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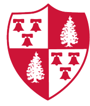

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ARTICLE

The interacting effects of psychological empowerment and ethnic identity on indicators of well-being among youth of color

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Abstract

Decades of legislative actions and power imbalances have limited African American/Black and Hispanic/Latina(o) urban youth's perceptions of empowerment and ability to rely upon social and institutional resources. Youth who have access to supportive resources and are connected to their ethnic–racial group perceive themselves as empowered and score higher on indicators of well-being. Among a sample of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latina(o) urban youth ($N = 383$) and using multivariate analysis of variance, the current study examined the relationship between psychological empowerment (PE) and ethnic identity among conceptually relevant outcome variables: community participation, neighborhood sense of community (SOC), school importance, and perceived substance use risk. Results indicated that PE and ethnic identity profile groups differed significantly on measures of community participation, neighborhood SOC, school importance, and perceived risk of using substances. Results provide preliminary support for the empirical and theoretical relationship between PE and ethnic identity on related empowerment measures, as well as indicators of well-being. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Youth of color represent an inordinate number of young people living in urban centers within (and throughout) the United States (Putnam, 2015). Placed in these spaces by decades of legislative actions (and inactions) and power imbalances, many of these adolescents, identifying primarily as African American/Black and Hispanic/Latina(o), are exposed to numerous developmental risks, which include, but are not limited to, substance use and abuse and community violence (Lardier, MacDonnell, Barrios, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2017). Moreover, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latina(o) youth living in urban communities are unlikely to feel empowered or rely upon social and institutional resources (Christens & Speer, 2015; McGee & Stovall, 2015) that would provide a bridge to additional resources to promote healthy developmental trajectories (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The lack of access to important sociocultural resources can be attributed to segregation, social isolation, and other significant inequalities (e.g., poorly

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funded schools with a limited number of high quality teachers) within their social system (Lardier, Herr, Barrios, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2017; Putnam, 2015)

As a consequence of social isolation and the proliferation of significant power imbalances, or inequalities, within these youth's social system, adolescents in underresourced urban communities are relegated to individualized descriptions of success, which are highlighted through U.S. narratives of resilience and “grit” (Bermudez, 2012; Lardier, Herr, et al., 2017; McInerney, 2009). Youth, however, who do have access to supportive resources (e.g., adult mentors, community organizations) and feel connected to their ethnic and racial group are likely to develop an empowered sense of self (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010). Furthermore, researchers have highlighted that empowered adolescents tend to participate in more community change activities, have a greater sense of community (SOC; Gullan, Power, & Leff, 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Lardier, MacDonnell, et al., 2017), and perceive the use of drugs and alcohol as risky (Garcia-Reid, Hamme Peterson, Reid, & Peterson, 2013; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011).

Empowered youth, with strong ties to their ethnic group, are also inclined to critically assess their social environment and engage with adult-empowerment agents, who are able to provide additional links to a variety of supportive sociocultural resources (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Yet despite the growth of empirical research examining empowerment among youth of color, there continues to be a need to uncover the process through which these young people generate empowerment (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Christens, Peterson, Reid, & Garcia-Reid, 2015; Peterson, Speer, & Hamme Peterson, 2011).

1.1 | Empowerment theory and psychological empowerment among urban youth of color

Empowerment is conceptualized as both an orientation for practice and a framework for understanding the participatory process at multiple levels (Christens, Speer, & Peterson, 2011; Rappaport, Rappaport, Swift, & Hess, 1984). Empowerment involves interdependent processes at the individual (i.e., psychological), organizational, and community levels, and focuses on how individuals obtain resources, gain control, and critically assess their environment to more adequately understand the conditions affecting their lives (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is also context-specific, which suggests that empowerment takes different forms for different people in different contexts (Zimmerman, 2000). Therefore, it is imperative to examine empowerment in ways that not only are context specific but also allow for a deeper understanding of culturally and contextually specific variables to inform the empowerment literature.

Much of the empirical literature in empowerment has focused on psychological empowerment (PE; Christens et al., 2011; Peterson, 2014). PE is a multidimensional construct (Peterson, 2014; Zimmerman, 1990, 1995; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991) that, despite being conceptualized by some as an intrapsychic variable, is more adequately defined as a psychosocial variable within (and among) reciprocating relationships at the organizational and community levels (Christens et al., 2011). Zimmerman (1990) states that an individual-level analysis of PE ignores the ecological nature and cultural influences of PE, which highlights that PE is context oriented. A commonly used definition of PE positions it as a mechanism through which individuals gain greater control over their lives, take a proactive approach in their communities, and work toward developing a critical understanding of their sociopolitical environments (Zimmerman, 1995).

