  $SD = .50$ ). A total of 70 participants (18.2%) were in cluster two, which was named “Critical and High Ethnic Identity”, reflecting elevated scores of both cognitive

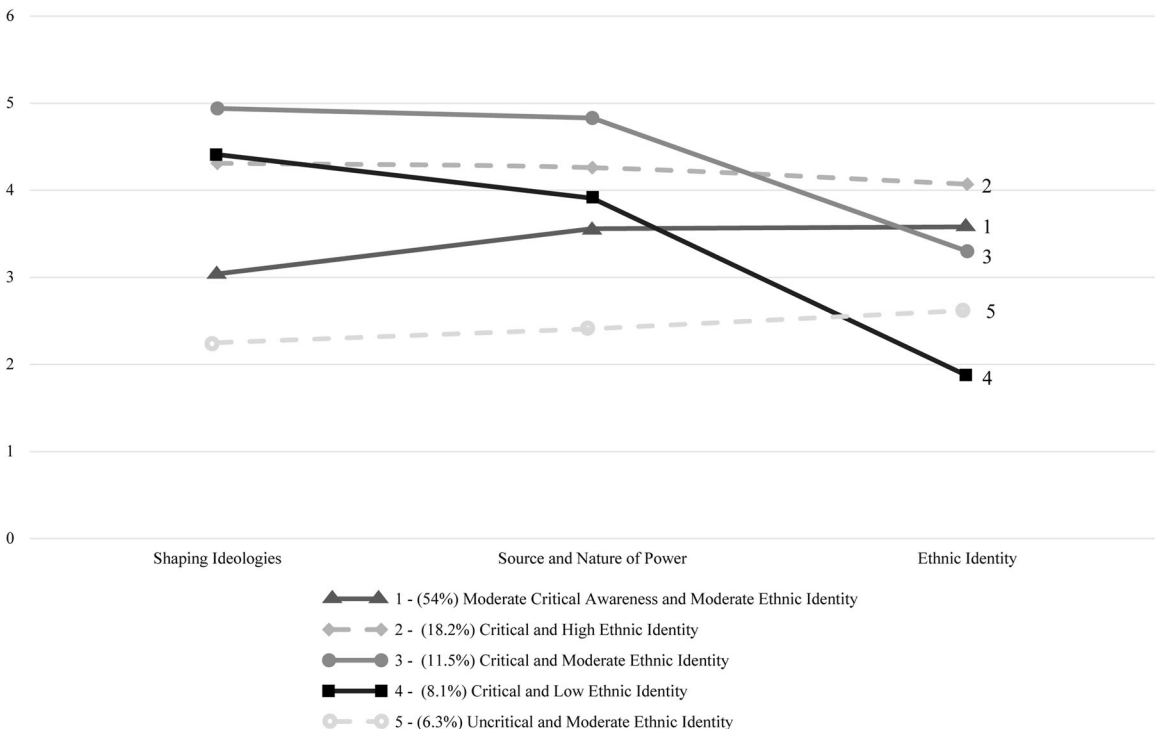
**TABLE 1** Latent class analysis model fit statistics for the intersection between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity

	BIC(LL)	AIC(LL)	Number of parameters	$L^2$	df	$p$ value (bootstrap $L^2$ )	Class. Error
1-Cluster	3659.77	3608.61	13	279.66	126	.14	0.01
2-Cluster	3561.20	3494.31	17	157.36	122	0.017	0.09
3-Cluster	3561.32	3478.69	21	133.73	118	0.15	0.12
4-Cluster	3578.78	3480.40	25	127.45	114	0.18	0.24
<b>5-Cluster</b>	<b>3590.64</b>	<b>3476.52</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>115.57</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>0.18</b>
6-Cluster	3612.06	3482.21	33	113.26	106	0.30	0.24
7-Cluster	3633.96	3488.37	37	111.41	102	0.25	0.31
8-Cluster	3649.92	3488.59	41	103.63	98	0.33	0.26
9-Cluster	3674.49	3497.42	45	104.46	94	0.22	0.31
10-Cluster	3691.83	3499.02	49	98.07	90	0.26	0.30

Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion; LL, log likelihood;  $L^2$ , likelihood ratio chi-square statistic.

