Culture, Racial Socialization, and Positive African American Youth Development

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Abstract

Positive youth development is critical for African American youth as they negotiate a social, political, and historical landscape grounded in systemic inequities and racism. One possible, yet understudied, approach to promote positive youth development is to increase African American youth consciousness and connection to their Africentric values and culture. The primary purpose of this article was to investigate the degree to which cultural and group consciousness factors (i.e., cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization) predicted positive youth development (i.e., future orientation, prosocial behavior, political/community, and social justice/equality civic mindedness) and how these might differ by gender. This article utilized survey data from 1,930 African American youth participants of the Pen or Pencil™ mentoring program. Results generally indicated that cultural orientation, Africentric values and, to a lesser degree, racial socialization, predicted positive youth development variables, with these effects varying by gender. These findings suggest that enhancing cultural consciousness may

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support the positive development of African American youth, although male and female youth may respond to these efforts in different ways.

For African American youth, cultivating a pathway to adult competency is encumbered by the challenges associated with negotiating a social, political, and historical landscape grounded in systemic inequities and racism (Durlak et al., 2007; Hughes, 2013). Media representations of people of African ancestry continue to display ideologies of White supremacy (Hazell & Clarke, 2008) and Black inferiority (Burrell, 2010). Social and physical environments are burdened with a host of inequities and disparities that create under-resourced neighborhoods and unequal conditions. Historical disinvestment in communities of color including poor health care (Burgard & Hawkins, 2014), unequal education (Merjian, 2010), inequitable access to healthy food and recreational space (González, Villanueva, & Grills, 2012), and poor services, transportation, and housing options (Policy Link, 2007) widens the race gap even further. African American youth are then unfairly expected to interpret the meaning of these disparities in ways that do not harm the integrity of a positive sense of self, their cultural orientation, connection to community, and beliefs about their future. In conflict with these contextual realities, African American youth are increasingly exposed to deracialized narratives in the broader society, whereby race is muted in discussions of social and environmental inequities (McIlwain, 2013; Perry, 1991). Such conditions offer evidence of a social and physical environment where race issues are ever present, yet often deemphasized, silenced, or negatively reframed to the discredit of African Americans. Therefore, it is critical for scholars and communities of practice to collectively further an understanding of the role of cultural orientation, Africentric values, racial socialization, and gender in positive African American youth development, particularly their future orientation, prosocial behavior, political and community civic mindedness (PC-CM), and social justice and equality civic mindedness (SJE-CM). The present study investigates these issues by applying a positive youth development frame to examine data collected from an evaluation of the Pen or Pencil™ (POP) youth mentoring program. POP is a year-round, culturally based, group-mentoring curriculum created by the National Alliance of Faith and Justice (NAFJ). In their demonstration project, NAFJ sought to prepare

African American youth for a highly racialized world that is increasingly grounded in either a deracialized or racially negative narrative.

Positive Youth Development

Current thinking in positive youth development suggests that, with support and guidance from caring adults, all youth can be healthy, happy, thriving, and make positive contributions to their families, schools, and communities (National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, 2007). Positive youth development is a strengths-based model in which youth are viewed as partners and resources to be developed (Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The emphasis is on harnessing their resilience, positive energy, and initiative rather than emphasizing their problems and perceived deficiencies (Deschenes, McDonald, & McLaughlin, 2004; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). It is also a relational developmental systems model (Overton, 2010), which argues that youth cannot be understood outside of their context; rather, youth development is understood within the transactional relationship between youth and their social and physical environments. The positive youth development research suggests that healthy young people have a sense of agency, belonging, competence, and power (National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, 2007).

The Five Cs model of positive youth development is the most empirically supported positive youth development framework to date (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009). Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring constitute the Five Cs (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004, 2009) and they are believed to lay the groundwork for a "sixth C"—Contribution (e.g., contribution to self, family, community, society; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2004, 2009; Lerner et al., 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Travis and Leech (2014) suggest that Sense of Community and Engaged Citizenship should be considered the sixth and seventh Cs, respectively, responding to the specific cultural and social experiences of African Americans.

This study examines how four features of positive youth development (future orientation, prosocial behavior, PC-CM, and SJE-CM) are affected by three aspects of cultural and group consciousness (cultural orientation, Africentric values, and future orientation).

