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Psychological sense of community, community civic participation, and ethnic identity on social justice orientation and psychological empowerment between LGBQ and Non-LGBQ youth of color

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ABSTRACT

For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning (LGBQ) youth of color, the intersection of identifying as both LGBQ and a person of color results in not only managing racial stereotypes, but also heterosexism and genderism. Developing a critical understanding of oppressive social conditions and ways to engage in social action is a form of resistance for these youth. Research is needed among LGBQ youth of color that examines the range of predictors and outcomes related to civic engagement, development, and empowerment. Drawing on data derived from a sample of urban youth of color ($N = 383$; 53.1% Female; 75% Hispanic; Age range = 14 to 18 years; 15% identify as LGBQ), this study will: (1) examine the relationship between community-based perceptions (e.g., psychological sense of community), ethnic identity, behaviors (e.g., community civic participation) and awareness of social justice concerns with dimensions of psychological empowerment; and (2) assess differences that these relationships have between LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth of color. Findings indicate that main predictors have a positive impact on intrapersonal and cognitive dimensions of psychological empowerment through social justice orientation, with noted variations between LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth of color.

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For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) youth of color¹, the intersection of sexual and racial identity results in managing racial stereotypes, as well as heterosexism and genderism in both their school and daily lives (Meyer, 2003; Meyer et al., 2015). Recent national surveys (Kosciw et al.,

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2018; White et al., 2018) indicate that LGBTQ students feel unsafe in their schools and experience higher levels of verbal and physical harassment. Research (Collier et al., 2013; Murphy & Hardaway, 2017) also shows that LGBTQ youth of color suffer severe mental health concerns and social isolation due to intersecting incidents of discrimination and oppression.

Policies enumerating LGBTQ protections and the support of Gay-Straight/Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) in schools, as well as social activism, broadly, within the LGBTQ community, has helped undermine heterosexism and genderism and its effects over the past 50 years (Wernick et al., 2014), yet GLSEN (2019) pointedly reports that “progress on safe schools for LGBTQ youth has slowed for the first time in years.” LGBTQ youth of color continue to face severe disenfranchisement and neglect (Ginwright et al., 2006; Wagaman, 2016). Emergent scholarship demonstrates ways that LGBTQ youth of color (e.g., Russell, 2016; Russell et al., 2009; Toomey & Russell, 2013; Wagaman, 2016), as well as youth of color, in general, can develop empowerment and leadership toward sociopolitical change (e.g., Christens, 2019; Christens et al., 2013; Lardier et al., 2019; 2019). However, we still know little about the mechanisms that influence empowerment and critical awareness among LGBTQ youth of color (Russell, 2016; Wagaman, 2016).

Developing a critical understanding of oppressive social conditions and ways to engage in social action and civic engagement can be a form of resistance for youth of color (Ginwright et al., 2006; Prilleltensky, 2008; Russell et al., 2009). The interest in studying social action and civic engagement as part of the developmental process among youth of color is also noted in various areas of study (e.g., youth civic development, positive youth development and empowerment research). Social action and civic engagement have been associated with positive outcomes among youth of color. This includes awareness of social justice issues, civic involvement, psychological wellness, risk behavior avoidance (Christens et al., 2018; Finlay & Flanagan, 2013), and educational attainment (Chan et al., 2014).

Among LGBTQ youth of color, studies have noted social action and civic engagement contribute to both social identity development and sense of connection to the LGBTQ community (McCallum & McLaren, 2010; Wagaman, 2016). Social action and civic engagement have also been related to the perceived empowerment of LGBTQ youth of color (Frost et al., 2019; Russell, 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2013). However, both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth of color tend to feel less empowered due to the ways power imbalances and inequalities manifest in society (Russell, 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2013). Even so, access to supportive adults and organization structures in their community, stronger connection to their ethnic-racial group, and greater social justice consciousness, can lead to empowerment and

critical social awareness and actionable social change (Lardier, Opara, Garcia-Reid, et al., 2019).

Additional research examining the range of predictors and outcomes related to civic engagement, development, and empowerment is needed among youth of color (Christens et al., 2018; Peterson, 2014), particularly LGBQ youth of color. Further research is needed to examine the paths toward empowerment that manifest among LGBQ youth of color to develop supportive community programming. This study hopes to contribute to the limited literature by: (1) examining the relationship between community-based perceptions (e.g., psychological sense of community) and behaviors (e.g., community civic participation) and awareness of social justice concerns with dimensions of psychological empowerment including the ability to enact social change (i.e., intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment) and develop critical awareness of social issues (i.e., cognitive component of psychological empowerment) among a sample of youth of color; and (2) assessing differences in these relationships between LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth of color. These lines of inquiry will provide additional information on the mechanisms important toward empowering LGBQ youth of color.

Conceptual framing and literature review

Empowerment theory

Empowerment theory emphasizes individuals' and groups' abilities to participate in emancipatory processes and action-oriented solutions that relieve the difficulties they face within their lives and alter unjust systems that create, maintain, and perpetuate social oppression (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment theory offers an approach to focusing on intentionally and strategically creating social change and is defined by three separate dimensions: (1) *Psychological or individual empowerment*; (2) *Organization empowerment*; and (3) *Community empowerment* (Zimmerman, 2000). Of the varying dimensions in Empowerment theory, psychological empowerment is the most widely examined dimension (Christens, 2019; Peterson, 2014). Psychological empowerment has been characterized as a construct developed through relational processes to gain mastery and control over the circumstances influencing their lives (Peterson, 2014), and within it are four interconnected sub-dimensions: (1) *intrapersonal or emotional component*; (2) *interactional or cognitive component*; (3) *behavioral component* (Zimmerman, 1995); and (4) *relational component* (Christens, 2012).

The *intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment* is defined as perceptions of control, perceived leadership capacity or potential to engage

in sociopolitical change, and a critical awareness of social issues, specific to the sociopolitical system (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000), leading to sociopolitical change (Christens et al., 2018). The intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment has been associated with community civic participation, psychological sense of community, ethnic identity, social activism, and having a social justice orientation (Christens et al., 2011; 2018; Speer et al., 2013).