Note. Bold text indicates the preferred model

empowerment and ethnic group identity/attachment (CE scale group mean = 4.25;  $SD = .28$ ; Ethnic Identity scale group mean = 4.07;  $SD = .39$ ). A total of 44 participants (11.5%) were in cluster three, which was named "Critical and Moderate Ethnic Identity", reflecting elevated scores of cognitive empowerment, but slightly above average scores of ethnic identity group attachment (CE scale group mean = 4.79;  $SD = .18$ ; Ethnic Identity scale group mean = 3.69;

**FIGURE 1** Cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity response probabilities by latent cluster

**TABLE 2** MANOVA results between cognitive empowerment-ethnic identity profile group (N = 383)

	Leadership		Policy control		Social justice orientation	
	Mean (95% CI)	SE	Mean (95% CI)	SE	Mean (95% CI)	SE
1. Moderate critical awareness and ethnic identity (54%)	3.33 (3.25, 3.43)	.05	3.14 (3.05, 3.23)	.05	3.49 (3.35, 3.62)	.07
2. Critical and ethnic identity (18.2%)	3.63 (3.47, 3.81)	.09	3.32 (3.15, 3.49)	.08	4.11 (3.88, 4.34)	.11
3. Critical and moderate ethnic identity (11.5%)	3.74 (3.54, 3.94)	.10	3.37 (3.14, 3.60)	.11	4.05 (3.71, 4.41)	.17
4. Critical and low ethnic identity (8.1%)	3.48 (3.14, 3.81)	.16	3.26 (3.01, 3.52)	.13	3.85 (3.51, 4.20)	.17
5. Uncritical and ethnic identity (6.3%)	2.86 (2.57, 3.15)	.13	2.93 (2.66, 3.19)	.13	2.79 (2.34, 3.24)	.21
Univariate F (3, 826)	8.83***		2.70*		11.68***	
Mean different, $p < .05$	2, 3 > 1, 4 > 5		2,3,4 > 5; 3 > 1		2, 3, 4 > 1 > 5	

Overall MANOVA: Wilks' Lambda = .83,  $F(12, 981.65) = 5.88$ ,  $p < .001$ .

\*\* $p < .01$

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

$SD = .52$ ). A total of 31 participants (8.1%) were in cluster four, which was named "Critical and Low Ethnic Identity", reflecting higher levels of cognitive empowerment, but lower than average scores of ethnic identity (CE scale group mean = 4.09;  $SD = .26$ ; Ethnic Identity scale group mean = 1.87;  $SD = .37$ ). A total of 24 participants (6.3%) were in cluster five, which was named "Uncritical and Moderate Ethnic Identity" (CE scale group mean = 2.37;  $SD = .53$ ; Ethnic Identity scale group mean = 2.62;  $SD = .55$ ).

Next, we tested membership of the five clusters for meaningful differences on demographic characteristics including grade in school, sex, African American/Black racial identity, and Hispanic/Latinx ethnic identity. No significant differences were identified between cluster groups and African American/Black racial identity ( $\chi^2(4) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .82$ ), Hispanic/Latinx ethnic identity ( $\chi^2(4) = 1.50$ ,  $p = .82$ ), sex ( $\chi^2(4) = 1.62$ ,  $p = .80$ ), or grade in school ( $\chi^2(12) = 6.59$ ,  $p = .88$ ). After these analyses, a MANOVA was conducted between latent classes on conceptually related variables: Subcomponents of emotional PE including leadership and policy control (measured through SPCS-Y) and social justice orientation.

Table 2 presents the results from the MANOVA analysis, with latent class clusters as the grouping factor, and leadership, political-self efficacy, and social justice orientation as the dependent variables. MANOVA results indicated that significant differences existed between latent class clusters on leadership, policy control, and social justice orientation. Pairwise univariate comparisons were used to further understand the results. Latent class clusters two and three both had significantly higher scores on leadership and social justice orientation, when compared with cluster groups one and five. Cluster groups one and four, however, had higher mean scores when compared with cluster group five on both leadership and social justice orientation. Latent cluster groups two and four had higher mean scores when compared with cluster group five on policy control. Furthermore, cluster group three had significantly higher mean scores when compared with cluster group one. Taken together, findings indicate that both latent cluster two, which had elevated levels of both critical awareness and ethnic identity, and cluster three, with higher critical awareness and more moderate ethnic identity, had important functions in predicting conceptually related variables. Yet, cluster group four, high critical awareness and low ethnic identity, also seemed to play an important role, which may point toward the connection between critical awareness in the empowerment process and having a social justice mindset.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