Cultural Orientation and Africentric Values

Cultural orientation is the extent to which one embraces mainstream culture and his or her ethnic culture's worldview (Bell, Bouie, & Baldwin, 1990; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012) and may be a potentially

salient construct for African American positive youth development. Among African American youth, cultural orientation is evidenced in their endorsement of a set of cultural values (Cokely, 2005) that are Africentric, including communalism, spirituality, collectivism, fairness, and social justice (L. R. Gordon, 2002; Grills, 2002; Jagers & Mock, 1993; Scott, 2003; Thomas, 2000). These foundational Africentric cultural values reflect multigenerational cultural retentions that can be found across the African diaspora. In the African American context, they have been shaped and reshaped by the African American experience, manifesting in an Africentric orientation found in the values, behaviors, and beliefs of contemporary African Americans (Belgrave, Townsend, Cherry, & Cunningham, 1997). As one example, Boykin (1983, 1986) argued that an Africentric communalistic perspective—a fundamental value explored in the current study—is promoted, in part, by one's sense of interdependence, socialization, and civic duty. It reflects greater emphasis on human qualities and relationships than the blatant individualism and materialism (Bell, Bouie, & Baldwin, 1990) that are synonymous with postindustrial society.

Cultural orientation has been associated with ethnic identity exploration, advanced stages of identity development, positive group attitudes, increased persistence and performance, and group-oriented ethnic behaviors among African American adolescents (Bentley, Adams, & Stevenson, 2009; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; O'Connor, Brooks-Gunn, & Graber, 2000; Stevenson, 1995). The presence of an Africentric cultural orientation has been identified as a critical protective factor in the psychological well-being of African American youth (Neblett, Seaton, Hammond, & Townsend, 2010; Neblett et al., 2012; Scott, 2003) and is negatively associated with substance use (Belgrave et al., 1997; Nasim, Corona, Belgrave, Utsey, & Fallah, 2007; Nasim, Fernander, Townsend, Corona, & Belgrave, 2011). It is also associated with positive youth development outcomes including self-esteem (Constantine, Alleyne, Wallace, & Franklin-Jackson, 2006) and academic engagement (Williams & Chung, 2013). As such, an Africentric cultural orientation promises to promote a host of positive social, behavioral, and psychological factors for African American youth, consistent with the positive youth development framework.

It is important to consider the role of gender differences in cultural orientation. Belgrave, Brome, and Hampton (2000) found that girls who endorse Africentric values were more aware of the harmful effects of drugs than girls with lower Africentric values and boys in general. Williams and Chung (2013) identified a trend between Africentric cultural orientation, gender, and college enrollment. They argue that research needs to explore the nuances of the relationship between Africentric cultural orientation and masculinity, as boys have regularly been outperformed in high school and college by girls.

Racial Socialization

Racial socialization presents another potentially useful contribution to African American positive youth development. Racial socialization is the transmission from adults (particularly parents) to children of "information about cultural practices and objects, efforts to instill pride in and knowledge about African Americans, discussions about discrimination and how to cope with it, and strategies for succeeding in mainstream society" (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 748). In this article, we consider racial socialization among African American youth to be distinct from ethnic socialization. African American ethnic socialization focuses on the transmission of ethnic group values, history, beliefs, and customs, whereas African American racial socialization focuses more on messages of racial barriers and cultural pride (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2010). Racial socialization enables youth from historically oppressed groups to positively negotiate contexts characterized by high racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, bias, and strain, thereby contributing to their well-being and functioning within these contexts (Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002b).

Different conceptualizations exist regarding what constitutes racial socialization messaging, although there is general agreement that they encompass direct messages about race (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Hughes et al. (2006) proposed that racial socialization was a means for African Americans to prepare youth for experiences with racial barriers and stereotypes. Yet in her review of the racial socialization literature, Lesane-Brown (2006) found that much of the research on racial socialization focused on messages of cultural pride, rather than addressing racial barriers. Lesane-Brown (2006), nonetheless, argued that each of these types of messages have been found to affect African American positive youth development. In these contexts, racial socialization messages transmitted by parents, caring adults, and peers can strengthen African American youth resiliency, coping, identity, and positive youth development generally (Hughes et al., 2006; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999).

Racial socialization messages vary by gender, likely due to the different experiences of race, ethnicity, and stereotypes for African American boys and girls. Thomas, Speight, Barrie, and Turner-Essel (2013) argued that African American girls are typically stereotyped in the broader society as nurturing, threatening, or overly sexualized. Boys, on the other hand, are more often viewed as threatening (Stevenson, Herrero-Taylor, Cameron, & Davis, 2002) and are harassed more often than girls. Given this, racial socialization of African American girls often focuses on building strong women who will be educated, avoid premarital sex, and be independent (Thomas, Speight, Barrie,

& Turner-Essel, 2012). Discussions with boys are more likely to include messages of racial barriers and negative stereotypes and strategies for coping with racism (Hughes et al., 2006; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Particularly salient for boys are messages concerning racial profiling and incarceration (Elmore & Gaylord-Harden, 2013).

