

A Different Voice: Examining Positive Youth Development in African American Girls
through Youth Participatory Action Research

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy
(Human Development and Family Studies)

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2013

Date of final oral examination: 07/01/13

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving parents, Darlene and Dwight Duke who always push me to be all that I can be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the girls who gave their time, insight, and heart to this project; without you, this project would not be possible or nearly as fun.

Thank you to my advisors, Jeffrey Lewis and Shannon Sparks, who help me through this process. Your feedback and support was invaluable.

Thank you Brian Christens, Brad Brown, and Lynet Uttal for being supportive and sharing your insight. I was fortunate to have such a great committee of scholars.

Thank you to Christopher Marks for supporting me emotionally through this process even though you were far away. Your love, encouragement, perspective, and optimism have been invaluable to me finishing my degree.

Thank you Mom for telling me never to give up when things were difficult, that most things really can be simplified, and that I should push to finish my PhD in the timeline that I set. Thank you Dad for your love, support, encouragement, and prayers; you both made home a place to come for love, rest, and rejuvenation.

Thank you to my extended family and church family back in Alabama for the constant encouragement and support; you have called me Dr. Duke since the day I left for Wisconsin and that has helped me finish and fulfill that title.

Thank you to all of my friends for being so supportive and making graduate school enjoyable. You all supported me not only through my dissertation process, but through some of the most difficult times for me in graduate school. You brought laughter, perspective, and encouragement when I needed it the most.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how theoretical understandings of positive youth development inform our definitions and interpretations of developmental assets for African American girls. Positive youth development (PYD) is a theoretical framework that uses an ecological and strength-based approach to understanding positive characteristics and support mechanisms for youth. The Five C's which are confidence, competence, connection, caring, and character, is the most widely used model in the PYD literature. As the theoretical base for various youth programming, the Five C's are often studied through organized activities and prevention programs. However, many of these programs and organized activities fail to contextualize the cultural and sociopolitical realities of minority youth like African American girls, and are missing opportunities to build on cultural assets that may help promote resiliency and PYD. Consequently, the present study adds triple quandary theory, to the Five C's model. Triple quandary theory is a developmental theory for African American youth predicated on three cultural realms of experience: the Afro-cultural, mainstream, and minority realm.

Through combining the Five C's and triple quandary theory, I analyzed positive developmental assets as they were cultivated, developed, and displayed in an in-school youth participatory action program. This program and research project was collaboratively directed by the suggestions and interests of twelve African American adolescent girls. I designed and implemented this program one day a week, for three semesters, in a 7-12 grade charter school. Instrumental case study design was used to focus on assessing the skills and characteristics fostered through the youth participatory action research project; the actual research design that the girls undertook was secondary. Assets that were developed, cultivated, and displayed

by the girls were confidence, competence in research skills, positive Black identity, positive connections with peers and adults, social and cognitive competence, respect, and initiative.

Through the use of triple quandary theory, the definitions and manifestations of the Five C's expanded to include the socio-political realities of African American girls.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Scholarship on African American girls often outlines the problems and issues they face such as poverty, increased likelihood of victimization, and lack of opportunities regarding education and employment (Murray 1994; Stevens 2002). However, this study places African American girls at the center of positive inquiry by focusing on understanding the assets that can be developed in a youth-focused context. To study these assets I use the theory of positive youth development.

Positive youth development (PYD) is a theoretical framework that uses an ecological and strength-based approach to understanding positive characteristics and support mechanisms for youth (Lerner et al, 2004). As the theoretical base for various youth programming, PYD is often studied through organized activities and prevention programs. Scholars theorize that participation in PYD promoting activities can foster resiliency by helping youth develop psychological, behavioral, and social competencies (for review, see Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). However, many PYD programs and organized activities fail to contextualize the cultural and sociopolitical realities of African American girls and other adolescents of color, and are missing opportunities to build on cultural assets that may help promote resiliency and PYD (Baliey & Paisley, 2004; Belgrave et al., 2000; Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002). In order to understand the positive skills and assets of African American girls, PYD must be theoretically expanded in order to account for the various assets that manifest in diverse youth. To include the racial and gendered realities of African American girls in PYD, I have supplement PYD with Triple Quandary Theory.

Triple Quandary Theory, much like PYD, seeks to provide a framework for understanding ways to optimally prepare youth for successful participation in American society; however, unlike PYD, this theory specifically focuses on the socialization of African American youth. It posits that African American youth develop in three different contexts: the mainstream realm (White, middle class culture), the Afro-cultural realm (culture transmitted from generations of African traditions), and the minority realm (culture formed because of oppression and marginalization) (Boykin and Ellison, 1995). These three realms have different norms and standards of behavior, which translates into different views, characteristics, and manifestations of positive development in youth. In order to understand the complexity of what is considered a positive skill or asset, PYD and triple quandary theory are used to analyze assets.

Purpose of the Study

While there has been research about the ways girls develop positively they have generally focused on at-risk themes such as teen pregnancy and sexual behaviors, violence and increased likelihood of victimization, and lack of opportunities regarding education (Murray, 1994; Miller, 2008; Brown, 1993; Davis, 2002; Dixon, Schoonmaker, & Philliber, 2000; Jewell, 1993). While these are important issues to study, the literature frequently neglects normative and positive developmental processes for African American adolescent girls (Sanders & Bradley, 2005). This study challenge the dominant discourse around African American girls to focus on the positive assets they possess. Assets in this study are defined as skills, characteristics, and supports that can foster positive outcomes in African American girls. In order to investigate the positive attributes of African American girls, I created a program that could serve as a positive developmental context. This program was a youth participatory action research project implemented one day a week, for three semesters in a charter school.

Youth participatory action research is a methodology and approach to doing research where participants are co-researchers and actively participate and influence the production of research for social change (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). This method was chosen because studies have shown it as a potent positive developmental context for minority youth (Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Cammorota & Fine, 2008). It has also been found to support inquiry, discovery, problem solving, and knowledge construction around issues directly related to youths' lives (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009).

While most studies of PYD have occurred within an established PYD-based program or through anonymous quantitative surveys, the purpose of this study is to explore the positive skills and assets that manifest in a context created for and by African American adolescent girls. Through utilizing YPAR, I explore how African American girls define and display PYD for themselves in a way that centers their race, gender, and social history. Using the YPAR program as my context, I designed and conducted an instrumental case study to explore positive asset in African American girls. Two research questions guided this study:

- 1) What developmental qualities, skills, and characteristics (assets) does youth participatory action research foster in African American adolescent girls?
- 2) Using triple quandary theory as an analytic and interpretive framework, in what ways does this theory influence definitions and understanding of developmental assets?

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter provides a general overview of the study and introduces the topic. In chapter two, I discuss the conceptual and theoretical framework for the dissertation, explaining positive youth development through the

Five C's and triple quandary theory. I also explain the combination of these two theories and provide examples of positive youth development according to cultural values defined through triple quandary theory. Chapter three is a review of literature on positive youth development based organized activities that have been found to help youth develop positive outcomes. I also give theoretical support for the use of youth participatory action research as a positive developmental context to study the Five C's of PYD. Chapter four is a descriptive account of the YPAR program, as well as an in-depth description of the start of the program, the process of developing the research design, conducting qualitative research, and the action that followed after the research was complete. Chapter five describes the methodology and the nature of instrumental case study. In chapter six I present and discuss my research findings and analysis. In the last chapter I summarize my key findings, discuss these themes within a larger context and list implications for practice and future research.

Chapter 2

Conceptualizing a Model for Understanding Positive Youth Development in African American Youth

This chapter will explain the theoretical frameworks that I use in this study starting with positive youth development and moving to triple quandary theory. In order to understand how positive youth development is defined, I discuss the research that serves as the basis for the conceptualization and definition of the Five C's (confidence, competence, connection, caring, and character). Through the literature, I describe the contributions of the Five C's to the field of positive youth development and discuss some of its limitations as it relates to cultural diversity and African American youth. Following the critique, I will engage in a discussion of triple quandary theory, a developmental theory specific to the socialization of African American youth, and ways it can expand how we conceptualize positive development.

Adolescent Development

Traditionally, adolescence has been considered a time of "storm and stress," with universal, biologically based changes inevitably influencing adolescence as a period of emotional and physical conflict (e.g., Hall, 1904). This approach to adolescent research views adolescence through a problem-centered lens (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) and focuses on preventing or ameliorating the inevitable negative consequences of the adolescent period (e.g., in Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1969). Developmental research has begun to shift from this deficit perspective partly through the innovations brought about by the positive youth development (PYD) theoretical perspective (Lerner et al., 2009). PYD strives to recognize

how gender, cognition, psychological factors (e.g., sense of identity, positive regard), and social connections with family and peers play out across multiple contexts (Lerner, 2004).

Positive Youth Development

To frame this study, I draw on positive youth development theory. Positive youth development (PYD) is a relatively new theoretical approach to maximizing positive developmental outcomes in youth (Lerner, 2004). This approach emphasizes potentialities of youth and believes all youth, regardless of background, have strengths and assets. While the positive youth development approach recognizes the existence of adversities and developmental challenges that affect youth, it resists conceiving the developmental process mainly as an effort to overcome shortcomings and risk (Damon, 2004). Instead, the emphasis is on understanding and engaging youth in productive, strength building activities rather than at correcting, curing, or treating them for maladaptive tendencies (Damon, 2004). There is a focus on optimizing youth's chances to thrive by enhancing "protective factors," sometimes called assets, in young people's lives and minimizing "risk factors." These protective factors can include experiences, contexts, skills, or traits that reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes (Warner & Smith, 1992; Lerner et al., 2005; Bernat & Resnick, 2006). This strengths-based approach to adolescent development has had an effect on ways researchers and practitioners view developmental processes.

PYD has advanced the philosophy that "problem free is not fully prepared," and that all youth need to be supported through supportive environments for *optimal* development (Hamilton, 1999). This understanding of youth development has influenced ways scholars conceptualize and study adolescents, bringing greater attention to skills, ecological supports, and assets that help all youth thrive into adulthood (Lerner, 2005). Incorporating ecological

models that include context, family, community, and institutions is a departure from the biological, cognitive, and individual-focused understanding of youth development. This understanding of development allows both researchers and practitioners to work towards developing positive contexts that can influence the developmental trajectories of adolescents.

In order to better understand the skills, characteristics, and supports needed to foster positive development in youth, the Five C's have been used to define and operationalize PYD. The Five C's is the most empirically tested model used in research focused on PYD (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009; Jelicic et al., 2007). The Five C's comprise of Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring and represent positive outcomes and the indicators of positive development. Lerner and his colleagues define competence as a positive view of one's actions and divides it into four domains: social, academic, cognitive, and vocational (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004, Roth & Brooks-Gunn 2003). Social competence pertains to interpersonal strengths like conflict resolution. Cognitive competence refers to skills related to decision making and critical thinking. Academic competence is related to school performance in grades, attendance and test scores. Finally, they define vocational competence by work habits and career choice explorations (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004, Roth & Brooks-Gunn 2003). Lerner and his colleagues do not describe the other four C's as elaborately, but define them in general terms.

Confidence is defined as an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004, Roth & Brooks-Gunn 2003). For example, connection is the positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and their peers, family, schools, and communities in which both parties contribute to the relationship (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004, Roth & Brooks-

Gunn 2003). Character is defined as respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, morality, and integrity (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004, Roth & Brooks-Gunn 2003). Caring, is a sense of sympathy and empathy for others (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Research also suggests that young people whose lives incorporate the Five C's develop a sixth "C", Contribution, which includes contributions to self, family, community, and to the institutions of civil society (Lerner et al., 2005).

Empirical support for the Five C's

Empirical measures for PYD were unavailable prior to launching the longitudinal study done with 1,700 5th grade youth who participated in 4-H programming (Jeilic et al., 2007). In order to "establish that the concept of PYD, as it had been discussed in the literature, had empirical reality, both in its purpose structure and co-variation with other key individual and ecological variables," Lerner and his colleagues used 4-H youth development programs to test the Five C's model (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 18). The investigators focused on three things: creating a measurement to assess the Five C's; examining the latent and manifest variables that constitute PYD; and deriving components within the developmental system that promote thriving.

After an extensive literature review, a pilot study involving 339 youth from Massachusetts, and a model fitting analysis, the "working" model for the Five C's, as currently conceptualized, was created. The results of this preliminary study found that differential behaviors across subgroups of youth including race/ethnicity, gender, household income, and mother's education, were found to have relatively few differences in positive developmental scores (Lerner et al., 2005). There were also preliminary findings for a sixth

C, contribution. According to research generated by the first longitudinal study done with 4-H youth programming, youth exhibiting the Five C's and Contribution had lower risk levels and showed more indicators of thriving. Although they determine that no strong conclusions could be drawn in the first wave of the study, the C's were related to contribution which suggests that there is a bidirectional relationship between youth civic engagement (contribution) and thriving (Lerner et al., 2005).

In the second wave of the 4-H study, Jellicic et al. (2007) tested measures of contribution, depression, and risk behaviors from grades 5 to 6 in order to assess the theoretical assumption that PYD can predict lower levels of negative outcomes and higher levels of positive outcomes over time. Youth who were in the fifth grade during the first wave were retested as sixth graders. In order to control for the influence of prior testing, an additional sample of previously assessed sixth graders were tested. Subsequently, the sample of this study was 982; 46% male and 54% females with 54.9% White, 15.2% Latino, 4.7% African American, 2.4% Native American, 4.2% Asian American, 2.3% multi-racial.

Outcomes for depression, substance use, delinquency, and contribution were measured in youth across wave 1 and wave 2. By using structural equation modeling, a theoretical model of the relationships among contribution, depression, and risk behaviors, as predicted by PYD, was tested. In all analysis, sex differences were also tested. The results of this study found that more PYD traits significantly predicted lower depression and lower engagement in risky behavior. It also demonstrated that PYD outcomes are not the lack or reduction of negative behaviors or outcomes, but are separate, desirable attitudes and behaviors that can be defined and measured. The tested positive outcome in this study was contribution.

Contribution is defined in the positive development literature as contributing positively to self, family, community, and civil society (Jelicic et al., 2007). According to the model, PYD scores in contribution during grade 5 predicted similarly higher scores grade 6. The study also found significant gender differences in the outcome measures of contribution based on gender. Girls had higher contribution scores than boys and significantly lower risk behaviors.

To further explore gender differences, Lerner, Phelps, Alberts, Forman, and Christiansen (2007) used the same 6th grade data to look exclusively at urban girls to identify factors involved in the promotion of PYD, assess the diminution of risk and problem behaviors, and identify the level of contributions that these young girls make to themselves, their families and communities (Lerner et al., 2007). Along with quantitative methods, they conducted qualitative interviews to delve deeper into the girls' definitions of thriving, their descriptions of girls who are doing well, and understandings of *their* well-being (Lerner et al., 2007).

Findings from the quantitative data indicate that higher PYD traits in urban girls significantly predicted lower depression and lower engagement in risky behavior- regardless of social economic status and family structure. Qualitative findings highlighted the variation in urban girls' definitions of positive characteristics in themselves and others. All of the Five C's were cited as important indicators for well-being. Competence was defined mostly in relation to academic competence and athletic competence. Confidence was described as generally being "proud of oneself" (Lerner et al., 2007, 42). Girls talked about connection in relation to family and peers and caring was expressed in multiple ways for friends, family, and animals. Character was defined as "being good to others and doing the right thing"

(Lerner et al., 2007, 42). Moreover, the qualitative data showed that there were also positive traits that could not be categorized or coded into the Five C's that were related to thriving (Lerner et al., 2007). These included various participation in activities (sports, hobbies, spending time with friends), being spiritual, popular, positive and negative descriptions of contexts, and descriptions of physical appearance (Lerner et al., 2007). Lerner et al. 2007 states, "The most often mentioned 'non-C' themes were positive personal characteristics and outdoor activities/sports participation" (p. 42). Therefore, findings from this study indicate that the "Five C's model of PYD is a necessary but also an incomplete frame for depicting the dimensions along which urban girls may thrive" (Lerner et al., 2007, 45).

Critique of Five C's of Positive Youth Development

In their studies, Lerner and his colleagues (2005, 2007) found that regardless of identities or social location, all youth display attributes of the Five C's. Although their studies include American racial minorities, girls, boys, as well as urban, rural, and suburban populations, social identities like race and gender are often treated only as an independent variable - not as an identity that fundamentally shapes adolescent development and influences the way developmental contexts and assets manifest. For example, confidence is defined in the literature as an individual's assessment of self-worth and self-confidence. However, when the social identities of race and gender are added, confidence, in the form of personal self-worth, is also attached to a worth placed on their social identity. Therefore, it is not enough to measure confidence from individual terms but scholars should also add to the PYD measurements the social identities that could affect confidence.

In the 2004 Society for the Study of Human Development Presidential Address, Lerner shares his vision of developmental science: "A developmental science that is devoid of

knowledge of the individual and group ranges among diverse groups, and a developmental science that is devoid of knowledge of the range of assets in diverse context, is an incomplete developmental science” (338). While Lerner makes this assertion, his model characterizes the developmental process toward thriving by focusing on the idea that more valued behaviors (Five C’s) and positive person/context interactions can positively affect development toward an idealized personhood (Lerner, 2004) without recognizing the intricacies of the various contexts in which youth develop, nor the ways person/context and bi-directional relationships are affected by discrimination and marginalization experienced because of the race, class, and gender of the youth. Furthermore, scholars that have focused on racial/ethnic minorities, girls, or urban youth have fit assets into a PYD framework without acknowledging or interrogating the ways culture and gendered identities actually affect assets - even though ecological theories have attempted to create a foundation to do so.

Developmental systems theory, as well as other ecological theories of human development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, 1991, 1995), have generally included a dimension of cultural values and norms, as well as race and ethnicity (Swanson, Spencer, Angelo, Harpalani, Spencer, 2002). Within these theoretical models, culture, race and ethnicity are viewed as critical dimensions in growth and development that underlie identity formation, cognition, and social interactions (Swanson et al., 2002). Despite this important recognition, many studies in the PYD canon focus on context- as it relates to family, community, youth programs, and public institutions such as schools- without accounting for the important macro-level systems such as racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that affect these contexts. Some scholars have recognized

that race, gender, and culture needed to be explored in a more nuanced way. Sesma et al., 2003, p.10 state:

There is a need for deeper, culturally specific research that not only examines the dimensions and dynamics of positive development within different cultures but also takes into account the powerful influences of context and societal issues on young people's healthy development... recognizing the power of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in shaping development.

In order to expand the Five C's and positive youth development, I will use triple quandary theory to specifically focus on the complex developmental ecology for African American youth. Triple quandary theory recognizes the social, political, and historical context of African Americans and identifies these factors as important to youth development. Within this theoretical framework, strengths and assets will be discussed according to the values in three culture realms: the mainstream, Afro-cultural, and minority. By using triple quandary theory, positive developmental assets can be analyzed as they relate to African American girls' raced and gendered experiences.

Positive Youth Development through Triple Quandary Theory

Triple Quandary Theory and the realms of development

Triple Quandary Theory posits that African American youth grow up in three realms of social realities because of their racial identity in America (Boykin and Ellison, 1995). These realms are the mainstream (dominant White American culture), the Afro-cultural (intergenerational transmission of African traditions), and the minority (burden of oppression and marginalization). Each realm has its own set of values, belief systems, and behavioral patterns that inform development. However, in the lives of African American youth these values, norms, and behavioral patterns converge and influence ways youth function in various contexts. The acknowledgment and understanding of these three social realms can help

illuminate the various assets and supports that African American youth need to develop positively.