The social justice movements today shed light on the abilities of youth in the sociopolitical sphere, youth as partners in collective efforts of systemic community change, as well as youth as empowered and engaged citizens (Hart, 2016). Youth organizing is also taking on a more robust role in youth-work in the United States, wherein social transformation and community change are held as critical approaches to engaging youth and contributing positively toward their development (Atkinson, Chico, & Horn, 2016; Hart, 2016). For youth of color, the intersection between their ethnic-racial identification and their critical awareness or cognitive empowerment is an important area of examination. Through shared collective identity, individuals are not only likely to develop cognitive empowerment or critical awareness, but also have a perceived capability of mobilizing toward civic action and change (Gutiérrez, 1995; Lardier et al., 2019; Tatum, 1997). As Christens et al. (2018) noted, greater critical awareness among youth of color is likely because of the need to reflect on how social power operates and the importance of ethnic-racial group identity in engaging in action and collective social change for one's ethnic-racial group.

While an awareness of power and ethnic-racial group solidarity is important, limited research is present that examines this connection. Those studies that are present have shown that ethnic-racial group identity is associated with a groups' political identity (Gutierrez, 1988; Gutiérrez et al., 1995), their awareness of social issues – particularly those that impact their group – and the group's drive to engage in social change (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Lardier, 2018). The current study, using person-centered analysis, tested the association latent profile groups of cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity had with other indicators of sociopolitical development, specifically leadership and policy control – that is subcomponents of SPC – and social justice orientation. Results provide insights into the conceptual overlap between cognitive empowerment or critical awareness and ethnic identity, as well as the heterogeneity of these components among young people of color.

Drawing on previous scholarship, we hypothesized that the youth who exhibit greater cognitive empowerment and similarly higher levels of ethnic identity would have higher mean composite scores on dimensions of emotional PE, as well as social justice orientation. The results from this study provide some evidence in support of this hypothesis. The largest proportion of the sample (54%) was classified in cluster one, "Moderate Critical Awareness and Moderate Ethnic Identity", nearly 20% of the sample were identified in cluster two as "Critical and High Ethnic Identity", and roughly 12% were in cluster three, "Critical and Moderate Ethnic Identity". Though some variation was noted, MANOVA results indicated that these three clusters are noteworthy because nearly 90% of the sample were critically aware and identified moderate to high ethnic identity. More specifically, youth in cluster groups two and three reported higher mean scores in both leadership and policy control, as well as in social justice orientation. This may suggest that there is a relationship between being critical and experiencing moderate to high ethnic identity, and that these processes are associated with leadership, control within the sociopolitical sphere toward policy change, and civic action. Prior studies would suggest this is a reasonable assumption, given the association between ethnic-racial group identification and critical awareness and social action (Gutiérrez, 1989a, Gutiérrez, 1989b; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Stepick & Stepick, 2002).

While a strikingly large difference exists in the proportion of youth participants in the sample who were classified in cluster groups one "Moderate Critical Awareness and Ethnic Identity" and four, "High Critical Awareness and Low Ethnic Identity", those youth in cluster group four were identified to have higher mean scores on policy control. Even more interesting is that youth in cluster groups two, three, and four all identified high critical awareness and varied levels of ethnic identity (high, moderate, and low). These findings together suggest that critical awareness may have a stronger relationship with the dependent variables, when compared with ethnic identity. These outcomes are also interesting because it supports prior scholarship (e.g., Christens et al., 2018; Lardier et al., 2019) and provides some preliminary evidence, when connected with ethnic identity, that being critically aware is an important component in empowerment and the perceived ability to exert action to control policy. Furthermore, this finding provides support for the theoretical and empirical association between

subcomponents of emotional PE and cognitive empowerment. This outcome may too suggest that ethnic-racial minority youth would benefit from awareness of how social power operates due to social, institutional, and historical marginalization, which translates into their perceived ability to facilitate policy change (Christens et al., 2018; Lardier, 2018; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018; Watts et al., 2011).

