

Measuring Intrapersonal Psychological Empowerment and Ethnic Identity: Highlighting Strengths of Urban Black Girls

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Abstract

Limited research has examined intrapersonal psychological empowerment (PE) among Black girls solely. This study aims to fill a gap in empowerment literature by examining the factor structure of the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) among Black girls ($N = 377$) between the ages of 14–17 years old. We also examine the association with ethnic identity as a conceptually related variable. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the factorial validity of the abbreviated, eight-item SPCS-Y among Black girls. Results support the two-dimensional factor structure of the abbreviated SPCS-Y among Black girls, as well as the association intrapersonal PE has with ethnic identity. Findings provide preliminary support for the empirical and theoretical relationship between intrapersonal PE and ethnic identity among Black girls.

Keywords

identity, racial/ethnic identity, race/ethnicity, African-American

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Black girls in the United States face a double or triple jeopardy that can place them at risk for adverse outcomes (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Opara, 2018). Black girls must negotiate belonging to intersecting identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, and class), which are shaped by social constructs that often times assert negative stereotypes and assumptions. Theories such as Black feminism (Collins, 1991) and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) have called for the need to acknowledge and examine intersecting identities, as a way to validate the lived experiences of Black females that can not fit into a single categorical axis (Bowleg, 2012; Opara, 2018). An aim of Black feminist theory has been to increase empowerment through consciousness and social justice for Black girls (Collins, 1991). Empowerment refers to a process by which individuals gain mastery and gain a critical awareness of their environment (Zimmerman, 1995). However, understanding empowerment among Black girls who experience an added layer of marginalization due to their age has been limited in the literature (Opara, 2018; Opara, et al., 2019a). Empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1990) has the ability to be used as framework to not only measure empowerment but also to highlight strengths and nurture resilience for Black girls in research.

Black girls living in urban communities (e.g., densely populated communities) may be unlikely to feel empowered due to limited access points to structural resources (e.g., quality education, adult allies), social supports, and having to challenge negative stereotypes, which all contribute to feelings of inferiority (Christens & Speer, 2015). An important component of identity development during adolescence involves coming to an understanding of one's position within their racial and ethnic group (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). Although youth become aware of ethnicity and race at very early ages, the process of actively exploring one's ethnicity and race and determining the meaning in one's life becomes far more complex during adolescence (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). As Black girls often receive messages about their race and gender due to social norms and values present within their social environment, close attention to the conceptualization of both empowerment and ethnic identity among Black girls living in urban communities in the United States may be crucial in improving their outcomes (Corneille & Belgrave, 2007). Empowerment researchers have acknowledged the difficulty in operationalizing empowerment as it is conceptualized differently in various contexts (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Opara et al., 2019a; Zimmerman, 1995). Due to this complexity in diverging experiences, empowerment is mostly untested in research (Peterson, 2014).

Black Girls and The Concept of Psychological Empowerment

As we use the term, Black girls, we are referring to adolescent girls, living in the United States who are either African, African American, or Afro-diasporic descent. We acknowledge that the experiences of Black girls are not monolithic. Yet, the exploitation and oppression that Black girls experience is shared and are due to hegemonic notions of Western patriarchy that minimize the identity of Black girls. Such notions place negative stereotypes on Black girls and negates how empowerment can be fostered, manifest, and be sustained in Black girls (Collins et al., 2015; Opara et al., 2019a). Using a framework that provides space for the examination of power, privilege, and oppression in society is essential in challenging such negative assertions.

Empowerment theory is positioned as one such framework that considers how people attempt to gain greater control in their community, challenge power, as well as engage in leadership and decision-making toward socio-political change (Zimmerman, 1990; 2000). Within empowerment theory, psychological empowerment (PE) is defined as “individuals” or “groups” understanding of their socio-political environment (Zimmerman, 1990, 2000). PE is a multidimensional construct that includes *intrapersonal* (emotional and one’s perception of being empowered), *interactional* (inter-group relationships), and *behavioral* components (how one behaves) (Zimmerman, 1990, 2000). The *intrapersonal* component is defined as the way people perceive their capability to influence social and political systems important to them, their self-view of control, and the level of power they possess within their environment (Zimmerman, 1990, 2000). The interactional component of PE involves a critical understanding of the source, nature, and instruments of power (Peterson et al., 2006). Last, the behavioral component of PE is understood through participatory and coping behaviors that focus on the community and broader sociopolitical and community change (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000).

