

“It validates her identity”: A mixed methods approach to examining culture, context, and family engagement in an urban afterschool program for Black and Hispanic girls

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**Author Biographies**

Jacqueline O. Moses, PhD, is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research focuses on strengths-based, contextually relevant, and culturally accessible models of mental health care and pathways to higher education for youth and families of color, with emphasis on Black youth, living in urban poverty.

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Dionne P. Stephens, PhD, is a professor of psychology at Florida International University. Her current research foci examine the ways in which cultural beliefs and expectations influence health inequities, identity development, and decision-making processes. She frames this research using a non-deficit lens and utilizes approaches that prioritize cultural humility throughout all phases of the research process.

Doreen Jean-Jacques, BA, is a graduate of Florida International University and current graduate student at the University of South Florida. Her passion for community outreach and wellness shows through her research experiences in youth focused wellness, mental health, and education.

Helen Vilorio, MSW, is the Director of Programs for Girl Power Rocks, Inc. As Director of Programs, she leads a team to provide high quality programs for at promise girls. She strives to enhance Girl Power's current programming and envisions expanding its programs and services throughout Miami.

Thema Campbell is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Girl Power. She is a champion, an expert in children's issues, and a true advocate for at-promise girls. Ms. Campbell believes passionately in her personal mission at Girl Power: to protect, preserve and nurture the integrity and moral conscience of girls.

Stacy Frazier, PhD, is a professor of psychology at Florida International University. She seeks to resolve health disparities by partnering with youth programs, particularly in systemically underserved communities, and making mental health science historically-, culturally-, and contextually-relevant, accessible, digestible, and actionable.

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The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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### **Ethical Approval**

All study procedures were performed in accordance with the ethical standards of external and Florida International University's institutional review boards.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participating youth, parents, and after-school staff included in the studies.

### **Abstract**

Neighborhood OST (out-of-school-time) programs can provide a safe and accessible setting and promote positive youth development for Black and Hispanic girls in under-resourced communities. The present mixed-methods study examined program-level cultural and contextual influences in family engagement among 24 girl-caregiver dyads (aged 11-15, 83% Black, 13% Hispanic) in a partnering OST program, Girl Power Rocks, Inc. While quantitative analyses minimally revealed girls' perceptions of cultural respect was positively associated with girls' engagement, qualitative analyses elucidated nuance in overlapping and differential themes and subthemes among girls and caregivers. Both girls and caregivers reported on four identified themes contributing to their engagement in OST programming: culture, context, gender, and positive youth development and prevention. While girls reported more on the importance of having a safe supportive space to discuss coping with community violence and discrimination, advocate for their communities, and socialize with friends; caregivers focused on program features fostering healthy development into adulthood for their girls (e.g., communication skills, future orientation, educational support), female empowerment, and program-facilitated experiences beyond their community. Findings provide support for tailoring programs to Black and Hispanic girls and families' unique needs to increase engagement and maximize positive youth development.

*Keywords:* mixed-methods, out-of-school-time programs, culture, context, Black and Hispanic adolescents, caregivers, girls

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Adolescence is a critical period for youth development (Lerner et al., 2011), particularly among Black and Hispanic adolescent girls living in poverty who are developing their identities at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (Clonan-Roy, et al., 2016). Due to systemic racism and historical marginalization, Black and Hispanic girls living in poverty are at elevated risk for health and mental health problems and limited educational opportunities (Anderson & Mayes, 2010; Winkler et al., 2004). Out-of-school-time (OST) programs (afterschool, summer, mentoring) can promote positive youth development (PYD) – positive academic, behavioral, and interpersonal outcomes – among youth. A growing literature cites cultural (e.g., cultural respect) and contextual (safety from community violence) influences towards engagement among Black and Hispanic families in urban communities (Ettetal et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2018). Examining how cultural and contextual factors may influence engagement specifically among Black and Latinx girls and their caregivers may provide insight on improving program relevance and maximize benefits for this special population. The present study extends the current literature by leveraging an ongoing academic-community partnership to examine cultural and contextual facilitators and barriers towards adolescent engagement and caregiver satisfaction in Girl Power Rocks, Inc., (abbreviated Girl Power), an urban multi-site OST program for Black and Hispanic girls.