Zimmerman's (1995) nomological network for PE includes the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components. Variations in PE lead to variations in intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral dimensions (Peterson, 2014). The *intrapersonal component* of PE, which includes perceptions of control and self-efficacy, specific to the sociopolitical sphere, has been conceptualized through the Sociopolitical Control Scale (SPCS), developed by Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991). The *interactional component* of PE, which involves a critical understanding of the social environment, has been theorized through a community-organizing context, with residents understanding the source, nature, and instruments of social power (Speer, 2000; Speer & Peterson, 2000). Last, the *behavioral component* has been viewed through participatory and coping behaviors that focus on community and social change (Zimmerman, 1995).

Studies examining PE at the *intrapersonal level*, through the SPCS, have found that persons reporting greater control over key aspects in their life and are involved in leadership activities have a greater neighborhood SOC (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991), stronger beliefs of community control (Peterson et al., 2011; Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014), and are more involved in organizational and community activities (Christens & Lin, 2014; Christens & Speer, 2015). For instance, Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, and Maton (1999) found that PE, over time, assisted, and even protected, Black urban youth from the negative consequences of helplessness on mental health indicators; meaning, PE is likely to buffer urban youth from negative mental health symptoms and other associated consequences.

Peterson, Hamme Peterson, and Speer (2002) similarly found among a sample of African American/Black and White adults that components of PE (e.g., political functioning and power through relationships) were more pronounced for African American/Black adults than Whites. Based on these findings, the authors surmised that given the historical disenfranchisement of African Americans/Blacks within the United States, they were more likely to develop an understanding of power distributions and resources and, furthermore, learn how to maneuver through this system to survive (Peterson et al., 2002).

More recent investigations have corroborated such findings and further revealed that urban youth of color with higher PE composite scores were more critically aware of their community, in control of their surroundings, and able to access resources that increased overall mental well-being (Christens & Peterson, 2012), as well as reducing the probability of engaging in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use (Christens et al., 2013). Yet despite such findings, PE continues to need further investigation among urban youth of color (Peterson, 2014). Moreover, we still know little about the relationship PE has with other key developmental variables, such as ethnic identity, among racial–ethnic minority youth.

1.2 | The intersection between PE and ethnic identity

Paulo Freire (1968[2014]) emphasized that people are highly complex and that we must understand individuals in terms of their history, culture, and context. It is, therefore, critical to explore the relationship between empowerment and ethnic identity, particularly among social and historically marginalized groups (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Ethnic identity has been defined as one type of social group-based identity (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010) that is part of the individual's self-concept (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Ethnic identity has also been labeled “a sense of people-hood” within a group, or culture, based on cultural norms and values specific to that ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Studies illustrating the relationship between ethnic identity and PE, although minimal, have argued that ethnic identity is an important developmental process that should be considered in tandem with PE (Gutiérrez, 1995; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010).

Investigations conducted over a decade ago stressed that cultural group affiliation and community participation with one's ethnic, racial, or cultural group impacted one's community connection, self-efficacy, and ethnic identity (Gutiérrez, 1995; Tatum, 1997). More recent studies have upheld such findings and further displayed the positive effect ethnic group identity has on had PE and well-being, particularly among ethnic minority groups, when compared to Whites (Molix & Bettencourt, 2010).

PE has also been shown to have the strongest effect among those youth who participated in community activities with and for their ethnic–racial group (Gullan et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). As a consequence of this type of participation, youth developed a stronger sense of collective group belongingness and connection to individuals within their ethnic–racial group (Gullan et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Hence, ethnic–racial minority adolescents involved in empowering group activities tend to have more solidified ethnic identities (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), a stronger neighborhood SOC (Christens & Lin, 2014; Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008; Phinney & Ong, 2007), a greater connection to their school environment (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009; Peterson et al., 2011; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007), and an overall lower probability of engaging in risky behaviors such as substance use (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Gullan et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015).