The intrapersonal PE (the *emotional* component), has received the most attention in current research on PE (Zimmerman, 1990; 2000). Intrapersonal PE has been speculated to be a key indicator of the PE construct (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Therefore, to be consistent with empowerment research, intrapersonal PE will be used to conceptualize PE moving forward.

Measuring Intrapersonal Psychological Empowerment

Sociopolitical control has been documented in empowerment literature to be associated with important concepts for Black youth such as ethnic identity, self-esteem, and sense of community (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Lardier

et al., 2018; Opara et al., 2019a; Ozer & Schotland, 2011; Watts et al., 2011). Sociopolitical control refers to having the ability to identify and pinpoint those in power, understand how to acquire essential resources, and the factors that include their decision making (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Developed the Sociopolitical Control Scale (SPCS), originally a 17-item scale. The SPCS has been validated as unidimensional (Holden et al., 2005) and multidimensional scale (Peterson et al., 2006). Peterson et al. (2006) specifically confirmed that not only is the SPCS a multidimensional construct but also it designates two underlying dimensions: leadership competence and policy control. *Leadership competency* involves people's perception of their ability to mobilize a group of people or groups. In contrast, *policy control* involves the perception and one's confidence about their ability to impact and inform policies in their environment.

Peterson et al. (2011) also validated the factor structure of the SPCS for youth (SPCS-Y) and showed that this measure encompassed two underlying dimensions (e.g., leadership competence and policy control), similar to the SPCS tested among adults. Based on items from the SPCS, the SPCS-Y was adapted (i.e., questions were oriented and written toward a youth population) and tested among a sample of youth and represents the two hypothesized dimensions of leadership competence and policy control (Peterson et al., 2011). Several other studies have undertaken the validation of the SPCS-Y among youth in various contexts in both the United States (Christens et al., 2016; Lardier et al., 2018; Opara et al., 2019b; Peterson et al., 2011, 2017) and internationally, including Italian adolescents (Vieno et al., 2014), Portuguese youth (Rodrigues et al., 2018), and Malaysian adolescents (Cheryomukhin & Peterson, 2014). Nevertheless, critical race and gender differences have not been fully explored in validation studies, leaving a gap in the empowerment literature.

A recent study validated the SPCS-Y among a sample of Black and Hispanic girls and found support on the use of SPCS-Y and the association of conceptually related factors such as ethnic identity, social support, and sense of community (Opara et al., 2019a). However, it is important to acknowledge that Black and Hispanic girls have varying experiences, and research should further examine subgroups solely to acknowledge their unique social locations and identities. Therefore, since empowerment is a context-specific theory, validating and examining SPCS-Y specifically among a sample of Black girls, is essential to ensure the measurement is accurate and conveys empowerment outcomes among this group (Christens & Peterson, 2012).

Intrapersonal Psychological Empowerment and Ethnic Identity

Freire (1968) suggested that in order for power dynamics and inequities to diminish, society has to attempt to understand groups that have been

marginalized in the context of their socio-cultural history. Therefore, it is critical to explore further the relationship between how empowerment can be conceptualized and its connection with ethnic identity among Black girls (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2017). Ethnic identity refers to (a) self-identification with a specific ethnic group; (b) the sense of belonging and attachment to such a group; (c) the perceptions, behaviors, and feelings one has, due to such membership; (d) and involvement in the cultural and social practices of the group (Phinney, 1989; Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Various definitions of ethnic identity encompass a personal view of self and group, derived from their knowledge of membership in that particular group, in addition to the values, beliefs, and emotional attachment to that group (Phinney et al., 2001). The construct of ethnic-racial identity can provide a foundation for how identity develops over time and manifest in Black girls. Ethnic-racial identity processes include the following: (a) specific actions that youth engage in to learn about their ethnic or racial group (Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014); (b) attitudes and beliefs regarding youth's sense of pride, affirmation, sense of belonging, and perception of self in relation to the world (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014); and (c) sense of resolution about being a member of a particular ethnic-racial group (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Studies that have attempted to resolve ethnic-racial identity among Black girls, showed that Black girls connection to their race is often influenced by stereotypical imagery of Black people (e.g., food consumption, language, behaviors; Mims & Williams, 2020). However, consistent with the ethnic-racial identity developmental process, youth often become empowered to challenge and resist these stereotypical images during adolescence and into young adulthood (Opara, et al., 2019a).