**Positive Youth Development Among Black and Hispanic Girls Living in Poverty**

Black and Hispanic adolescent girls living in urban poverty experience greater risks and barriers towards healthy development. Prior research has found minoritized girls are at higher risk for depression and anxiety (Anderson & Mayes, 2010), post-traumatic stress (Javdani et al.,

2014), juvenile delinquency (Lopez & Nuño, 2016), school discipline (Annamma et al., 2019), and adolescent pregnancy (Kost & Maddow-Zimet, 2016) when compared to non-Hispanic white girls. While Black and Hispanic girls face more barriers towards PYD than their white peers, frameworks that center their strengths, needs, contexts, and intersectional identities highlight opportunities to mitigate risk and maximize benefits. Spencer and colleagues' (1997)

Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) states that consideration of adolescents' intersectional identities – including race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status intersecting with macro socio-structural levels of access and privilege – including racism, discrimination, and sexism is essential in adolescent identity development among Black and Hispanic youth (Bowleg, 2012). PVEST emphasizes that acknowledging the unique experiences and perspectives of Black and Hispanic youth can be leveraged in a strengths-based, culturally responsive and contextually-sensitive approach by youth settings seeking to foster healthy development. Clonan-Roy and colleagues (2016) further suggest that Black and Hispanic girls specifically, need tailored safe and supportive spaces where they can both be valued for their knowledge and culture and examine the forms of oppression and social contexts they experience.

### **Out-of-School-Time Programs Facilitate Positive Youth Development**

Community-based OST programs are accessible and contextually sensitive settings, often located within neighborhoods and staffed by community members, offering academic support, sports, recreation, enrichment, and arts that promote PYD. A large body of literature has demonstrated youth benefits from OST programs include positive social, academic, and behavioral developmental trajectories, particularly for Black and Hispanic youth (Mahoney et al., 2018; Lerner, et al. 2020). Indeed, 24% of Black youth and 29% of Hispanic youth in the United

States are enrolled in OST programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Thus, OST programs are an ideal setting to maximize reach of PYD opportunities for Black and Hispanic youth.

Several community-based programs, such as the YWCA, Girls on the Run, and Girls, Inc., focus on adolescent girls. In addition to the many benefits of general OST programs, girl-focused programming often aims to provide supportive and strengths-based environments to counter harmful gender stereotypes, promote female empowerment, and foster relational skills and self-esteem to facilitate positive trajectories for girls into adulthood (Galeotti, 2015). For example, Kuperminc and colleagues (2011) found that girls in a predominately Black youth development girls-only program reported higher gains in scholastic competence, future orientation, and physical activity than non-participating girls. Findings support that community-based girls-only programs may foster PYD among Black and Hispanic girls.

### **Program Benefits Depend on Youth Engagement**

Much of the extant OST literature has defined attendance as the primary indicator for maximizing benefits among participating adolescents (Leos-Urbel, 2015; Fiester et al., 2005; Lauver & Little, 2005); however, a strong and growing recent literature has examined the importance of adolescent psychological engagement, conceptualized as the extent to which youth enjoyed, were interested in, and were challenged by program activities, in linking PYD and OST programming (Moore & Hansen, 2012; Liu et al., 2018). Several studies have reported that youth psychological engagement in OST programs – not just attendance – influences positive developmental outcomes including higher reported social competence and academic achievement among racially/ethnically diverse adolescents (Faust & Kuperminc, 2020; Hirsch, et al., 2010). Findings from these studies suggest that psychological engagement in after school programs may be an important factor in predicting positive adolescent outcomes.



Indicators of psychological engagement and PYD outcomes in OST programs have largely relied upon conventional program quality assessment measured through observation and expert review (Shernoff & Vandell, 2008; Hirsch, et al., 2010) yet it is important to ask Black and Hispanic families themselves what they want most in OST programs to tailor programming towards maximizing engagement and PYD benefits. Studies on youth psychological engagement that leverage surveys typically assess the same expert-defined program quality indicators (e.g., diversity in activities). For example, Greene and colleagues (2013) surveyed 435 racially diverse adolescents attending 30 OST programs. Findings revealed program content (e.g., learning new skills) and staff quality (caring, competent) were strongly associated with youth psychological engagement. Of the small examples of qualitative studies focused on OST psychological engagement among Black and Hispanic youth, youth reported opportunities to develop autonomy, competence, learning, and relatedness or social connection to others as motivating factors to engage in programming (Faust & Kuperminc, 2020; Munoz et al., 2023; Dawes & Larson, 2010). Further examination is needed, however, to better understand whether and which culturally and contextually relevant factors may contribute to psychological engagement among Black and Hispanic girls and their caregivers in OST programming.