Participation and Orientation to Cultural Realms

As African American youth develop, their involvement in these three realms can take on two forms - participation or orientation. First, participation in a cultural realm is predicated on the degree of contact with that cultural space and how often youth function within it, which can range from superficial to full immersion (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). Second, orientation is the level of importance it is given by youth and the degree of identification to facets of that realm (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). Because each realm is multifaceted, youth do not participate or orient exclusively in any one realm, but are involved in all realms simultaneously. Research by Stanton-Salazar (1997) observed that many youth of color face the difficult tasks of learning to function successfully in different, non-overlapping worlds with different, sometimes conflicting languages, cultures, and norms. Below are the descriptions and examples of these realms and the various forms of positive development.

Mainstream cultural realm

The dominant social realm of American society is the mainstream cultural experience (Jagers and Mock, 1993). Most institutions and institutional supports are embedded in this realm, and many organized systems require mainstream behaviors and values (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). According to Boykin and Ellison (1995), there are nine cultural values that define the mainstream cultural realm: *emotional containment*, the *elevation of the cognitive over the affective* (reason over emotion), *competition*, *objectification and bureaucratization of human relationships and interactions*, *effort optimism* (work for work's sake), *delay in*

gratification, and two types of individualism, *self-contained* and *possessive*. *Self-contained individualism* is the value of psychological and material independence, while *possessive individualism* focuses on attributes such as beauty, intelligence or material possessions, as central to identity and indicators of one's value to society. Later studies also highlight *Machiavellianism* as a part of the mainstream cultural ethos (Jagers & Mock, 1999; Jagers, Smith, Mock, & Dill, 1997). *Machiavellianism* implies an unwavering focus on personal goal attainment and a willingness to manipulate others to achieve one's desired ends (Jagers, Smith, Mock, & Dill, 1997; Geis, 1978). As individuals function in the mainstream realm, these qualities inform role expectations and shape normative expectations for interpersonal interactions.

Orientation and Participation in the Mainstream Realm

African American youth who live in the U.S. participate in the mainstream realm because most institutions and indicators for success are predicated on values in this cultural realm (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). However, youth can be oriented to and participate in this realm to varying degrees. Their success in mainstream institutions, as well as their success as future adult members in this cultural sphere, is predicated on their ability to participate and adhere to the values of this realm. However, participation in the mainstream realm does not necessitate complete orientation. Since orientation is the degree to which youth integrate the values and behaviors of a realm into their identity, this can vary; youth can participate in the mainstream realm while holding values that are advanced in other realms. This makes defining positive development more complex than scholars have described. There are many other cultural values that can be expressed differently, be complimentary, and even be

contradictory to mainstream values. One of these parallel and intersecting realms relevant to African American youth is the Afro-cultural realm.

Afro-cultural Realm

The Afro-cultural realm embodies factors that are linked to the African cultural ethos (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). It represents the continuation of a cultural legacy that has survived the transatlantic slave trade, enslavement, and generations of race-based social, political, and economic oppression and exploitation (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). Additionally, it is linked to forms of human expression that are not unique to people of African descent, but are distinct through its Afro-cultural expression (Boykin & Ellison, 1995).

Within this realm there are nine dimensions outlined by various scholars and synthesized by Boykin and Ellison as *spirituality*, *harmony*, *movement*, *affect*, *verve*, *expressive individualism*, *communalism*, and *social time perspective*. *Spirituality* connotes an acknowledgement of a non-material force that permeates all human affairs. *Harmony* implies that one's functioning is fundamentally linked to events in nature and the elements of the universe. *Movement* gives a premium to the interwoven variety of movement, dance, percussion and rhythm as central to psychological health. *Affect* is an emphasis on emotion and feeling; it is also expressive emoting. *Verve* is a propensity for simultaneous, complementary experiences of several stimuli rather than a singular, routine stimulus. *Expressive individualism* acknowledges the value of personal expressions of style and self-expression. *Communalism* emphasizes the interdependence of people to social bonds and relationships. *Orality* brings focus to the centrality of oral/aural modes of communication for conveying meaning and speaking as performance. Lastly, *social time perspective*, describes the phenomenon where time is treated as passing through social space that cannot be

measured by a clock (Stuckley, 1987; Levine, 1977; Nobles, 1991 as cited in Boykin & Ellison, 1995).

Orientation and Participation in the Afro-cultural realm

The behavioral values associated with the Afro-cultural realm occur in varying degrees among African Americans, depending on youth's access to the cultural sphere, and their participation and orientation levels toward the Afro-cultural ethos. According to Boykin and Ellison (1995), it is difficult sometimes for youth to participate and orient themselves in this realm because characteristics and qualities that are valued in the Afro-cultural realm "are largely not psychologically supported and sustained by interactions with those who principally define themselves in mainstream cultural term" (p. 100). Boykin (1986) states that many people, regardless of racial heritage, view many of the qualities within the Afro-cultural ethos in pejorative terms because they are seen as antithetical to the mainstream cultural ethos and a hindrance to Black progress (Boykin, 1986). Regardless, there are many manifestations of the Afro-cultural experience in the daily lives of African American youth that occur in their interactions with others and in the way that they think about themselves as African American people (Boykin & Ellison, 1995).

Example of PYD in the Afro-cultural realm

Positive participation and orientation to this realm can give rise to implicit and explicit values that can be fundamental to positive development. Scholars have sought to understand the various ways Afro-cultural norms and values affect African American youth. This scholarship has mostly used Karenga's (1988) conceptualization of an African-centered worldview called *Nguzo Saba*. According to Karenga (1988), *Nguzo Saba* represents seven core principles of the Afrocentric worldview. These are *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-

determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics); *Nia* (Purpose); *Kuumba* (Creativity); and *Imani* (Faith)¹. These terms are based in a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions founded on African cultural traditions that relate to definitions of the self, others, and the relationship of the self with the environment (Constantine et al., 2006). The origin of these values stem from both traditional African philosophies and intergenerational wisdom generated through Africans surviving slavery in America.

Belgrave and her colleagues (1997) developed a scale to measure three of the seven Afro-centric values for African American children and adolescents: collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, and self-determination. They define *collective work and responsibility* as the belief that African Americans are responsible for one another and should work together for the betterment of family and community. *Cooperative economics* is defined as a belief in sharing and maintaining resources among and within the African American community. They also define *self-determination* as the belief that African Americans should make decisions for themselves, their families, and their communities. In their evaluative study of an Afrocentric program for African American girls, Belgrave and colleagues (2007) found that higher adherence to these values correlated with decreased relational aggression, increased rejection of stereotypes, and strengthened cultural beliefs and values that promote resiliency.

In another study using Belgrave's (1997) scale, Constantine et al. (2006) examined the relationships among Afrocentric cultural values, self-esteem, perceived social support satisfaction, and life satisfaction in a sample of 147 African American adolescent girls. The

¹ These terms are expressed in Swahili.

age of the girls ranged from 13-18 years of age, with the majority of them being sophomores and juniors at a large urban and culturally diverse high school in the northeast. The study aimed to test three propositions: whether greater adherence to Afrocentric cultural values will result in greater self-esteem and greater satisfaction with perceived social support; if higher self-esteem and greater perceptions of perceived social support satisfaction will result in greater life satisfaction; and whether self-esteem and perceived social support satisfaction significantly mediate the relationship between Afro-centric cultural values and life satisfaction (Constantine et al., 2006).

Findings from this study suggest that the relationship between Afrocentric cultural values and self-esteem was significant and positive, which indicates higher adherence to Afrocentric cultural values is predictive of greater self-esteem (Constantine et al., 2006). The relationship between adherence to Afrocentric cultural values and perceived social support satisfaction was also significant and positive, indicating that girls who had greater Afrocentric cultural values also reported higher perceived social support satisfaction. Finally, perceived self-esteem and life satisfaction was significant and positive, suggesting that higher level of self-esteem predicted greater life satisfaction. In sum, this study demonstrated that Afrocentric cultural values play a vital role in African American adolescent girls' personal (i.e. self-esteem), social (perceived social support satisfaction), and mental health (i.e. life satisfaction) experiences.

Constantine's (2006) research highlights a different way of conceptualizing youth development from a perspective consistent with cultural values held in the Afro-cultural realm. The girls who scored highest on collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, and self-determination were considered to be developing positively. Scholarship

within the PYD literature addressed self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction; however, when studied through an African-centered social and cultural lens, these assets are connected to cultural values attached to their identity. Research shows that a positive ethnic identity is an invaluable asset for minority youth, especially for African American youth (Hurley, Boykin, & Allen, 2005; Townsend & Belgrave, 2000; Belgrave, 2009; Ward, 2000).

According to multiple studies done by Belgrave and her colleagues, African American girls with high ethnic identity were compared to those with low ethnic identity had less drug and alcohol use, and intolerant attitudes towards drugs (Belgrave, 2009; Hurley, Boykin, & Allen, 2005). As demonstrated in these studies, adhering to the Afro-cultural realm values can have positive outcomes. By contrast, negotiating minority realm values yields both positive and negative developmental outcomes.

Minority Realm

The history of African Americans in the United States is one of immeasurable suffering and remarkable resilience; which serves as the basis for the minority realm. In the early 1600s, people of African descent were generally brought to the United States involuntarily by people of European descent under the inhumane system of chattel slavery. Chattel slavery was a distinct form of slavery in which ownership of a human being meant ownership of any of his or her descendants (Christan & Bennet, 1998). The humanity of men and women of African descent was negated and empirical studies were even crafted to prove the inferiority and animal-like status of African slaves (see Cartwright, 1851). For 250 years, people with African ancestry were treated as sub-human, denied basic human rights, and were intentionally kept illiterate and uneducated (Christan & Bennet, 1998). Also during this time

African Americans retained and adapted cultural traditions like spirituality and extended kinship networks to affirm their humanity and resist oppression.

Following the abolition of slavery, White terrorism - including the bombing of Black homes, institutions, and towns, lynching, and other acts of racially motivated violence by individuals and groups like the Klu Klux Klan- was a part of the lived reality of African Americans (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2001). Local governments constructed and put in place a legal system aimed at re-establishing White supremacy and legislation, known as Jim Crow laws (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2001). These laws separated African Americans from Whites in schools, housing, jobs, and public gathering places and relegated Blacks to inferior services, materials, housing, and public facilities. Ruled by the Supreme Court in 1896 as non-discriminatory and constitutional, African American people legally became excluded from access to public and private resources (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2001). These laws were overturned in 1957, but in the cities of America, legal de-segregation did not actually begin until the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the legal abolishment of segregation, de-facto segregation continued to occur in residential and educational institutions. According to The Southern Poverty Law Center, “at the dawn of the 21st century, education for Blacks is more segregated than it was in 1968”.

The history of African descended people in the U.S. is full of atrocities and the deep-seated, negative assumptions about intelligence and character are still present today. More than two centuries of slavery, segregation, and de-humanization created the cultural realm of experience for people of African descent. This legacy, combined with the current educational, economic, and criminal justice system inequities and injustices form the basis of

the minority cultural realm. Consequently, adaptive mechanisms and coping strategies developed by African American inform behavioral patterns, beliefs, and values.

According to Boykin and Ellison (1995), the cultural values of the minority realm are *racial pride*, *de-racilaization*, *ethnic or racial group identification*, and *impression management*. *Racial pride* is the strong identification with their racial group and celebration of heritage (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). They define *de-racialization* as the idea that race is or should not be important (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). *Ethnic or racial group identification* is the opposite of de-racialization and is an allegiance and solidarity to one's racial/ethnic group (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). *Impression management* is a preoccupation with perceptions that others have, as well as, how one crafts how they want to be perceived (Boykin & Ellison, 1995).

Participation and Orientation to the Minority Realm

The minority realm is the cultural space where the mainstream and Afro-cultural realms collide and intersect in complex and potentially contradictory ways. There is considerable variation in the level of marginalization that African Americans experience and in the coping strategies employed. Participation in this realm could be the development of racial allegiance, solidarity, and an exclusive in-group mentality. These could develop from various strategies that parents and other adults use to instill racial pride and fortify youth against negative images, explicit or implicit racial hostility, and their marginal status within the American social order (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). Furthermore, African American youth could also respond to their minority status in ways that lead to self-rejection and even out-group preferences, resulting in the heightened need to belong to the mainstream (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). These are only a few responses to youth's participation in the Mainstream.

Example of PYD in the minority realm

When African American youth experience racism or prejudice in the mainstream realm, they may assert their self-worth and dignity by acts of resistance, which serves as a positive trait specific to the minority realm. Ward (1996) defines resistance as a psychological buffer against the internalization of negative images and evaluations of Black people; the act of constructing an identity that values Blackness and views that racial identity as positive. In order to understand how African American youth develop, and ways that Black parents play an essential role in orienting their children to the existing social environment (i.e. socialization), Ward (2000) conducted interviews with mothers, fathers, and adolescents who represented different economic classes, regions, and family structures. She found that parent's cultural and political interpretations of society, as well as assumptions derived from their lived experiences of being a minority in White America, influenced how youth learned to handle racialized experiences (Ward, 2000). Ward states that learning resistance is a part of the socialization process and is "the development of a unique cultural and political perspective – a perspective that stands against that which is perceived as unjust and oppressive" (p.87). Ward posits that healthy psychological resistance helps youth grow strong individually and empowers them through their knowledge of belonging to a group whose survival has been dependent upon the collective ability to resist. As children became adolescents, parental messages about race were not rejected, but actually influenced how adolescents employed resistance strategies.

While it may appear that resistance strategies are only transmitted through individual families, it is a cultural transmission that occurs generationally (Ward, 2000). This protective psychological strategy has been employed historically by African Americans as a response to

the legacy of discrimination and prejudice. This important asset is culturally relevant to the positive development of African American girls and affects not only their development in the minority realm, but in the mainstream realm as well.

Conclusion

Triple quandary theory illuminates that definitions of positive development are dependent on cultural norms. Although the Five C's have been tested as universal developmental assets that promote thriving, studies show that there are variations, especially with urban girls and youth of color. Variations occur in how positive assets are defined, ways that assets are displayed, as well as what assets are important. Triple quandary theory can broaden the scope of how youth development is explored; beyond a single cultural lens toward a lens that is broadened to include culture and socio-political context.

As a developmental theory specifically for African American youth, triple quandary theory focuses on the development that occurs in three different contexts simultaneously: the mainstream realm (White, middle class culture), the Afro-cultural realm (culture transmitted from generations of African traditions), and the minority realm (culture formed because of oppression and marginalization) (Boykin and Ellison, 1995). As African American youth develop, the norms and values of each realm complement and contradict each other. Some of these contradictory values result in different views, characteristics, and manifestations of positive development. Furthermore, the various contexts that youth participate in routinely, can affect the assets that are developed.

Chapter 3

Creating the Conditions Linked to Positive Youth Development

As the theoretical base for various youth programming, PYD is often studied through organized activities and preventative programs. Scholars theorize that participation in PYD promoting activities can foster resiliency by helping youth develop psychological, behavioral, and social competencies (for review, see Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). However, many PYD programs and organized activities fail to contextualize the cultural and sociopolitical realities of African American girls and other adolescents of color, and are missing opportunities to build on cultural assets that may help promote positive development (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Belgrave et al., 2000; Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002).

This chapter outlines how youth programming fosters positive youth development and some of the various programs that have been used to study and promote assets. I also discuss culturally relevant programming to talk about programs specifically created to cultivate assets in African American youth. Furthermore, I discuss participatory and social justice oriented programs as they relate to youth organizing and youth participatory action research in order to talk about various approaches outside of the PYD literature that foster positive developmental assets like the Five C's.

Positive Youth Development: Asset building Contexts

Researchers recognize development-context relations as integral to positive youth development (Damon & Lerner, 2008). There is growing awareness that it is impossible to explain development by focusing on individual-level variables alone; research must reflect the ongoing interactive processes that occur between individuals and their contexts (Lerner,

2005). While contexts are often described as home, school, and community, there are youth-focused contexts that studies have been found positively affect development. These can be generally described as youth organized activities.

Organized activities are loosely defined as “structured leisure activities organized by adults that adolescents choose to engage in” (Cobb, 2010, xi). Research on organized activities finds that they positively affect youth through increased exposure to developmental opportunities and supports (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). They have also been found to promote assets that reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes, increase the likelihood of positive outcomes, and have a synergistic effect which develops more assets as they progress (Bernat & Resnick, 2006; Lerner et. al, 2005; Warner & Smith, 1992). Furthermore, participation in these type of activities can offer opportunities for sustained, positive adult-youth relations and skill building experiences that exist even in urban settings that are often dismissed as being resource poor (Lerner, 2004).

According to Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), all organized activities do not promote PYD. There are specific characteristics and outcomes that youth develop and express through participation in these activities and programs in order to qualify them as PYD. Determining which activities promote PYD has been an important focus for many scholars and practitioners seeking to understand positive development and to identify key characteristics and outcomes of PYD promoting activities and programs.

Characteristics of Organized Activities

Scholars have identified a number of characteristics within youth programming that foster positive youth development. When examining the PYD literature on programs and organized activities, program evaluations provide important insight into the character and

nature of activities that foster positive development in youth. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002) states that key criteria for PYD program supports and opportunities include: a structure that provides opportunities for decision-making and leadership, opportunities for skill building and mastery, and support of efficacy and responsibility in positions of leadership. Studies done by Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) and Lerner (2004) also support the characteristics outlined above, highlighting the effectiveness of programs that have an emphasis on life skills, provide opportunities for leadership and foster supportive relationships. Larson and Hanson (2005) found that activities that foster initiative and agency in youth are defining features in PYD promoting programming and activities. They assert that youth's goal-directed action in activities affect organizational and interpersonal systems and that, in turn, youth are provided opportunities to influence their own development through challenges (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005). Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen (2003) conducted 10 focus groups to examine high school students' descriptions of their "growth experiences" in organized activities. In this study, organized activities were defined as school-based extra-curricular activities, community-based youth organizations, and all activities and programs for youth that are both voluntary and structured; sports, performance and fine arts, and clubs/organizations (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). The researchers identified six domains of personal and interpersonal experiences that youth reported in programs: identity work (found through exploration and development of identity around the program), development of initiative and social skills (experienced by working with others to achieve goal, and time management), learning emotional competencies (through engaging in empathy and self-regulation), forming new connections and learning how to communicate with peers, and acquiring social capital (through positive relationships with

adult leaders and others in the community) (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). These constructs were all found to be pertinent growth experiences that youth experienced.

A particularly interesting finding reported by the girls in this study is that these programs provided them with ways to learn emotional self-regulation. Girls reported learning experiences that taught them how to control anger and anxiety through controlling their temper and fears. They also learned how to prevent emotions from interfering with attention and performance through blocking out negative feelings, acquiring strategies for managing stress by putting things in perspective, and learning how to use positive emotions constructively in order to relax (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). Moreover, the youth in this study reported both personal and interpersonal processes of development. The personal experiences included experimentation and identity work, development of initiative, and learning strategies for emotional regulation. The interpersonal experiences included acquiring knowledge, new peer relationships, developing group social skills, and connecting with adults.

Mahoney and Stattin (2000) found that when activities provide connections and a sense of belonging with supportive social networks, they are ripe for positive development. They specifically found that affiliations with groups characterized by peer-established norms can potentially influence identity development positively. If the peer group norms are positive, constructive values will be integrated into identity formation, thus enhancing the likelihood of positive outcomes (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Similarly, the promotion of positive adult-youth relationships has been found to be a key element of PYD programs. According to Gilman et al., (2004) activities that forge and strengthen connections with nonparent adult figures and promote social capital promote positive development. Another study done by

Scales, Benson, and Mannes (2006) also found that youth activity involvement positively predicted thriving, not solely because of the assets that they developed, but in part because of greater support, empowerment, and boundary from adults outside of youth's families.