Within empowerment research, the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment has received the most attention (Christens, 2019). The *intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment* has been studied through the Sociopolitical Control Scale and validated among both adults (Peterson et al., 2006) and youth of color (Lardier, Reid & Garcia-Reid, 2018); however, no validation of this measure has been conducted among LGBTQ youth. Assessing the factor structure of the Sociopolitical Control Scale among LGBTQ adult and youth samples would provide more evidence on the utility of this scale among diverse populations.

The *interactional or cognitive component of psychological empowerment* has received less attention when compared to the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment. Unlike the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment, which focuses on perceptions of control and leadership capacity in the sociopolitical domain, the cognitive component of psychological empowerment has been defined as an individual's or group's critical awareness of their socio-political environment, as well as their ability to engage in change (Speer, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). The cognitive component of psychological empowerment primarily focuses on critical awareness, decision-making, resource mobilization, and relational processes (Speer, 2000). Theoretically, the cognitive component of psychological empowerment has been associated with critical consciousness and therefore centers on critical awareness of socio-political inequalities (Diemer et al., 2017). Empirically, studies have connected the cognitive component of psychological empowerment with the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment (i.e., measured through the Sociopolitical Control Scale) and ethnic identity, community participation, and psychological sense of community (e.g., Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Lardier, Opara, et al., 2020; Lardier, Opara, Garcia-Reid, et al., 2019).

The *cognitive component of psychological empowerment* has been studied using the Cognitive Empowerment Scale. While this measure has been validated among adult (Speer & Peterson, 2000) and youth samples (Lardier, Opara, et al., 2020; Speer et al., 2019), it has not been examined among LGBTQ adults and youth. Further, to these authors knowledge, no study exists that has examined the *cognitive component of psychological*

empowerment in LGBTQ youth of color development. Such research would help provide further understanding on the empowerment process among a group that is historically and socially marginalized, yet, has and continues to engage in sociopolitical change.

Intersectionality theory: Positioning Racial-Ethnic and LGBTQ identities

Intersectionality offers another useful framework to further conceptualize empowerment among racial-ethnic and sexual-minority populations. At the intersection of race (e.g., African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian), LGBTQ identification, and living in a poor urban community, the lives of LGBTQ youth of color intersect with sociocultural/political locations that contribute to their oppression and subordination. These marginalized social positions in the U.S. shape youth's lived experiences, raising the probability for continued subordination, isolation, and social disenfranchisement.

Drawing on intersectionality theory and positioning racial-ethnic identity and LGBTQ identity through this lens illustrates that their lives are entangled with both White-majority authority and heteronormativity (Frost et al., 2019). To effectively support and affirm youth that identify as both LGBTQ and a person of color, it is critical to understand the development of their intersecting identities to connect subgroups (Poteat et al., 2009), recognize the complexity of identity development, and understand the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (Balsam et al., 2011; Poteat et al., 2009; Singh, 2013). Through this lens, it is possible to form a critical analysis of the social locations, context, identities, and histories of these youth – highlighting not only their marginalization but also their sense of empowerment and ability to critically analyze their social landscape toward change (Collins, 2019).

Positioned through intersectionality theory, racial-ethnic minority and LGBTQ youth identity development ensues within a matrix of co-occurring socio-cultural and ecological experiences that influences their social position, connection to their racial-ethnic and LGBTQ groups, and perceptions of empowerment, particularly when juxtaposed to their non-racial-ethnic minority and non-LGBTQ counterparts (Frost et al., 2019). For racial-ethnic minority youth, ethnic identity is a complex and meaningful process. Ethnic identity is defined as an individual's perceptions, cognitions, and emotions related to how they understand and connect to their ethnic group (Phinney, 1989, 1996; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Ethnic identity develops over time as an individual perceives themselves within their cultural groups and begins to understand the values and customs associated with that group (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Smith & Silva, 2011). Ethnic identity development includes self-identifying as part of the ethnicity and consists of

both a *cognitive dimension*—gaining knowledge of historical accounts and culturally sound traditions; and an *affective dimension*—possessing a sense of belonging and affirming the racial or ethnic identity, factors in addition to others (Smith & Silva, 2011). The process of identity development is continuous. However, one's identity becomes more solidified when the individual has explored, accepted, affirmed, and committed to their ethnicity (Smith & Silva, 2011; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), much like LGBTQ identity development models (Parks et al., 2004).

Recent sexual identity literature deviates from understanding sexual identity as linear and stage-based (cf. Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994). Instead current investigations have taken an intersectional, contextual, and multidimensional perspective of the concept (Goodrich & Ginicola, 2017). Significant contextual influences include an individual's social, historical, family, and institutional context (D'Augelli, 1994), as well as consideration of acceptance concerns, concealment motivation, identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity, difficulty with the identity development process, identity superiority, identity affirmation, and identity centrality (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). This lens puts into perspective the intricacies of sexual identity development for individuals carrying multiple marginalized identities such as LGBTQ youth of color, and that both sexual identity development and ethnic identity development may be co-occurring (Goodrich & Ginicola, 2017).

Youth with multiple marginalized identities tend to experience increased stress and stigmatization (Nadal et al., 2016). For adolescents, this may include potential disapproval of LGBTQ identity by their racial-ethnic group (Nadal et al., 2016), as well as struggles with acceptance of their sexual or gender identity (Rosario et al., 2012). Furthermore, the sociocultural impact of discriminatory systems on the bodies and minds of racial-ethnic and LGBTQ youth may place them at risk for substance use, mental health concerns, and suicidal thoughts (Balsam et al., 2011; Poteat et al., 2009). Yet, these same experiences may make such youth more resilient, feel a great connection to their LGBTQ and racial-ethnic community of allies, and empower them toward sociopolitical change to shift the experiences for others in their community (Singh, 2013).