Examining PE beside ethnic identity reminds us of the importance of collective group identity and critical consciousness for and among marginalized groups. It also reminds us that such processes may both help these groups move along and through the empowerment process (Gutiérrez, 1995) and combat the sociopolitical and historical pressures of their subordination in the United States (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). As McMillan (1996) stated, "if one can find people with similar ways of looking, feeling, thinking, and being, then it is assumed that one has found a place where one can safely be oneself" (p. 321).

Taken together, the extant research indicates that individuals higher in PE engage in more community change activities, have a greater SOC, and an increased awareness of community issues (Christens & Lin, 2014; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Peterson & Reid, 2003; Peterson, Speer, et al., 2011; Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2012). Such individuals are also expected to have more solidified ethnic identities, which, similar to PE, augments youth's neighborhood SOC, community participation, and school connectedness, and decreases the probability of participating in negative health seeking behaviors (e.g., substance use and misuse; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Christens et al., 2013; Peterson & Reid, 2003). We argue that the presence of both higher composite scores of PE and ethnic identity is associated with greater perceived neighborhood SOC, community participation, school importance, and substance use risk.

2 | STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to build upon our understanding of PE among urban youth of color and, more specifically, explore the relationship between PE and ethnic identity among conceptually relevant outcome variables: *community participation*, *neighborhood SOC*, *school importance*, and *perceived substance use risk*. Four profile groups (i.e., high PE and ethnic identity; high PE and low ethnic identity; low PE and high ethnic identity; and low PE and low ethnic identity) were created to assess the effect on conceptually relevant outcome variables. Significant heterogeneity between profile groups on outcome variables would have important implications for the development of empowerment among racially and ethnically marginalized youth, as well as for practitioners and advocates in the design and implementation of targeted youth programming. We expected that those youth with both higher scores of PE and ethnic identity would report greater community participation, neighborhood SOC, school importance, and view drugs and alcohol as risky.

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Sample

The sample of students ($N = 383$) were from a northeastern underresourced urban school district in the United States. These students were asked to participate in a needs assessment as part of a 2013 Minority AIDS Initiative grant program that examined youth empowerment, as well as mechanisms that may buffer them from substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and contracting and transmitting HIV/AIDS. Data collected for this study informed environmental strategies and prevention–intervention protocols. Students were sampled through their high school physical education and health classes in Grades 9 through 12. Those students who returned parental consent and student assent forms were eligible to complete the questionnaire.

Students ranged from Grades 9 through 12, with 29.2% in the 9th grade, 45.7% in 10th grade, 6% in 11th grade, and 19.1% in 12th grade. The majority of students identified as Hispanic/Latina(o) (75%), with the next largest group of adolescents identifying as Black/African American (24.3%). A nearly equal proportion of students identified as male (46.9%) and female (53.1%). Among these youth, 50.6% ($n = 193$) were between 13 and 15 years of age and 49.4% ($n = 190$) were 16 to 18 years of age. The majority of youth received free or reduced lunch (75%), an indicator for low socioeconomic status.

3.2 | Measures

This study used two sets of measures. Measures related to substance use, ethnic identity, and school importance were designed by the funding agency to help capture information necessary to intervene and prevent substance abuse and the transmission of HIV/AIDS. The research team added psychometrically validated empowerment-based measures (e.g., PE, neighborhood SOC, community participation) to further inform prevention–intervention protocols and develop a deeper understanding of how these empowerment constructs affected specific risk and protective behaviors. Six scales were included in the current study.

3.3 | Criterion measures

3.3.1 | Sociopolitical control

Sociopolitical control was measured using the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y; Christens, Krauss, & Zeldin, 2016; Peterson et al., 2006; Peterson, Hamme Peterson, et al., 2011; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Through confirmatory factor analysis, Peterson, Hamme 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 (sample items: I am a leader in groups. I can usually organize people to get things done) of *leadership competence* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$; mean [*M*] = 27.35, standard deviation [*SD*] = 5.73) and the nine-item measure for *policy control* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$; *M* = 28.81, *SD* = 6.17) were combined (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$; *M* = 56.17, *SD* = 10.46). Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Overall, participants responded with moderate perceived rates of PE.

3.3.2 | 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.). Youth participants responded to each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Scores were totaled, with higher scores representing greater identification with one's ethnic group (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). Youth responded with moderate levels of ethnic identification. 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 (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003).