While the literature on PYD programming is overwhelmingly positive and assumes that adult leaders and program environments are nurturing places for youth, this is not always the case. Adults in these contexts mainly support youth development within the mainstream realm (i.e. efficacy and initiative) but do not attend to the other realms of development. The program could even be a space where youth are functioning in a minority realm of experience and are consistently navigating spaces where they are deemed "different" or much worse, inferior (i.e. culturally, gender-wise, class, etc.). Although we do not live in a mono-cultural or homogenous society, PYD programs and activities often take a color-blind approach to youth programming – asserting that they do not see the race/ethnicity/culture of youth but treat all youth the same. However, treating all youth the same often means that programs and adult facilitators use White mainstream cultural norms to frame their ideas of behavior, work-ethic, communication, as well as measurement of positive outcomes. This is particularly important when looking at the cultural and sociopolitical realities of adolescents of color. Other activities outside of the PYD literature have sought to explore culturally-relevant activities to foster positive development (see Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Belgrave et al., 2000).

Organized activities and Programs outside of PYD

There are multiple organized activities that facilitate PYD outside of the traditional PYD canon. Scholars in various fields have highlighted the tremendous need for youth development programs that are culturally, socially, and politically relevant to the lives of participating youth. These programs and activities are inclusive of other cultural values and

even critique the mainstream realm of experience as it relates to marginalized² youth (see Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Ginwright & James, 2002). Three different types of organized activities that help broaden our understanding of positive youth development within the context of organized activities will be discussed. They are culturally relevant programs, youth organizing, and youth participatory action research.

Culturally relevant programs

Culturally relevant programs are situated in the belief that youth have cultural and experiential differences that are a function of their interacting ecologies consisting of their family system, peer social network, and larger institutional, societal, and historical systems (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008). When programs are culturally relevant, they include youths' unique cultural backgrounds as well as their historical and current sociopolitical realities. This recognition fosters positive outcomes and promotes cultural assets to help youth cope with, negotiate, and manage stressors associated with a prejudices in their environment and elevate their psychosocial development (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003).

A study by Thomas, Davidson, and McAdoo (2008) examines the effects of Young Empowered Sisters (YES!), a culturally relevant intervention aimed at promoting cultural assets among a group of African American adolescent girls. Specifically, the study explored whether the intervention cultivated the following assets: African American ethnic identity, racism awareness, collectivist orientation, as well as intentions and actual participation in liberatory youth activism (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008). Ethnic identity was defined as a positive sense of membership in an ethnic group as well as, sharing attitudes and feelings

² Marginalized youth comprises of racial/ethnic groups that are not White, poor/working class, girls, LGBT, disabled and the various intersections of these identities.

with that group (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008). A collectivist orientation was described as a cultural orientation in which interdependence and social obligations are given precedence over personal needs (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008). Having a critical awareness of racism is defined by “being cognizant of the dynamics and nuances of racist and unfair treatment... and having an understanding on what inhibits or enhances one’s efforts to effectively cope with, exert control over, and/or effect change in racially hostile situations” (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008, p. 265). Libratory youth activism refers to “involvement in social action and community development... and the psycho- logical ability to resist and effectively cope with racism” (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008, p. 2658).

There were three philosophical approaches that informed this intervention: *Nguzo Saba*, critical pedagogy, and holistic learning. *Nguzo Saba* represents seven core principles of the Afrocentric worldview³. Critical pedagogy is used to raise individuals’ awareness of oppressive social conditions and empower them to get involved in social change activities (Freire, 1970, 1990). Specifically, it focuses on the development of a critical consciousness that recognizes connections among their individual problems and their experiences within social contexts in which they live (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008). In accordance with both *Nguzo Saba* and critical pedagogy, principles of holistic learning were also incorporated. Holistic learning engages students in both the teaching and learning process, personal and collective responsibility, embraces spirituality and promotes an understanding of diversity (Miller, 1999).

The goal of the intervention was to promote cultural factors (i.e., ethnic identity, communalism, racism awareness, and activism) that can protect African American youth from

³ See pg 24 for full description

the adverse effects of racism. Overall, the findings from the study demonstrated that in comparison to the control group, participants in the intervention had a stronger ethnic identity, a stronger sense of communalism, enhanced awareness of racism, and greater intention to, and increased participation in liberatory youth activism at the end of the program (Thomas, Davidson, McAdoo, 2008). The researchers attributed these findings to the content and facilitation of the intervention curriculum and to the philosophical orientations (i.e., Nguzo Saba, critical pedagogy, and holistic learning) that formed the blueprint of the interventions.

Research done by Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani (2003) also involved the creation and evaluation of an in-school culturally relevant intervention that was designed to foster the psychological and behavioral well-being of eight grade African American students. They defined psychological and behavioral well-being as communal worldview (defining self in relation to community or feeling a duty to their social group); school connectedness (how one feels personally accepted, valued, supported, and encouraged by all people in the school environment); and motivation to achieve (one's desire to learn and excel) (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003). The intervention involved two major components. The first was an educational component. It included a focus on cohesion-building and collectivism, African and African American cultural topics such as history, culture, African rituals and practices, as well as, learning opportunities that dealt with leadership and social change for African American students (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003). The second was an empowerment component, which equipped youth with practical avenues to change their lives and their community (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003).

Through comparing the group that received this intervention with a group that received a general life skills course, the researchers demonstrated that the intervention was

effective at improving the participant's communal orientation, school connectedness, motivation to achieve, and overall social change involvement compared with the control group (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003). Increased communalism and school connectedness mediated the relationship between the intervention and student's motivation to achieve.

Although culturally relevant programming is important, a major challenge for many culturally relevant programs stems from the reality that while individuals within a given cultural group share some commonalities there is intra-cultural diversity. Although social history is often assumed to be the same, racial-ethnic groups often reflect significant diversity because of region, country of origin, immigration status, etc. This results in very different social histories and collective identities. Even for individuals who share a common setting and history there are intra-group differences (e.g., gender, class, sexual identity, etc.) that make creating a “culturally-specific” program difficult – particularly without youth input and attention to their immediate socio-historical context. Therefore, while culturally relevant programming is important, programs must move past focusing on a central identity (i.e., race) and allow youth to engage in their identities in a holistic way and learn to fight against multiple oppressions.

Youth organizing

Youth organizing is a form of civic engagement that supports opportunities for youth to explore and address poverty, racism, gender discrimination and other issues that affect their community and shape their social conditions (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Sherwood & Dressner, 2004). Unlike PYD programs, youth organizing is centered on the lived experiences and socio-political realities of the youth involved. Young people in youth organizing groups identify the community and social conditions they want to change, develop

the change strategies, and carry out campaigns to achieve their goals – with support and guidance from adults, but making the key decisions themselves (Sherwood & Dressner, 2004). It is an empowering process in which the voices of youth are central.

Youth who participate in organizing assume roles that move them beyond being learners to researchers and educators of other youth and adults (Christens & Dolan, 2011). This shift in the roles of youth can promote positive outcomes such as leadership, community involvement, decision making, psychological well-being, and even academic engagement (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Christens & Dolan, 2011). Due to the increased scholarship on youth organizing, a report by Sherwood and Dressner (2004), states that it is “increasingly being seen by youth development professionals as a promising approach to PYD” (6). This is also true for youth participatory action research.

Youth Participatory Action Research

Similar to youth organizing, YPAR is used to empower youth to use their voice and develop and use skills that are often untapped in other contexts (Cammorota & Fine, 2008). Schensul et al. (2004) defines youth participatory action research (YPAR) as a “social science and advocacy-based approach to working with young people” that incorporates elements of “positive youth development, experiential education, prevention and service learning” (5). Within YPAR, youth collaborate with academic researchers in multiple ways: identifying areas that need improvement; developing assessment tools; collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data; determining how data can be used to inform actions to improve community issues; designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions; and disseminating findings (Minkler & Robertson, 1991). YPAR positions youth as partners, and within that partnership their knowledge and experiences as deemed legitimate by adults (Cammorota & Fine, 2008).

This repositioning allows youth to offer important and unique insights to social issues that disproportionately affect them.

The level of engagement, insight, and leadership that is required from youth to make a YPAR project successful provides a context to study positive developmental outcomes. Moreover, in accordance with the participatory action research tradition, YPAR has mainly involved youth that have been historically marginalized and oppressed - racial/ethnic minorities, females, poor and working class youth, etc. – in a liberatory and social justice oriented research process. Therefore, this context can be an important space for liberation and social consciousness for African American adolescent girls.

YPAR projects have many of the characteristics that PYD organized activities assert as important for positive development to occur in youth. As youth began to do research for social change, they can potentially become more competent, confident, empathetic, and connected - not just to school, but to peers and adults they may meet in the process. Through a review of three programs, Powers and Tiffany (2008) found several assets acquired or enhanced through participatory research. These are: (1) leadership skills as change agents; (2) critical thinking ability; (3) building a diverse social network and a broad base of knowledge; (4) valuable skills such as writing, analysis, presentation, and advocacy; (5) opportunities to take on new roles and responsibilities involving decision making; (6) formation of new relationships with adults and members of the broader community; and (7) serving as role models to other youth and as experts possessing local knowledge about issues that affect young people. Projects also provide youth with meaningful roles in leadership positions while simultaneously involving them in civic engagement that is directly connected to themselves, their family, and community (Powers & Tiffany, 2006). These assets are similar

to those found in the Five C's, as well as the outcomes of PYD promoting organized activities. Accordingly, the current study uses YPAR to understand the positive developmental assets of African American girls.

Conclusion

Most studies use youth programs or organized activities to further define positive development and understand how healthy youth develop. These programs help to operationalize the theoretical claims posited in positive youth development theory and further develop “best practices” in youth programs. Although research has found that PYD based programs foster a host of positive outcomes for youth, they generally do so in the mainstream realm; most studies using youth programs minimally discuss race, class, gender, or the social and political context of the youth involved. Therefore, they fail to identify and discuss assets for other cultural realms of experience for youth.

Scholars that focus on culturally relevant programming, youth organizing, and youth participatory action research have focused on activities that attend to the social and political realities of youth. Youth organizing and youth participatory action research are activities that move beyond the common binary depictions of structured or unstructured programming, and instead are semi-structured, which allows for an organic and flexible context open to youth input. This flexibility fosters greater opportunities for youth involvement and creates a context where youth can create a developmentally rich context specific to their interests.

Although it is not exactly a youth program, youth participatory action research is specifically designed to engage youth in a collaborative research process that capitalizes on their strengths, and develops their weaknesses. When examining the positive developmental assets of African American girls, having a context that allows them to utilize assets that are

already present within them, learn new skills, express who they are, and tell their stories is important. Because many institutions and programs that serve this population, seek to police their behaviors, censor their voice and worldview, and stifle the many cultural styles that may be beneficial to their well-being (Morris, 2007), it is imperative to study assets in a context that can capitalize on their sense of agency. Therefore, YPAR is used in this study to provide an opportunity for girls to co-create a developmental context to study positive assets.

Chapter 4

The YPAR Program

This chapter outlines a YPAR project that I created as an in-school program to study assets in African American adolescent girls. It is an account of our weekly meetings and gives a detailed account of the three semesters of the YPAR program- discussing the participants and group processes. This chapter also details the progression of the research design and the challenges that the girls and I faced doing YPAR in their school context. The following section describes the school context and the YPAR project that lasted twelve months and is divided through the three semesters of the school year.

Research Context

Lakeland School District

Lakeland⁴ School District is located in Ashland which has a population of 36,966. The estimated median household income in the city is around \$36,459 and 12.5% of the population lives below the poverty line. Due to a history of racial tension and inequity in the Lakeland school district, there have been various initiatives, programs, and research agendas to combat some of these issues. Over several years, some of this work included my advisor, Dr. Jeffery Lewis, who was invited by district partners to help schools address concerns specifically with African American youth and families. I started working with Dr. Lewis as a student hourly in January, 2009 to assist in his African American boys' rocketry program at Atlas Middle School. The following school year (2009-2010), a colleague and I created and implemented an in-school program for African American eighth grade boys and girls at Atlas, focused on identity exploration and positive transitions into high school.

⁴ All names are pseudonyms for the real name of the district, schools, and all parties involved.

During fall of 2011, Dr. Lewis and I had meetings with principals at three schools in the district- Atlas Middle School, Lakeland High School, and Chase Charter High School to discuss the ways we could help them address the needs of African American students through research and programming. Atlas and Chase Charter were chosen because of our previous relationships with the principals and we reached out to the principal at Lakeland High because the majority of the eighth grade students from our program at Atlas were now attending this school.

In these meetings, the principals stated that they generally wanted to learn three things: student perspectives on initiatives that have been done in the school, ways to reduce fighting and conflict, and how youth feel about attending their school. In response, I created a research agenda that was beneficial to the school, the students, and myself as a graduate student, with an interest in community based-research methods, and particularly youth-based participatory action research. Subsequently, I created three youth participatory action research programs in the district, one at each school, designed specifically for African American girls. There were seven participants at the middle school, five at the traditional high school, and twelve at the charter school. I taught each research team about social science research and qualitative research design. Each team had their own research question and created and implemented a research project to answer that question. They also committed to a plan of action based on their analysis of their data. This study only focuses on the youth participatory research program implemented at Chase Charter School. This school was chosen because the YPAR program in this context followed a more traditional structure of YPAR.

The Setting: Chase Charter School

Chase Charter School is the name of the building that houses two different charter schools within its walls - Dean Carter Academy and Franklin Charter School. Both schools are small, computer-based, and geared towards students working independently at their own pace. The students represent a diverse population, however, most of the teaching staff are White. These schools do not have lockers, nor do students move to other classrooms. The only times they leave their computer station is for lunch or during extracurricular activities that are held elsewhere in the building, a different school, or at the local liberal arts college. Although individual learning forms the basis for the school curriculum, students still interact with teachers. While these schools are similar in many ways, each school has its own vision and structure which attracts different types of students.

Dean Carter Academy

According to its flyer, Dean Carter Academy is a school for students with “high intellectual curiosity.” It is both a middle school and high school and includes grades 6-12. The student teacher ratio is 1: 14-20 and there are about 75 students enrolled in Dean each year. Dean Carter Academy has a project-based learning approach to education that lets students make decisions about what they want to learn in ways that work best for them. They are allowed to choose their topics for research in core subject areas such as English or history, and create research projects around it. As a computer based school, there is an expectation that students must take responsibility for the direction and nature of their own learning.

The actual physical environment of Dean Carter Academy appears to be very congested. It is a very large room full of computer workstations that are the students’ permanent desks. Generally, there are books, papers, and snacks on the students’ desk; some students have headphones in their ears and many seem busy online or in PowerPoint or

Microsoft Word working on their projects. There are only four teachers at Dean. Teachers sit at a wide desk strategically located in the four corners of the room and are responsible for the students that sit in their section.

The girls who participated in the YPAR program from this school talked about strained relationships with teachers. They asserted that teachers were slow and even reluctant to help students because of the “independent learning” structure of the school; this was especially a source of frustration for girls who felt they needed more help. They also told me that they felt they were scrutinized more than the other students for not being “on task” as other students engaged in similarly distracted activities (e.g. texting, on Youtube, talking to another student). In fact, many of the students left the school because they were unhappy. By the end of the program only two out of the five girls that started the program remained at Dean. The mother of one of the last two girls told me that she was transferring her daughter out of the school the year after the program ended.

The Franklin Center

The Franklin Center is on the other side of the building and includes grades 9-12. Initially the district conceptualized the Franklin Center as a credit recovery high school, geared to help students who were failing in the city’s high school. Over time, the school developed a negative stigma in the community. A community member described it as, “a school kids are sent to and passed through without any accountability.” Franklin was considered an alternative high school. Although this may be the perception, the school’s focus and mission changed in 2009 to a post-secondary prep school. This change happened the year before the YPAR program started.

As a post-secondary prep school, students construct an individualized learning plan based on their career goals and complete high school at their own pace. The Franklin Center's informational flyer states that the learning opportunities in the school consists of online and project based learning, direct teaching, real life experiences, and career and technical education. According to their handbook, students take math, English, science, history, and elective courses online using Odyssey, a computer learning program. Students read, take notes, complete quizzes and tests in order to complete each class. Students also receive help with career and post-secondary planning and are required to take either the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the American College Test (ACT), or the COMPASS Test (a computer adapted version of the ACT).

The physical environment of Franklin is similar to Dean in regards to computer stations; however, it is in the larger part of the school and has classrooms. Instead of one room for all students, the school consists of four large classrooms with computers for each student. The teaching staff at this school, three teachers and a counselor who taught seniors, were all male.

The relationships between students and teachers at Franklin were also described in negative ways. The girls in the YPAR program regularly talked about the various ways that the relationships between teachers and black students were strained. Many of the girls said that they observed Black students being punished disproportionately in comparison to White students, and teachers were more lenient with White females than Black females who engaged in similar behaviors (e.g. talking to the person beside them). The perceived inequality created resentment and sometimes sparked arguments between the teachers and students.

During my time at Chase Charter School, most of the fights and suspensions occurred at Franklin. There appeared to be tension throughout the school between Black and White students, and fights often happened among the African American girls. The principal was mainly concerned with the fighting and conflict occurring with the African American girls on this side of the school. He attributed the conflict to altercations in the community between the girls or their families (cousins, siblings, and mothers) that were brought to the school environment and caused conflict.

School Staff

One principal is responsible for both schools. When I initiated the program in 2011, Mr. Dixon was the principal. My initial meetings concerning the needs of the school and students were with him. Mr. Dixon had been the principal since 2009 and understood the racial tensions in the district and in the schools. He served on the district's "culturally responsive taskforce" and although a White male, had biracial children that exposed him to issues in schools around race and inclusion. He welcomed my program and its focus on engaging African American girls in a research project, allowing me to recruit and meet with students during the day and made arrangements for girls that participated to receive elective credits. However, his involvement was short-lived. When I arrived at Chase for the second semester of the program, he disclosed that he was leaving to take a new position, but that I should still work with the girls.

After a month went by without a principal, Mr. Lane, a former principal who came out of retirement, stepped in to serve as the interim principal. Although Mr. Dixon did not notify Mr. Lane that I was working in the school, I continued with the program as arranged with Mr. Dixon. I scheduled a meeting with Mr. Lane to explain the tenants of YPAR, the goals of the

program, and the work that had been done previously. Fortunately, he expressed support for the program. He allowed me to continue the program during the time previously agreed upon and I continued the program, uninterrupted.

Three months later a new principal, Dr. Ibe was appointed for the duration of the school year. After meeting with her and explaining the program, she was also accommodating and allowed me to continue working with the girls. As a Black woman, she stated that she saw the program not only for its academic and interpersonal benefits, but also the opportunity it provided to engage African American girls in a positive context where they are respected and learn new things. Her support allowed us to continue the program and finish the research project.

Although there were three different principals, the teaching staff at the school remained stable. I had limited interactions with the teachers at both schools and have only had conversations with four of them (two casually and the other two teachers only conversed with me when there was a problem). Since I was not introduced to the staff and only sent out two emails outlining the program, I did not have relationships with the teachers in this small school, something which proved to be problematic later on. In spite of this, my positive relationships with the various principals helped me establish, maintain, and complete this in-school YPAR program.

Initiating the Youth Participatory Action Research Program

In one of my initial meetings with Mr. Dixon, he stated, “I think the girls here need some sort of positive mentoring group to help them be better students and stay out of trouble.” Although I respected his opinion about the girls he saw daily, I did not do a mentoring group. Instead, I decided to take the classroom knowledge that I acquired from my positive youth

development and community-based research methods classes and apply it to the girls in that setting. Considering the literature, I thought it would be advantageous to do a youth participatory action research project, letting the girls be agents of their own development and taking part in a group that had goals and focused on collaborative learning. I also decided that instead of doing a program for them after school, it should be done during the school day. I believed that engaging the girls during the school day would foster greater participation because it eliminated after-school transportation barriers and helped prevent any conflict with familial responsibilities and extra-curricular activities that are also important to their development.