### **Cultural and Contextual Factors May Influence Family Engagement**

A rich and long-standing literature suggests that cultural and contextual factors can create risk or promote resilience (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Gapen et al., 2011; Neblett et al., 2012). Cultural factors related to mental health risk include discrimination and stigma associated with seeking mental health care (Mays et al., 2017); on the other hand, ethnic-racial identity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), ethnic matching (Cabral & Smith, 2011) and cultural respect (Liu et al., 2018) have widely been recognized as protective, contributing to positive mental health,

academic achievement, and involvement in extracurricular activities among Black and Hispanic youth living in disenfranchised communities, mitigating risk factors such as discrimination.

Contextual factors described as adolescents' social contexts including their household financial resources, school, neighborhood, and community (Spencer, 1997), may also play a role in engaging adolescents in OST programs. Among Black and Hispanic youth and families living in poverty, contextual risk factors (Prelow et al., 2004) have been directly linked to violent behaviors and delinquent acts (Chen et al., 2016), and posttraumatic stress (Javdani et al., 2014), while community cohesion (Gapen et al., 2011) has been linked to more PYD outcomes.

Given the importance of cultural and contextual factors, and the documented contribution of psychological engagement in OST programs, for developing Black and Hispanic youth, a small, yet recently growing literature has begun examining cultural and contextual facilitators and barriers to youth engagement. For instance, in one study exploring Hispanic youth and program leaders' perspectives on cultural responsiveness in youth programming, participants emphasized the importance of program leaders who could create a safe space to affirm youths' cultural values, serve as trusted allies, help youth process discrimination and share experiences, and promote cultural awareness with attention to exploring cultural nuances to enhance program experience and engagement (Govern et al., 2020).

While youth perspectives are important, caregivers – who often find programs, enroll their youth, and must consent to participation – also provide unique perspectives (though their voices are only infrequently represented in research). Caregiver satisfaction – the extent to which caregivers are satisfied with youth programming (e.g., activities, staff-youth relationships) – can influence caregiver involvement and youth engagement in OST programs for Black and Hispanic youth (Moore & Hansen, 2012). A quantitative study of 154 Hispanic adolescent and caregiver

perceptions of cultural features in organized activities found that while adolescents' perceptions of cultural content in activities was associated with more negative experiences, caregivers' perceptions of cultural content predicted higher caregiver involvement in their adolescents' activities (Liu et al, 2018). Moreover, nuance between caregiver perceptions and satisfaction and youth perceptions and engagement in youth programming has been observed among Hispanic families. Ettekal and colleagues (2020) examined perceptions of cultural responsiveness among Hispanic families participating in organized activities. Findings revealed significant heterogeneity in preferences, as some caregivers and adolescents wanted activities to represent mainstream American culture, while others preferred an emphasis on Hispanic culture, and among this group, some were dissatisfied with its narrow representation. Indeed, as Black and Hispanic caregivers hold their own social identities and considerations for their adolescents, discordant perspectives between the two groups may reflect the complexities of meeting the needs of both generations of families and communities. Gaining a deeper understanding of the perspectives of Black and Hispanic girls and caregivers participating in OST programming in high poverty communities can inform program development, relevance, and reach of services.

### **Present Study**

The present study utilized a sequential mixed-methods design to explore how cultural and contextual factors in OST programs relate to youth engagement and caregiver satisfaction among Black and Hispanic families in a partnering urban OST program, Girl Power Rocks. Our first (quantitative) aim was to examine cultural and contextual factors associated with engagement among girls and caregivers. We hypothesized that girl and caregiver perceptions of cultural and contextual factors would be associated with family engagement, such that positive perceptions would be related to higher youth engagement and higher caregiver satisfaction; while negative

perceptions would be related to lower youth engagement and lower caregiver satisfaction. Our second (qualitative) aim was to explore convergence or concordance in perspectives among girls and their caregivers related to engagement and satisfaction to identify factors within and between groups that may maximize OST program benefits for families.