Research on empowerment and ethnic-racial identity has shown that individuals who possess or belong to marginalized identities and have a stronger connection to their ethnicity or culture, which can aid in the sense of pride in themselves, their decisions, and their beliefs (Lardier et al., 2018; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010). Intrapersonal PE has been found to have a significant effect on ethnic-racial identity among youth who participate in community activities with and for their ethnic-racial group (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2017). Within the ethnic-racial identity construct, engaging in such participation allows youth to develop a stronger sense of collective group belongingness and connection to individuals within their ethnic-racial group (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2017). Lardier (2019) found that youth who reported high intrapersonal PE and high ethnic identity also reported high community participation, high sense of community, and had a greater risk perception of using drugs and alcohol. Similarly, Opara et al. (2019a) found that girls of color who had higher levels of intrapersonal PE also had higher levels of ethnic identity, social support, and lower levels of drug use.

Ethnic Identity Development in Black Girls

The social construction of race and ethnicity in the United States can be complicated and challenging to frame. Sociologists differentiate ethnicity from race by defining race as groups who share similar physical characteristics and ethnicity as those groups that share similar values, customs, and beliefs (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007). However, groups such as Black people who were born and reside in the United States can comprise multiple ethnic groups (e.g., African American, African, and Afro-Caribbean; Schwartz et al., 2014), and some researchers have further argued that ethnic and racial identity may be inseparable concepts for such groups especially among Black people in the United States (Schwartz et al., 2014). Mims and Williams (2020) found that Black “girls” defined race as more concrete, physical appearance, however, they understood that being “Black” has social connotations associated with patterns or stereotypes commonly attributed to their race (e.g., food preferences, behaviors). The exploitation and oppression that Black girls experience are due to hegemonic notions of Western patriarchy that minimize the identity of Black girls and places negative stereotypes on them, which they then internalize (Collins et al., 2015). Within in the US, their identity is both ethnic and racial due to historical and current disenfranchisement and oppression that intersect with collective lives of Black girls – that is, designating ethnic identity as an integral process for all minority groups even if race has been the main “categorization” the U.S. (Hughes et al., 2009).

The historical experience of the enslavement of Black females and the residual effects of such a traumatic period has contributed to racist and sexist values, beliefs, and ideologies that are embedded currently in society (Collins et al., 2015; Gentry et al., 2005; Respress et al., 2018). Within a racial and historical context, female slaves were conditioned to believe they were less than in every aspect, particularly less intelligent, powerless, and unattractive, yet were only valuable due to their bodies for sexual purposes (Collins et al., 2015). Such attitudes have led to residual effects of slavery that shape the view of Black girls in the United States. As an example, when Black girls reach puberty, they are often viewed as promiscuous and sexually active (Opara, 2018). In addition, Black girls routinely experience adultification bias where they are viewed as older than they are, leaving adults to have less empathy for Black girls and treat them in developmentally inappropriate ways (Morris, 2019). Due to racist and sexist ideologies that have become normalized in culture, their self-identities are form based on how they are viewed in society and also based on how Black girls perceive that they are viewed by society as well (Collins et al., 2015; Respress et al., 2018). During adolescence, which is a critical developmental stage, racial

and ethnic stereotypes associated with their identities can become learned and internalized (Rowley et al., 2007). Ethnic identity can play a crucial role in reducing unhealthy behaviors among ethnic minority populations (Nguyen & Belgrave, 2011). For Black girls, high ethnic identity has been found to be a significant protective factor with numerous psychological and behavioral characteristics including self-esteem (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Corneille & Belgrave, 2007; Townsend et al., 2010) and low rates of substance use (Belgrave et al., 2000; Sanchez et al., 2018). Taken together, ethnic identity and intrapersonal empowerment have the potential to contribute to not only positive developmental outcomes for Black girls, but also increase their consciousness to social justice issues, challenge societal norms that are placed on them, and enhance their view of self in relation to the world.