I expected that the YPAR program would give the principal data on issues facing the girls from their perspective, and that the girls would learn valuable research and leadership skills that could help them become better students. I also speculated that if the girls had a space to work together in a positive environment that fostered respect, conflict between them would be reduced. At this point, I had not yet established my research questions, but was focused on YPAR as a programmatic effort to promote a positive context for the African American girls in school.

Recruitment for the Program

In order to get youth partners to participate in the program, recruitment flyers were passed out to all of the African American girls in the school in November. These flyers were used as an open recruitment method and explained the program by highlighting potential activities. Through previous experience, I found that relying only on recommendations from the principal or a counselor could limit participants to those in the extremes, girls who are doing exceptionally well academically, or girls who are sent to office frequently and “in need

of mentoring.” It was important to me to have a range of girls as partners, those at the extremes, “average students,” as well as girls that might be invisible to the school. Therefore, the only prerequisite for participating was interest in the research project.

Two weeks after giving out the flyers, I held an orientation meeting at the school during the school day. During this meeting, I introduced myself, the program, and had the girls who were interested introduce themselves. I also used this meeting to briefly explain YPAR and show them an example of a project that had already been done called VOYCE *Voices of Youth in Chicago Education*. VOYCE is a YPAR project in Chicago, IL that focuses on understanding school dropout rates in their surrounding high schools. Since many of the girls have relatives or friends in Chicago, this project gave them a glimpse of YPAR in a familiar context. This video was also chosen because it illustrated what youth of a similar race/ethnic background were doing to explore school related issues through research. I left space for questions after the presentation and then handed them the parental consent and assent forms to bring back. Girls who were interested in participating brought back the forms the next week.

Participants

January, 2011 was the first semester of the program. Twelve girls participated in this program. The YPAR program began with eight African American girls ages 14-18. They were Brittney, Felicia, Keisha, Destiny, Andrea, Star, Nia, and Krystal. The group had representation from both schools in the building: Brittney, Destiny, Keisha, Krystal, and Nia were from Dean and Felicia, Andrea, and Star were from Franklin.

Although I originally told the girls the program would last one semester, we did not finish the research project in this time frame. Factors that contributed to this were: testing and

other school related interruptions which gave us less days to meet and training related to research design and implementation that took longer than anticipated. Therefore, the girls collectively decided to continue the program until the research project was finished. That summer, Star and Nia graduated, and Keisha and Andrea transferred to a different school. Although we lost four group members, Brittney, Felicia, Destiny, and Krystal continued in the program and took initiative to recruit four new members at the beginning of the second semester: Ally, Shayla, Dion, and GiGi. Table 1 details the girls' affiliations and participation.

Table 1 <i>Participants</i>				
Name	School	Age	Time in Program	Reason for leaving
Brittany	Dean Carter Academy	14	Semester 1-3	
Felicia	Franklin	15	Semester 1-3	
Krystal	Dean Carter Academy	14	Semester 1-3	
Destiny	Dean Carter Academy	14	Semester 1-3	
Keisha	Dean Carter Academy	14	Semester 1	School Transfer
Andrea	Dean Carter Academy	14	Semester 1	School Transfer
Star	Franklin	17	Semester 1	New Girls/Graduation
Nia	Franklin	18	Semester 1	Graduation
Ally	Franklin	16	Semester 2-3	
Shayla	Franklin	15	Semester 2 and Half of 3	Move to after school
Dion	Franklin	15	Semester 2-3	
GiGi	Franklin	16	Half of Semester 2	Expulsion

Along with the girls, I had an undergraduate student, Mya, who started working with me at the end of February as an intern. She worked with the program until May, attending many of the sessions, helping me set up things for the girls, assisting in facilitating

discussions about methodology and methods, and planning our end of the year trip to the University.

Overall Group Process, Structure, and Rules of Engagement

Daily Start

Each group session, the girls would come in and sit at a table arranged in the shape of an octagon. Placing the tables together in an octagon created a central workspace for collaborative processes and was a symbol of equality, power sharing, and connectedness. As a part of the group, I sat at the table with them. Often, before everyone was settled, the girls would talk about what happened during the school day, what was going on in their lives, and/or what was the recent community “drama.” As they were talking, individual research binders were passed out by me or one of the girls. I would subsequently signal our start by asking someone to read a bio that I placed in their notebook with the Woman of the Day.

The Woman of the Day was a Black woman in history or currently alive, who champions social justice, education, perseverance, and achievement in the American context. The bios and accomplishments of many women such as Mary Bethune-Cookman, Michelle Obama, and Angela Davis were read and then discussed, followed by a quote from the woman titled the Quote of the Day. Each session, a different girl read the Woman of the Day and another girl read the Quote of the Day. I decided to create these bios because I wanted the girls to be exposed to Black *Herstory*⁵ and understand that there is a deep history and tradition of Black women who are successful and cared about their communities.

Group Process

⁵ **Herstory** is history written from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the role of women, or told from a woman's point of view.

The method of carrying out the program was organic and flexible. Various parts of the research design (i.e. deciding on a method) was given as many days possible to complete. Each workshop utilized different teaching and learning strategies such as: peer teaching, worksheets/ handouts, and idea mapping. Because decisions about the research were made collaboratively and/or through closed ballot voting, the content of our workshops had to be created weekly as decisions were made.

Semester I

Establishing the Group

The first few meetings were focused on establishing the group structure. During the first session, I talked about overall program and asked the girls to tell me about who they are (their interest, how long they have been attending the school, age, birthdays, and other general questions). After introductions were done, I asked the girls to decide as a group the day and time they wanted to meet. They chose Thursday and decided that 10-11:00am would be our meeting time.

In session two, girls established the group rules. Since I wanted them to take ownership of the group, I explained that they would establish the rules that govern the group, the process, and its members. My intent was to reiterate their power and voice within this program. I went around the table and each person gave me a rule to write on the board for us to follow while we were in the group. The only role I played in the creation of these rules was to write them down on the board and make sure that everyone agreed on the suggested rules before they were adopted. The rules were:

- Respect other people and yourself
- Don't talk when others are talking

- Be on time
- Don't gang up on other people
- Everyone must participate
- If you miss a number of sessions you cannot participate
- Keep hands feet to yourself
- Be sympathetic to others
- What is said in here stays in here
- Have respect for ideas (nothing is a dumb or stupid idea)

Initially I wanted the girls to nominate a teacher or community member to be a partner on the research team. After asking them who they wanted as a community partner, various girls let out sighs as I told them they should choose someone. Statements such as “There is no one that I like,” “Ain't no positive people like that in Ashland,” “They HAVE to be an adult?” and “I don't know anyone who I would want to do this” filled the room. The girls did not want to have an adult partner from their school and could not think of anyone in the community that they wanted to invite. Since I told them they should choose someone, in the end, they chose a Black woman who was the assistant principal at the main high school. Unfortunately she was not available to participate so we did not have an adult partner.

Creating the Research Design

The goal of the program was for the girls to come up with their own research question and guide the research process. However, after initial conversations that illuminated their misconceptions concerning research, I decided to teach them about social science research

and the research process first. As we discussed and read about the research process the girls began to create their own research project.

Research Question

Initially we discussed the definition and purpose of a research question. Then the girls were asked to list questions that they found interesting; things about their school that they would like to explore or wanted to understand. The only request was that the questions focus on issues that concern them at school. After many questions were listed to explore and a long discussion and venting session occurred, we voted on our research question. The research question that had the majority votes was: Why do White people question the intelligence of black people?

After the research question was decided, I wanted them to refine the question and think about what they are really asking. I wanted them to break down what they meant by *questioning the intelligence*; and what *White people* where they talking about?

So I asked *Who* are the “*White people*” that they are talking about? The answer was varied: someone answered, “all of them,” but after asking them who they come in contact with the most and in what situations did they feel that their intelligence is questioned they said: *teachers, staff, administrators, students*. After a discussion on these four groups, they chose to focus on the teachers. I then wrote in the board: What do you mean by *questioning the intelligence*? They said: assume low test scores; acting shocked when you answer something right; assume you lack common sense; assume we are ignorant; question why we do certain things a certain way. I then asked them why they thought this question was important to research.

Each person gave an answer:

“Because we know that we are smart and we don’t like to be compared”

“This has a negative effect on your life”

“If we find out why they do it we can work to improve it”

“Because we want to be noticed in class”

“Because we know we’re not dumb and it makes me mad”

“Because it makes me feel dumb”

“We don’t like being stereotyped but they stereotype us”

“White people think they better than us and I don’t like that”

Reframing the Question

Although the question was valid and I understood what they were observing was worth exploring, I did not feel comfortable with the question being researched in the school context. After two weeks, I met with Dr. Lewis to discuss the research question and my concerns about it not being well received in the majority White context of the school. Subsequently after much discussion, we thought it would be good to reframe the question: Do teachers underestimate the abilities of their students? (from the perspectives of Black students).

I decided that I would talk to the girls about my concerns, present them the new question as an option, and then listen to their opinions about the prospective change. The next meeting I presented my request to make adjustments to the research question to the girls and got their opinions. After talking about it, they agreed with my concerns and decided that we would reword the question. Therefore, while the question was originally, “Why do White people question the intelligence of black people?” we refined the question to: “Do students feel that teachers underestimate the abilities of their students?”

Methodology and Method

After our question was chosen, we did a session on ways to answer their research question. During this session we talked about qualitative and quantitative methodology, how they are different, and what type of questions they seek to answer. Before our meeting, I created five handouts that discussed interviewing, collage method⁶, photovoice⁷, focus group, and survey. I selected these methods because I was familiar with them and felt I could effectively guide the students in their use if selected. Instead of me going over each method in a lecture, I decided that the girls should teach each other about the various methods on the handouts. Therefore, the girls were paired and asked to read the handout about one of the five methods and then explain to the entire group the definition of their method, what they believe to be the pros and cons, and an example of how we could use this particular method to answer our research question.

After all of the methods were explained, we voted through closed ballot; interviewing had the most votes and would be our research method. Subsequently, there was a lot of discussion about doing a focus group because Brittney really felt that doing this method would be the most effective way of hearing people's opinions. She also saw it as a way to change some of the opinions of others because they get to hear multiple sides of the issues. However, the majority of the girls argued for interviewing and felt like focus groups limited the amount that some people would talk about certain issues. After a long discussion and a

⁶ Collage method is gathering and selecting visual images (pictures and words) to explain thoughts about a particular issue or research question (see Leavy, 2008).

⁷ Photovoice is a method that allows participants to use a camera to take pictures that represent and express a theme or research question (see Wang & Burris, 1997)

re-vote, interviewing was chosen and Brittany said that she was fine with the group's choice to do interviews.

Study Sample

Since the girls wanted to focus on Black students being underestimated, they wanted Black students to be interviewed; students of other races would also be interviewed and asked about classroom experiences. They also wanted to interview teachers and the principal of the school. Each person came up with an idea for a sample so we could vote on it. The two main options given were: a sample of ten with an equal number of students and teachers and a sample of fifteen total, ten students and five teachers. When I asked for the rationale of the first option they said that it would be fair to have equal representation (Two girls voted for this). For option two the girls responded, "We want to know the students' viewpoint since they are the victims... not really the teachers." (Two girls voted for this). Since there was a draw and some of the girls were not there, we decided to wait until next session to vote again.

During the next session I invited Dr. Lewis to come and help them think about how to sample with the new question in mind, but without losing their original question. After he was introduced to the girls, and they explained our current sample options, he suggested that we sample twenty people and break it into three categories victims, witnesses, and perpetrators. The girls liked that idea and decided to adapt this sampling strategy.

We decided to utilize purposeful sampling. The girls chose African American students as the victims; White students as witnesses; and teachers as perpetrators. Names of students, teachers, and girls from the group were written on a piece of paper to be drawn as our sample for interviewing. After the names were drawn from a bucket, a list of names were created as our sample. The girls' volunteered to interview people. Three girls were not

interested in interviewing and said that they would rather transcribe the interviews; some girls said that they wanted to do both. The girls' who wanted to interview were responsible for giving parent consent and student assent forms to the interviewee and collecting them before interviewing them.

Revision of the Sample

Ultimately, our sample did not follow our sampling plan. This was because the categories of witnesses and a victim became blurry and the girls had difficulty recruiting for each group. As the girls begin to ask people to participate in the study, they found that not everyone that was chosen wanted to participate. When we came back for our next session, they talked about the difficulties of recruiting people for the study. Since we did not discuss or practice recruiting for the study, I decided to have a workshop during the next meeting and give them a chance to practice with me and the girls in the group.

In order to help the girls understand recruitment, I asked them to talk about ways they asked students to participate. Afterward, we all brainstormed more effective ways to share our research so that they are more interested. After practicing, we had a few more students from our sample who were interested, but there were still others who just did not want to participate. The final sample was eight students.

Interview Protocol

The creation of the interview protocol was a collaborative process. The girls were first given the research question on the board and told that all of the interview questions should seek to answer the question. Mya helped facilitate this process by asking the girls to go around the table and give at least one question to write on the board as a starting point. The first girl asked the research question directly, stating, "Do your teachers underestimate your

abilities?” In response I told her that interview questions should be open-ended, not just yes or no. Immediately, other girls suggested that we add, if so why? Or why not? Brittany, who was writing on the board, suggested that they turn the question into an open ended one. So they reworded it. Another suggestion from Andrea was that there should be lead-in questions or something to “warm the interviewee up.” Creating interview questions was a slow process; but as the process became more collaborative, with multiple people helping to formulate one question, we were able to create the protocol.

I took the questions that were given and added a few more that I felt would be relevant. I brought a printed version to our next meeting as a rough draft. Although I asked for feedback, they concluded that the interview protocol was complete.

Interview Training

Since interview was the method of choice, the girls needed to understand how to interview well and practice their interviewing skills. I created another handout on how to interview and had multiple girls read the different sections to the group. I divided the girls in pairs so they could practice with each other while Mya and I listened to each group. Since the interview protocol was created, they used it their mock interviews. After listening to two groups and feeling as though I was constantly giving them tips on how to get their interviewee to expand on a question, I decided that they needed to see an example.

At the start of our next meeting, I modeled interviewing skills with Mya; focusing on how to effectively interview with both engaged and disengaged interviewees. During this meeting I asked the girls to write down the various strategies I used to engage Mya during our interview and vice versa. The girls took notes and were able to discuss what they saw us doing to keep the interview on track and get the information needed. They also saw things

that we could have done better. The girls then practiced interviewing with different girls in the group for two sessions before conducting their interviews. After talking with the principal, and giving him a list of the students recruited for the study, the girls conducted and recorded their interviews during the school day. After the interviews were done, our efforts turned to transcription.

Transcribing Interviews

I created a handout to describe and define interview transcription, with helpful hints on how to organize the process. Since the school is computer-based, I sent each girl an email with an audio file for them to transcribe. The girls brought headphones to school and listened to interviews during our meeting time. By the end of the semester, four interviews were transcribed fully, while two were half done, and two were left undone. They stated that they would finish next semester since I was coming back.

End of the Semester

At the end of the semester the girls (along with the other research teams of girls at the middle and high school) took a field trip to the state university. Mya planned the trip as part of her internship project and took them around campus, showed them dorms, had them watch performances from students who are involved in the Arts, and had a question and answer panel with African American undergraduate student about the college experience. Although this was not completely related to the research program, it made an impression on the girls and their experiences at the University came up in their end of the year interviews about the program.

Semester II

Re-establishing the Group

In September 2011, the continuing member of our research team met during our regular meeting time. Three of the girls did not return - Andrea graduated the previous semester; and two girls at Dean Academy transferred to the city's main high school for the 2011-2012 school year. Maya also graduated from the University that spring and was no longer working with the group. The girls who met the first meeting of the semester were Star, Felicia, Brittany, Krystal, and Destiny.

During the first meeting, I told them that I wanted them to participate in two presentations in order to share our research with the community and Cooperative Extension. They were energized by the idea of doing something with the semester's worth of work. After this discussion, Felicia told me that she recruited new girls for the group. Our group, which had been deemed by her "our Black girls' class," seemed to be smaller and she felt that we should add more people to the research team. All of the girls did not have the same excitement for new girls in the group and some spoke out against the prospect of adding new people. I suggested that we could have them come to the next session and I would give them an orientation about the research team and the expectations. I also reiterated that their attendance, did not mean that they would stay or be able to join the group. At the end of the conversation, they agreed to have them come to the next session.

Shifts in Membership

The next session the new girls that Felicia recruited for the research team joined us. There were four girls who were interested in joining the group: Ally, Shayla, Dion, GiGi. When the girls came in, they all sat around the table and chatted about the day. Since the new

girls had not met me previously, I started the session by introducing myself - giving them background information about where I am from, my educational background, where I attend graduate school, and briefly, the group's focus. Then I asked the girls to go around the table and introduce themselves, telling me their names, grade, which school they attend, and why they are interested in joining the group. One by one, they sat up straight, put on a "professional" tone, and told me who they were. Most of the girls laughed and mocked at the "proper" disposition of the new girls as they spoke to me. After the girls went around the table, GiGi, a new girl who was a senior at Franklin, asked me, "Why do you come to Ashland and work with Black girls?" Some of the girls who had worked with me last year thought she was being rude because of the tone she used, but I told them that it was a good and valid question for her to ask me. My response to her and the group was that I come to work with Black girls for several reasons:

The first reason I come here is because I am a graduate student and my doctoral research focuses on the experiences of Black girls; the second reason is that I was once a Black girl in school and understand that girls need support; the third reason is that I understand that there are many stereotypes about Black girls and women that cause people to perceive us in a negative way- a way that can limit opportunities, cloud our own perceptions of ourselves, and make interacting with certain teachers very difficult. I also stated, many people think that Black girls have a bad attitude, but I think that attitudes are just a reflection of the treatment that they receive from those on the other end. I feel that it is important for me as a Black woman to help you as young women begin to change some of those perceptions by teaching you skills that can prepare you to understand some issues that you face a little deeper. Honestly, that's why I'm here and that's why I do what I do.

While I was speaking I received verbal and non-verbal affirmations from the girls; a few of the girls even clapped at the end. My intent was not to give a speech and I was surprised by the handclapping, but I think that in that moment they were assured that I was there to help them and cared about them, not just the research.

After this section of the meeting the new girls, as well as those I had been working with previously, began to share some of their family and school experiences with me—explaining how hard it is to focus on school at times because of other responsibilities. Although this was my first group meeting with some of the girls, they shared very personal information with me and the group. Some girls cried while talking about parents or siblings in jail, having to take care of too many household responsibilities, and other sensitive topics. I felt as though the girls were using this as a safe space to vent their frustrations and concerns in their lives. After that initial meeting, all of the girls came back and brought in their parental consent and student assets forms to participate in the program.

After her first two sessions of observing the new girls in the group, Star decided that she did not want to continue participating on the research team. She stated that she was graduating in two months, did not like GiGi, and was annoyed with the other new girls. As a senior she decided to opt out of coming regularly; however, she would come sporadically to listen to what we were doing until she graduated. I was disappointed that Star decided to leave the group before she graduated, especially since GiGi was expelled from school by week four.

Continuing in Research Design

The Recap Sessions

The next two meetings were dedicated to an in-depth explanation and review of the research project. Although I initially started to explain the project, I stopped myself and asked some of the returning girls to explain the project. Felicia and Brittany volunteered to do this task. They opened up our flip chart from the previous semester and used it as a guide to explain how we came up with the question, method, sample, and other work we had done to

date. During these two meetings, the other veterans in the program chimed in to help Felicia and Brittney.