## **Method**

### **Setting**

The present study extends an ongoing partnership with Girl Power, a nonprofit OST program for Black and Hispanic girls (ages 11 to 17) in systemically marginalized communities of high poverty and violence in a large urban center in the southeastern United States. The primary goals of Girl Power are to 1) increase academic success, and 2) decrease juvenile justice involvement and school dropout, via academic support, sports, cultural activities, counseling, and mentoring. Girl Power is offered daily during summer from 8 am to 12 pm and Monday to Wednesday afterschool from 4 to 6 pm during the academic year. At the time of study, total enrollment across four sites was approximately 64 girls (80% non-Hispanic Black; 20% Hispanic). Leadership and staff are located at Girl Power's headquarters and central office, which also serves as one of the four program sites. All other sites are housed within neighborhood middle schools. Girl Power has seven centrally located full-time staff members (86% Black; 14% Hispanic; 86% female) at its headquarters and one part-time frontline staff member per site ( $n = 4$ ; 100% female; 75% Black; 25% Hispanic), recruited largely from the communities they serve.

Girls enrolled in Girl Power participated daily in "girls' circle" – staff-facilitated group discussions to foster interpersonal and leadership skills; twice-weekly tutoring and homework help; twice-weekly physical and mental health education sessions (e.g., yoga); weekly STEM

courses (e.g., learning to code); and health promotion programs targeting healthy choices and drug use prevention. Staff also facilitated local and out-of-state field trips (e.g., cultural museum trips, college tours) and service learning projects (e.g., school beautification) to support girls in gaining positive experiences both within and outside of their communities.

### ***Girl Power Program Site #1***

Site #1 is in a predominately Black (63%; 33% Hispanic) neighborhood, also home to one of the city's largest affordable housing projects. The median household income was \$22,198 and 98% of families lived below the federal poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The neighborhood is often in the local news for violent crimes and criminal activity. At the time of data collection, the site was experiencing frequent staff turnover, having changed their primary frontline staff member three times over the course of six months.

### ***Girl Power Program Site #2***

Site #2 is in a previously predominately Black neighborhood that has more recently diversified with residents of Dominican, Central American, Nicaraguan, Honduran, and Haitian descent (73.63% Hispanic; 21.2% Black; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The median household income was \$22,260 and 97% of households lived below the federal poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). This site had the largest number of Hispanic participants (with a small minority of Black participants). It was the only site with a Hispanic woman as the frontline staff member, all other sites were led by Black women.

### ***Girl Power Program Site #3***

Site #3 is in a neighborhood within the southern region of the city. Residents are predominately Hispanic (54%; 17% Black; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), however, families enrolled in the site were still largely Black. The median household income was \$43,003 and 81%

of households lived below the federal poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The recently assigned frontline staff member was active in family engagement at monthly parent meetings.

#### ***Girl Power Program Site #4***

Site #4 is located near downtown. In the 1940s and 50s, this historic, predominately Black (48%) and Hispanic (48%) neighborhood was a center for nightly entertainment and Black owned businesses (Dunn, 1997). The area experienced economic decline and gentrification as a result of urban renewal and the construction of highways, fragmenting the area's population. Today, the neighborhood is characterized by high poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity. The median household income was \$30,231 and 97% of households lived below the federal poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). This site is in a community-based center that hosts Girl Power's headquarters, offering summer and afterschool programming with focus on justice-involved girls with non-violent offenses. Site #4 houses the most staff and leadership (four Black, one Hispanic, 100% women). Monthly parent meetings with staff and families from all sites are held here.

#### **Participants**

All girls ( $N = 64$ ) enrolled in Girl Power's summer or afterschool program and their caregivers were eligible to participate. Of these, 31 adolescent-caregiver dyads consented, and 24 dyads ( $N = 48$ ) participated in the present study, representing 37.5% of Girl Power's enrolled families. Despite initial interest, seven families didn't participate due to caregiver job conflict, family obligations, or inability to be contacted (e.g., phone disconnected). All consented girls and caregivers ( $N = 48$ ) completed surveys. Twenty girls and 20 caregivers participated in focus groups, while four girls and four caregivers participated in individual interviews represented by 18 transcriptions. For more information on demographics of participating families, see Table 1.