In applying an intersectionality lens, not only is racial-ethnic identity and LGBTQ identity complex, these processes are both co-occurring and imbedded within a broader sociocultural and ecological context (Collins, 2019). Connecting these ideas to empowerment illustrates that LGBTQ youth of color with greater connection to their community and racial-ethnic group may be more inclined to not only engage in sociopolitical change but be critically aware of social inequalities (Russell et al., 2009). Relying on both Empowerment theory and intersectionality theory provides a more

accurate view of youth development (Santos & Toomey, 2018) and engagement, particularly at the intersection of racial-ethnic minority status and LGBTQ identity status (Frost et al., 2019). This framing positions the lives of LGBTQ youth of color, who are likely to experience multiple forms of oppression, into focus (Toomey & Russell, 2013). It also grounds the cultivation of empowerment among LGBTQ youth of color as part of an interconnected process with psychological sense of community or community belongingness, ethnic identity development, and civic engagement. Together, these frameworks may help ground our understanding of LGBTQ youth of color empowerment and the process through which empowerment is developed. This is further discussed in subsequent sections.

Psychological sense of community, community civic engagement, and ethnic identity

Psychological sense of community has been defined as feelings of belongingness and a shared belief that community members will meet one another's needs through these relationships (McMillan, 1996). Within a developmental context, psychological sense of community, community civic participation, and ethnic identity have all been associated with self-worth, leadership and self-efficacy in the sociopolitical domain, and critical awareness of sociopolitical concerns among youth of color (Christens et al., 2013; Gutierrez, 1988; Gutiérrez, 1989; 1995; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Peterson et al., 2017). Generally, youth living in marginalized social positions may find greater difficulty in feeling connected to their community, as well as having opportunities for civic engagement; however, the extant research indicates that those youth of color who experience greater psychological sense of community are not only more satisfied with their community, but have greater capacity toward contributing to the community environment (Kenyon & Carter, 2011; Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Rivas-Drake, 2012). For instance, greater psychological sense of community and civic participation among youth of color has been associated with connection to one's ethnic-racial group (Gutiérrez, 1989; Rivas-Drake, 2012), as well as reductions in negative behavioral outcomes such as substance use and mental health symptoms (Lardier, 2019).

Furthermore, civic engagement, defined as individual or collective action toward identifying and addressing issues of public concern (Ballard & Ozer, 2016), and ethnic identity, along with psychological sense of community, have all been connected with both the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment, or perceived capacity to engage in sociopolitical change and as a leader in this process (Christens & Lin, 2014; Lardier et al., 2018), and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment,

or a critical awareness of the sociopolitical environment, among youth of color (Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2005). Recent research has also linked psychological sense of community, community civic engagement, and ethnic identity with a social justice orientation among youth of color (Christens et al., 2018; Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020).

Among LGBTQ youth, not only is community belongingness associated with health and wellness (Hanley & McLaren, 2015) but for LGBTQ youth of color, community belongingness is also related to ethnic-racial group identity development (Balsam et al., 2011; Parks et al., 2004; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Further, belongingness to these communities is associated with civic action, and as Frost and colleagues (2019) noted, there is a long history of activist related work tied to the discrimination of racial-ethnic and LGBTQ individuals. Some have also discussed that for LGBTQ people of color, increased identification and belongingness to both their LGBTQ and racial-ethnic communities has been connected to their willingness to participate in collective action against discrimination (Moradi et al., 2010). Among LGBTQ youth, a stronger connection to the LGBTQ community and local GSA has been associated with school belongingness, higher GPA, social justice involvement (Toomey & Russell, 2013), future plans for LGBTQ-related civic engagement, as well as overall greater perceived empowerment in the sociopolitical domain or the ability to enact sociopolitical change (Russell et al., 2009). And at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, LGBTQ youth of color may be more critically aware of social inequality and driven toward engaging in sociopolitical change (Russell, 2016). Specifically, we predicted that while psychological sense of community or community belongingness, ethnic identity, and civic participation would all be related to youth empowerment and critical awareness of inequalities, these associations would be more robust for LGBTQ youth of color due to identities that sit on the “margins” and the need to be socially active to eliminate inequalities.

Social justice orientation, intrapersonal empowerment, and cognitive empowerment

Social justice orientation is defined as having an orientation toward civic life and advocating to change social issues (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). A social justice orientation is a key component in youth development and the empowerment process (Christens et al., 2018; Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2014). It incorporates a critical awareness of social concerns, while also uniting this knowledge with an awareness of sociopolitical conditions and injustices and a drive to engage in critical community action (Shaw et al., 2014). Among youth, research has consistently aligned a social

justice orientation with not only experiencing prior injustices (Bondü & Elsner, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2005) but also empowerment, challenging power, and addressing the root causes of social oppression (Christens et al., 2018; Ginwright, 2015; Zeldin et al., 2018). While a social justice orientation is critical for youth of color in developing and defining their own sense of empowerment toward sociopolitical change (Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020), it may be a more focused perception for LGBTQ youth of color due to identifying with multiple marginalized identities and resisting multiple forms of social oppression (Frost et al., 2019).

The activist efforts in the LGBTQ community have had a historically high representation of people of color (Moradi et al., 2010). Among LGBTQ youth of color, critical awareness of social inequalities is not only a result of living on the “margins” but focused through activism, it is a potent response to oppression and social inequities (Campbell & Deacon, 2006). LGBTQ youth critical awareness of social inequalities and injustices has not only engendered these young people to participate in solidarity efforts with other social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, immigration struggles, police brutality), but being empowered to, for example, create GSAs and challenge school policies that violate anti-discrimination statutes (Meyer & Stader, 2009). Recent investigations have specifically identified that experiences of discrimination and awareness of social injustices were associated with higher levels of involvement in activism, and in turn overall greater meaning in life and wellness for LGBTQ youth (Earnshaw et al., 2016). Others have similarly found that greater LGBTQ sociopolitical engagement (Poteat et al., 2020) and critical awareness of social inequalities was associated with youth empowerment (Frost et al., 2019). Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that critical awareness of social injustices would have a more robust association for LGBTQ youth of color when compared to non-LGBTQ youth of color on dimensions of empowerment (e.g., the intrapersonal dimension of psychological empowerment and the cognitive dimension of psychological empowerment).