Training/Interviewing

After the girls explained the research project, they realized that we did not have a large sample. In fact, it was much smaller than what we set out to achieve on paper. Brittany suggested that we do more interviews and all of the girls agreed. They also stated that interviews need to be done more seriously because some of the girls admitted that initially they did not put forth their best effort when conducting the interviews; but because of the presentation they wanted to do a better job and interview more people for the project.

During October and November, the girls revisited the interviewing handouts that I made for them and began practicing interviewing. The new girls were paired with the girls that had done interviewing previously and began practicing their interviewing skills using the interview protocol. During these two sessions, they began to understand that the interview protocol was just an outline of what they should say to the interviewee and began to ask follow-up questions/statements like: “Why do you think that?” “Why do you feel that way?” “Give me an example?” “Tell me more.” During these sessions, the girls decided to interview the three new girls in the group for our sample and they chose four more students to interview. Girls were assigned a person to interview and were responsible for collecting their parental consent and assent forms. Unlike last semester, all of the girls wanted to interview. Each girl had the opportunity to interview a student and improvement in their interviewing skills was shown by the use of more probing techniques to get the information that they needed. This was the last thing we accomplished before Christmas break.

Semester III

The goal for semester three was to finish transcribing the interviews, complete data analysis, and create a presentation for the state's Diversity in Education conference that we were attending at the end of April. This was challenging because during this semester there were four weeks that I was unable to meet because of conferences and their spring break.

Transcribing Interviews

Since the interviews were completed last semester, the girls could start transcribing interviews. We used the same handout that was used the first semester and discussed how to effectively transcribe interviews. Although some of the girls transcribed interviews during the first semester of the program, they all needed a review of the process.

After two trainings, I told Brittany that I would send her an email with all of the audio recordings of interviews. Her responsibility was to give each of the girls their interviews so they could transcribe them. It took the girls two weeks to finish transcribing the interviews. After they were finished, I made copies of all the transcriptions, old and new, and created packets for the girls. The names of the interviewer and the interviewee were removed in preparation for data analysis.

Data Analysis

In order to give the girls an introduction to data analysis, I created a handout that described the definition of qualitative data analysis and its process. Since I was away at a conference and our analysis needed to be done, Dr. Lewis came the next meeting and helped the girls organized themes within the data through thematic analysis. Interviews were read, responses were sorted, and themes were created around the interview responses. Due to time constraints, only one interview question was analyzed completely. That question was: "In

comparison to other schools you have attended, do you feel that you can participate fully in class? Why or Why not?" The girls organized the stories told concerning "Why" and "Why not" into themes. These themes were teacher helpfulness (and the lack thereof), student disengagement; and teacher harassment. When I returned, the girls and Dr. Lewis explained to me the data analysis process.

Moving the program after-school

That same day, although I saw Destiny at school, she was missing from the group. As I walked out of the classroom, she approached me, visibly upset. When I asked her what was wrong she said that her teacher, Ms. Smith, talked to her mom and convinced her that she should not participate in the program because she was behind on her math. Although at the beginning of the semester, Ms. Smith expressed concern about Destiny's progress with her math assignments and we both agreed that she would be fine as long as she made up some of her work. Unfortunately she did not. We went and talked to Ms. Smith about her math grades and after learning that she was missing much of her assignments, I told Destiny that she should focus on catching up in math and that we would try to work something out so that she could participate after school.

The next session, I asked the girls on the research team if they would meet some days after school. I told them that Destiny could no longer miss class time, but wanted to continue participating in the group possibly after school. In our discussion, I told them that this could be an opportunity for them to get more school work done during the day (since it was close to the end of the semester) and that we could have more work time for the project. They all like the idea of moving some of the group session to after school time and were fine

compromising so that Destiny could still participate. Therefore, for a month we met on Thursdays from 2:45- 4:00pm.

After two sessions at our new time, Shayla stopped coming because she had a conflict after school. I also found that the girls were less focused after school and the tasks that were outlined did not get done as quickly. After a month, we moved back to our in-school time to make sure everything was completed in time for the conference. As we got closer to the conference date, Destiny was allowed to come to the meetings.

Diversity in Education Conference Prep

In order to prepare the presentation, we started by making an outline for the slides that would be presented. After the outline was created, the girls were asked to choose their section(s), and provide the information needed. All of the girls contributed to the slides that described both schools and divided the speaking parts equally. The girls also divided the themes that were found in the data and collaborated to find examples to substantiate the main bullet points in the outline. Felicia suggested that we have pictures of the classrooms in the presentation so that people could have a visual for our descriptions. I told them they could take pictures as long as there were no people in them. In regards to the actual presentation I suggested that the girls write down what they were going to say on an index card. They could write down whole sentences, or could write down main ideas to help them remember their parts. After the outline was finished and all of the parts were divided among the girls, I created the PowerPoint slides. I sent the presentation to them for final corrections and our presentation was complete. The girls had two practice sessions before the actual conference with me.

The girls also had to understand presenter dress decorum for the conference. The girls had never been to a conference and most of them had not given a formal presentation. I wanted them to dress professionally and appropriately for their particular body types. This proved to be more difficult than I thought because most of the images online for professional dress were for smaller body sizes. We spent an entire session and half of another session on what is appropriate for them to wear and what is not. After a few weeks, some of the girls still did not have anything to wear because they could not find anything cheap enough to purchase. They had economic constraints that made it difficult for them and their parents to buy clothes for the conference. In response, I decided to take them to the mall after school to help them find appropriate outfits for the presentation. By the end of that day, they had the appropriate attire for the conference.

Negative Feedback from Teachers before the Conference

The day before the conference, the girls decided that they would practice without me in the school's glass conference room. While this was a great show of initiative, it spawned a series of events that led to negative relationships and correspondence with two teachers in the school. The principal, Dr. Ibe called me and told me that there was an altercation that happened between the girls and one of the male teachers at Dean Academy.

During our conversation she said that she gave the girls permission to use the room to practice their presentation. When she walked by she saw that they were not practicing and went in to get them on task and offer feedback to the girls as they practiced. Soon after, Mr. Aster came in and wanted see their presentation. Mr. Aster is a teacher that has previously had negative relationships with many of the girls in the group. Therefore, many of the girls did not like him and did not want him to sit in on the presentation practice. The principal

stated that he started giving the girls feedback and told them that they needed to change how they were presenting the findings. According to the principal, Brittany got very upset, as well as did the other girls and they told him to get out of the room. She also said that they told him that this was “a group for Black people only” and he did not belong in the room. The principal said she canceled the practice session and sent them back to class.

I decided to text Brittany later on in the day to see what happened from her perspective. According to Brittany, they were practicing the presentation and the principal and Mr. Aster came in to watch them and give unsolicited feedback. She wrote, “When Mr. Aster started suggesting things the girls did not take to it well because they did not agree with his opinions.”

On our way to the conference the next day, I asked the girls as a group what happened. The girls said that they went in the conference room to practice by themselves, but the principal and Mr. Asher came in despite their protest. They told me that they became upset because although they asked Mr. Aster to leave, he would not. He also gave them unsolicited advice about making changes to some of their slides because it “made the school look bad.” When I asked them about the comment that he needed to get out because he was White, they said they told him that he needed to leave because they did not want anyone to see their presentation until they were completely ready. However, they also added that since this is an African American girl’s research group, he did not have the right to be in the room. Most of the girls said they felt disrespected because Dr. Ibe nor Mr. Asher respected their request to practice on their own. Felicia ended the conversation by saying, “All we wanted to do was practice one more time before the conference to make sure it was perfect, and they ruined it.”

The Diversity in Education Conference

During the presentation the girls did not seem nervous, remembered what they wrote down, and added some additional statements. At the end of the presentation there were lots of questions and comments about the girls and the research project. Overwhelmingly they had a positive response and received positive feedback from the educators who were at their session. During and after the conference the girls talked about feeling very proud of the work they accomplished over the year.

Student – Teacher Roundtable Discussion

When the girls came back from the conference they were met with hostility; especially Brittany and Destiny who were students at Dean Academy. Since it was close to the end of the semester, grades and extracurricular activity credits were beginning to be processed. Destiny was having trouble getting credit for our project and asked me to talk to her teacher. I thought this was odd because at the beginning of the program, we had an agreement that the girls would get credit for participating. When I went to talk to Destiny's teacher, Mrs. Smith, she told me that, "We don't give credit for teacher bashing, Destiny will have to do something else." I proceeded to explain to her that our program was not "teacher bashing" but was about understanding the process of research and understanding some of the issues that were happening within their school. I told her that if she wanted to schedule a meeting I would gladly help her understand the process and that whatever information she had gotten from Mr. Asher is not the full story.

Instead of waiting to have a meeting, I talked with the principal and requested to have the meeting that day with Mr. Asher and Mrs. Smith and requested the girls be present as well. The principal thought that it would be good to have everyone in the meeting and we met an hour later. In that meeting all people at the table had equal say and the teachers did not

like that the girls could talk to them as equals and they had to reciprocate respect. Mrs. Smith even called Destiny disrespectful for challenging her opinions about the group's research. Although all parties were heard, concerns and rationales were expressed, and the research process was explained in depth, the teachers still did not "like" the research. As the discussion came to stalemate with the teachers, in the end it was a valuable experience for the girls. They were able to talk to the teachers about how the research was conducted and were able to control their anger and frustrations in a way that allowed them to leave the meeting proud of themselves. In the end, I still had to talk to the teachers individually in order to get their credits for the class. A part of our agreement was that Brittany and Destiny had to write a paper about the research process.

Local Presentations

A few weeks later, Brittany and Destiny, presented to a small group affiliated with Cooperative Extension and the University. Later, they also presented to a parent group in their community. These two presentations and experiences gave Brittany and Destiny a chance to sharpen their public speaking skills and describe all of the findings and stories that were originally created by others. They also handled the many questions that were posed to them about the research and showed that they understood the process of research and the intricacies of the issue they researched.

Chapter 5

Methodology

Instrumental Case Study

Two research questions guide this study: 1) What developmental qualities, skills, and characteristics (assets) does youth participatory action research foster in African American adolescent girls? And 2) Using triple quandary theory as an analytic and interpretive framework, in what ways does this theory influence definitions and understanding of developmental assets? The youth participatory action research program described in the previous chapter is used as a context for positive youth development. An instrumental case study was employed to investigate the positive assets derived from participating in YPAR. Robert K. Yin (1993) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. A case study is considered instrumental, “if a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw generalizations; although the case is looked at in detail, the case itself is of secondary interest, playing a supportive role in order to facilitate an understanding of something else” (Stake, 2000, p.436). According to this definition, the case under investigation is the YPAR program. While the YPAR program, which includes the research question, data collection and analysis done by the girls, is a part of the study, it is of secondary interest. The main purpose of the study is to understand the assets that were fostered in African American girls as they participated in the YPAR process.

Data Collection

Participant observation, individual interviews with participants, and audio and video recordings of each meeting were used to explore assets. Participant observation is a sociological research method in which the researcher takes on a role in the social situation under observation (Macionis & Plummer, 2005). In this method, the researcher immerses herself in the social setting under study, with the aim of experiencing events in the manner in which the subjects under study also experience these events (Macionis & Plummer, 2005). I engaged in participant observation because of my role as the co-researcher and facilitator of the research project. I simultaneously was an active participant and observer of the process. Observations were done during each meeting and important events were briefly written in a notebook. Field notes of my observations were compiled after each meeting throughout the sixteen months of the YPAR project. Notes focused on three topics: observations about the workshop/meeting (comprehension, engagement), group process and dynamics (collaboration, helpfulness, conflict) and individual girls (level of participation in activities, behavior, engagement, comprehension). As an active participant in the research process, observations were a way to explicitly look for and categorize assets that were manifesting as they occurred.

To ensure the validity of my field notes and add data sources, each session was video and audio-recorded. The video and audio recordings assisted in seeing behaviors and hearing conversations that occurred during our group meetings. Field notes, video data, and audio data allowed me to code interactions and behaviors outside of the interview data that was collected. Assets may have been missed if I relied solely on the girls' reflections of their development or my own observations in field notes. The recordings also allowed me to observe any assets that were displayed through their interactions with me. Although Leedy & Ormrod (2005) state that the presence of audio and video recorders may make participants

uncomfortable, I did not find that to be an issue. Girls understood that the video and audio recordings would only be viewed and heard by me, and often said this aloud when certain things were said so there was no discomfort. In fact, girls alternated setting up the video camera at the beginning of each meeting.

Interviews

Interviews are a form of qualitative research in which individuals are asked about their experiences, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Interviews were done individually and were semi-structured using an interview protocol. I created the interview protocol based on my research questions, as well as previous conversations and observations within the group. Interview questions focused on the girls' assessments of what they learned in the program, their perceptions of working in a group with other African American girls, and skills and qualities that were refined or developed during the process (see Appendix A for interview protocol). Girls who were in the program from beginning to end were interviewed twice - once at the end of the first semester and also at the end of the program. Girls who graduated, moved to a different school, or were new additions to the group were only interviewed once. I used the same interview protocol each time in order to understand their perceptions and experiences, as well as highlight any changes from the first semester of the program to the last.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality and respect were essential to this study, especially because my participants/co-researchers were adolescent girls from the ages of 14-18. Parental consent and student assent forms were required for participation and students were not audio or video recorded without both forms. The parent consent form had a bolded section alerting them that

their child would be video-recorded during the research process, but that these recordings would not be for public use. Therefore, all audio and/or video recordings of the participants were stored on a password protected computer and were not shared with others. All individual interviews done with the girls were conducted in isolation, audio recorded, and also saved on a password protected computer. Lastly, journal entries that were done were placed in a file under their pseudonym. Girls could opt out of any questions they were asked and their participation in this study was explained as being voluntary.

In order to further protect the participants in this study, pseudonyms were used; however instead of me choosing them, I let the girls choose their own. The girls chose their own pseudonym because I believed it would assure them of the protection of their identity. Furthermore, since they were in the process of learning how to conduct research, this act of preserving anonymity was helpful in understanding privacy and confidentiality issues in research.

Validation Strategies

Qualitative researchers utilize various validation strategies to make their studies credible and rigorous (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility for this study was achieved using the validation strategies of triangulation. Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to investigate a research question for an enhanced confidence in the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Interviews, observations, and audio-visual data were used in this study to validate the data collected for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through thematic analysis. As a qualitative analytic method, it is used to “identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes

and describes the data set in rich detail and frequently goes further and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.79). Thematic analysis was done using both an inductive and deductive approach to coding. An “inductive” or “bottom-up” approach, uses the perspectives and words of research participants to inform codes, while a “deductive” or “top-down” approach, uses theory to derive codes (Lett, 1990). Through thematic analysis, I focused on the collective assets that were developed throughout the YPAR program, not the individual developmental trajectory of girls.

Interview data and observational data were both analyzed. Since some girls were interviewed once and others twice, interview data for girls with two interviews were combined. Interview data that was collected after the first semester was compared to interview data from the final, third semester; any changes between these data collection points was noted. During analysis, observational data was also coded by semester. Since notes were already categorized into three topics - observations about the workshop/meeting (comprehension, engagement), group process and dynamics (collaboration, helpfulness, conflict) and individual girls (level of participation in activities, behavior, engagement, comprehension) - I used this to guide my analysis.

Inductive Coding

Analysis started with an “inductive” or “bottom-up” approach, which uses the perspectives and words of research participants to inform codes (Lett, 1990). Individual interview transcripts, field notes, video and audio data were analyzed and then compared to identify themes. Audio and video data themes were based on actions, behaviors, and conversations that occurred during group work. Definitions were created for these themes that are informed by the data. Themes were then categorized as developed, displayed, or

cultivated based on verbal assertions made by the girls. Subsequently, a table was created to display assets, definitions, and examples of each theme from the data.

Table 2 <i>Inductive Coding</i>		
Theme	Definitions for coding	Example
Respect	Consideration of others	Written as the first group rule; asserted not to talk about other girls and telling them it's rude; learned to speak one at a time and not talk over each other
Positive Black identity/Racial Pride	Positive feelings about being African American and recognition of diversity in Black girls	Had racial pride, appreciated of the diversity of Black people and different ways of being
Positive Peer Relationships	Girls displaying friendship, relating to each other	Forged new friendships and closer bonds with current friends in the group; negative feelings or fear of girls in the group progressively diminished; described the group as "family," showed that they cared for each other
Positive connection and perceptions of adults	Positive view and bonds with adults	Asked me to advocate for them when they needed help in school matters; understood that there are adults who want to help them and will listen to what they have to say; freely talked to me about their personal lives
Trust	Girls sharing their personal lives with those in the group; depending/relying on others	Told personal and familial stories; trusted others to do their part of the project; trusted my confidentiality in personal matters
Emotional Regulation	The ability to manage anger/frustration within themselves and	Left the situation until they were calm or separated themselves when there was

	help others do the same	conflict; were able to work with girls who they may have previously had conflict, even the day before; exhibited patience in working with others that were off task
Open-mindedness	Receptive to new ideas; the ability to see the perspective of others	Listened to suggestions from me and other girls in the group; valued and used the ideas of others during research design and analysis; understood that there are multiple perspectives on their research topic; built ideas on the comments and perspectives of others
Empowerment	Belief in ones abilities despite obstacles	Voiced their opinions, even if they were shy; spoke during presentations as the authority on their research; led group discussions; read aloud
Initiative	Taking and exhibiting responsibility	Volunteered to do various tasks without prompting from me; started organizing the group even if I was late; recruited others to be in the group second semester
Competence in Research skills	Understanding social science research	believed that <u>their</u> observations can be substantiated through research; recognized limitations but believed they had a solid research project and defended it accordingly; ability to think critically about issues in the school

Deductive Coding

Data was also analyzed deductively. According to Lett (1990), deductive analysis takes an existing theory or conceptual framework and tests if it applies to a new setting or population. Therefore, data was coded using the standard definitions of each of the Five C's as given by Lerner et al., 2004, 2005 and Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003. Then, each of the coded assets derived from inductive coding were compared to the Five C's to see if there was overlap.

Table 3 <i>Deductive Coding</i>		
Theme	Definition	Inductive codes that speak to this asset
Confidence	internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy	Empowerment
Competence <i>Cognitive</i>	a positive view of one's actions in regards to knowledge construction, task completion, problem solving, and decision making	
Competence <i>Social</i>	a positive view of one's actions in regards to interpersonal skills	Emotional regulation, Open-mindedness
Connection	the positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and their peers, family, schools, and communities in which both parties contribute to the relationship	Positive peer relationships, positive perceptions and relationships with adults, trust
Character	respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, morality, and integrity	
Caring	a sense of sympathy and empathy for others	

Examining the Five C's, three of the C's overlapped with most of the previously coded assets. Those that were not applicable to the Five C's were initiative, respect, and positive Black identity. Initiative, which is discussed in the PYD literature separately, was not categorized as a C. While respect could be deemed as showing *Character*, the way it is displayed in this group is less of a moral prerogative and more of a bi-directional agreement. Character was also not included because I was left with questions concerning whose standard of correct behavior and cultural rules will evaluate their behaviors. I also realized through analysis that the culture, standards of behavior, and rules of the group differed in some ways from the institutional culture of school (girls had equal standing as adults; they could use language in the group that the school deemed unacceptable; collaboration was encouraged). A positive Black identity was also not categorized into a C because pride in a racial/ethnic identity is not a part of the mainstream understanding of PYD. Behaviors, such as empathy, that could have been coded as *Caring* were actually more reflective of *Connection*, especially in regards to peer group connection. After analysis was completed, there were eight assets: confidence, cognitive competence, social competence, competence in research skills, peer and adult connection, respect, positive Black identity, and initiative.

These eight assets were then categorized as displayed, cultivated, or developed during the course of the program. *Displayed* assets are skills that were already present in the girls but needed a positive context like our YPAR program for them to be exhibited. *Cultivated* assets are skills and traits displayed or utilized by the girls, which were improved by education, training, and practice. *Developed* assets are assets described by the girls during interviews and group discussions as skills and competencies that they did not have previously,

but were developed through this program. I have made these distinctions in order to accurately describe assets exhibited through this process.