## **Procedures**

Study methods were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board and the partnering school district's Research Review Board. Recruitment involved several strategies encouraged by Girl Power leadership and staff including Girl Power's parent meetings, brief presentations for girls during program hours, and flyers. Five focus groups (at least one per site, ranging from 21 to 51 minutes) with girls and caregivers were conducted separately and simultaneously (2 to 7 participants;  $M = 4$ ;  $SD = 2.35$ ) by a research team of trained, racially/ethnically matching graduate and undergraduate students at Girl Power sites after program hours. Staff agreed to leave during data collection to protect confidentiality. Upon arriving, a member of the research team consented caregivers and girls. Families participated only if both caregiver and girl agreed. First, participants completed surveys (approximately 30 minutes) independently, with assistance from research staff as needed. Next, refreshments were served during a short break while the research team quickly reviewed and synthesized survey responses to identify trends among participants informing the sequencing and prioritizing of questions when focus groups convened. Focus groups, led by one trained facilitator and one notetaker, were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. At the conclusion, participants were asked their preferences for receiving information about findings from the aggregated data (e.g., in-person presentation, newsletter).

Several interested caregivers had work and family obligations that precluded their attendance at groups. Rather than exclude them from the study, we conducted caregiver-only and adolescent-only individual semi-structured interviews and surveys at caregivers' preferred times and locations (e.g., at home).

## **Measures**

### *Survey Measures*

Measures were selected from existing, complete, validated, and psychometrically sound scales based on theoretical and empirical work relevant to racially/ethnically diverse samples. Items were averaged to create indicators of program-level cultural and contextual factors (i.e., cultural content, cultural respect, program discrimination, program ethnic composition), and engagement (i.e., adolescent psychological engagement, caregiver satisfaction).

**Demographics.** Girls reported age, grade/education, gender, race, ethnicity, and years enrolled in Girl Power. Caregivers reported on the same demographics for themselves with the addition of items on public assistance, housing instability, and adolescent's mental health need.

**Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) Impairment Measure.** Caregivers reported on their adolescent's mental health and to what extent difficulties impaired adaptability and functioning (3 items; 1 = not at all to 4 = a great deal;  $\alpha = .90$ ; e.g., "Overall, do you think that your child has difficulties in one or more of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behavior or being able to get on with other people?"; Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Bourdon et al., 2005; Goodman, 2001). Items were computed into a cumulative impact score of adolescents' mental health need and impairment across settings (i.e., home life, friendships, classroom learning, and leisure activities). Caregiver report revealed 54% of youth had impact scores within normal range (i.e., 0), 5% in the borderline range (i.e., 1), and 41% in the abnormal range (i.e., 2-10). Impairment was reported for 46% of youth (10 with minor difficulties, one with definite difficulties), with over half ( $n = 6$ ) exhibiting impairment for more than one year.

**Perceptions of Cultural Content Measure.** Respondents (girls and caregivers) reported on girls' exposure to aspects of culture at Girl Power (3 items; 0 = strongly disagree to 4 =



strongly agree;  $\alpha = .58$  for girls,  $.77$  for caregivers; e.g., “Program leaders teach me about my ethnic or cultural background”; Liu, et al. 2018).

**Perceptions of Cultural Respect Measure.** Respondents reported to what degree the adolescent’s ethnic culture was positively accepted at Girl Power (4 items; 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .68$  for girls,  $.64$  for caregivers; e.g., “The program is a place where people respect my ethnic or cultural background”; Liu, et al. 2018).

**Perceptions of Activity Discrimination Scale.** Respondents reported on perceived discrimination from Girl Power leaders and staff and peers (11 items; 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .92$  for girls,  $.94$  for caregivers; e.g., “The leaders at the program would treat you badly because of your ethnicity”; Liu, et al. 2018).

**Activity Features Measure.** Respondents reported on the number of staff leaders and peers at Girl Power that identify with the adolescent’s own cultural background (2 items; 0 = none to 4 = all of them;  $\alpha = .65$  for girls,  $.65$  for caregivers; e.g., “How many of the leaders at the program are of your same cultural background? ”; Liu, et al. 2018).

**Psychological Engagement Scale.** Girls reported on the extent to which they enjoyed, were interested in, and were challenged by program activities at Girl Power (6 items; 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .68$ ; e.g., “I feel challenged in a good way in the program”; Moore & Hansen, 2012).