In addition, some research, while limited, has shown that a social justice orientation may mediate the association between community civic engagement (Dancy et al., 2019), psychological sense of community, and ethnic identity, with both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment (Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020). Social justice orientation may also serve as a mediator between specific experiences related to injustice and behavioral outcomes in youth (Giovannelli et al., 2018), as well as the association between social responsibility and civic engagement (Hope & Bañales, 2019). Given this evidence, we hypothesize that social justice orientation may relate to both the intrapersonal and cognitive

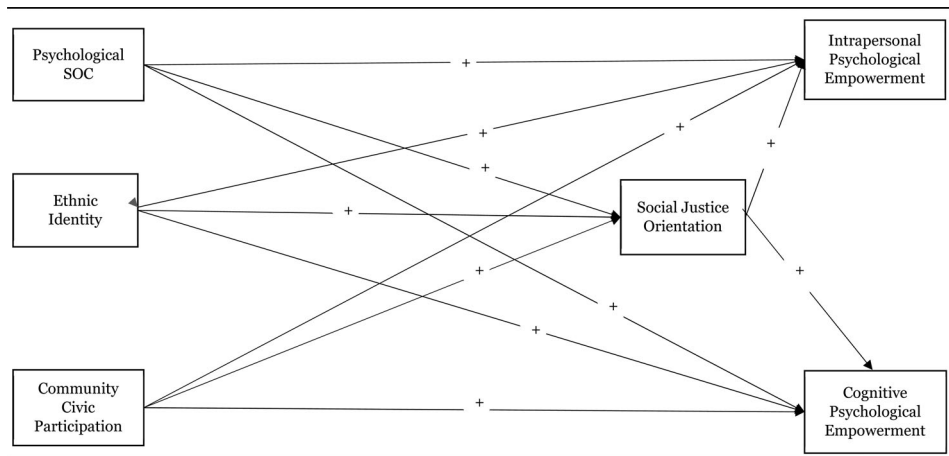


Figure 1. Hypothesized model predicting intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment.
Note. Sense of Community = SOC.

components of psychological empowerment, as well as empowerment-based predictors (e.g., ethnic identity).

The current study

For the current study, we draw on a sample of youth of color from an urban community. Building upon the existing research, we hypothesized that (see Figure 1):

- H1:** Psychological sense of community, community civic participation, and ethnic identity would be directly associated with social justice orientation, and indirectly related to both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment.
- H2:** Social justice orientation would mediate the association psychological sense of community, community civic participation, and ethnic identity have with both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment.
- H3:** The associations presented within the path-model will vary between LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth of color, with more robust associations present for LGBQ youth of color.

To contribute meaningfully to the literature without the availability of longitudinal data, we utilized an alternative modeling strategy (see Figure 2 for alternative model) to examine associations against an alternative-theoretically supported model. Results will provide important implications for empowerment research and youth work, among LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth of color in under-served communities.

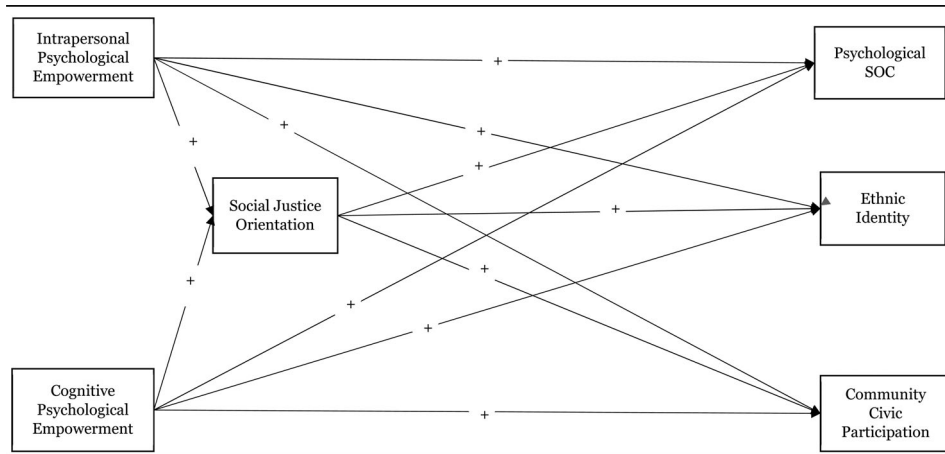


Figure 2. Alternative model predicting psychological soc, ethnic identity, and community civic participation.

Note. Sense of Community = SOC.

Methods

Sample and design

This study was part of a larger Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Minority AIDS Initiative grant. The original study was focused on the implementation of a HIV/AIDS, sexual health, and substance abuse prevention-intervention education program. Students were recruited to participate in the prevention-intervention implementation study. These data were collected at baseline among a convenience sample of 383 students from a Northeastern United States school district. Students were recruited through their high school's physical education and health classes.

See Table 1 for demographic characteristics. Most students identified as Hispanic/Latinx (75%), with the next largest demographic group identifying as Black/African American (24.3%). A nearly equal proportion of students identified as men (46.9%) and women (53.1%), and 1.0% as non-Binary. Approximately, 50.6% of youth were between 13 and 15 years of age and 49.4% between 16 and 18 years of age. Students ranged from grades 9 through 12, with 29.2% in 9th grade, 45.7% in 10th grade, 6% in 11th grade, and 19.1% in 12th grade. Approximately 15% of the sampled identified as queer or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ), which higher than most national averages in the US (Bostwick et al., 2014).

Measurement

The study used the 120-item, paper, pencil-based National Minority SA/HIV Prevention Initiative Youth Questionnaire or the National Outcome

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 383).

	Full Sample	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender Identity		
Men	180	46.9
Women	203	53.1
Sexual Orientation Identification		
Non-LGBQ	327	85.0
Lesbian	16	3.8
Gay	28	7.0
Bisexual	13	3.2
Queer	4	1.0
Age (in years) ^a		
13 to 15	194	50.6
16 to 18	189	49.4
Grade in School		
9th	112	29.2
10th	175	45.7
11th	23	6.0
12th	73	19.1
Race-Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latinx	289	75.7
African American/Black	94	24.3

Note. ^aParticipants were on average 15.40 years old (SD = 1.09).