Future Orientation

Future orientation is a relevant concept for positive youth development that is concerned with thoughts, feelings, hopes, and plans for the future (McCabe & Barnett, 2000a, 2000b; Nurmi, 1991; Schmid, Phelps, & Lerner, 2011; Steinberg et al., 2009; Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2011). A positive future orientation advances goal setting (Stoddard et al., 2011), which is important in shaping adolescents' attitudes toward education and career planning. Future orientation predicts several outcomes for African American youth including academic performance (Adelabu, 2007), college enrollment (O'Hara, Gibbons, Weng, Gerrard, & Simons, 2012), and positive attitudes toward education more broadly (W. T. Brown & Jones, 2004). Future orientation is believed to serve as a protective factor against violent behavior (Stoddard et al., 2011), hopelessness, and depressive symptoms (Hamilton et al., 2014) and is positively associated with self-efficacy and ethnic identity (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008).

Important gender differences may exist with respect to future orientation, particularly for boys in communities of color (Bolland, Lian, & Formichella, 2005; B. Davis, 2005; Kerpelman et al., 2008; Steinberg et al., 2009). For example, African American boys are often immersed in social and educational environments where they experience greater hostility than their female counterparts; these experiences may explain why girls often express a diminished future orientation and sometimes make decisions that reflect a sense of hopelessness (Adelabu, 2008; Hamilton et al., 2014; Kesner, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Noguera, 2003). In these contexts, African American girls essentially hold the belief that negative institutional and societal issues compromise their futures (Adelabu, 2006; Bolland et al., 2005; D. M. Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009).

Prosocial Behavior

Kindness, care, and concern for others are hallmarks of an African-centered cultural orientation and are considered essential to healthy psychological functioning (Grills, 2004; Gyekye, 1996). This is reflected in the concept of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior refers to actions taken that benefit

others, such as sharing, caring, comforting or helping others, engaging in cooperative activities, taking the perspectives of others, and donating time (Belgrave, Nguyen, Johnson, & Hood, 2011; McMahon et al., 2013; Mussen & Eisenberg, 2001). Prosocial behavior has significant effects on a number of developmental outcomes including social competence, positive family and peer relationships, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Belgrave et al., 2011; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Wentzel, Filisetti, & Looney, 2007).

The literature on prosocial behavior among African American youth is scant. Humphries, Parker, and Jagers (2000), however, argued that the sense of communalism—an Africentric cultural value—is related to prosocial behavior in African American boys. Therefore, prosocial behavior may have particular relevance to African American positive youth development, which the present study sought to investigate.

Civic and Community Engagement

Having an orientation toward community and civic engagement and social justice can be an important marker of African American positive youth development. In an Africentric cultural orientation, a sense of responsibility for the community and values of justice and fairness are central to healthy psychological functioning (Grills, 2002, 2004; Gyekye, 1996). This collectivist orientation affords an opportunity to "be" in community and "do" the work of community (Grills, 2012) and is consistent with theories in positive youth development where the benefits of mutual, person–context interactions define healthy developmental regulation (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003).

A growing body of empirical work has emerged highlighting the untapped potential of adolescents' promotion of social justice (Durlak et al., 2007; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Similarly, scholars in liberation psychology (Azibo, 2001; Burton & Kagan, 2009; Martín-Baró, Aron, & Corne, 1994; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003) note the critical intersection of social power and wellness that can occur when adults and youth engage in critical analysis and activism in the service of equity and justice. Youth of color participating in political and broader civic engagement activities—youth organizing, participatory action research, and so forth—tend to develop a heightened sense of civic mindedness and concern for their community (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). Participation in civic activities also produces a sense of agency and capacity with respect to achieving goals (Larson & Hansen, 2005), which may broadly reflect an elevated sense of future orientation. Community-focused civic engagement among youth can promote social

capital through the facilitation of social networks; that is, youth in communities of color tend to leverage their social ties—family, peers, mentors, role models, and so forth—to make well-informed decisions and participate in prosocial, civic activities (Ginwright, Norguera, & Cammarota, 2006). Therefore, civic engagement can be considered an indicator of several aspects of positive youth development (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012).

Of particular interest is also the extent to which attitudes toward civic engagement differ by gender. Existing literature suggests that boys and girls portray differing behaviors and attitudes toward civic engagement. For example, girls may be more likely to engage in civic activities than boys (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012; McIntosh & Munoz, 2009) and have positive attitudes toward civic activities (Metzger & Ferris, 2013). These trends were consistent when looking specifically at civic engagement (Davila & Mora, 2007) and civic values for African American girls versus boys (Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008). It is essential to uncover what influences gender differences in civic engagement, attitudes, and values.

As youth participate in community service activities, they develop a stronger sense of self and begin to define themselves in terms of their civic-minded actions (Yates & Youniss, 1998). Such development puts them on a path to become adult citizens who make culturally specific, generative contributions to self, family, community, and civil society (Lerner et al., 2003). It is therefore critical to examine youth's knowledge of, and attitudes toward, civic engagement, particularly in communities of color.