Purpose

Although research has shown the connection between intrapersonal empowerment and ethnic identity among adolescents, very few studies, if any, have discussed the psychometric properties of intrapersonal empowerment and its association with ethnic identity as a conceptual variable among a sample of Black girls. This study aims to fill a gap in the empowerment literature by examining the factor structure of the SPCS-Y, which measures intrapersonal psychological empowerment and the association with ethnic identity among Black girls living in an urban community. As suggested within the empowerment field, testing and validating SPCS-Y is essential in ensuring empowerment processes and outcomes are measured accurately and appropriately for specific populations, as the construct has been largely untested. Therefore, this study identifies the factor structure of SPCS-Y and tests its validity on ethnic identity as a conceptually related variable.

Methods

Sample and Design

Data were collected from two survey administrations of a comprehensive community needs assessment in a northeastern US urban school district. The purpose of the community needs assessment was to assess perceptions of substance abuse, mental health, crime and violence, educational outcomes, health and wellness, and youth capacity for empowerment and social change. Eight high schools in the target community participated. To obtain a sample of high school students living within the community, survey participants were sampled through physical education and health classes, as these are

required all 4 years of high school. Parent/guardian consent forms were sent home to all students, with those students who returned a signed parent consent form and student assent form eligible to take the survey. This non-probability sampling of students was given 90 minutes (i.e., nearly two class periods) to complete the student questionnaire. Questionnaires were self-administered in English to all students.

A total of 1,477 students were sampled with 67% female and 32.4% male. For the current study, this sample was delimited participants who identified as African American/Black adolescents and females ($n = 377$). These African American/Black female students ranged from grades 9 through 12, with 24% in 9th grade, 21.9% in 10th grade, 29.9% in 11th grade, and 24.3% in 12th grade. Female participants in the study were between the ages of 14–17 years old. The majority of African American/Black female participants were between 14 and 16 years of age (56.2%). Nearly 65% of students were on free or reduced lunch, an indicator of low socioeconomic status (SES) (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010). Post-hoc power analysis was conducted to assess the sample size needed for regression-based approaches. Analyses indicated that based on a significant difference of 0.5, power .75, and a small effect size of .5 was 380 students (Faul et al., 2007).

Measures

Intrapersonal psychological empowerment. Intrapersonal PE was measured using an abbreviated 8-item scale, referred to as the Abbreviated Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Christens et al., 2016; Lardier et al., 2018; Opara et al., 2019a). Lardier et al. (2018) confirmed among a sample of youth of color the validity for an abbreviated SPCS-Y as a measure of intrapersonal PE that encompasses two subscales: a four-item measure of *leadership* (sample item: I am a leader in groups. I can usually organize people to get things done) (Cronbach $\alpha = .81$, $M = 3.80$, $SD = .73$) and a four-item measure of *policy control* (sample item: There are plenty of ways for people like me to have a say in what our government does) (Cronbach $\alpha = .85$, $M = 3.58$, $SD = .70$). Most recently, Opara et al. (2019a) confirmed also among a sample of girls of color that the abbreviated SPCS-Y continued to maintain its two latent subscales of *leadership* (Cronbach $\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.75$, $SD = .74$) and *policy control* (Cronbach $\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.55$, $SD = .73$) were combined (Cronbach $\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.60$, $SD = .66$). For the current study, the *leadership* (Cronbach $\alpha = .70$, $M = 4.02$, $SD = .66$) and *policy control* (Cronbach $\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.65$, $SD = .73$) were combined (Cronbach $\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.88$, $SD = .53$). Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Ethnic identity. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) is a twenty-item scale used to measure how individuals identify with their identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Sample questions include, "I have spent time trying to figure out more about my ethnic group?" The MEIM was designed and has been used among multiple ethnic groups (Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The MEIM has been widely validated among youth across the United States (Kazarian & Boyadjian, 2008), with a Cronbach alpha ranging from .71 to .92 (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Ponterotto et al., 2003). Responses were recorded using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). Responses were totaled to represent higher levels of ethnic identity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$, $M = 54.60$, $SD = 10.08$)

Analytic Approach

Before the main analyses, missing data were examined. Numerous techniques are available to handle missing data (Little & Rubin, 2014). For this study, maximum likelihood (ML) estimations were used through AMOS SEM v. 25 software to address missing data. ML estimations in AMOS addresses the missing data and parameter estimates and estimates the standard error in a single step (Hancock & Liu, 2012). Using AMOS to handle missing data also allows for a theoretically informed direct approach to handling missing data through modeling, opposed to other imputation methods, which can be designated as indirect (Hancock & Liu, 2012).