Measures (NOMs) provided by CSAP. This questionnaire assessed outcome behaviors based on measures from the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey (YRBSS; e.g., 30-day substance use, sexually risky behavior; Kann et al., 2014). The survey also assessed empowerment-based measures of both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment, as well as ethnic identity, psychological sense of community, community civic engagement, and social justice orientation. Six measures were included in the current analysis. Refer to Table 2 for descriptive statistics, associated alpha levels (Cronbach’s α), and a correlation matrix.

Psychological sense of community

Psychological sense of community was measured using eight-items (sample items: *I feel like a member of this neighborhood.*) from the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS), which was based on the scholarly work of McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Peterson et al. (2008). The BSCS was designed to assess four-dimensions of SOC: needs fulfillment (NF), group membership (MB), influence (IN), and emotional connection (EC). A five-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) was used to assess responses from youth. A recent investigation assessed the BSCS among youth and confirmed the four-factor structure (Lardier et al., 2018; overall scale: Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$, Mean [*M*] = 3.08, Standard Deviation [*SD*] = .89). For the current study, scores were averaged and combined.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlation matrix (N = 383).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	SD	α
1. Psychological Sense of Community	—	.10*	.12*	.12**	.41**	.20**	-.10**	3.18	.80	.88
2. Ethnic Identity	.14**	—	.11**	.14**	.12**	.11**	.12**	3.62	.85	.80
3. Community Participation	.26**	-.04	—	.10**	.12*	.12**	-.01	3.18	1.20	.80
4. Social Justice Orientation	.18*	.16**	.10*	—	.15**	.39**	.15**	3.76	.68	.83
5. Intrapersonal Psychological Empowerment	.33**	.25**	.12*	.30**	—	.30**	-.11*	3.30	.62	.89
6. Cognitive Psychological Empowerment	.15**	.31**	.12*	.36**	.13**	—	-.01	3.75	.68	.89
7. Gender (Woman = 1)	-.01	-.29**	.01	-.03	-.25**	-.17	—	—	—	—

Note. Upper quadrant non-queer youth. Lower quadrant queer youth.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Community civic participation

Community civic participation is a self-report, five-item measure derived from the *Student Survey of Risk and Protective Factors/Community Participation scale* (Arthur et al., 2002). This measure assessed participation in community activities (sample item: *How often do you go to meetings/engage in activities in your community?*), using a four-point Likert scale ranging from *never* (1) to *almost every day* (4). Speer and Peterson (2000) demonstrated support for the reliability of this scale, and through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) identified a single underlying participation scale. Scores were average and combined.

Ethnic identity

Ethnic identity was measured using a six-item scale developed by the federal funding agency (sample items: *I have spent time trying to figure out more about my ethnic group. I participate in cultural practices of my own ethnic group.*). Youth participants responded to each item on a four-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Our prior research has demonstrated support for the factor structure of this ethnic identity scale developed by the federal funding agency (e.g., Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Opara et al., 2020). Scores were averaged and combined.

Social justice orientation

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

Cognitive component of psychological empowerment

Speer and Peterson (2000) developed the interactional empowerment or the Cognitive Empowerment Scale. Through principal components factor analyses, Speer and Peterson (2000) confirmed that the measure for the cognitive component of psychological empowerment encompassed three subscales. *Power through relationships*, measure the understanding that the source of power in noneconomic or community organizations is the strength of the relationships between the people within them (Speer, 2000) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$; $M = 18.47$, $SD = 3.83$; sample item: *The only way I can improve [city name] is by working with other community members and students. Only by working together can we (citizens) make changes in [city name].*). *Nature of problem/political functioning* assessed the understanding that those in power exercise that power through rewarding their friends and punishing their enemies (Speer, 2000) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$; $M = 16.69$, $SD = 4.24$; sample item: *Those with power try to stop teens who challenge them too much. Adults with power undermine community members and students that work for changes that these adults dislike*). *Shaping ideologies* examines the understanding that power is exercised through the shaping of community interests and ideology (Speer, 2000) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$; $M = 14.44$, $SD = 2.77$; sample item: *School officials, politicians, and other authorities are able to get students and community members to see most things from their point of view. The only way I can affect community issues is by working with others in my community.*).

A recent investigation tested the current iteration of the Cognitive Empowerment Scale among youth of color, and more specifically examined for differences between African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx youth (Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020). While no differences were identified between groups, these authors found that the overall Cognitive Empowerment Scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$; $M = 3.75$, $SD = .68$) encompassed the same three broad sub-scales of *power through relationships* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$), *nature of problem/political functioning* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$) and *shaping ideologies* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$). For the current study, the four-item measure of power through relationships (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$), the four-item measure of nature of power/political functioning (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$), and the six-item measure of shaping ideologies (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$) were combined. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment

The *Intrapersonal Component of Psychological Empowerment* was measured through the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (Lardier et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2011), using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly*

disagree (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Through confirmatory factor analysis, Peterson et al. (2011) confirmed the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (overall scale: Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) as a two-factor measure that examined *leadership competence* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$) and *policy control* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). For the current study, the eight-item measure of *leadership competence* (sample items: *I am a leader in groups. I can usually organize people to get things done*; Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$) and the nine-item measure for *policy control* (sample items: *My friends and I can really understand what's going on with my community or school. There are many ways for me to have a say in what my community or school does*; Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$) were combined.

Covariates

Gender was measured using two options (0 = *Men*, 1 = *Women*). LGBQ identity was measured using a single forced choice measure that asked participants to disclose their sexual orientation identification. Options included: *non-LGBQ or Heterosexual* = 1, *Lesbian* = 2, *Gay* = 3, *Bisexual* = 4, *Queer* = 6 and an *open response option* (7) if the presented labels were not congruent with participant's identity. For the purposes of moderation analyses described below, this variable was dichotomized: *non-LGBQ* = 0 and *LGBQ* = 1. Gender-identity and sexual orientation identification items were created by CSAP for the purposes of the broader HIV/AIDs, sexual health, and substance abuse prevention-intervention study; this presents a limitation that is discussed in the limitations section.