**Parent Perceptions of School Age Child Care (SACC) Measure.** Caregivers reported on the extent to which they are satisfied with Girl Power programming (10 items; 1 = rarely to 3 = always;  $\alpha = .74$ ; e.g., “Are there enough different activities offered that your child can choose?”; environment, e.g., “Has the program been a good environment for your child to build friendships?”; and relationships between staff and school-aged children, e.g., “Are the relations

between staff and your child fairly positive?"; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996). Items were minimally adapted for adolescent caregivers (e.g., replacing "child" with "teen").

### *Qualitative Measures*

**Focus group guide and individual interviews.** A study-developed focus group guide (and corresponding semi-structured individual interview) was designed to encourage respondents to expand on their (aggregated or individual) responses from the surveys with greater detail and specific examples while also allowing for alternative perspectives and ideas to add depth to results. We chose focus groups as our primary source of qualitative data collection because they actively involve Black and Hispanic families – often marginalized in research – into the research and feedback process; encourage participation from quiet/more reserved participants (e.g., to expand on another participants' perspective); present opportunity for convergence and divergence on shared experiences (program participation, neighborhood experience); and are easily adaptable and accessible for OST settings (families convened at their local program site; Schaefer-McDaniel, et al., 2007). Focus groups and individual interviews began with an open-ended lead question, "What led you to enroll (your teenager) in Girl Power?". This initial question was followed by probes focused on cultural and contextual factors informed by preliminary review (during break for refreshments) of survey responses. For example, "(Many of) you gave high/low ratings on cultural respect. For example, 'Girl Power has leaders who understand my ethnic or cultural background.' What role do you believe exposure to aspects of your (teenager's) culture has in your (teenager's) experiences at (program name)?" Probes related to context included examples such as, "Tell me about your community" and "What role do you believe Girl Power plays in addressing concerns about (leveraging strengths of) your community?".

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Quantitative Analysis***

Data were analyzed in SPSS Process (Version 23). Girl and caregiver analyses and variables were run separately to eliminate shared variance. Given the sample, boot-strapped analyses were conducted to examine numeric trends between study variables (Preacher et al., 2007). Associations between variables were identified by examining the joint significance between predictors (program-level cultural content and respect) and outcome variables (adolescent psychological engagement, caregiver satisfaction).

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

Aligning with best practices in qualitative and community-engaged research, each coder considered their positionality and reflexivity in relation to participants and the community (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). JOM, a Black, Nigerian-American woman and graduate student at a local university at the time of the study, engaged with Girl Power staff and families for one year prior to conducting this study, facilitating mental health and educational workshops for parents and girls at the request of families, staff, and leadership. DPS is a Black woman of Canadian-Caribbean descent and professor at a local university who partnered with Girl Power for over 10 years prior to the study. DPS introduced JOM to Girl Power leadership and staff. MM is a MENA American of the Coptic diaspora with nine years' experience as a provider in OST settings. EIB is a Hispanic woman of Puerto Rican descent and lifelong local of the city in which the study was conducted.

Qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo 12. We used deductive and inductive thematic analysis approach, an iterative hybrid process that included reviewing data collected and leveraged PVEST and relevant empirical literature to generate themes with focus on culture,

context, and adolescent development, and to explore and embrace emergent themes generated from the data and derived from families' phenomenological experiences (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2006). Further, analysis followed recommended norms to ensure trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Numeric trends informed probes for the focus group and individual interview guides to clarify and extend conclusions drawn from quantitative data.

JOM and DPS generated codes and developed a codebook within domains based on the focus group and individual interview guides as well as observation drawn from all transcriptions and open-coding methods. Through an iterative process, codes, definitions, and categories were refined and agreed upon by three doctoral student level peer coders (JOM, EIB, and MM) during discussion of transcriptions. Focus groups and individual interviews may demonstrate differences; thus, to ensure quality of analysis and interpretation each transcription was coded separately and analyzed for patterns, convergence between and within groups and methods (Rabiee, 2004; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Initially, JOM and EIB independently coded all 18 transcriptions then discussed discrepancies to reach consensus. For thoroughness, a third coder, MM who also contributed to refining the codebook, independently coded 80% of the data. All coders participated in peer discussions and debriefing to elucidate themes. The use of adolescent and caregiver only focus groups and interviews and separate coding of each group and interview allowed for rich data highlighting points of convergence and divergence between and within groups. Illustrative quotes were selected from many different families and across all sites; however, we did not specify each participant's site affiliation to protect confidentiality.