Current Study Research Questions

The current study seeks to expand our understanding of how dimensions of African American cultural and group consciousness (cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization) predict several aspects of positive youth development (future orientation, PC-CM, SJE-CM, and prosocial behavior) among African American youth. First, to what extent do cultural orientation, Africentric values, racial socialization predict future orientation? Second, to what extent do cultural orientation, Africentric values, racial socialization, and future orientation predict prosocial behavior? Third, to what extent do cultural orientation, Africentric values, racial socialization, and future orientation predict African American youth perceptions of the importance of civic mindedness in the form of political participation, community involvement, and social justice and equality? Finally, do any of these relationships differ as a function of gender?

Method

Participants

Study participants were 1,930 African American youth who voluntarily enrolled in the POP mentoring program in 12 states and the District of Columbia. Participants ranged in age from 9 to 19 years (M_{age} = 12.68, SD = 1.72); 54% (n = 728) of youth who provided gender information were male and 46% (n = 627) were female. Data were collected across a 3-year period from two waves of students who participated in the POP program evaluation.

Intervention

POP is a culturally grounded and curriculum-based mentoring program. It uses the history of the Underground Railroad, community-wide political engagement, and youth leadership during the Civil Rights Movement as the context and content of an approach to mentoring that is designed to mobilize, reach, teach, and inspire African American youth who struggle through immense social, environmental, family, and school stressors. On a weekly basis, screened and trained mentors lead mentee groups through a series of materials and activities in sessions that last 1 to 2 hours for a minimum of 3 months. POP groups track their movement through the curriculum and their completion of various activities using a mock stock exchange tracking procedure developed by NAFJ in which mentors are the investors and youth are the stockholders in their POP corporation of information, activities, and anticipated growth. The curriculum-driven activities ensure consistency in program delivery and support bonding and emotional connections between mentors and mentees. Innovative activities challenge mentors and mentees, (the investors and shareholders) to set goals to mobilize a movement of personal, social, and community change. Activities include mentor-supported reading and skill development, which are aligned with Common Core and other standards to prepare mentees for graduation, higher levels of education, and transitioning into family and broader society as productive members.

Procedures

POP was a mentoring curriculum designed for easy adaptation and implementation in diverse settings (e.g., schools, community organizations, military family settings). As such, sites were given the flexibility to recruit participants in ways that complimented their respective contexts and means

of access to youth. For example, in school settings, the mentoring program was offered to entire classrooms based on teacher interest. In community settings, recruitment included referrals from juvenile justice facilities, community-based organizations, and state agencies. In military family settings, students in school sites were recruited via their membership in particular classrooms. In all instances, participation was voluntary and parental consent and youth assent were obtained.

The evaluation of POP was reviewed and approved by the relevant university institutional review board. Participants completed a self-report survey as part of the pretest administration of the POP evaluation on the first day of the program (Orientation) in either a classroom of the host school or a meeting room of the host community-based setting. The pretest survey was administered to participants by trained staff from each site. Participants were informed that they would be asked to complete a similar survey on completion of the program. Only pretest data were analyzed in the present study.

Measures

Because this was a pilot evaluation study of POP, a full-scale model of the planned evaluation was not utilized due to limited program resources and a need for formative evaluation results for program improvement efforts. The pilot study was used to test a theoretical model on a small scale to attain the highest response rates and greatest subsets of POP youth participants. Therefore, the items and subscales selected for inclusion were selected by the research team based on a thorough literature review in concert with the following criteria for our survey: accessibility, simplicity, and brevity. That is, our need to rigorously assess a number of evaluation variables had to be balanced against the POP sites' desire to minimize the assessment burden placed on youth participants by our survey in order to capture the highest response rates. This resulted in an evaluation tool that included items drawn from established scales rather than the full scales or subscales; a necessary concession to the needs of our community partners (i.e., POP sites) that may have affected the psychometric rigor of the evaluation tool.

Within the tool, the independent variables included cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization, while the dependent variables included future orientation, prosocial behavior, PC-CM, and SJE-CM.

Cultural Orientation. This six-item measure is composed of four items of Nobles and Goddard's (1996) Cultural Orientation Scale, and two items of the Private Regard subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). A sample item

from cultural orientation measure is "Black people should treat each other as brothers and sisters." The two items used from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity are "I am happy that I am Black" and "I often regret that I am Black." Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicated a more positive endorsement of cultural orientation. The current sample yielded modest internal consistency (α = .68).