Data analysis plan

Preliminary analyses

Missing data were handled using maximum likelihood (ML) estimations through AMOS SEM software. ML estimations addresses the missing data and parameter estimates, as well as estimates the standard error in a single step (Hancock & Liu, 2012). Byrne (2013) also indicates that using AMOS to address missing data allows for a theoretically informed direct approach, through modeling, opposed to other imputation methods, which tend to be designated as indirect.

Normality, descriptive statistics, alpha level reliabilities (Cronbach's α) and a bivariate correlation matrix were examined. Data appeared to have relatively normal distribution, with no conspicuous outliers noted. Examining data through AMOS SEM software sidesteps issues associated with influential outliers that would influence model fit (Aguinis et al., 2013), normality, and limits the impact on parameter estimates (Hancock

& Liu, 2012). No issues of multicollinearity were noted, with all main analytic variables within the designated parameter ranges for variance inflation factor (VIF; < 10) and tolerance (> 0.2 ; West et al., 2012).

Gender, age, Hispanic/Latinx ethnic- identity, and African American/Black racial-identity were examined for inclusion in path analysis model. No differences were present between covariates and main analytic variables. Independent samples t-test was conducted to assess variation between non-LGBQ identity (0) and LGBQ (1) among youth on main analytic variables. Mean-level differences were noted in: Psychological sense community ($t[360] = 2.35$, $p < .01$); the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment ($t[360] = 1.77$, $p < .05$); and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment ($t[360] = 1.70$, $p < .05$).

Main analytic procedures

Main analytic procedures were carried out through AMOS SEM, using path analysis techniques and ML procedures to analyze the variance-covariance matrix (Arbuckle, 2013). The presented multi-group mediation path model examined the direct effect of psychological sense of community, ethnic identity, and community civic engagement on social justice orientation and indirectly on both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment between non-LGBQ and LGBQ youth. For mediation analyses, bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals were used to test the significance of the mediational associations through ethnic identity and social justice orientation. Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals provide more accurate intervals for small samples (Efron & Tibshirani, 1994). These methods also provide more accurate intervals for skewed distributions of the indirect effect estimates (Mallinckrodt et al., 2006) and improve the power of the test of the indirect effect (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Conducting mediation analyses in SEM over standard regression methods provides robust model fit information about the consistency of the hypothesized mediational model to the data and evidence of the plausibility of the causality assumptions made when constructing the mediation model (Gunzler et al., 2013).

Multigroup analyses were conducted using an unconstrained-constrained approach to assess statistically significant differences between participants' gender expression identities. First, an unconstrained model was run, which allowed parameters to vary freely. This analysis was followed by a fully constrained model, where parameters were constrained to be equivalent across groups (e.g., non-LGBQ and LGBQ youth) (Hoyle, 2012). The unconstrained and constrained models were then compared using chi-square difference (χ^2_{diff}) testing to examine the presence of moderation in

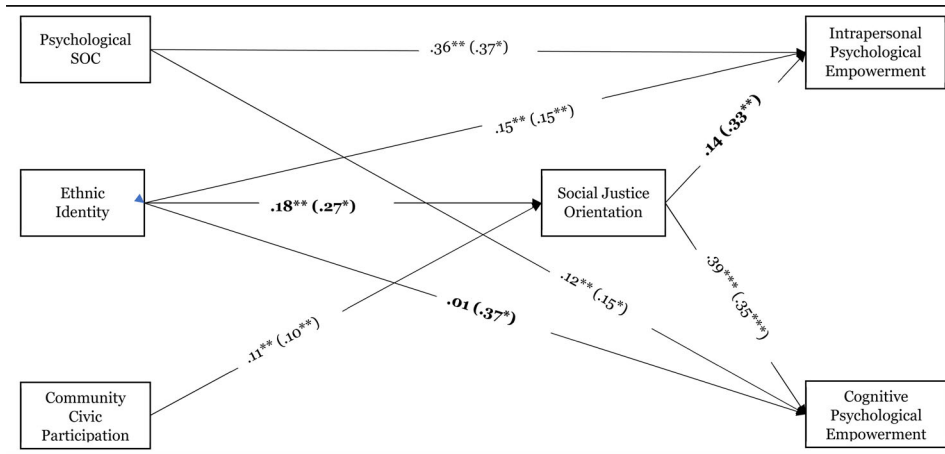


Figure 3. Standardized Path Model Displaying the association between psychological sense of community, ethnic identity, and community civic participation on social justice orientation and intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment among LGBQ and non-LGBQ Youth of Color.

Note. Model fit: χ^2 (22) = 26.52, $p = .23$; GFI = .99; AGFI = .97; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .02 (95% CI = .01, .05), AIC, 126.93 (Saturated = 144.00); BIC, 147.62 (Saturated = 175.00); CMIN/DF = 1.11. Covariates in the model included *gender*. Sense of Community = SOC.

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

the overall models, with a significant χ^2_{diff} indicating moderation at the model-level (Gaskin, 2012). Next, path specific moderation was conducted. Path moderation was significant if the chi-square result fell within the confidence interval (CI) range produced by the χ^2 difference test. Insignificant paths for all groups were removed during analyses to create the most parsimonious mode (Hoyle, 2012; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Werner & Schermelleh-Engel, 2010)

Model fit is considered good if the χ^2 value is Non-significant, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) are $\geq .95$ (adequate if $\geq .90$), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is $\leq .06$ (adequate if $\leq .08$) (West et al., 2012). The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) to compare model fit between models (West et al., 2012).