Broadly, the study provides evidence of the value of person-centered approaches to the study of empowerment as a profile construct and further situates empowerment as a multidimensional construct (Christens et al., 2018). More importantly, through these analyses, empowerment may also be situated among and between concepts within its multidimensional framework, drawing conclusions that the processes of empowerment are indeed relational (Christens, 2012) and may not be as rigidly placed within the framework. These analyses contribute, therefore, to an emerging and growing body of research that has examined civic and sociopolitical development as profile constructs (Christens et al., 2018; Finley, 2011; Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013); however, this study is unique in that no prior study has investigated cognitive empowerment with ethnic identity as a profile construct based on multiple dimensions assessed among the youth. Therefore, we may be able to build on empowerment theory by expanding our theoretical understanding of cognitive empowerment, considering the larger role ethnic identity has in the conceptualization of cognitive empowerment and also within empowerment theory.

The examination of cognitive empowerment as a profile construct with ethnic identity and, too, as a predictor of components of emotional PE and social justice orientation stands in contrast to previous research and theory that considers cognitive empowerment as a superordinate (Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Peterson, Hamme Peterson, & Speer, 2002; Speer & Peterson, 2000) construct. Earlier ways of understanding empowerment, while important, limit conceptualizations of empowerment, and more specifically, cognitive empowerment, as a multidimensional construct. Hence, on the basis of how cognitive empowerment is modeled, it is likely that its association with conceptually related variables, such as social justice orientation and other dimensions of PE, such as emotional PE, will vary.

This study also offers some insight into the association between cognitive empowerment and critical consciousness. As noted in the introduction, this association is because of the conceptual and theoretical overlap that cognitive empowerment and critical consciousness share as frameworks for understanding sociopolitical development (Christens et al., 2018). While both frameworks draw attention to social and political points (Flanagan & Levine, 2010) and highlight an understanding of social and structural inequalities (Watts & Hipolito, 2015), critical consciousness is more substantively focused on the external, social power dynamics, whereas cognitive empowerment emphasizes the internal, cognitive understanding of power dynamics (Christens et al., 2018). Furthermore, given that ethnic-racial identities have been found to relate differently to constructs of PE (Christens et al., 2018), the addition of ethnic identity in this study draws attention to the importance of this developmental process in both cognitive empowerment (Lardier et al., 2019) and, theoretically, critical consciousness (Christens et al., 2018; Gutiérrez, 1989a, Gutiérrez, 1989b). In relation to this study, the variation in social justice orientation on the basis of the youth's critical awareness and ethnic identity orientation is reasonable given that directionally higher levels of critical awareness and ethnic identity reported greater social justice orientation, and those with diminished cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity had lower levels of social justice orientation. Future research should examine the interplay between cognitive empowerment, ethnic identity, social justice orientation, and critical consciousness, given that there appears to be theoretical, conceptual, and empirical overlap.

## 6.1 | Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting results and designing future investigations. First, the data are cross-sectional and from a single U.S. urban community of color. Variations within the findings in this study may be because of regional location and demographics, such as a majority Hispanic/Latinx and African American/Black community versus majority White, non-Hispanic community. Future research should be conducted among youth from varying contexts to further understand the variations identified within this study and the heterogeneity observed between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. It is also reasonable to assume that

as youth occupy a deeper and broader role in the national sociopolitical sphere, youth engagement in local-level activism across varying communities will also be influenced, as well the responses to survey questions. Furthermore, variations were not identified according to age, sex, or specific Hispanic/Latinx ethnic identity and African American/Black racial identity. Additional research is needed that not only examines the developmental trajectories of the association between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity, but also for any variations that may occur between and among Hispanic/Latinx and African American/Black youth. Similarly, while the detail was provided on the demographic breakdown of the sample, related to race and ethnicity, within-group differences were unexamined for/among African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx adolescents. For instance, although demographically labeled "Hispanic," there are significant within-group variations, on the basis of ethnic background (e.g., Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, and Mexican). Such within-group differences should be considered in future studies. Moreover, the measure of ethnic identity, whereas psychometrically sound was limited to those questions proposed by the federal funding agency. Though prior studies (e.g., Lardier et al., 2019; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018) have utilized similar measures and observed important findings that contributed to the field of empowerment, future research is needed which replicates this study using alternative ethnic identity measures from widely validated scales (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bamaca-Gomez, 2004). Using other measures would corroborate the role of ethnic identity within cognitive empowerment, and among other theoretically related variables. Finally, the data that were analyzed did not have an indicator for socioeconomic status, and therefore did not provide insight into the role that social class may play in the processes identified in this study.