### ***Integrating Data Strands***

Quantitative and qualitative data strands were integrated to generate richer meaning and strengthen conclusions and implications. Quantitative data was used to examine trends in responses, while qualitative data was used to generate themes and elucidate nuance from quantitative trends. Qualitative data were also used to inform quantitative data analysis such that we recognized themes focused on cultural content and respect arose more often in discussion among families, respectively, so we selected only these two variables as predictors in quantitative analyses.

## Results

Results reflecting integrated strands are presented below. Quantitative data were examined using regression analyses. Little's test of missing data patterns (Little, 1988) was not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(6096) = 19.31, p = 1.00$ ; thus, missing data were Missing Completely at Random (MCAR). Qualitative data were examined according to two a priori themes focused on cultural and contextual barriers and facilitators to engagement. Additional emergent themes included gender-specific focus and PYD and prevention. Though not explicitly part of the original research questions or qualitative interview guides (Massey, 2011), they were identified consistently and sufficiently by families as important facilitators of engagement. See Table 2 for additional qualitative examples of subthemes, definitions, and quotes from girls and caregivers.

### *Shared Cultural Values and Representation to Create Safe and Supportive Space*

Families were asked the extent to which, and examples of how, cultural factors (i.e., cultural respect, cultural content) contributed to their engagement in Girl Power. Regression analyses found that cultural respect,  $\beta = .57, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.155, .818]$ , but not cultural content,  $\beta = -.32, p = .09, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.626, -.010]$ , was significantly and positively associated with engagement, suggesting that girls who perceived Girl Power as high in accepting and

understanding of their culture also reported high engagement in Girl Power. There were no significant associations between adolescent-reported program perceptions of cultural content and adolescent engagement with programming. There were no significant associations between caregiver-reported program perceptions of cultural content or cultural respect and caregiver satisfaction with programming. While initial open-ended probing also suggested girls (n=11) and caregivers (n=16) indeed expressed indifference to cultural features or value in culture, indicating that it was not an explicit consideration in engagement, additional probing revealed deeper nuance in family perspectives on cultural influences in programming. Girls and caregivers expressed that Girl Power's incorporation of cultural values rooted in cultural respect and ethnic identity development was a benefit of the program. Further, many caregivers favored that there was representation within the program – staff and peers shared similar backgrounds to their families – which may have helped to cultivate girls' ethnic identity development and feelings of mutual respect and understanding among families and staff.

**Cultural Respect and Understanding.** Both girls (n=16) and caregivers (n=11) said that program staff and families respected and understood their culture, as many identified with their own racial or ethnic group. Families expressed feeling more supported and secure knowing that staff were from the same cultural background and had many of the same cultural and familial values (e.g., respecting authority and elders, educational aspirations, raising girls to be independent women). Girls shared that they felt comfortable sharing experiences of discrimination and seeking advice. Girl #8 shared, “Yeah [staff leaders] understand you more ‘cause they’re from your culture.” Caregivers shared that they trusted staff with their girls because they understood “the struggle” and could build strong relationships because of a shared cultural understanding.

Some girls (n=6) liked that Girl Power provided a space to cope with experiences of discrimination that occurred in other settings. For example, two girls that were called by a racial slur expressed high appreciation for the group space, support, and encouragement received from their program leaders and peers. They added that because most of their Girl Power peers and staff are of the same race, and could relate to their experiences, they felt deeply understood while describing the incident and discussing ways to cope with and respond to racial discrimination. Girl #1 explained, “They can talk to us. Like if we talk to them and say like people are being racist to us, like they’re... judging us off our skin color... They’ll help us [talk] about the racism.”

**Cultural Role Models.** More caregivers (n=13) than girls (n=9) liked that most staff were women of the same cultural background as their family, expressing that staff were positive role models for girls, inspiring them to achieve higher education and obtain employment in the future. Caregiver #2 shared, “The program is run by, mostly, people who look like her, so, to me, it validates her identity... So, it lets her know that her future—she can be in any position she wants.”