Following ML estimations, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS SEM software (Arbuckle, 2011) to assess the validity of the SPCS-Y as a second-order, two-factor structure: *leadership and policy control* in the sociopolitical domain. Reflective models (scale) were fit, which specifies that the relationships emanate from an intrapersonal PE construct and are directed toward observed measures, suggesting that variation in the abbreviated SPCS-Y leads to variation in the two-factor structure, which leads to variation in the intrapersonal PE measures (Peterson et al., 2017). Two models were examined:

Model 1: tested the second-order two-factor model of the abbreviated SPCS-Y.

Model 2: tested a structural equation regression analysis of the second-order, two-factor model of the abbreviated SPCS-Y on ethnic identity as a conceptually related variable among Black girls.

To assess model fit for the CFA models, several fit indices were used. Chi square (χ^2) was used as the primary indicator of model fit; however, because

χ^2 alone may be a too stringent indicator of goodness-of-fit, additional indices that are considered robust, were also examined. These include: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) (West et al., 2012). A non-significant χ^2 value indicates acceptable model, higher values that are greater than .95 on the GFI, AGFI, CFI, and TLI, and smaller RMSEA values that are less than .90 are desirable (West et al., 2012). Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) were also used to assess the better fitting model between the models tested. For BIC, differences larger than 10.00 provide evidence in support of the lower BIC value (West et al., 2012) and with regard to AIC, the solution closest to the saturated AIC value is considered as providing a better fit to the data (West et al., 2012).

Age and *grade* were also examined for variation with the abbreviated SPCS-Y, due to previous research suggesting that variation is likely present based on these demographic variables (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Lardier et al., 2018). Results indicated a significant difference in grade on the *policy control* dimension of intrapersonal PE ($F [3, 334] = 3.72, p = .01$).

Results

Table 1 displays the model-fit statistics for the overall abbreviated SPCS-Y as a second order model. Fit statistics for the second-order abbreviated SPCS-Y demonstrated good overall model-to-data fit: $\chi^2 = 22.19 (21), p = .37$; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; GFI = .98; AGFI = .97; RMSEA = .01 (95%CI = .000, .04), AIC = 70.18 (90); BIC = 162.08 (262.30). Bollen-Stine bootstrapping results showed that the p value was greater than .05 ($p = .29$), indicating that the proposed model is consistent with the sample data (Walker & Smith, 2017).

All standardized factor loadings for this second-order model ranged from .63 to .89 at $p < .001$. First order weights ranged from .60 to .78 (see Figure 1). Second order weights ranged from .79 to .80. The model explained 85% of the variance in *leadership competency* and 62% of the variance in *policy control* in the sociopolitical domain.

Final analyses explored the association with ethnic identity as a conceptually related variable (see Figure 2). A structural equation regression analysis of the scale was conducted. The association allows for a test of predictive validity of the abbreviated SPCS-Y among Black girls on ethnic identity. Fit statistics for model 2 demonstrated good overall model-to-data fit:

Table 1. Model Fit Statistics for Abbreviated SPCS-Y Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Measures of fit	Models	
	Second-order abbreviated SPCS-Y (Model 1)	Second-order abbreviated SPCS-Y predicting ethnic identity (Model 2)
χ^2	22.19	44.77
<i>df</i>	21	50
<i>p</i> -value	.37	.68
GFI	.98	.98
AGFI	.97	.97
CFI	.99	.99
TLI	.99	.98
RMSEA	.01 [.000, .04]	.01 [.000, .03]
AIC model	70.18	126.77
AIC saturated	90	182
BIC	162.08 (262.30)	283.76 (530.43)

Note. *df*= degree of freedom; GFI=Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI=Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; CFI=comparative fit index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation; CI= confidence interval; AIC=Akaike Information Criterion; BIC=Bayesian Information Criterion.