Results

Table 1 displays the correlation matrix. All main analytic variables were correlated for both non-LGBQ youth of color; however, for LGBQ youth, all items were correlated outside of the association between community civic participation and ethnic identity. Some additional variations were also present. See Figure 3 for over identified multigroup path model with only statistically significant paths and standardized beta weights presented. The

unconstrained model showed good overall model fit for the sample data: $\chi^2(22) = 26.52$, $p = .23$; GFI = .99; AGFI = .97; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .02 (95% CI = .01, .05), AIC, 126.93 (Saturated = 144.00); BIC, 147.62 (Saturated = 175.00); CMIN/DF = 1.11. The constrained model demonstrated equally good model-to-data fit, when compared to the unconstrained model: $\chi^2 = 43.54$ (35), $p = .15$; GFI = .99, AGFI = .98, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .02 (95% CI = .001, .049), AIC = 127.55 (144), BIC = 143.62 (175.0). The chi square difference (χ^2_{diff}) test illustrated that models were invariant, or groups were not different at the model level: $\Delta\chi^2 = 17.02$ (13), $p = .19$ [95% CI = 29.23 – 33.15]. Path-by-path analyses yielded some significant differences between groups (see [Figure 3](#) for differences in bold).

Direct paths between psychological sense of community, both the intrapersonal and cognitive component of psychological empowerment, were significant for both LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth ($p < .05$). No path from psychological sense of community was present to social justice orientation. A direct association was present between ethnic identity and social justice orientation ($p < .05$), as well as the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment for both LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth ($p < .01$). Ethnic identity was also positively associated with the cognitive component of psychological empowerment for LGBQ youth only. Community civic participation had a direct association with social justice orientation only for both LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth ($p < .01$). Social justice orientation was positively linked to the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment for LGBQ youth only ($p < .01$), and with the cognitive component of psychological empowerment for both LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth ($p < .001$).

Using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs), the following indirect associations were present through social justice orientation. Among non-LGBQ youth: community civic participation and the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .02, 95% CIs = .01 to .04, $p = .03$); community civic participation and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .04, 95% CIs = .02 to .08, $p = .04$); ethnic identity and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .03, 95% CIs = .02 to .09, $p = .02$). Among LGBQ youth: community civic participation and the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .03, 95% CIs = .01 to .09, $p = .04$); community civic participation and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .02, 95% CIs = .01 to .07, $p = .03$); ethnic identity and the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .05, 95% CIs = .01 to .07, $p = .01$); ethnic identity and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment (indirect effect = .05, 95% CIs = .02 to .08, $p = .01$).

When testing the alternative model specification (Figure 2) the overall model fit to the data had less than adequate fit: $\chi^2 = 43.64$ (30), $p = .03$; GFI = .95, AGFI = .93, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .07 (95% CI = .05, .10), AIC = 147.64 (144), BIC = 145.88 (175.0). Fit indices were outside the range of acceptable model-to-data fit, when compared to the hypothesized model. The AIC value for the hypothesized model (126.93) was closer to the saturated model of 144.00, when compared to the alternative model. The BIC for the hypothesized model was 145.88 and 157.62 for the alternative model, with a difference greater than 10.00, further indicating support for the hypothesized model. Consequently, bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals to test indirect paths yielded non-significant results. This suggests that mediation in the alternative direction was not present, and no results are provided for this model. Therefore, we conclude that the most probable order of association is as we hypothesized.

Discussion

Our findings are consistent with prior research indicating that higher levels of ethnic identity, community civic engagement, and social justice orientation have a positive impact on both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment (Bondü & Elsner, 2015; Christens et al., 2018; Lardier et al., 2018; Rivas-Drake, 2012). Interestingly, significant differences emerged between non-LGBQ and LGBQ youth of color among several variables. Both community civic participation and ethnic identity had indirect paths through social justice to both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment for LGBQ youth. In addition, ethnic identity had a significant positive association with the cognitive component of psychological empowerment for LGBQ youth only, when compared to non-LGBQ youth of color. These findings support and extend our understanding of the mechanisms predictive of both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment. It also provides some deeper understanding of the influence community civic participation and ethnic identity have in the empowerment of LGBQ youth of color.

From an intersectionality perspective, because there was a slightly more robust association among LGBQ youth of color we can elucidate that the intersection of multiple intersecting disadvantaged social statuses may have positioned these youth to be more civically engaged, as well as, have a stronger connection to their racial-ethnic group. This provides some evidence on the positive association between community civic engagement and separately ethnic identity on dimensions of empowerment among LGBQ youth of color with intersecting marginalized identities. Through

these findings, the importance of a strong ethnic group attachment and civic engagement on awareness of social inequalities and potential for engaging in sociopolitical change are put into perspective. Moreover, these results point toward the importance of the cognitive component of psychological empowerment among youth belonging to multiple intersecting marginalized identities (e.g., race, LGBTQ identity), which may impact their perception of self and their relation to society (Dancy et al., 2019).

Among both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth of color, psychological sense of community did not have a direct path to social justice orientation and only direct paths to both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment. The significant relationship between these variables for LGBTQ youth of color is important to consider. As prior studies have found, connection to a community, particularly the LGBTQ community, has been identified as an important predictor of not only well-being but empowerment and sociopolitical engagement in LGBTQ rights activism (Barr et al., 2016; Toomey & Russell, 2013).

The mediating variable, social justice orientation, had a positive association with the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment for LGBTQ youth of color unlike non-LGBTQ youth. However, social justice orientation was positively associated with the cognitive component of psychological empowerment for both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth of color. While limited, previous research supports the relationship between a social justice orientation and empowerment among LGBTQ youth of color, as well as sociopolitical engagement, stronger school belongingness, higher GPA while in school, and overall better health and wellness (Russell, 2016; Russell et al., 2009; Toomey & Russell, 2013). For LGBTQ youth of color, possessing the self-efficacy to advocate and being critically aware and knowledgeable about social justice issues can have a profound impact on a youth's ability to form resistance against oppression (Earnshaw et al., 2016; Frost et al., 2019) and in-turn feel empowered (Diemer et al., 2017).