3.4 | Outcome measures

3.4.1 | School importance

School importance was measured using six items developed by the federal funding agency (sample item: How important do you think things you are learning in school are going to be for your later life?). Youth were asked to respond to each question on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In addition to these six items, a seventh-item was included, which asked students to identify their average letter grade on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "*Average grade is a F*" (1) to "*Average grade is an A*" (5). Adding this item is consistent with previous studies using a similar measure to assess school importance (Garcia-Reid, Peterson, & Reid, 2015; Peterson et al., 2006; Peterson, Hamme Peterson, et al., 2011). Scale items were totaled (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$), with students identifying moderate rates of school importance.

3.4.2 | Community participation

Community participation was measured using nine items (sample items: How often do you participate in protests/marches? How often do you attend public meetings?) that examined how often participants engaged in community

activities that had the possibility of manifesting in systemic social change (Speer & Peterson, 2000). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*one time*) to 5 (*about weekly*). Items were totaled to represent higher levels of community participation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Youth participants identified overall lower levels of community participation. This result, however, is consistent with current discussions specifying that urban youth have limited access to community and afterschool-based organizations, which would promote empowering community-level activities (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Christens & Speer, 2015; Putnam, 2015).

3.4.3 | Neighborhood SOC

Neighborhood SOC was measured using nine items (sample items: I feel like a member of this neighborhood.) from the Brief Sense of Community Index (BSCI), which was based on the work of Peterson et al. (2008) and McMillan and Chavis (1986). The BSCI was designed using four dimensions (i.e., needs fulfillment, group membership, influence, and emotional connection) of SOC theorized by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Youth participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from *strongly* 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses were totaled to represent higher levels of SOC or community belongingness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Overall, youth identified moderate levels of community connection.

3.4.4 | Perception of substance use risk

Perception of substance use risk was measured using eight items (sample item: How wrong do you feel it would be to have one or two drinks of an alcoholic beverage nearly every day?). These scale items were designed from the federal funding agency; however, these questions represent similar measures from the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey (Kann et al., 2016). Student participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*no great risk*) to 4 (*great risk*). Responses were totaled to represent a greater perceived risk of using drugs and alcohol (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). Youth identified higher levels of perceived risk for using drugs and alcohol.

3.5 | Analyses

Prior to 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 the Chi square result was significant, $\chi^2 =$ (degree of freedom [*df*] = 23) 43.23, p. = .006, and that these data were most likely not MCAR. Further inspection of data revealed that the largest amounts of missing data were related to perception of substance use risk (15%). This is not surprising because sensitive questions related to substance use tend to be missing, or either over- or underreported by adolescents (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Although numerous missing data techniques are available (McGinniss & Harel, 2016), missing data for this study were handled using maximum likelihood (ML) estimations because data were not MCAR (Little & Rubin, 2014). Following ML estimations to handle missing data, normality, descriptive statistics, and a correlation matrix were examined. Univariate skew and kurtosis were within normal distribution ranges.

Following preliminary analyses, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted using SPSS (version 22). MANOVA was used to examine whether profile groups of PE, with the inclusion of ethnic identity as a theoretically related variable, differed on measures of school importance, community participation, neighborhood SOC, and perception of substance use risk. Profile groups of high and low PE and high and low ethnic identity were created using mean-split. Although there are additional methods to create profile groups, such as person-centered analyses, mean-split was deemed an appropriate method, given its prior implementation in previous studies within the empowerment literature (e.g., Peterson, Hamme Peterson, et al., 2011; Speer, 2000). The mean-split categorical variables were found to match the proportions of the PE ($r = .83$) and ethnic identity ($r = .86$) continuous distribution, therefore displaying a highly collinear relationship to the original distribution (DeCoster, Iselin, & Gallucci, 2009).

TABLE 1 Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics for main study variables (N = 383)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. PE	—	.32*	.11*	.12*	.39**	.04
2. Ethnic identity		—	.34**	.12*	.03	.17*
3. School importance			—	.05	.14**	.43**
4. Community participation	.			—	.04	-.02
5. Sense of community					—	.06
6. Perception of substance use risk						—
Skew	.18	–.25	–.52	2.4	.02	–.66
Kurtosis	1.31	.56	.51	4.87	.08	–.12
Mean (SD)	56.17 (10.46)	15.72 (3.31)	26.55 (4.12)	13.58 (6.95)	24.47 (6.60)	22.01 (3.88)
Cronbach α	.89	.80	.73	.90	.85	.80

Note. PE = psychological empowerment; SD = standard deviation.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Based upon theoretical discussions highlighting the relationship between greater levels of perceived PE and ethnic identity (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Gutiérrez, 1995; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010), four profile groups were created. These profile groups are as follows: (a) individuals with both high PE and ethnic identity; (b) individuals with high PE and low ethnic identity; (c) individuals with low PE and high ethnic identity; and (d) individuals with both low PE and ethnic identity.