Analysis through Triple Quandary Theory

The last step in the analysis process was to use triple quandary theory to interpret the eight assets found inductively and deductively. As I examined the data, mainstream values that were evident were, *the elevation of the cognitive over the affective, emotional containment*, and the *objectification and bureaucratization of human relationships and interactions*. These values were particularly salient for cognitive competence, social competence, and competence in research. Afro-cultural realm values that were present in the data were *communalism, orality, and affect*. Similarly, three out of the four minority realm values, *racial pride, racial identification, and impression management*, were demonstrated. These values were important when examining positive Black identity and respect. There were also some assets that were influenced by more than one realm; they were *connection, confidence, and positive Black identity*. *Initiative* was not categorized into any of the three realms.

Chapter 6

The Five C's through Three Realms of Experience

Through the use of instrumental case study design, the purpose of this research was to ascertain what assets were fostered as African American adolescent girls participate in a school-based youth participatory action research program. Assets that were identified in the data were confidence, cognitive competence, social competence, competence in research skills, peer and adult connection, respect, positive Black identity, and initiative. In the following chapter, each asset is discussed in detail. Furthermore, the cultural values that correspond with the mainstream, minority, and Afro-cultural realms of triple quandary theory are also discussed for each asset.

Connection

Connection is defined in the PYD literature as “the positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges, in which both parties contribute to the relationship, between the individual and their peers, family, schools, and communities” (Lerner, 2005, p.19). Through youth participatory action research, the girls developed and displayed strong bi-directional relationships within the group and with myself, the adult facilitator. These connections were displayed because of the collaborative nature of YPAR and were developed because of the trusting relationships that matured over time. In the following section, I will first talk about positive peer relationships. Second, I will talk about my relationship with the girls and the positive shift in perceptions of other adults.

Positive Peer Relationships

Positive peer relationships were developed and displayed during the YPAR program. The relationships within the group were developed because of the collaborative nature of YPAR and the realization that they share similar marginalizing experiences in the school environment. Positive peer relationships are explored by using mainstream, minority and Afro-cultural values to frame connection.

Connection as a part of YPAR methodology

The methodological approach of YPAR was the foundation for positive relationships to flourish. Cahill (2004) states that the process of YPAR is a “*collective approach* [italics added] to research in which the participants look critically at their social and environmental contexts and develop proposals to address the problems raised by the research” (p.275). The success of a YPAR program hinges on the collaborative contributions of youth to achieve a collective goal (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Our collective goal was to formulate a research project and implement it as a group - starting with the research question and progressing until we created a presentation for the state’s Diversity in Education conference. In order to complete the project, small group and partner work was done extensively. Girls worked with someone different every week so they could get to know others in the group. While some of the girls in the group were friends previously, there were others who were not. Although there were difficult interactions at times, Destiny attests to the way relationships in the group developed: “We have grown together like a family. When we did the whole research and interviewing thing... and we were there for each other. Sometimes we got into arguments but after a while it’s like I love these people, we did this thing together, and we’re cool.” The

family metaphor and sense of community is what characterizes this group's connection.

When viewed through the Afro-cultural and minority realm, it is more than just a positive bi-directional relationship - connection occurs because of a shared identity and cultural norms.

Connection through shared identity

Connection because of shared race and gender identity was an important factor in building positive, trusting relationships within the group. Krystal stated, "This group was fun because we all could relate in some kind of way and we could be ourselves around each other...we don't have to act different." When I asked her what she meant her statement, "we don't have to act different" she said, "Like, if we had other races in the group we couldn't act or talk the same... we couldn't speak our minds." Brittany also felt similarly about the relationships in the group, "We were able to be comfortable around each other which made the group THAT much better. If you're uncomfortable around a bunch of people you're just not there." Because the girls live within a minority realm of experience, they saw the YPAR group as an exclusive space where they could be the majority. In fact, they called it, "Our Black girl's class" and would enact in-group partiality (Tajfel, 1970) against those who did not hold the same race and gender in the space. Discussion in this space, even during our "down time," was about racial issues... and their language style often reflected their anger and frustration. The girls also discussed difficult issues concerning gender, as well as the inequality that they perceived in their school and communities. For example, during the first semester of the project, Felicia came into our meeting very upset. There was an altercation earlier that day between her and a White male student, where an argument escalated to him yelling and throwing a chair at her. She seemed livid as she talked about how he threw the

chair at her, but even more upset that his punishment was not school suspension, but only to leave the classroom. She said, “If I threw a chair at somebody, I would have got suspended.” Many of the girls verbally agreed that she would have been suspended and Star stated, “This type of stuff happens all the time, they (White students) don’t get in trouble the same way we do.” Felicia, stated, “Then the principal had the nerve to say, ‘Well I was told that he only threw the chair in your direction, not at you.’ ARE YOU SERIOUS!” Andrea also chimed in and said, “If you were White and the guy was a Black male he would have gotten suspended and would probably be going up for expulsion.” All of the girls shook their heads and verbally agreed with Andrea’s statement. Subsequently, the girls spent the rest of our meeting sharing incidences they had witnessed or experienced that demonstrated inequity in discipline practices in school. The ability to share these experiences and not have them dismissed helped girls to feel safe in sharing their thoughts.

When examining the Afro-cultural value of communalism the YPAR project was a supportive Black female space. According to Cannon (1996), African American female’s connections have served as “safe sanctuaries” from the trauma of racism and oppression. These “sanctuaries” are also talked about as *homespace* by bell hooks. Bell hooks (1990) writes:

Historically African American people believed that the construction of *homespace*, however fragile and tenuous, had a radical political dimension... it was about the construction of safe space where Black people could affirm one another and by so doing begin....healing the wounds inflicted by racist domination. (42)

Accordingly, the YPAR program could be considered a *homespace* within the school that provided relief from dominant oppression and marginalization. In essence, it was a space that recognized their experiences as African Americans in a White majority context; a space where

African American girls could come together and affirm each other's humanity. This is exemplified in Ally's comment about the group: "Honestly, I think all of us got closer during the research. The problems we had, we told each other and were honest with everybody." Ally, like many of the other girls who participated in the group, believed she could share her lived experiences with others who could empathize. The girls expressed that their ability to be comfortable around each other and honestly speak about their experiences and feelings was central to their positive time in the group and to relationship building. Both the minority and Afro-cultural realm values illuminate the ways that our YPAR program became a safe space to discuss their lived experiences. Connection was cultivated because the girls did not have to worry about impression management. They could be more open and honest about who they are and things they experienced. The value the girls placed on this in the group is in line with the feminist scholarship on girls' development which asserts that girls' socialization is "grounded in mutuality, care, and connection" (Stevens, 2002, p.16).

In the Afro-cultural realm, caring and empathy can be interpreted through a communal understanding of "if it happens to you, it happens to us." This is based in the African philosophical understanding of self, "I am, because we are" (Imbo, 1998) which is a communal understanding of personhood. In the YPAR program, caring was displayed through a communal understanding of what it means to care. This was best exhibited through the girls engaging in storytelling.

Connection through Storytelling

Storytelling speaks to the Afro-cultural value of orality and communalism. The girls in the YPAR program opened their lives to each other to share and connect through oral

storytelling. When looking at storytelling and oral forms of communication in the Afro-cultural tradition, call-and-response is prevalent. In Sub-Saharan African cultures, call and response is a pattern of democratic participation—in public gatherings to discuss civic affairs, as well as in musical traditions (Sale, 1992). This tradition was brought to America and has been transmitted over the centuries in various forms of cultural expression (Sale, 1992). In connection to this tradition, caring is displayed through bi-directional caring. The sharer enlists the sympathy of girls through the telling of her story, and in turn, the group gives an empathetic response.

Storytelling was also done to help other girls in the group realize that they were not alone in their experiences. The girls talked about issues they had concerning responsibilities in their families that were overwhelming, family members in jail, things that happened over the weekend, and issues with teachers. When girls told difficult stories about their experiences in school and outside of school, girls listened and offered sympathy, but also often responded by saying, “I know how you feel because...(similar story).”

Trust was essential to the girls sharing stories in the group. The value of trust delves deeper into how positive bonds form, especially in the minority realm. Trust through the lens of the minority realm, is not given, but earned. Due to negative experiences with peers and adults, often in school settings, bonds are truly formed when trust is involved.

Connection through Trust

Trust was an asset identified in the data and defined by girls sharing their personal lives with those in the group and depending and relying on others. Although I discussed earlier that the response to storytelling is a form of caring, storytelling is also a display of trust. At the

beginning of every meeting, the girls would talk about something going on in their lives. While these conversations often prolonged our start, I began to realize that sharing stories about their lives was important to building trusting relationships.

When the girls reflected about their experiences, they all talked about how they developed trusting relationships with the other girls in the group. Nia stated, “I don’t usually trust people and tell about my life, but in this group I felt like it was ok.” Ally also felt similarly about the culture of the group, “We are close and can tell each other what’s going on in our classes.” The trust level within this group is an example of how girls formed bonds with one another and established positive peer relationships.

Another way that trust was established was through the ability to depend on others and trusting in the abilities of others. This is exemplified as Destiny reflected on the program:

I learned in this group that I can depend on people. Usually I’m a self-working person... If I don’t trust you with it, I won’t ask you. Even if I’m doing a group project with this other person and we have to do three parts, then I’ll be like, I’ll do these two parts and you can do that part. I don’t want someone to mess it up. I’m learning to trust people more with stuff. We could trust each other to do our part so that it could all come together at the end.

Destiny, like many of the other girls in the group, felt that they could trust others to do their part in the research. There was an expectation in the group that everyone would do their part; if girls did not do their part there were social consequences, like girls talking about them negatively for not meeting that expectation until that expectation was met. Although this may not appear to be an example of positive peer relationships, it was a way that girls established the group norm of trust as it related to finishing the research project.

Summary

Positive peer relationships were one level of connection displayed and cultivated during the YPAR program. It was shown because of the methodological process of YPAR, shared identity, storytelling, and trust. The development of positive relationships with adults involves similar elements. The YPAR facilitator's approach to working with youth is focused on building trusting and respectful relationships. Since I have the same gender and racial identity as the girls in the program, my identity also informed the ways relationships were established and maintained.

Positive Relationships with Adults

As a facilitator, research partner, and participant observer I formed a relationship with the girls that transcended the title of “teacher” that they first assigned to me. Although I do share the same race and gender as my participants, I am older, from a different region of the country, and was originally seen as “other” by the girls because of my speech patterns and university status. Overtime, however, I was progressively viewed and treated as an advocate, role model, and a confidant.

Partnership with a trusted adult

As the adult partner, I facilitated group discussions, maintained the cohesion of the group, and engaged in scaffold learning processes to teach research skills. This level of involvement was important to the progress and success of the program. Although YPAR is often conceptualized as more organic and led by the participants, Yang (2008) states that it is a fallacy to think that adults can engage youth in a research process where there are no teachers (Rodriguez & Brown, 2008). In fact, the YPAR literature suggests that both students and university partners are teachers. Therefore, while I was initially regarded as the “teacher of the class,” I did not replicate the authoritarian interactions that are typical of adult/youth

interactions in school settings. Instead, I chose to intentionally engage in the practice of power-sharing. Power was shared in the form of group facilitation by asking some of the girls to take the lead and trusting them to be responsible for certain tasks and materials. Even in our seating arrangements, there was a visual form of power-sharing; we were all seated at a table that was the shape of an octagon. According to Rodriguez & Brown (2008), power-sharing is one of the key elements in participatory approaches and “is particularly vital to working with youth who are subordinate in multiple realms of their lives” (28).

As a researcher who shared the race and gender of her co-researchers, it was important that I did not replicate practices that marginalized the girls. Therefore, I made sure that girls in this context were treated as valuable, knowledgeable, and intelligent. I encouraged all girls to participate in discussions, making sure to ask girls who were shy what their opinions were so that their voices would be heard. The girls responded positively to this type of engagement and as time went on, began to participate more. It was clear that Felicia observed the level of participation by everyone in the group by stating, “This program really brought some girls out of their shells. Some girls that NEVER talk, talked in here.” The relationships developed in this program allowed girls that were uncomfortable in other spaces to be comfortable in our program and talk about certain issues that concerned them.

The respect and confidence that I had in their abilities also shaped how they formed bonds with me. During the three semesters that I worked with the girls, they often sought out my help when there were issues at school. Due to my identity and status as a doctoral student, they saw me as a sympathetic adult with power, who could advocate on their behalf in school matters. An example of this was discussed in Chapter Four concerning Destiny and her teacher, Ms. Smith. During the third semester, Ms. Smith told Destiny that she could no

longer participate in the program because her math assignments were not being completed. Upset and feeling that the decision was unjust, she asked me to talk with Ms. Smith to see if I could help change her perception. She believed that if we both made an appeal it would make a difference. Although I subsequently told her that she needed to focus on her math (she was close to failing), I offered to talk to the girls about moving the meetings to after school so she could continue to participate; she saw this as a great compromise.

Another instance of advocacy was when Felicia asked for me to go with her to the school counselor so she could change her math class. Felicia had recently started a new math class but to her, much of the material looked the same. She thought that she was in the wrong math class and wanted to ask the counselor to place her in a different class. I went with her and the three of us talked about her current class. We found out that she was in the correct math class with some review at the beginning. In a sigh of relief, Felicia left the meeting thanking me for coming with her to discuss this issue. This interaction showed me that she trusted me to help her talk to another adult about a potential mistake in her curriculum. In her exit interview she stated, “there are some people in this world that are here to make you mad and push you to the point where you want to explode, but then, there are some people here in the world to help us, like you.” My relationships with the girls gradually surpassed the identity of a group facilitator and research partner, to a confidant and ally. I did not see this level of connection with other adults in the school, however, I did observe a shift in their perceptions of adults during and after their presentation at the state educational conference.

Positive shifts in perceptions of adults

After the girls completed their presentation they talked extensively about the adults in the room. As we made our way to the luncheon, adults made positive comments on their presentation and the girls in turn thanked them for their support. Although the girls had limited interactions with these adults, the positive response helped them realize that there are adults who are supportive and listen to the ideas of youth. The Afro-cultural value of *affect*, can help explain how the girls had a positive regard for adult educators at the state education conference with such limited interaction. Affect is a value that is defined by the ability to decipher and feel the emotional sincerity of others. Through affect the girls felt that many of the educators they interacted with at the education conference were caring, supportive adults. Because they felt a sincere, positive response from adults through affect, every girl felt a greater sense of confidence in themselves, their ability to do research, and present their findings.

In discussions after the conference, comments concerning their interactions with adults in that context were positive. They said, “I felt like they (adults) were actually listening to us and what we had to say,” “I felt like a super star...everyone telling us how well we did and how brave we are for speaking up.” “I never thought that adults like THAT would listen to us;” “Yeah and I liked that Black lady who sat in the front. She told us that she was proud of us and that we did excellent. I felt so special.”

Dion in particular spoke very candidly about her perceptions of some adults in the audience and the ways they shifted: “Y’all remember that White lady who was sitting in the front? I thought she would be the main one against us (the other girls shook their heads in agreement). But she was really the main one for us. Especially when that other White lady tried to say we were wrong. She defended us.” Krystal chimed in stating, “Yeah, she told her

she need to go to cultural training... I was laughing’.” Through laughter, Felicia said, “yeah I was shocked too.” In this scenario, there was a teacher in the audience that was being critical of the girls’ findings regarding students’ perception of differential treatment. As soon as the woman hinted that the finding was biased, other adults stepped in to defend and substantiate the girls’ claims. Particularly important was that the adults who challenged the teacher were other White educators. During our focus group the girls talked extensively about being surprised that there were White adults who would support their research and would even defend them against other White people. Their strained relationships with some of the teachers in the school and the lack of positive relationships with other White people in their daily lives/communities, made this experience an important step towards interrogating some of their own assumption and biases concerning White adults. It also gave an example of other adult allies and advocates who will listen to the voices of youth and champion justice. The girls left this conference aware that there were adults allies and that they were doing something important and valid to adults. While this positive feeling about adults was tainted by the contemptuous meeting with the Ms. Smith, Mr. Asher, and Dr. Ibe (outlined in Chapter Four), all of the girls stated in their interviews that their experiences in the program showed them that there are adults who care.

Summary

Connection was exemplified through the collaborative nature of YPAR, shared identity, storytelling, trust, a supportive adult partner, and positive interactions with educators outside of their school. Connection reflected values from all three realms in the triple quandary framework. Mainstream norms regarding the value of relationships based on what someone get obtain from another were seen with peers and with me, the adult facilitator. Connection

through minority realm cultural values, showed that bonds were formed more out of a shared marginalizing experiences and identity; not necessarily bi-directional, reciprocal relationships or social gain. Similarly, communalism which is an Afro-cultural realm value, expresses the idea that race and gender identity creates an interdependence. This asserts that regardless of the nature of the relationship, the group is connected and the strength and support that comes to the individual is connected to the strength and support within the collective group.

Positive Black Identity

A positive Black identity was an asset that was cultivated in the program. The minority realm values of racial pride and identification with their racial identity reflects the positive regard that the girls cultivated towards their race and gender. Creating YPAR as a program specifically for African American girls caused their perceptions of themselves and others who share their race and gender to positively change. This was important because of the initial negative perceptions that many of the girls had about other African American girls and women.

When talking to the majority of the girls in the group, they expressed low and even negative expectations about working with African American girls in the program. At the end of our first semester, Brittany talked about her assessment of the group the first day of our meeting. She stated, “we Black, we loud, we have attitudes, we don’t get along, and we argue all the time and we are ALL gonna be in one group?” Instead of associating these traits to individuals, she generalized those traits to all African American girls. Star similarly talked about her perceptions of being in the group before we started, but also told me how it shifted as she participated in the program. “I thought it was going to be hard. A group of girls... a group of Black girls? With different thoughts, you would of thought a lot of drama would

have been going on in our meetings but it wasn't... We worked together well.” One of the interview questions specifically asked about their feelings regarding working in a group with only African American girls. Most of them talked about their initial perceptions as a potentially negative experience because African American girls are “full of drama,” “loud,” and “always arguing.” These negative perceptions could be based in their experiences with other girls, but they are often grounded in mainstream stereotypes about African American womanhood. There are many stereotypes about African American females but the one that is described by the girls is that of the Sapphire.

The Sapphire caricature/stereotype portrays Black women as rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing (Jewell, 1993). This characterization was popularized during the Jim Crow era by the loud and insulting character created by White men, named Sapphire Stevens on the *Amos n' Andy* show (Jewell, 1993). The original character was played by a White male, but later when it became a television show, African American actors were used.

In the 21st century, the Sapphire has evolved into the stock character of the angry Black woman. This stereotype is probably the most popular characterization of Black women today. This woman is always yelling, starting fights, and insulting men. Because of these stereotypes, African American girls, as well as those around them, are socialized to believe that Black womanhood is depicted and enacted in this negative way. These stereotypes can have a negative impact on African American girls' self-worth. Fortunately, having positive experiences within programs like YPAR can show girls that communication, collaboration, and positive connection can exist within Black girl space.

The relationships that were fostered during YPAR were essential to diminishing some of the negative stereotypes and even fear of some girls in the group. Destiny talked very candidly about how she felt about some of the girls before coming to the group:

Brittany used to scare me. Felicia used to scare me. Krystal used to scare me. Those three mainly used to scare me a lot and then we got into this classroom and I saw that they were actually nice people. Now Brittany and I are calling each other every day and texting each other and she'll come to my house and I'll go to her house. I see Krystal around the block and she'll be like, what's up. I texted Felicia this morning.... It's cool.