Collectively, our findings point toward the importance of and the need for LGBTQ youth of color to be more acutely aware of how social power operates. Based on findings in this study, such awareness may be partially explained because of their ethnic-racial group attachment and community engagement. Therefore, for LGBTQ youth of color, participation in the community and a stronger ethnic identity may not only be predictive of empowerment but contribute to how these youth understand the ways in which power is manifested in society – an important protective mechanism. These experiences, may again, be even more important for LGBTQ youth of color due to their multiple marginalized and intersecting identities.

Consistent with established research, community civic participation and ethnic identity are important developmental mechanisms among youth of

color who have lives that intersect with sociopolitical marginalization (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2017; Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Zeldin et al., 2017; 2018). These mechanisms appear to be interrelated with mechanisms of empowerment and social justice. This interrelatedness contributes toward challenging the effects of discrimination and oppression among LGBQ youth of color. Much of the literature on youth has focused on the impact of social and political contexts, and much less on how young people are affecting those domains (Christens & Peterson, 2012). As a result, programs and interventions targeting young people rarely take on an intersectionality perspective to help address structural inequities, or the ways young people can become more aware and engaged in efforts to impact these inequities and the systems that reinforce these inequalities.

Limitations

Findings from this study are important for extending the youth empowerment literature among LGBQ youth of color; however, results should be interpreted with caution and considered with several limitations. First, results were drawn from a cross-sectional convenience sample of urban adolescents. While cross-sectional research may be important for the design of future longitudinal studies, future research needs to replicate these findings using longitudinal data and unpack the temporal order of these variables and associations. In addition, while important mediating results were identified, mediation should be examined longitudinally.

Future research needs to replicate findings using mediation analyses longitudinally. Second, within-group differences were unexamined for and among African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx adolescents. Given the heterogeneity present within these populations, future research should expand upon this limitation and examine within-group differences. Third, as a survey created by CSAP, the gender-identity variable was limiting in this study and further perpetuates the gender-binary. Future studies are urged to move beyond this binary and allow for a more fluid gender identity category.

Similarly, while we were able to identify important variations between LGBQ and non-LGBQ youth of color in this study, these fixed labels within the survey do not consider breadth of identities youth may take on that are congruent with their sexual and affectual identities. Furthermore, Trans* youth were not identified within the sample. This could be due to limitations in the questions on gender-identity and sexual orientation identification, as well as other cooccurring circumstances in the school such as stigma, homophobia, or concerns of fear with disclosure. Future studies need to use inclusive gender and sexual-orientation identification questions

that empower youth participants to put forward identity labels congruent with their perceptions and lived experiences (Pinto, 2018).

Last, there are concerns with the measures used in this study. For example, the measurement of both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment, as well as the measure for psychological sense of community, while having been validated among youth of color (Lardier, Barrios, et al., 2020; Speer et al., 2019), the measure has not been examined among LBGQ youth, and specifically LGBQ youth of color. Further, the entire nomological structure of psychological empowerment has not been tested adequately (exceptions include Rodrigues et al., 2018). LGBQ youth of color with multiple intersecting marginalized social identities are not a monolithic and therefore have diverging lived experiences and identities that may influence the reliability of such measures. Future studies are urged to examine the structural validity and reliability of these measures among diverse populations including LGBQ youth of color. Similarly, while interesting results were present among ethnic identity, community civic engagement, and social justice orientation, these measures should also be examined among LGBQ youth of color to further enhance the accuracy of findings put forward in future research. Of note, measures such as parental, peer, and mentor support, as well as participation in GSAs are missing in this study. Such variables can positively contribute to the community belongingness, ethnic identity, civic engagement, and empowerment of LGBQ youth. Future research should examine these variables among those variables tested in this study.

Conclusion

This study provided preliminary evidence on the important part psychological sense of community, ethnic identity, and community civic engagement have on not only a social justice orientation (or an orientation toward civic life and advocating to change social issues), but dimensions of empowerment including both the intrapersonal and cognitive components of psychological empowerment among a sample of youth of color. Moreover, this study provided some understanding of how these relationships may manifest differently for LBGQ youth of color, when compared to non-LBGQ youth of color. Findings from this study have implications for youth development programming with and for LGBQ youth of color.

As a group that is historically and socially marginalized, youth of color, but more importantly, LGBQ youth of color are likely to experience social isolation and limited power within their lives (Frost et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2016). Drawing on intersectionality, the multiple marginalized identities of these youth places them firmly on the “margins” of society, leaving

little opportunity for social and often practical support (Frost et al., 2019). However, these marginalized identities may also position these youth for resisting sociopolitical forces that oppress their bodies, minds, and lives. Taking up this lens, may help shape work with and for LGBQ youth of color that frames the possibilities for collective agency.

Given the findings from this study, it is reasonable to call on youth programs and youth workers to take on, as Ginwright (2015) highlighted, a “radical healing” perspective with youth, wherein youth are positioned as savvy actors with the capacity to respond to sociocultural forces in ways that contribute to collective well-being. One mechanism to achieve this goal may be through developing a robust mentorship network that helps these youth socially connect with racially-ethnically similar mentors in the LBGQ community. Pairing youth with such mentors could help form bridging and bonding relationships (see Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and facilitate a critical lens to problematize systems of oppression to motivate toward empowerment and sociopolitical change. For communities of color and those in the LBGQ community, mentors are critical in drawing youth living on the “margins” to the center and helping them feel empowered as well as frame ways to resist oppression (Frost et al., 2019). Again, the results from this study suggest the importance of engaging youth on the margins, particularly LGBQ youth of color, who can then be encouraged to speak out on the change they envision for themselves and their communities.

Note

1. The authors have used the abbreviation LGBQ throughout this article. The “T” for Trans* identifying persons was removed due to this specific subgroup not being examined in the data of this study, as well as youth and adults in this group having often diverging experiences even among those with LGBQ identities. Further, some articles referred to in the introduction use variations on this acronym but for clarity we have kept this term consistent. The LGBQ term was utilized in this study because youth could only identify as one of these four options in this survey that was created by The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) National Minority SA/ HIV Prevention Initiative federal grant program, a limitation discussed later. This limitation will be improved in future research in the field to reflect greater diversity.

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