Initially, gender, age, Hispanic/Latina(o) ethnic identity, and African American/Black racial identity were included because previous studies have found relationships between PE (e.g., Christens & Peterson, 2012; Peterson, Peterson, et al., 2011; Speer et al., 2012) and ethnic identity (e.g., Brook, Whiteman, Balka, Win, & Gursen, 1998; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). However, results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between profile groups on gender, $\chi^2(3) = 1.39$, $p > .05$, age, $F(6, 375) = 1.43$, $p > .05$, Hispanic/Latina(o) ethnic identity, $\chi^2(3) = 4.98$, $p > .05$, and African American/Black racial identity, $\chi^2(3) = 2.66$, $p > .05$. Therefore, statistical controls of these variables were not necessary in MANOVA analyses.

4 | RESULTS

The correlation matrix and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. PE had a relationship with all variables, except for perception of substance use risk. Ethnic identity was also found to have a relationship with all variables, apart from neighborhood SOC. Ethnic identity and PE had a positive relationship. The strongest relationships were between school importance and perception of substance use risk ($r = .43$, $p < .01$); PE and neighborhood SOC ($r = .39$, $p < .01$); PE and ethnic identity ($r = .32$, $p < .01$); and ethnic identity and school importance ($r = .34$, $p < .01$).

Findings from the MANOVA analysis are presented in Table 2. Statistically significant differences were found between PE and ethnic identity profile groups for all four conceptually related variables. Post hoc pairwise comparisons displayed that for example, individuals in group 1 (i.e., those higher in PE and ethnic identity) had significantly higher scores among all four conceptually related variables. Post hoc analysis further revealed that group 2 had significantly higher scores when compared to group 3 for neighborhood SOC, and among all variables when compared to group 4. Group 3 also displayed higher scores when compared to group 2 for school importance and among all variables when compared to group 4. Taken together, findings from this analysis begin to illustrate the importance of higher levels of PE and ethnic identity on specific outcomes related to well-being and participatory activity. Moreover, results also demonstrated the burgeoning theoretical relationship between PE and ethnic identity.

TABLE 2 MANOVA results between PE and ethnic identity profile groups (N = 383)

Variable	Group 1: Both high PE and ethnic identity ($n = 79$)	Group 2: High PE and low ethnic identity ($n = 110$)	Group 3: Low PE and high ethnic identity ($n = 75$)	Group 4: Both low PE and ethnic identity ($n = 118$)	Univariate F (3, 378)	Mean different, p < .01
School importance	28.23	26.19	27.36	25.26	10.13***	1,3 > 2,4
Community participation	15.06	14.15	13.31	12.25	2.97*	1, 2, 3 > 4
Sense of community	26.44	25.95	22.56	23.01	8.69***	1,2 > 3,4
Perception of substance use risk	22.44	22.23	22.57	21.16	2.88*	1, 2, 3 > 4

Note. MANOVA = multivariate analysis of variance; PE = psychological empowerment. Wilks' Lambda = .84, F (12, 992.45) = 5.37, $p < .001$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

5 | DISCUSSION

Empowerment is conceptualized as a modality that can "enhance wellness instead of fixing problems, identify strengths instead of cataloging 'risk' factors, and search for environmental influences instead of blaming victims." (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 44). Empowerment is, therefore, a key process in the promotion youth civic engagement and well-being (Kirshner, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011), as well as in the prevention of risky behaviors, such as substance use and abuse (Christens & Peterson, 2012). As a mechanism through which individuals develop a collective sense of identity, leadership, and power, empowerment is a highly important process for marginalized and oppressed groups in the United States. This process is manifested through PE, i.e., individual's with greater sense of empowerment are likely to engage in community change, have a greater SOC, and increased awareness of community issues (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Empowered individuals are also likely to have a more solidified ethnic identity, because they tend to have a greater connection to their cultural group and are often participating in community-based activities with/for their ethnic, racial, or cultural group (Gutiérrez, 1995; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010; Tatum, 1997). This in turn affects community connection, power, and perceived capabilities to make change, as a collective, in their community.