Before the YPAR program, Destiny said she did not have any Black females as friends in her school. She told me that she appreciated having the opportunity to work in a group of African American girls. Without the opportunity to participate in this program, Destiny could have continued to hold negative assumptions about African American girls in the school and missed the positive traits that her peers possess.

Understanding Difference

Although the participants in this program shared the same race and gender, and knew of each other previously, respecting difference was described as something that was developed through their participation. After her first semester in the program Krystal stated, "I realize now that we are all different people, who come from different backgrounds, but we can still work together." Destiny also commented on her appreciation for diversity in the group, "I didn't know that we were so different! I mean we all grew up in the same city but we are not the same, we don't all listen to rap, we like different stuff, I thought we were all the same but we are not."

Brittany also talked about her new found respect for different people: "I learned not to judge a book by its cover...even though a person may seem to be one way, if you get the chance to know them they are always going to be different...I liked that I got a chance to be

able to talk to people and interact with people even though they are completely different from me.” Brittany related this to the girls in the group but also talked about how she initially perceived me: “When I first met you I thought you were a preppy, perfect little Black girl and was stuck up and wouldn’t understand anything about us but that’s not who you are... you are different from us but you’re still cool; sometimes different is good.” She also saw herself as different. She states, “I can be loud sometimes ‘cause I’m a loud person, but I’m not the typical Black girl, I learned that I’m different.” Brittany did not think of herself as a “typical Black girl” because she realized that she is not the stereotype; she sees herself in more complex ways.

The girls’ respect and acknowledgment of difference in an all-Black context is important. It moves them from thinking about themselves in mainstream pejorative definitions of Blackness, to a more positive, heterogeneous understanding of themselves - capable of many different trajectories. It also served to counter stereotypes about themselves and quell a disassociation from Black identity that can occur due to negative and stereotypical perceptions of their own racial/ethnic identity. Through understanding the diversity and complexity of African American girls, they can begin to have the confidence to challenge negative over-generalizations and explore an identity that is more complex than the negative traits assigned to them in the mainstream realm.

Summary

African American girls cultivated a positive black identity while in this program. Successfully working together to complete their research project helped them understand that African American girls can work together in a positive way. It also helped them understand that although they are similar in their outward appearance concerning race and gender, they

listen to more than rap/hip hop, are interested in a wide range of things, and are not the stereotypes that are pervasive in the mainstream realm. The minority realm is conceptualized as the mirror of the mainstream. One exist because of the other. Racial pride and identification are all minority realm values that influenced the way that positive black identity was cultivated in the YPAR program. The program served as a positive space that recognized the minority realm experience and cultivated pride outside of the mainstream conceptualization African American girls.

Confidence

Confidence was an asset that was cultivated. It is defined in the PYD literature as the internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy. Self-worth is directly connected to the ways that the girls perceive their worth as people (Belgrave, 2009). Self-efficacy determines the beliefs a person holds regarding his or her power to affect situations, thus strongly influencing both the power a person actually has to face challenges competently and the choices a person is most likely to make (Belgrave, 2009). Cultivating this asset is important for African American girls who live simultaneously in the mainstream and minority realm. Although research shows that African American girls have higher self-esteem than girls in other ethnic groups (Belgrave et al., 2004; Belgrave, 2009; Green & Way, 2005), one's self-worth and self-efficacy are often challenged when functioning in the mainstream and minority realm.

I observed in the data that participation in the YPAR program had a positive affect the cultivation of a positive sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. It is important to note that the girls in this group were already confident in various domains. Research done by Corneille & Belgrave (2007) states that in categorizes like appearance, problem solving, athletic

achievements, getting along with others, and often academic achievement African American girls score high. However, the girls in the program lacked confidence in certain areas related to scholastic and intellectual domains because adults have contributed to a diminished sense of efficacy. This was evident in their initial research question, “Why do White people question the intelligence of Black people.” Therefore as the adult leader, it was important for me to verbalize and seek opportunities to demonstrate to them that they are intelligent, their voices matter, and that they are important members of their schools, communities, and society. This act also helped them feel empowered to do their research.

Confidence was also shown in their sense of empowerment, or socio-political confidence. This includes confidence within individuals, but also the collective group’s confidence in their ability to foster positive change. The Afro-cultural value of communalism influences confidence in a way that acknowledges that there is a bi-directional relationship between the confidence of the individual and that of the collective. This was evident through the changes I observed from the second semester to the last day of the program. The girls who participated in the program the first semester were more confident than the girls who started the second semester. The girls in the first semester helped boost the confidence level of the new girls cause the level of volunteering, voice within meetings, and faith in their research skills and data to increase as the semesters progressed.

Voicing Opinions

Through participating in this program, the girls garnered more confidence in their own voices. Many of the girls were comfortable voicing their opinions in a group setting, but others were not. When interviewed, girls who described themselves as shy said this was the most they had talked or read aloud in a group. As an Afro-cultural value, orality was an

important value that was not being utilized. It was present, but was silenced. As I listened to the audio recordings of a group meeting, Keisha talked about how she did not talk in class because of negative past experiences in classroom settings. She shared that she never raised her hand in class, even when she needed help, because she did not want to be made fun of or be seen as stupid. Her experiences in class were shared by other girls in the group. Many of them talked about how they do not talk to teachers or ask for help. It can be assumed that their experiences in the mainstream realm as it relates to the value of self-contained individualism (the values of standing on your own two feet without help from others) silenced their voices. The fear of being regarded as “stupid” was central to why our research question was initially, “Why do White people (teachers) question the intelligence of Black people (students).” Their research question spoke to the ways they were functioning in the minority realm and the dissonance between the mainstream realm and Afro-cultural realm values. This issue was also present when I asked them to read things aloud to the group.

Public Reading

As described in Chapter Four, each meeting was started by reading our “Woman of the Day.” We read the bios of these women in order to set the tone for the social justice work in which we were engaged. However, while orality (oral performance) is a value in the Afro-cultural realm and was displayed through storytelling, the girls had a difficult time enacting this value as it relates to reading aloud pre-written text. Initially, most of the girls did not like to read aloud and protested the first half of the first two semesters anytime I asked them to read to the group. They would say things like, “I can’t read” or “I don’t want to read out loud.” I would patiently wait, ask them if they were done protesting, and then ask again for a volunteer. Eventually, someone would volunteer, but would ask another girl to share the

reading responsibility with her so they could read small parts. As each semester progressed, I saw the girls in the group build confidence in their reading and in turn, readily volunteer to read and distribute reading responsibilities amongst the group. In a way, they were forced to build confidence in that domain because reading aloud was a part of our daily routine in the group.

When seeking to understand why they did not want to read, I realized that there was a fear of sounding stupid or bringing attention to the fact that they did not know how to pronounce certain words. To prevent embarrassment, they did not want to read aloud. At the beginning of the program, when they came to a word they did not know how to pronounce, they would first laugh and then say, “Someone else needs to read...I don’t want to read anymore.” Instead of working through the pronunciation of the word they would easily give up. Fortunately, the social fear of being regarded as unintelligent in the group diminished significantly over time. I attribute this to the behaviors and responses of the girls when others read. Instead of people laughing at mispronunciations they began to help each other. My response to their reading was also important. They would often ask me how to pronounce a word because they knew I would help them, without negatively evaluating their intelligence. The cultivation of confidence not only helped them voice their opinions and read aloud, but it also helped them understand that they were able to implement a research project. This was evident as they took leadership roles to implement tasks that were essential to completing the research and preparing their presentation for the conference.

Summary

Many of the girls were uncomfortable reading aloud and engaging in public speaking when they first started in the program; however, they progressively became more confident

about their own abilities, speaking, and reading. When looking at confidence through triple quandary theory, the Afro-cultural value of communalism helps illuminate that confidence is not just internal self-worth, but it attach to the worth of one's social group/identity. When a group like the YPAR program is developed, it uplifts the status of the social/identity group, raising collective and individual confidence. Due to the minority realm norms of impression management the girls had silenced their voices in fear of being seen as unintelligent.

However, this group was a space to make mistakes without the fear of it being attached to their identities and in turn, confidence was cultivated.

Initiative

As they cultivated confidence they were able to display initiative. Initiative was an asset that was displayed through girls exhibiting responsibility and taking action based on their own assessments. Larson (2000) defines initiative as “the ability to be motivated from within to direct attention and effort toward a challenging goal” (p. 170). Accordingly, there are three requirements for initiative: 1) intrinsic motivation, wanting to do an activity and being engaged; 2) converted engagement, not just doing an activity, but internalizing the real life challenges and rules in order to be successful; and 3) a temporal arc of effort directed towards a goal, regardless of setbacks, re-evaluations, and adjustment of strategies (Larson, 2000). Using Larson's (2000) definition, the YPAR program created an avenue for girls to show initiative. As the girls progressed through the program, they became increasingly motivated to do the research, volunteered to do various tasks without prompting from me, and did things on their own that they saw needed to be done.

As a group, the girls were allowed the space to display initiative every time we met. Every day that I came to their school, the girls would be walking out of their classes and

gathering materials needed for our meeting. They would organize the tables and chairs, Destiny would set up the tripod for the video camera, and Felicia would get the group binders from the principal's office. Destiny and Felicia were only asked once to help me with these tasks and from that day forward, they saw it as their responsibility.

Even if I was late, by the second half of the first semester, I would walk in to the room and see the girls sitting around the table, with their program binders, talking quietly. This behavior was shocking for some of the teachers in the school. On a day I was late, one of the teachers told me she went into the room to tell the girls to go back to class, but decided to let them stay because they looked so organized with their materials, waiting for me. This image was important for the teacher to see because she assumed that she would be walking into a rowdy room because there was no adult supervision, but was proven wrong.

Although initiative was displayed throughout the process, during the final semester, initiative was unequivocal as the girls finished sections of the project they knew needed to be done. For example, after the second set of interviews were done, the girls knew the next step in the process was transcription. When I came back a week later, all of the interviews were transcribed, without names, just initials, like I taught them during the first round. I was told that the girls who were in the program the first semester taught the new girls how to transcribe the interviews while I was away and divided the interviews among themselves to complete by our next meeting. Felicia told me that she decided on a deadline for everyone to be finished. This level of initiative shows that they were dedicated to getting things done and that they understood the data collection process enough to teach others and carry it out without my help.

Another example of initiative comes from an Afro-cultural value found in communalism called, collective work and responsibility. Collective work and responsibility is defined as, “the belief that African Americans are responsible for one another and should work together for the betterment of family and community” (Constantine, Alleyne, Wallace, & Franklin-Jackson, 2006, p.143). In the context of our YPAR program, collective work and responsibility was shown through the girls’ commitment to working on this project for the betterment of other African American students in the school. A great example was Felicia’s recruitment efforts at the beginning of the second semester. During our first meeting of the second semester she said, “Miss Adrienne! I have new people to join our group! I told them about you and about how fun the class is and they want to come.” While we had not discussed adding new people to our program, she took it upon herself to tell new students about the group and get them interested in participating. She said that she wanted other girls to have the chance to be in our Black girls’ class because it was fun and they could learn a lot from the group. Although not all of the girls were excited about adding other girls to the group, the action of “recruiting” other girls that she thought would benefit from being in the program was an example of her taking initiative for the benefit of others. Although during the individual interviews the girls did not talk about initiative, it was displayed in the YPAR program, especially as they became more confident and competent in certain domains.

Summary

Initiative was displayed through the girls always being ready for our meetings, volunteering to do tasks without me asking, and Felicia’s recruitment of new girls during the second semester. Initiative is not a part of the Five C’s and did not map on to the definitions of any of the C’s. When examining initiative through triple quandary theory, the mainstream

value of effort optimism speaks to the way the girls were motivated from within to direct attention and effort towards finishing the research project. Initiative through the Afro-cultural realm is connected to the cultural value of communalism through collective work and responsibility. The social justice nature of YPAR helped the girls understand that they had a commitment to the project not just for themselves, but for the betterment of other African American students who attended the school. This positively affected their level of engagement, spawning high levels of initiative during the program. Nonetheless, initiative could not be enacted without feelings of competency.

Competence

Competence is defined in the PYD literature as a positive view of one's actions that spans across social, academic, cognitive, and vocational domains (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The girls demonstrated three different types of competence during the course of the YPAR program: cognitive and social competence, as well as competence in research skills. Although youth have diverse levels of competencies, the goal was to cultivate the competencies they already possess, develop those that they did not have, and provide opportunities for competence to be displayed.

Cognitive Competence

Cognitive competence was an asset that was cultivated. It corresponds to the mainstream realm value of the elevation of the cognitive over the affective. Cognitive competence is defined in the PYD literature as a positive regard for one's cognitive abilities as it relates to decision making, critical thinking, and knowledge construction (Sun & Hui, 2012). In the YPAR program, critical thinking skills were connected to the ability to construct knowledge. Due to the collaborative nature of YPAR, critical thinking and decision

making was more than an individual endeavor; the ability to use collaborative decision making skills was a more important asset than individual decision making.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is defined as applying, synthesizing, analyzing, and evaluating information gathered or generated by reflections, observations, experiences, or discussions (Sun & Hui, 2012). YPAR pedagogically focuses on cultivating critical thinking skills about larger social issues and local school/community problems (Brown and Rodriguez, 2009). Critical thinking skills were utilized throughout the program and many of the girls recognized this as a critical area of their own development. As Keisha stated, “I think the thing I learned the most was critical thinking skills. Thinking about the questions we came up with at the beginning and then our final question, made me think about what was going on around me.”

Critical thinking skills were cultivated through assignments and discussions within the group. In their interviews, the girls talked about particular activities in the program that were important to them understanding the value of critical thinking. One that stood out to them was an online literature search on our first research question, “Why do White people question the intelligence of Black people.” After doing the assignment, the girls came to the following meeting unhappy with the results they received after typing in “Black people and intelligence.” During that meeting, the girls said that many of the articles and blogs written about Black people and their intelligence were hurtful, made them angry, and made them question whether these things were actually fact. One of the articles they shared with the group was based on the book, *The Bell Curve*, and stated that African Americans were scientifically proven to be less intelligent than Whites and a host of other negative commentary. After discussing these websites and claims in our meeting, I subsequently

brought forward other literature that refuted those claims. The girls talked about how they learned through this exercise that everything they read online should be critically examined and that sometimes research can be biased.

YPAR allows youth to challenge the dominant discourse through critical thinking, research, and knowledge construction. As a process that has roots in liberatory pedagogy, YPAR engages marginalized youth in analyzing the social, economic, and political conditions within the minority realm that shape their experiences in schools and communities. This process yields itself to a form of critical thinking that pushes beyond individual-level explanations of problems faced by people who hold the same social identities, towards investigating broader explanatory factors (Cahill et al., 2008). It also serves as a way to examine the types of decisions that must be made in order to be resilient in the face of these social level issues.

Decision-making

Decision-making skills in the traditional PYD literature are tied to the ability to make sound, individual decisions; however, successfully doing YPAR is dependent on the ability of youth to understand and engage in shared decision making. The ability to make decisions as a collective and incorporate the thoughts and opinions of others is no small feat, but the girls displayed this ability throughout the program. Krystal described our decision-making processes by saying “we listened to other people’s ideas and used them helped us get more work done.”

An example of collective decision-making can be illustrated in the way the girls decided on their method to answer their research question. As discussed in detail in Chapter Four, there was a disagreement when we were deciding on the method to use in our research.

Interviewing had the most votes, but there were two girls who thought that focus groups would be better suited to answer the research question and could also potentially change the mindsets of some of the teachers. This argument was posed by Brittany. Brittney felt that doing focus groups would be the most effective way of hearing people's opinions. She also saw it as a way to change some of the opinions of others because they get to hear multiple sides of the issue. However, Nia and Felicia argued for interviewing, stating that hearing individual opinions was more important. They also believed that focus groups would limit the depth of discussion they wanted to have about certain issues because some people will not feel comfortable talking. After a long discussion and a re-vote, interviewing was chosen.

The act of engaging in an in-depth discussion concerning the pros and cons of the two methods shows that they were thinking critically about the impact that they can make in the school. They came to an agreement and made a decision that everyone felt comfortable supporting. Furthermore, the fact that the girls could construct an argument around methods also shows that they were becoming more competent in their understanding of research design.

Competence in Research Skills

Competence in research skills can be categorized as a mainstream realm asset. It is a mainstream realm asset that allows youth to learn skills and language styles that speak to those in power. It also adheres to the mainstream cultural value of the elevation of the cognitive over the affective. Competence in research was developed as the girls' learned how to design and implement their own research project. These skills were demonstrated by their ability to teach each other how to do certain skills within the research process. During this program the girls were exposed to qualitative research design, interviewing, transcription, and

data analysis. In her last interview, Felicia stated, “I learned how to do qualitative research and interview. I didn’t know how to do that before... I was actually doing college level research.” Felicia realized that she knew how to do research and she connected that understanding to her ability to do college level work. As she spoke, her tone indicated that she was excited and proud that she was able to do “college level research.” Her confidence in her ability to do research was echoed by many of the other girls in the group.

The girls’ understanding of research became clearer over time. In the beginning, there was not a clear understanding of what research actually entailed and they were unfamiliar with social science research. In her first interview Brittany stated, “Research is harder than I thought. Sometimes you can’t just look at Google and Yahoo because they can give you answers that aren’t always right.” Much like Brittany’s initial understanding of research, many of the girls thought that research was finding information in books and on the web; they also thought that STEM research was the only type of scientific inquiry. Over time all of the girls came to understand that research and focus on social issues and is more than looking for information in a book or typing queries into a search engine; it is talking to people and critically examining the world. As they gained a greater understanding about research and designing a qualitative study, they became increasingly more confident in their abilities. This was clear in Felicia’s recount of the data analysis process. Felicia stated, “Once we got to laying out the work on the board and we had all the papers (*interview transcripts*), we just came together. We were like, we need to mention this and we need to bring up that, and remember when that girl said this?” Because the girls were more competent and confident in the research process, by semester three they were able to understand data analysis easier than they would have semester one.

Feeling competent also changed how they viewed their own research. During the conference and in the meeting with the Dean teachers, the girls voiced their opinions and spoke as the authority on their research. The way that they described their research project indicated that there was a clear shift in the belief that *their* observations could be substantiated through research. This belief was so strong that when their findings were challenged by Ms. Smith and Mr. Asher, they readily wanted to have a discussion with them. In our roundtable discussion with Mr. Asher, Mrs. Smith, and the principal Dr. Ibe, they were able to explain their research, the process that was undertaken, and utilized appropriate terminology in explaining the qualitative research process. While the girls recognized the limitations of their research, they believed they had a solid project and defended it accordingly. This was not just a display of individual competence but was a display of collective competence concerning their collective process. This can only be done if there is a strong sense of social competence

Social Competence

Roth-Brooks-Gunn, (2003) defines social competence as youth's positive view of their interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution. In the YPAR program, social competence was expressed through their use of emotional regulation and open-mindedness.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is was an asset that was developed. As a mainstream realm value, emotional regulation refers to how we try to influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express these emotions (Gross, 1998). It is a skill that is said to contribute significantly to healthy personality growth (Thayer, Rossy, Ruiz-Padial, and Johnsen, 2003). The ability to control anger and de-escalate conflict emerged as notable indicators of emotional regulation during the program. Evidence of this skill is

highlighted through two examples- working with others they did not like in the past and working through present conflict.

Krystal admitted that she did not get along with some of the girls in the group at the beginning of the program. She stated, "...some of the people, when the class first started, I didn't like them and they didn't like me, so I had to learn to keep my comments to myself and things got better." Krystal decided to regulate her negative emotions toward some of the girls in the group in order to participate in the research program. As time went on, the collaborative working environment of YPAR created a space where positive interactions were the norm and they were able to work together.