Africentric Values. Four items were used from the Children's Africentric Values Scale (Belgrave et al., 1997), which assessed behaviors representing some of the cultural values of Black or African American people (e.g., "I respect older people because they know about life more than I do"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicated a stronger endorsement of Africentric values. The current sample yielded an internal consistency of α = .59, which was consistent with earlier reported reliability coefficients ranging from .42 to .67 for the original full scale (Belgrave et al., 2000).

Racial Socialization. Participants completed four-item subscale, Source and Frequency subscale of the Comprehensive Race Socialization Inventory (Lesane-Brown, Brown, Caldwell, & Sellers, 2005) that addressed experiences of being Black/African American (e.g., "How often do your parents or the people who raised you talk about race, racism or other groups?"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Higher mean scores indicated more conversations and thus greater racial socialization. The current sample demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .81).

Future Orientation. Four items were selected from the Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness (Karcher & Santos, 2011), which assessed participants' orientation toward the future by rating their expectations and aspirations (e.g., "I will have a good future"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicated more positive expectations for the future. Internal consistency was good in the current sample (α = .84).

Prosocial Behavior. This 12-item scale measured youth endorsement of behaviors that build connections with others (e.g., "I showed patience with a person or situation") and was developed using items from the Multidimensional Well-being Assessment (Harrell, 2011). Youth reported how often they engaged in various activities that supported a connection with others in the previous 2 weeks using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

Higher mean scores indicated a greater likelihood of engaging in behaviors that reflected care and concern for others. This scale yielded good internal consistency (α = .92).

Political and Community Civic Mindedness. Four items were used from the Youth Social Responsibility Scale (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007), which assessed youth perspectives concerning knowledge of, and participation in, civic affairs (e.g., "Young people should know about how their country is governed, even if they're too young to vote"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicated stronger endorsement of the value of political knowledge and engagement. The current sample yielded good internal consistency (α = .78).

Social Justice and Equality Civic Mindedness. This eight-item scale was derived from items selected from the Search Institute's (2004) Developmental Assets Profile and measured the extent to which youth endorsed general principles of equality and self-determination (e.g., "Helping to make sure that all people are treated fairly"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). Higher mean scores indicated greater endorsement of principles of equality and self-determination. Internal consistency was strong in this sample (α = .92).

Statistical Analysis

All analyses were conducted using SPSS 21. Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to examine dependent variable differences by gender and Pearson's correlations analyzed variable interrelationships.

Regression models were constructed to assess the predictive relationship of our cultural and group consciousness variables (i.e., cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization) to positive youth development variables (i.e., future orientation, prosocial behavior, PC-CM, and SJE-CM). Within these regression models, Block 1 consisted of the gender and age demographic variables. Block 2 contained the cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization predictor variables. Variance inflation factor tests of multicollinearity were generally near 1, well within reasonable limits, and therefore no further action was taken in regard to multicollinearity. Separate male and female participant regression models—excluding gender as a predictor variable—were analyzed. This is based on *t* test findings revealing sample mean gender differences. The extant literature also supports attending to gender differences in positive youth development (Belgrave et al., 2011).

Table 1. Mean Scores by Total Sample and by Gender.

Dependent variables	Total sample	Males	Females
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
Future orientation	4.50 (0.65)	4.46 (0.68)	4.51 (0.66)
Prosocial behaviors	3.70 (0.84)	3.64 (0.87)	3.76* (0.82)
PC-CM	3.96 (0.79)	3.86 (0.84)	3.97* (0.77)
SJE-CM	4.06 (0.87)	3.94 (0.93)	4.11** (0.84)

Note. PC-CM = political and community civic mindedness; SJE-CM = social justice and equality civic mindedness.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$ on independent samples *t* test.

Results

Independent t Tests

Table 1 reports independent samples *t* test results by total sample and gender. Female youth scored higher than male youth on prosocial behavior ($t = 2.56$; $p < .05$), PC-CM ($t = 2.30$; $p < .05$), and SJE-CM ($t = 3.43$; $p < .01$). There was no significant difference between male and female youth on future orientation.

Linear Regression Analyses

As shown in Table 2, Pearson's correlations indicated that the cultural and group consciousness variables of cultural orientation and Africentric values were strongly positively intercorrelated, whereas racial socialization did not significantly correlate with either cultural orientation or Africentric values. Additionally, all the positive youth development variables were significantly positively intercorrelated. Finally, all the cultural variables and positive youth development variables were significantly positively intercorrelated (except for racial socialization with future orientation), supporting regression analyses. In our regression tables, reported betas reflect predictor values for the final model block (Block 2).