Despite what we know about empowerment among marginalized groups, we still know little about the relationship between PE and ethnic identity, as well as the connection that these two constructs have with related empowerment predictors (e.g., community participation, neighborhood SOC, school importance, and perceived risk of using drugs and alcohol). Given that the relationship between PE and ethnic identity has not been adequately teased apart is problematic, considering the original conjectures in empowerment were with and for individuals of color living in underresourced and oppressed communities, where a strong ethnic group identity both performed as a buffer and a catalyst toward action (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). The current study provided preliminary evidence on the empirical relationship between PE and ethnic identity and how these developmental mechanisms influence related empowerment constructs.

Prior research has argued that higher levels of ethnic identification increases youth PE and reduces negative outcome behaviors such as substance use (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Gullan et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). The relationship between ethnic identity and empowerment has been implicated in marginalized youth developing a stronger cultural group or collective identity, as well as community affiliation, which in turn affects self-efficacy, youth's sense of solidarity, and communitarianism (Tatum, 1997). We argue that youth with higher levels of both PE and ethnic identity are more inclined to be connected to their communities and schools, tend to engage in more community participation, and are often less susceptible to engage in risky behaviors. In light of the results, we can begin to visualize the important, yet still understudied, relationship between ethnic identity and PE and explore how these mechanisms work together to promote well-being among African American/Black and Hispanic/Latina(o) youth (Gullan et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Results from this study have implications for empowerment theory and practice.

5.1 | Implications for empowerment theory

Previous studies have shown that empowerment–more specifically PE–has a relationship with ethnic identity and in predicting community participation, neighborhood SOC, school importance, and perceived risk of substance using behaviors (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Christens et al., 2013; Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). This study extends the empirical work on PE in relation to ethnic identity. Through MANOVA and post hoc analyses, this study found that youth who had higher composite scores of both PE and ethnic identity were also likely to identify greater school importance, community participation, neighborhood SOC, and perceived risk of substance using behaviors. This suggests that not only may PE and ethnic identity be linked to one another, but also, shared membership with a group is connected to one's sense of empowerment and together operate to predict greater school and community connectedness, as well as community participation. It also stands to reason that PE and ethnic identity may work together to transform perceptions on substance use and abuse.

The presence of these findings supports prior research, which indicates that individuals who internalize a stronger ethnic identity may also feel more empowered (Gutierrez, 1995; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010; Tatum, 1997). The current landscape in the United States and the DREAMers serves as a good example of this process; wherein, DREAMers with a strong ethnic identity–i.e., identifying largely as Hispanic/Latina(o)– also are experiencing a sense of empowerment and need to engage in civic activities (Forenza, Rogers, & Lardier, 2017).

Considering these findings and the role ethnic identity and empowerment plays among youth of color, researchers should engage in additional investigations that further uncover the function of ethnic identity in the development of PE. Doing so may help to further conceptualize empowerment, and, specifically PE. Furthermore, given that empowerment is a higher-order theory (Peterson, 2014), considering the function of ethnic identity within the measurement of PE may allow for a more culturally responsive approach to measuring empowerment among ethnic–racial minority groups and begin to place the *power* back in em*power*ment for groups of color (Woodall, Warwick-Booth, & Cross, 2012).

5.2 | Implications for community prevention–intervention and policy

PE is more than a personality variable: It is a component of empowerment that considers the process of gaining control over circumstances facing individuals and their communities (Peterson, 2014). PE and ethnic identity are also more than individual traits, but part of a larger process that promotes collective identity, community connectedness, and action toward community change (Gutiérrez, 1995; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010). In addition, PE and ethnic identity together perform as a buffer against risky behaviors. Therefore, a major question for community prevention–intervention programs, and policy, is how to cultivate both PE and ethnic identity among youth in resource-deprived and oppressed communities.

Empowerment-based preventions and interventions should be tailored to consider the ethnic identity of the community and those within the program. Findings from this study indicate that higher levels of PE and ethnic identity increase community and school connection, community participation, and youth's perceptions that using drugs and alcohol were risky. Recent investigations have also illustrated that engaging youth in community-based activities (see Stanton-Salazar, 2011) can help foster youth ethnic identity and PE (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). As a result, young people are likely to feel supported, engage in positive peer networks (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015), and less likely to feel a sense of isolation, which would otherwise lead to myriad of negative life outcomes (Peterson & Reid, 2003).