## 6.2 | Implications for programming

The findings in this study have implications for youth empowerment and positive youth development programs, such as community-based educational settings (see Baldrige, Beck, Medina, & Reeves, 2017) and after school programs, school settings, and civic and community organizations. Results indicate that cognitive empowerment profiles with ethnic identity are highly heterogeneous among youth of color. It is likely that those youth who have a stronger ethnic identity may also feel empowered (Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Lardier, 2018, 2019; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018, 2019). Given the current U.S. sociopolitical landscape of youth civic engagement, such as the DREAMers and #BlackLivesMatter movements, this may be an opportune time for youth-based programs to encourage critical awareness and sociopolitical development (Christens et al., 2018), as well as to work toward promoting a true sense of youth ethnic identity that focuses on creating a collective sense of belongingness and support (Lardier, 2018, 2019; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018, 2019). Such programmatic goals may enhance youths' critical social awareness and point of subjectivity, where in healing may occur and hopefulness for the future may develop (Ginwright, 2015).

## 6.3 | Implications for theory

This study also offers a window into the how we understand the overlap between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity. As noted earlier, strong ethnic group identity creates a space where in individuals of color may be more apt to embody strong political identities that focus on social injustices, issues of power, and discrimination (Gutiérrez, 1988). Findings from this study illustrate that the overlap between greater cognitive empowerment or sociopolitical awareness (Christens et al., 2018) and ethnic identity (Lardier, Garcia-Reid et al., 2019) are predictive of a social justice orientation, leadership, and policy control, as components of emotional PE. The variation identified between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity may, however, indicate that being critically aware is a more important catalyst toward action and empowerment, when compared with ethnic identity. Nonetheless, this study directs questioning around the role of ethnic identity in the framing of cognitive empowerment, as youth of color with stronger ethnic identities may more readily develop cognitive empowerment and be willing to enact social change. It is important to note that people of color may also have some social identities that are privileged (e.g., male, non-queer identity) and some that are marginalized (e.g., darker skin tone, low socioeconomic status).



This further complicates our understanding of cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity, which requires that future researchers examine the overlap in these constructs.

Results from this study also help us further understand the association between cognitive empowerment, ethnic identity, and dimensions of emotional PE. An orientation for leadership and policy control, as components of emotional PE and social justice orientation, had a positive link to membership in more critically aware and greater ethnic identity-oriented groups. Such outcomes support research that not only places a dimension of PE as either an antecedent or outcome of another dimension of PE (e.g., Lardier et al., 2018a, 2018b; Lardier, Garcia-Reid et al., 2019), but is in line with prior studies, that question the way in which the multidimensional structure of PE functions in relation to other dimensions of PE (Christens et al., 2018). Future studies should focus on uncovering the relational processes between dimensions of PE, given empowerment's relational nature.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

Cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity are important development mechanisms among youth of color. The findings from this paper contribute to our still limited understanding of the relationship between aspects of PE and ethnic identity, and the importance these variables have in the empowerment of youth of color. Outcomes from this study highlight the empirical overlap between cognitive empowerment and ethnic identity and draw a path to additional variables, such as emotional PE and social justice orientation, which seem conceptually related. Findings also draw attention to the importance of youth empowerment in oppressed and marginalized spaces and the need to engage youth in a way that considers both a critical read of the ecology of youth's daily lives and their ethnic roots and cultural backgrounds (Flanagan et al., 2009). Hence, it is important to move away from a deficit lens of youth and their civic abilities, critical awareness, and empowerment, and instead towards embracing their capability and capacity to integrate both their ethnic-cultural selves with their critical and political selves.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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