$\chi^2 = 44.77 (50), p = .68; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; GFI = .98; AGFI = .97; RMSEA = .01 (95\%CI = .000, .03), AIC = 126.77 (182); BIC = 283.76 (530.43)$. Bollen-Stine bootstrapping results showed that the *p* value was greater than .05 (*p* = .64), indicating that the proposed model is consistent with the sample data (Walker & Smith, 2016). Figure 2 presents standardized beta weight coefficients. The abbreviated SPCS-Y among Black girls predicted ethnic identity ($R^2 = .34$).

Discussion

As a higher-order theory that can be conceptualized differently in groups and communities (Zimmerman, 2000), there continues to be a need to understand the nomological network of empowerment (Peterson, 2014). More specifically, PE remains largely understudied, despite receiving the considerable attention in the empowerment literature (Peterson, 2014). Several investigations have been put forward to examine intrapersonal PE, and more specifically among youth, using the SPCS-Y (Lardier et al., 2018; Opara et al., 2019a). Despite such work, no study has examined the bidimensionality of

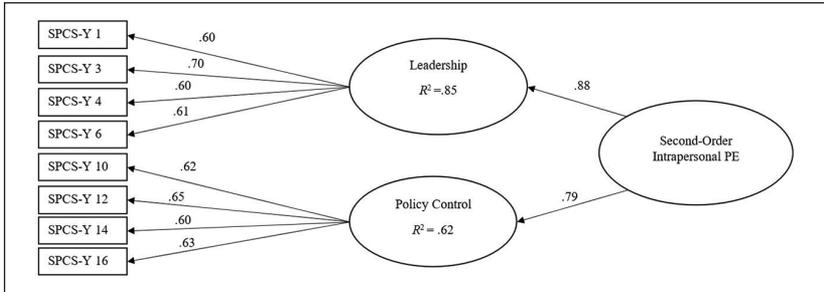


Figure 1. Multigroup second-order CFA of the Intrapersonal Empowerment Scale of PE among urban Black girls ($N=340$).

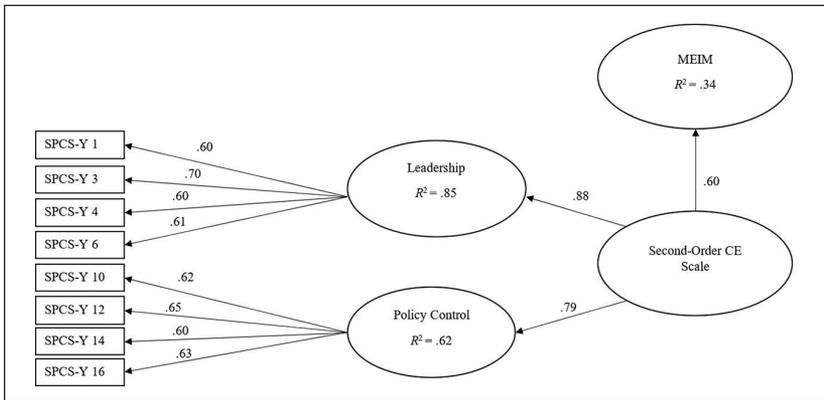


Figure 2. Structural equation model of intrapersonal empowerment regressed on ethnic identity.

the SPCS-Y solely on a sample of Black girls, and the factorial validity of the abbreviated eight-item scale of the SPCS-Y in the context of cultural processes (e.g., ethnic identity).

There may be various reasons that the factorial validity of the abbreviated eight-item scale of the SPCS-Y has not been examined among a sample of Black girls. First, Black girls' experiences are often diluted with other groups (e.g., Hispanics girls, Youth of Color) in empowerment research. Further, limited research has attempted to view Black girls through a strengths-based lens; instead, much of the research on Black girls maintains a deficit approach when describing their experiences (Opara, 2019b). While empowerment

theory is positioned as an anti-deficit framework, there is a dearth of both theoretical and empirical discussions that attempt to examine and unpack the interplay between empowerment and ethnic identity among racial-ethnic minority youth, and more specifically Black girls. Such work, would help provide promising evidence and ideas on not only the importance of empowerment in the lives of Black girls, but the relationship with ethnic identity. As such, this study contributes to the limited quantitative literature on this group and in the empowerment literature (Opara et al., 2019a). Furthermore, findings provide support for ethnic identity as a conceptually related variable with intrapersonal PE. This is a notable finding because it builds upon prior research illustrating that higher intrapersonal PE is associated with greater ethnic group identity among youth of color (Lardier, 2019; Lardier et al., 2018; Opara et al., 2019a). Intrapersonal PE and ethnic identity together are considered individual traits; however, these traits are often strengthened during adolescence and are part of a larger structural process that can promote wellness among Black adolescent girls within a society that has marginalized them as a whole.