Prevention specialists need to consider how to enhance youth's PE and connection to their ethnic group, which would in turn effectuate community participation and change and work toward offsetting risky behaviors such as substance use and abuse. Prevention specialists may, therefore, want to consider the unique role that supportive racially and ethnically similar adult relationships that include critical conversations on identity and power can have in fostering PE among youth of color (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Such mechanisms would work toward promoting collective identity and go beyond simply providing services to showing how to work together to overcome conditions of (dis)empowerment and isolation (Christens et al., 2011). It would also be prudent if prevention specialists and funders of prevention programming focused on developing sustainable programs that highlight the variety of community

resources valued by racially and ethnically marginalized youth in urban communities (e.g., collective group identity); yet these are not often highlighted by many in "mainstream" individualized prevention programming (Romero, 2016).

5.3 | Limitations

Several limitations of the study need to be recognized. First, the cross-sectional design of the study limits causal interpretation of data. Although cross-sectional studies are important for rapid analyses and dissemination of outcomes for marginalized groups, future research should consider replicating this study on a broader longitudinal scale.

A second limitation concerns the measurement of ethnic identity. For the present study, questions on ethnic identity were limited to those proposed by the funding agency. Although the measure for the current study was psychometrically sound, future research is advised to replicate this study using alternative ethnic identity measures from widely validated scales (e.g., Phinney, 1992; Umana-Taylor, Yazedijian, & Bamaca-Gomez, 2004), which would further corroborate the role of ethnic identity with PE and among theoretically related measures.

An associated limitation concerns the use of the school importance and perceived risk of substance use outcome variables. Both measures were provided by the funding agency. Despite these measures being psychometrically sound and based upon validated school importance (e.g., Stevenson, Maton, & Teti, 1999) and perceived risk of substance use measures (e.g., Kann et al., 2014), future studies are advised to replicate this study using those school importance and perceived risk of substance use measures from the original and previously cited scales.

A fourth limitation concerns the measurement of PE. In the current study, the *intrapersonal* component of PE was examined (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Peterson, 2014); however, PE is multifaceted (Peterson, 2014). Therefore, future research needs to develop scales that examine all aspects of PE (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal, behavioral, and relational components).

A fifth limitation relates to the use of mean-splits for creating profile groups. Although previous empowerment studies (e.g., Peterson, Hamme Peterson, et al., 2011; Speer, 2000) have used mean-split to establish profile groups, and in the current study, the created categorical variables matched the proportions of the PE and ethnic identity variables, mean-split approaches tend to be less rigorous when compared to person-centered analytic approaches. Future studies should consider the use of person-centered analyses to establish profile groups, which would provide a more nuanced examination of what items on both the SPCS-Y and ethnic identity scale separated the groups. Person-centered analyses would also allow researchers to infer the characteristics of group membership from the items that specified group membership (Christens et al., 2015).

A final limitation concerns the study's external validity, as our investigation was conducted among a specific group of adolescents in a specific U.S. community. In addition, youth were part of a larger federally funded HIV/AIDS prevention-intervention program, which may have influenced their reported levels of PE, ethnic identity, community participation, SOC, and perceived risk of using drugs and alcohol. This may limit the generalizability of findings; however, results from this study are consistent with prior investigations and extend the current yet limited literature base.

5.4 | Conclusion

PE and ethnic identity are important developmental mechanisms for youth of color. Results from this study progress our still nascent understanding on the relationship between PE and ethnic identity together, and the importance these mechanisms have in the empowerment of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latina(o) adolescents. Findings highlight that promoting youth well-being in oppressed and marginalized spaces involves providing urban youth of color with opportunities to foster PE and their ethnic identity. Developing a strong connection to one's community and school as well as participating in community activities may provide youth with a sense of purpose that in turn enhances PE and ethnic identity. Future studies need to consider PE and ethnic identity in the promotion of civic engagement and the prevention of negative life outcomes because they are part and parcel to urban youth of color's well-being. Funding priorities should also focus on those prevention programs that involve youth in the prevention process (e.g., Drug Free

Communities Grant program) and provide opportunities to engage in community organizations that promote direct and meaningful involvement.

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