The first set of analyses regressed all predictor variables on future orientation (see Table 3). For the total, male, and female samples, the Block 1 demographic predictors significantly accounted for 2%, 2%, and 1% of total variance, respectively. Adding the Block 2 predictors accounted for 30%, 28%, and 23% of the total variance in the total, male, and female samples, respectively. After entering all variables into the final block (Block 2), thereby

Table 2. Correlations of Predictor and Dependent Variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	—							
2. Cultural orientation	−.09**	—						
3. Africentric values	−.09**	.60**	—					
4. Racial socialization	.04	.02	.03	—				
5. Future orientation	−.17**	.48**	.47**	−.02	—			
6. Prosocial behavior	−.01	.38**	.40**	.15**	.32**	—		
7. PC-CM	−.10**	.53**	.49**	.10**	.46**	.41**	—	
8. SJE-CM	−.11**	.42**	.41**	.08**	.37**	.55**	.52**	—

Note. PC-CM = political and community civic mindedness; SJE-CM = social justice and equality civic mindedness.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

accounting for the effects of all predictors, age uniquely predicted future orientation for the total and male, but not female, samples. Cultural orientation and Africentric values—but not racial socialization—positively predicted future orientation for all three samples.

The second round of analyses regressed the predictor variables on prosocial behavior (see Table 4). The first block of predictors significantly accounted for 1% of total variance in the total sample only. In contrast, Block 2 predictors accounted for a respective 23%, 21%, and 23% of total variance in the total, male, and female samples. In the final block, gender independently predicted prosocial behavior in the total sample, whereas cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization independently predicted prosocial behavior across all three samples.

The third group of analyses regressed the predictor variables on PC-CM (see Table 5). Block 1 predictors significantly accounted for 1% of total variance in PC-CM for the total and male samples, but a nonsignificant amount of variance for female participants. The Block 2 predictors accounted for a significant 34%, 34%, and 28% of total variance in the total, male, and female samples, respectively. In the final block, cultural orientation and Africentric values uniquely predicted PC-CM in all three samples, whereas racial socialization was a unique predictor for the total and male samples only.

The final regression analyses regressed the predictor variables on SJE-CM (see Table 6). The Block 1 predictors accounted for a significant 2%, 1%, and 1% of total variance, whereas the Block 2 predictors significantly accounted for 22%, 21%, and 19% of total variance in the total, male, and female samples, respectively. In the final block, gender independently predicted SJE-CM

Table 3. Regression of Predictor Variables on Future Orientation.

	Full sample				Males				Females			
	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t
Block 1	.02***	12.05***			.02***	15.48***			.01*	5.98*		
Gender			.01	0.54			—	—			—	—
Age			−.08**	−3.38**			−.09**	−2.79**			−.07	−1.85
Block 2	.30***	108.09***			.28***	66.21***			.23***	45.12***		
Cultural orientation			.30***	10.06***			.40***	10.91***			.39***	9.15***
Africentric values			.30***	10.14			.18***	4.75***			.15***	3.41***
Racial socialization			−.03	−1.14			−.02	−0.63			−.01	−.19

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 4. Regression of Predictors on Prosocial Behavior.

	Full sample				Males				Females			
	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t
Block 1	.01*	3.75*			.01	0.62			.01	0.19		
Gender			.06*	2.54*			—	—			—	—
Age			.02	0.83			.02	0.51			.04	0.10
Block 2	.23***	76.22***			.21***	47.56***			.23***	44.10***		
Cultural orientation			.22***	6.98***			.27***	7.05***			.26***	6.20***
Africentric values			.29***	9.33***			.23***	6.00***			.28***	6.51***
Racial socialization			.13***	5.38***			.19***	5.72***			.28***	6.51***

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 5. Regression of Predictors on Political and Community Civic Mindedness.

	Full sample				Males				Females			
	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final Block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t
Block 1	.01***	6.71***			.01***	7.43***			.00	1.01		
Gender			.05	−0.95			—	—			—	—
Age			−.03	−1.26			−.04	−1.35			.00	−0.05
Block 2	.34***	128.81***			.34***	90.61***			.28***	59.74***		
Cultural orientation			.39***	13.60***			.47***	13.39***			.41***	10.13***
Africentric values			.24***	8.36***			.18***	4.99***			.18***	4.49***
Racial socialization			.08***	3.54***			.11***	3.68***			.07	1.89

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

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Table 6. Regression of Predictors on Social Justice and Equality Civic Mindedness.

	Full sample				Males				Females			
	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t	R^2	F	Final block β	t
Block 1	.02***	10.64***			.01*	4.47*			.01*	5.90*		
Gender			.08**	3.02**			—	—			—	—
Age			-.05	-1.85			-.03	-0.91			-.06	-1.47
Block 2	.22***	69.73***			.21***	46.09***			.19***	35.37***		
Cultural orientation			.25***	7.97***			.32***	8.36***			.26***	5.93***
Africentric values			.24***	7.79***			.20***	5.15***			.23***	5.17***
Racial socialization			.07**	2.82**			.10**	2.65**			.07*	1.97*

$*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.$

for the total sample. All three cultural variables of cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization independently predicted SJE-CM for the total, male, and female samples.