In addition, literature has supported intrapersonal PE and ethnic identity when activated together perform as a buffer against risky behaviors among adolescents (Lardier et al., 2018; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010; Opara et al., 2019a). Taken together, outcomes from this study provide empirical support for the validity of the abbreviated SPCS-Y among Black girls, as well as the association with ethnic identity as a conceptually related variable.

Understanding the relationship between empowerment and ethnic identity can be beneficial for Black girls especially those living in urban neighborhoods, as it is essential in encouraging girls to persevere through adversity in urban and under-resourced environments (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Opara et al., 2019a). Programming initiatives need to support Black girls in leadership activities and community organizing to strengthen intrapersonal empowerment (or sociopolitical control) and challenge norms that may be placed on them due to their social locations. Measurements such as the SPCS-Y can be adapted and used for evaluation purposes in programs designed explicitly for empowering Black girls and strengthening their identities. Furthermore, it may be important to promote ethnic-racial group identity among Black girls by aligning them with African American/Black female mentors. Doing so may not only create a sense of belongingness and support among adolescent Black girls (Townsend et al., 2010) but also work toward enhancing their critical awareness and sense of empowerment (Opara et al., 2019a).

The authors would like to acknowledge that the concept of empowerment can be seen as problematic to some, as the baseline notion of empowerment

assumes that some have power while others do not. This assumption leaves individuals whom belong to groups that have been historically marginalized (e.g., Black girls), as believing that they have no true power and need to be given power by those whom do have power. While this argument is difficult to challenge, we assert through this study that Black girls do have power, however, their power has not been highlighted, suppressed at times or not examined thoroughly in research. The notion of untapped power does not position individuals as having no power but having power that is stymied because of societal constraints and oppression (Freire, 1968). It is important to note that the authors do not suggest that the burden of change be placed on the shoulders of Black girls. This is an unfortunately frequent scenario for youth of color, and one common for Black girls and women (Morris, 2016). Instead, we suggest offering suggestions to individuals in power such as policymakers, adult community leaders, and families who are in the position to advocate and develop empowerment-based programming for Black girls while working alongside them.

Limitations

Although our quantitative study contributes significantly to empowerment literature, there are several limitations. This study is one of the few to examine intrapersonal PE on Black girls; however, it is important to acknowledge that Black girls are not a homogenous group and can have significant within-group differences. We did not examine differences such as in age groups, socioeconomic class, or Black ethnicities such as African American versus Caribbean. Participants self-identified as Black/African American and the survey did not ask questions regarding Black ethnicity. We urge researchers to collect and test within-group variations on empowerment. The study also uses ethnic identity as a measure instead of racial identity. Therefore, future research needs to collect both ethnic and racial identity data to test differences in how Black girls conceptualize these constructs. Lastly, in this study, we used a sample of Black girls whom lived in an urban community. However, we acknowledge that the definition of urban can vary. It is important for future research to not only operationalize the term urban but to also examine differences that may arise among samples of participants whom live in communities that are considered urban.

Conclusion

Intrapersonal PE and ethnic identity are important constructs for Black girls in the United States. Findings from this study provide a more critical discussion

in quantitative research by centering Black girls by using strengths-based theories that highlight ethnic-racial identity and empowering processes. Also, results contribute to our understanding of the relationship between intrapersonal PE and ethnic identity together for Black girls. Empowering Black girls overall can be a significant buffer in the engagement in risky behaviors and improve developmental outcomes such as educational, physical health, and mental health outcomes among Black girls. By engaging Black girls in organizational activities that foster empowerment, embedded in deep cultural values, and strengthen ethnic-racial identity development processes, girls can simultaneously become more attached to their community and self-identity while challenging structural factors that have placed them at risk historically. Future studies need to consider empowerment and ethnic identity in prevention research and programming for Black girls as these constructs are foundational in their upbringing.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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