The norm of reducing conflict influenced the way that the girls interacted within the group, despite conflicts that happened at other points of the day. An example can be shown through a conflict that happened the first semester between Felicia and Nia. These two girls were in a very heated argument outside of school that forced them to be separated in all of their classes. Interestingly, we had had two meetings before I was made aware that they were separated in every other setting except for our group. The principal was surprised that they had been together in the group and were functioning without any conflict.

The girls talked about how the YPAR program made a difference in the way they interacted with people. In their interviews, Brittany, Star, Krystal and Felicia talked about how their involvement in the program specifically helped them learn how to control their anger. Brittany states, "I learned anger management more than anything because a lot of people irritated me...when I was trying to focus and other people weren't...or they were playing around... There were so many times I wanted to go off but I didn't." When I asked her why she did not go off, she stated that it was because she learned how to be patient and

that she learned how to ignore people who irritated her. Star and Felicia also stated that they learned how to be more patient with people when they were irritated because of their participation in the group. During the last interview, Felicia also told me that her conversations with me help her learn to control her temper. She stated:

Just by working with you and you telling me, Felicia you have to calm it down. You have to keep yourself together. You know as a young Black woman they are already waiting on us to be loud and ghetto... Just you telling me those things made me calm down and be more cool, calm, and collected.

Our talks about Black womanhood, having a higher standard for who we are and how we interact with others, helped her regulate her emotions more effectively. In order to listen to me and take notice, she had to be open-minded to incorporate different information concerning identity.

Open-mindedness

Open-mindedness was defined by the data as the ability to listen to the thoughts of others and incorporate the ideas of others. The phrase “I learned to listen to others more” consistently showed up in the interview transcripts. Through the collaborative process of YPAR, youth felt comfortable not only sharing ideas but listening and incorporating the ideas of others. Field notes from observations and video data showed that as girls presented suggestions to the group, other girls commented on how that idea could be incorporated into the project. As the girls progressed through the YPAR program, their openness to other’s ideas became more prevalent. Nia states, “The fact that we listened to other people’s ideas and used them, helped us get more work done.” Even when adults outside the group, like Dr. Lewis, offered advice to the girls, they listened to his opinion, discussed it as a group, and

collectively decided to use his suggestion and blend it with what they had previously discussed.

The girls also showed that they developed open-mindedness through their ability to take into account multiple perspectives in their assessments of negative experiences. In her final interview, Brittany talked about how she learned to assess potentially racist experiences. She stated, “I learned to look at things from a different perspective and not just look at one side of something. To look at the whole picture and not just saying, ‘it’s just because she’s Black’... seeing if there is another reason behind it and looking at other reasons.” In our first discussion about our research question, we outlined other reasons that student’s intelligence could be questioned by teachers. The girls said that it could be past negative interactions with the teacher and doing badly on previous tests or assignments. They also said that their language styles can also have an effect on the ways teachers perceive them. I also added that teachers are human and are susceptible to functioning from stereotypes. Although they still felt that their experiences were often race-related, and could readily cite examples, they stated that they became more aware that there could be other factors affecting their interactions with teachers.

The experiences of living in the minority realm can color every experience girls have and has a large effect on how African American girls, who are consistently marginalized, perceive the world. Past negative, racialized experiences can cause all negative experiences to be viewed as racially motivated. Social competence through the lens of the minority realm is the ability to examine other factors, besides race, that influence why a conflict or issue might occur. Ward (2000) states that skill of reading a potentially racialized situation is the most complex and important process that African American youth must learn. Since racism

and sexism are pervasive, girls cannot discount them as factors in certain encounters. However, it is important that girls process the range of possibilities, from people acting on stereotype-based heuristics to a harsh personality that can also shape negative interactions. This is important because it removes the girls from the role of victim and places the onus on those who are enacting the negative action.

Summary

Cognitive, research, and social competence were fostered during the YPAR program. Cognitive competence is defined in the PYD literature as a positive regard for one's cognitive abilities as it relates to decision making, critical thinking, and knowledge construction. Competence in research is a mainstream realm asset that allowed the girls to learn skills and language styles to speak to those in power. Both cognitive competence and competence in research skills corresponded to the mainstream realm value of the elevation of the cognitive over the affective. Although these two competencies are linked to the mainstream realm, the nature of YPAR makes them more than individual-level aptitudes. The ability to make decisions as a group, to incorporate the ideas of others into one's own, and work collaboratively in knowledge construction for their research project, incorporates Afro-cultural values. This collaboration was in direct relation to their heightened levels of social competence.

The PYD literature defines social competence as interpersonal skills. In this study, social competence was exemplified through emotional regulation and open-mindedness. Emotional regulation is linked to the mainstream value of emotional containment. The ability to regulate negative emotions was important in the program. However, the reason that the

girls stated they regulated their emotional outburst was because of the minority realm value of racial pride, as well as the normalization of respect within our group.

Respect

Respect was defined by the data as the consideration of others. In the minority realm, respect is central to the recognition of another's humanity. Since the minority realm is linked to oppression and marginalization, learning and enacting respect is a central part of developing character. Respect was a displayed asset and was evident in interpersonal interactions within the group. The data shows that respect was shown by listening to others and refraining from talking about each other negatively.

"Respect," was the first rule that the girls established in the group; it was also written in all caps by one of the girls to denote its importance. The next rule after respect was "Don't talk when other people are talking." Although this is a form of respect, it was so important it was written as a separate rule. As the girls participated in the program, this rule became practice. They began to exhibit respect to others by listening. In all of the interviews, regardless of time in the program, the girls stated, "I learned how to listen to others." For them, listening to others is caring about what others have to say, just as much as they care about their own opinions.

Krystal was in the program for all three semesters and talked about listening in every interview. In her first interview she stated, "I normally don't listen to other people...I'm not a good listener. But this group helped me learn how to listen to people and their opinions." In her last interview she said, "Because we listened to each other, I think this prevented some arguments and people getting mad at each other because we had respect in the group." Dion, who participated the second and third semester similarly stated, "I really can say that I learned

how to listen... we had to listen to other people in order to get things done.” Krystal and Dion’s comments about how they learned to listen, speaks to some of the observations I saw in the video data throughout the process.

As I watched the video of the first few meetings, I or another girl in the group would tell someone to stop talking when someone else was talking. After a few meetings, instead of telling them to stop talking, I decided to ask those who were talking out of turn if they were listening. I asked questions like, “Can you repeat what she just said? “What do you think about her comment?” By asking questions the focus was on the comment, not on them talking. This reinforced the idea of listening to hear what others are saying. As I observed the video, by meeting five the girls began taking turns speaking and did not talk over others. I also noticed that if two people began to talk one would stop and let the other girl speak and then voice her opinion afterwards. This showed that they cared about the voices of other girls in the group. Close to the end of the semester I wrote: *“I really can see that the girls are now able to take turns sharing their ideas. They listen and add to the ideas of others and they don’t put each other’s idea down as stupid...PROGRESS!!”*

Another way that respect was displayed by the girls was in the way they talked to one another. One day during the second semester of the program, one of the new girls, Shayla, started talking about another girl in the group. Felicia and Krystal, who had participated the first semester immediately told her, “You can’t do that in here. We don’t talk about people in our group.” Shayla looked surprised and rolled her eyes, but stopped talking about the girl. This is just one example of ways girls showed respect for others by not talking about them negatively and asking that others do the same. Ally felt and experienced the level of respect in the group and said, “I think the thing I liked most was that we could get along without

arguing and saying bad things about each other.” She, like the other girls, appreciated the respect that was consistently displayed.

Respect is an important asset to have, but is often challenging in a girl culture where gossiping and disrespecting others has become normalized. In our group discussions, issues of disrespect were often discussed when referring to their relationships with teachers and with peers. Outside of the group, the girls were in school context where they perceived that respect was minimal. The dynamics within the group challenged the dominant culture to help girls develop the type of connection that fosters a clear sense of respect and care for others.

Summary

Respect was defined by the data as the consideration of others and is not categorized under any of the Five C’s. Respect was a displayed asset that was evident in interpersonal interactions, specifically listening to others and not talking about each other negatively. In the minority realm, respect is central to the recognition of another’s humanity. As a dual minority because of race and gender status, it was important for the girls to show respect for one another. Respect according to mainstream values must be earned because of the lack of trust and the competitive, usurping nature of relationships. The minority realm responds to this by not showing respect until it is first shown. However, according to the Afro-cultural realm, respect is the norm for interacting with others and is central to the recognition of their personhood. The girls in the program had to move from a mainstream enactment of respect to an Afro-cultural one that normalizes respect and sees it as a way to interact with others towards collective progress. Once respect was normalized in the space, the group was more productive. Consequently, the girls formed an African American girl space where they were respected, listened to, and appreciated.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study was a youth participatory action research program implemented one day a week, for three semesters in a 7-12 grade charter school. As an instrumental case study, the research project that the girls undertook was secondary to the main focus of this study- identifying skills and characteristics that are fostered through a youth participatory action research project and examining these assets through a cultural lens. Through thematic analysis, assets were identified and then categorized as displayed, cultivated, and developed during the program. The assets that were fostered in the youth participatory action research program were confidence, competence in research skills, positive Black identity, positive connections with peers and adults, social and cognitive competence, respect, and initiative.

Positive assets that were developed were analyzed through the use of two theoretical frameworks: positive youth development as conceptualized through the Five C's and triple quandary theory which uses a perspective that is culturally relevant to the African American experience. By merging these two theories, I was able to ascertain cultural values that influenced assets, ways they were displayed, and their importance from a socio-historical standpoint.

By adding the three cultural realms to the analysis of assets, the definitions of the Five C's were expanded. According to the definition given by the Five C's, confidence is positive self-efficacy and self-worth. Examining confidence through triple quandary theory reveals that confidence in African American girls is more than an individualized self-appraisal. It is also connected to the socio-historical and political contexts of the individual and their

perceived social group status. Although the girls may have felt confident, the context of school placed them in a minority status that perpetuated stereotypes about them and their abilities. This left them feeling inadequate and unintelligent. While girls in this program were confident in regards to self-esteem, their identities as African American girls, intellectual abilities, and voice, whether giving their opinion or reading aloud in the school context, were not as strong.

Positive relationships and connection are other assets cultivated during the program. In the PYD literature, connection is defined by positive bi-directional relationships. However, their connection within the group was based on more than positive bi-directional relationships. It was also a result of trust, similar racial/gendered identities as well as, comparable negative, racialized experiences. Respect is another indicator of positive connection, but was discussed separately. It is important to values in the minority realm and is an asset that is central to positive development in this realm. Learning and enacting respect is a central part of developing relationships. It is the ability to care and value others even when others may not initially see the value in them.

The girls displayed cognitive competence through their ability to engage in collaborative decision making and critical thinking. Due to the nature of YPAR and Afro-cultural values of communalism, competencies in cognition were directly related to the girls' ability to collaborate in making decisions and using the insight of others. Although individual decision making and critical thinking is important, the ability to come to an agreement that is best for all is central to Afro-cultural realm ways of thinking.

Roth-Brooks-Gunn, (2003) defines social competence as youth's positive view of their interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution. In this program, social competence was

expressed through emotional regulation, which is connected to the mainstream value of emotional containment. It was also defined as open-mindedness to other ideas and ways of being.

Overlap in the Five C's

Using triple quandary theory also made the Five C's less distinct, creating much overlap. For example, caring was not described separately because the behaviors associated with caring overlapped with connection and social competence. In fact, many of the behaviors and skills found in the data could have been categorized in multiple C's. This overlap signals a need for re-conceptualizing of the C's that eliminates the boundaries create through ridged categorization. Even in Lerner's first wave of the 4-H longitudinal study (2005), he recognized the difficulties in parsing the C's in ways that there was no overlap and suggested that there needed to be more work done in clarifying the definitions of the C's. However, the definitions of the C's in all of the studies have subsequently been the same.

Outside of the Five C's assets developed were respect, initiative, and positive Black identity. Respect for others in the program was demonstrated by listening and not putting others down. Initiative was shown through volunteering and taking leadership. Positive Black identity was developed as the girls began to recognize that their race and gender similarities did not mean that they are a homogeneous group. It was also developed as girls worked together and began to dispel some of the negative stereotypes they had about themselves and other African American girls. Creating YPAR as a program specifically for African American girls caused their perceptions of themselves and others who share their race and gender to shift positively. When talking to the majority of the girls in the group, they initially had low and even negative expectation about working with African American girls on

a research project. At the end of the program they said that they were happy they participated in an all-Black girl group and were proud to be a team of African American girls that could do research.

YPAR as Developmental Context

Core processes of YPAR involve the training of young people to identify major concerns in their schools and communities, conduct research to understand the nature of the problems, and take leadership in influencing the conditions in which they live (London et al., 2003). This in-school YPAR program proved to be a positive developmental context to study assets in African American girls because the process of doing YPAR allowed the girls to create their own space and rules of engagement, take initiative, build confidence to voice their opinions, think critically, develop competence, and connect with their peers in a meaningful way.

While the YPAR process fosters the development of certain skills, it was the girls' participation and level of commitment that truly created the context for positive youth development. Girls were treated as partners and were heavily involved with the decision-making processes concerning the research and our activities. According to Huber, Frommeger, Weisenbach, and Sagama (2003), "it is important to allow youth to participate in the creation process so they see that their opinion has value; consequently, they will value the program that is offered" (24). This was the case for the YPAR program and it is connected to research done in organized activities by Larson et al. (2004). Larson and colleagues (2004) found that when youth experienced themselves as deeply engaged and in ways that are not happening in other parts of their lives, the psychological conditions are ripe for them to be active learners, self-organizing, and connected to others in positive ways. This was true for

the girls in the YPAR program. Their research project was created through their concerns about their school environment and they were deeply engaged in an endeavor that affect their lives and those around them. This engagement fostered the type of assets that were cultivated, developed, and displayed in the program.

The lens of TQT and PYD: A metaphor

The metaphor of a kaleidoscope can be used to explain how I have used triple quandary theory to express the positive youth development of African American girls.

A kaleidoscope is a cylinder that operates on the principle of multiple reflections. It traditionally has three mirrors and contains loose, colored objects such as beads and bits of glass inside its chamber. Typically there are three rectangular mirrors set at 60° angles so that they form a triangle and can reflect light. As the viewer looks into one end and the tube is rotated, light is reflected and the tumbling of the colored objects presents the view with varying blends of colors and patterns. Arbitrary asymmetrical patterns show up as beautiful symmetrical patterns.

When we look at the Five C's through Triple Quandary theory, it is as though we are looking at assets through a kaleidoscope. The assets are seen in a new and different way because the lens in which we are viewing those assets are not one, but three, and change and shift into something different and beautiful as the context changes (the context changing is the equivalent of turning the kaleidoscope). Symbolically, those small colorful beads and bits of broken glass make up the Black experience in America. When magnified and reflected through a positive light, assets that are missed because they are considered "broken pieces" of the Black experience are now illuminated. Triple quandary theory takes those pieces and

reflects to the viewer the Black experience in a way that is beautiful and unique; taking asymmetrical ways of being and making them symmetrical in complexity.

Limitations/Delimitations

Creating an in-school program that occurs during the school day presented opportunities and challenges. While there are greater levels of consistent participation and enthusiasm for the program during the day, participation is influenced by teachers, grades, and events such as graduation and school transfers. These issues created a limitation in the measurement of assets cultivated in this study; mostly focused on data collection through interviewing. Four girls were interviewed twice, while the other girls were only interviewed once.

Although participants in this study changed from the first to the third semester, similar positive assets were reported through the YPAR program - whether they participated only in the first semester, for only semester two and three, or for all three semesters. While girls who spent all three semesters in the program may have developed different assets and had more time in the positive context, it is common that youth participating in programs differ in their experiences, regardless of their time commitment.

The methods used in the study was also a limitation. Since a pre- and post-test was not applied, assets that were present before the program cannot be measured. Furthermore, aside from observational data I cannot account for all of the assets developed over time. Another methodological limitation is related to the nature of YPAR. The process of implementing a YPAR project, makes it specific to a particular context and these girls. Every time YPAR is done new issues can arise, new topics are salient, the methods and process of data collection and analysis can differ; this affects the ways youth decide to engage.

Therefore, while the process of YPAR could be reproduced, the skills used and developed could differ.

Furthermore, this case study specifically focuses on African American adolescent females in a small Midwestern city. Although African Americans have a similar social history, the contextual history of each city, region, and school varies. As true for all studies that make generalizations about a racial group or a raced/gendered group, we must be careful in how results are interpreted and presented. African American girls are not a monolithic group. Since this study is exploratory in nature it is only a small piece of the larger puzzle concerning an inclusive positive youth developmental framework.

Implications

This study found that when the Five C's are examined through different value systems, mainstream, minority, and Afro-cultural, an expanded understanding of PYD can be derived. When examining PYD in African American youth, as well as all youth, we must take into account the context in which they develop; not just family and school, but the social, political, historical context in which youth live. This is imperative in order to have a comprehensive understanding of our definition of "positive" behaviors, skills, characteristics, and supports. Furthermore, scholarship must contextualize "positive in what context?" and "positive according to whose cultural values?" Therefore, future research should further interrogate ways that culture informs positive development; in the ways that assets are defined, examined, and cultivated in youth.

Future research that examines positive youth development in youth participatory action research programs should consider employing a mixed methods approach. For example, in addition to interviews and participant observation, conducting a pre-post survey

to determine assets that were already present, as well as those that were not would be helpful for measuring development. Conducting a longitudinal study would also be beneficial to understanding how skills, connections, and traits are sustained after participation in a YPAR project.

Recommendations for practitioners

Positive youth development has been used to help practitioners promote assets through programs and activities (Benson, 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These assets have been categorized in very distinct ways through a plethora of studies. However, when assessing assets displayed in observations and evaluations, program facilitators and directors must be aware that assets as described though the Five C's or another PYD model can manifest in various ways. These may not always align with the mainstream definitions given by the literature, but should be evaluated through a lens outside of the mainstream cultural realm. This is particularly important when evaluating outcomes for youth considered racial/ethnic minorities. The recognition of assets through cultural values, can allow programs to capitalize on various strengths and provide opportunities for minority youth to thrive in multiple realms. When PYD activities and programs fail to incorporate and build on cultural assets that may help promote resiliency in the minority and Afro-cultural realms, positive outcomes and assets can be missed (Frison, Wallander, & Browne, 1998).

This study also demonstrates that YPAR can be used as an in-school program to foster positive assets. As Dubas & Snider (1993) note, adults who facilitate effective programs in turn, have youth that develop a sense of belonging, an enhanced sense of self-worth, and reliable relationships with group members and their adult leaders. When examining the data, the youth/adult relationship within the YPAR process was imperative to the development of

positive assets. Adult facilitators/co-researchers do not need to be the same race and gender as their participants in order for a positive relationship to be fostered and yield the same results as this study. Many adults who have engaged in YPAR processes with minority youth have not shared the same race and/or gender as their co-researchers (see Cammorta & Fine, 2008). Through openly acknowledging both similarities and difference, as well as fostering connections built on trust, honesty, and consistency similar relationships that were established in this program can be established with others.

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Appendix A

Interview protocol for the evaluation of YPAR project

1. What are some of the thing you liked about the research project?
2. What are some things you did not like?
3. What skills do you think you used in this project? (Ones that you already have)
4. What skills do you think you developed through this project?
5. Was anything hard or difficult about learning how to do research?
6. What were some of the positive things about working in a group with only Black girls?
7. What were some of the difficult things about working in a group with only Black girls?
8. What do you think you learned during this project?
 - i. What did you learned about research?
 - ii. What did you learned about working in a group?
 - iii. What did you learn about the other girls in the group?
 - iv. What did you learn about yourself?
9. If you were to do something different in regards to how the whole research project was done, what would you do?
10. In what ways was the research project important to you?