Overall, regression analyses evaluating whether our cultural factors predicted positive youth development variables indicated that cultural orientation and Africentric values, but not racial socialization, predicted greater future orientation for both male and female participants. On the other hand, all three cultural factors (i.e., cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization) predicted greater prosocial behavior and SJE-CM for both male and female participants. The three cultural factors also predicted higher PC-CM for male youth, whereas only cultural orientation and Africentric values were predictive for female youth. Finally, although racial socialization emerged as a significant predictor of prosocial behavior, and PC-CM and SJE-CM in the total sample, it was less predictive of these positive youth development variables than cultural orientation and Africentric values.

Discussion

The current study expanded our understanding of the relationship between cultural and group consciousness (cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization) and positive youth development (future orientation, prosocial behavior, PC-CM, and SJE-CM) among African American youth. African-centered psychology has argued that healthy psychological functioning for people of African ancestry includes among other things, a collective orientation, sense of responsibility for community, kindness and caring for others, and fairness and justice in all human relations (Grills, 2004; Gyekye, 1996). We sought to explore whether these African-centered cultural strengths predicted positive psychological outcomes among African American youth. This study's examination of positive psychological and social capital among African American youth (Larson, 2000; Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2005) is aligned with the strengths-based perspective of positive youth development as well as that of positive psychology.

Cultural and group consciousness variables were found to be a significant predictor of African American positive youth development. This finding is consistent with research indicating that African American youth benefit from Africentric cultural orientation and racial socialization (Bentley et al., 2009; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Lesane-Brown et al., 2005; Neblett et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2000; Stevenson, 1995). Our findings are particularly pertinent given the myth of a "postracial" Obama era that has a narrative of increased racial tolerance in the United States and decreased racism. Africentric cultural orientation and racial socialization may serve a

psychological protective function for African American youth who continue to face racially charged, stressful, and harmful contexts (e.g., community, institutions, media) filled with anti-Black sentiments and racist cultural beliefs and norms. Beyond this protective function, however, we found a strong Africentric cultural orientation contributes to healthy youth development, possibly due to its capacity to cultivate and reinforce those African-centered behavioral elements considered essential to healthy human functioning, optimized quality of life, and harmonious communities (i.e., collectivism, prosocial behavior, community engagement).

The relationships between the three cultural variables suggested that cultural orientation and Africentric values strongly correlated with one another, but not with racial socialization. This is consistent with other findings indicating that cultural orientation and Africentric values are different, yet highly interrelated constructs and distinct from racial socialization (Bentley et al., 2009; Cokely, 2005). Racial socialization is more concerned with increasing awareness about race and racism (i.e., how others see and treat one in racialized society) rather than transmitting knowledge about one's cultural ethos and group membership (Bentley et al., 2009). Racial socialization has been linked to resilience and coping, whereas cultural orientation strengthens identity and positive development. Making meaning of, and being conscious of, their connection to people of African ancestry (cultural orientation and Africentric values), and having a high awareness of race and racism (racial socialization), contributed to various aspects of positive youth development (future orientation, prosocial behavior, civic mindedness).

The finding that cultural orientation and Africentric values positively predicted future orientation is particularly important given the persistent racial disparities compromising African American youth well-being (L. Davis, 2009). A sense of belonging to a group and grounding in a set of cultural values, principles, and praxis, may have the capacity to mitigate the pernicious and ever present effects of enduring racial disparities. Therefore, our data suggest that cultural orientation and Africentric values may contribute to African American youth internal motivation to achieve and their belief in the future. In contrast, our results indicate that solely talking about race does not appear to increase youth's future orientation. Instead, racial socialization may play a more salient role in providing youth with strategies to effectively cope (practically and emotionally) with discriminatory experiences. While having "the will" to move forward may be strengthened by the presence of a cultural and historical sense of self, racial socialization may strengthen awareness of internalized racism, buttress resiliency, and reveal ways to manage racial stressors (Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009).

Additionally, cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization positively predicted prosocial behavior for girls and boys. This finding

can inform communities of practice concerned with developing programs to foster these critical skills and behaviors among African American youth. Having strong cultural values that are collectivist in nature and greater willingness to talk about race and racism can increase mutually supportive relationships, which in turn, may promote other positive youth development outcomes such as social competence, positive family and peer relationships, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Belgrave et al., 2011; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Wentzel et al., 2007). Future research could explore the extent to which these additional outcomes are associated with prosocial behavior and cultural and group consciousness. Nonetheless, our data suggest that educational and social development programs for African American youth could enhance positive youth development by integrating a focus on cultural and group consciousness variables.

Cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization positively predicted youth's beliefs that persons should be politically and civically engaged. Engagement in civic and political affairs is an important component of positive youth development (Belgrave et al., 2011; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wentzel et al., 2007), and our findings are consistent with other research indicating that African American youth civic engagement is positively related to their ethnic socialization (Zaff et al., 2008). They also support the action–reflection cycle described in liberation psychology that leads to civic and political engagement (Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Of note, racial socialization predicted higher political and community civic activities for boys but not for girls. Watts and Flanagan (2007) also noted the significance of critical consciousness and societal involvement, signaling the importance of racial socialization for sociopolitical development, specifically among African American boys. Providing a space and place for the development of cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization may be critical in promoting African American youth's participation in civic activities, particularly for African American boys (Stevenson, Herrero-Taylor, et al., 2002; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999).

Cultural orientation, Africentric values, and racial socialization also predicted SJE-CM. Thus, cultural and group consciousness may reinforce equity-based attitudes and beliefs among African American youth, as well as an interest in, and/or commitment to, addressing those issues that help change social conditions. Cultural factors may be critical precursors to the intersection of social power and wellness, where activism in the service of equality and justice has psychologically liberating consequences (Azibo, 2001; Burton & Kagan, 2009; Martín-Baró et al., 1994; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003). These cultural factors may also serve as an antidote to oppression (Watts et al., 1999).

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the cross-sectional rather than longitudinal sample of the POP program (pretest data only) precluding causal inferences, the lack of generalizability of context, and reliance on self-report data. In addition, while the sample represented a cross section of parts of the country and types of settings, in all instances, participants volunteered to be in the POP program, which may limit study generalizability to the broader African American youth population. Finally, items and subscales employed in the current study design were selected and/or modified from their original full scales to accommodate the program evaluation needs of the diverse POP program settings (e.g., schools, military bases, community organizations). Although this selection process was achieved through group consensus by our research team, the modifications resulted in suboptimal but acceptable reliability for a few subscales. As a result, our findings should be considered preliminary. Future research is needed that combines self-report data from full scales with qualitative modes of investigation to confirm our findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of the contextual realities for African American youth. Future research should also incorporate additional dimensions of African-centered cultural and group consciousness—for example, spirituality and collectivity—to provide a more robust understanding of positive African American youth development.

Conclusion

Present findings suggest that African American youth benefit from talking about and affirming their culture. For African American boys, talking about race and racism can also help increase their sense of engagement with their community. African American boys often face racial issues of great consequence such as racial profiling, overincarceration, limited educational achievement, and scant employment opportunities. Fortunately, socializing African American boys to these realities can mitigate their negative consequences (T. L. Brown, Linver, & Evans, 2010; Hughes et al., 2006). Programs that work with boys can use our findings to support the need for a dialogical approach to intervention as part of their curriculum. Talking about racism and race provides boys both an opportunity to express their feelings and empathize with the feelings of others. In an era in which boys are often taught to need greater activity in educational and social programs, it is critical that we "reintellectualize" the experiences of African American boys and help them: (a) dialogue about perceptions, feelings, and experiences; (b) sharpen their critical consciousness; and (c) effectively navigate racialized social environments.

Yet in doing so, we should not ignore the challenges facing African American girls who are exposed to stressors of a magnitude equal to, but often different from, African American boys, while receiving considerably less political, economic, and research attention. Our findings suggest that cultural and group consciousness may also promote positive youth development for African American girls. Given the plethora of current legislation, regulatory reforms, and programmatic efforts investing in young men of color in the United States, particularly for African American youth, it is thus important to design interventions that also address African American girls so they too can learn to effectively navigate racialized social environments.

This study was conducted with youth participating in a culturally based, group-mentoring program, and its findings have implications for mentoring, prevention, and intervention programs. The finding that culture is positively related to prosocial outcomes suggests that including cultural and group consciousness in mentoring or youth development curriculum can provide an important context in which youth can learn and grow. This is particularly true given the dishonest narrative that race no longer matters in the United States, which undermines the integrity of African American youth's accurate perceptions of racial disparities and unfair treatment. Furthermore, there is a historically unfounded assumption that if race or ethnicity is not acknowledged, then racism will be eliminated. We argue that culture and an understanding of the process and state of racial oppression (Watts et al., 1999) can protect youth from the harmful effects of racism. More specifically, African-centered cultural consciousness may provide youth with an understanding of the deleterious effects of racism (individually and collectively) and how it is diametrically opposed to African American self-determination (Rowe & Grills, 1993). This consciousness could inspire commitment in youth to activities that reflect the image, interests, and intentions for reproducing the best in what it means to be African American (Nobles, 2006).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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