There were nearly no reported experiences of discrimination. In fact, only one girl of Hispanic background provided a negative perception of their program’s cultural sensitivity. She attended a site that was predominately Hispanic, and she expressed that staff enforced rules that she perceived as devaluing her culture (e.g., she was not permitted to speak Spanish during some group activities because not everyone was bilingual). Importantly, this was an older girl with significant life experience; thus, she may have felt empowered to express divergent and negative perceptions during this peak period for identity development (Kroger, 2006, Spencer, 1997).

**Cultural Content and Identity Development.** Both girls (n=14) and caregivers (n=14) said Girl Power's curriculum provided girls with opportunities to learn about and develop their own understanding of their cultural identity through various activities. Girls mentioned celebrating and learning the history of culturally relevant holidays such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day; attending cultural events including plays and ballets that centered on Black history with all Black troupes; and learning to tie an African headwrap. Girl #24 shared, "When Black History Month comes, she always have African colors on. She taught me how to put... the African scarf...And she told me how to put it on... It's important to me."

More caregivers (n=14) than girls (n=5) highlighted features of Girl Power that contributed to cultural identity development. One Hispanic caregiver at site #3, shared that, despite not speaking Spanish at home, her daughter was becoming more interested in learning the language and about her cultural background because Girl Power introduced her to and allowed her to socialize with many girls of similar Hispanic background. In sum, girls and caregivers appreciated both the intentional content and natural opportunities at Girl Power to learn, develop, and celebrate Black and Hispanic cultural identities.

### ***Girl Power Addressing Familial and Community Needs and Fostering Belonging***

Families were asked about the extent to which and in what specific ways contextual factors contributed to their engagement in the OST program. Families' experiences and needs particularly related to living in urban, divested and high violence communities and low-income households highlighted appreciation for Girl Power's ability to provide unique opportunities, safety, and shared community experiences, identities, and belonging among girls and caregivers. Among the contextual factors discussed were safety from community violence, community setting and peers, experiences beyond the community, and financial strain.



**Safety from Community Violence.** Girls (n=10) described their communities as having “a lot of problems”, “loud”, and often “hearing gun shots”. Caregivers (n=3) valued Girl Power as a safe and supervised setting, providing protection after school from community violence. One girl said that when her friend was shot and killed, Girl Power helped her to cope with the loss by providing social support and a safe space for her to talk about it. Girls (n=4) also said Girl Power provided one-on-one counseling for them to cope with traumatic experiences related to community violence. Girls (n= 7) also liked program-led opportunities to engage in and advocate for their community. For example, many girls described cleaning and re-painting a local school.

**Community Setting and Peers.** Several caregivers (n=8) and girls (n=6) liked that Girl Power provided a space for new friendships with other girls who were demographically similar and shared similar experiences. Caregiver #24 shared:

I think Girl Power was a way for her to express herself and gain feedback from other girls that were experiencing the same things ...like having a single mom, you know, single parent home... one income homes... siblings from, you know, different parents. You know, um, I said financial burdens. You know, just those community things that we all face.

Relatedly, few caregivers (n=4) and girls (n=4) liked that Girl Power was located at their school which made it easy to transition from school day to afterschool program, with the added benefit that they could socialize with peers for an extended time. A few girls (n=4) expressed that Girl Power provided an alternative to being home after school where they and their caregivers (n=3) felt was safe from community violence while parents were at work. Most girls said they first learned of Girl Power from a peer who was already enrolled or from staff members promoting Girl Power during school events or classroom visits.

**Experiences Beyond Their Community.** Caregivers (n=7) and one girl liked that Girl Power content included experiences beyond families' immediate neighborhood and community contexts, such as organized field trips around the city (e.g., museums) that they may not otherwise have had. Several caregivers (n=8) also liked that multiple aspects of Girl Power were free including enrollment, transportation home, and local field trips. Caregiver #17 expressed:

I also like that they take them on field trips. Cause if we don't have the time, let's say—um, I work. And by the time I'm home, I'm tired. So, they get to be exposed to other things in the community, like field trips, that, maybe, I can't take her to... They can say, "I've been there. I've experienced that. I like it. I don't like it."

**Financial Strain.** Despite the many free features of Girl Power, some caregivers (n=7) were displeased with some extraneous costs and fees, such as college tours to out-of-state universities, that burdened their already strained financial resources. Caregivers described making difficult financial choices between paying for basic needs for their families or paying fees for their girls to participate in all activities, often to the benefit of their education or futures, Girl Power offered. Caregivers explained the tension in balancing wanting to engage in Girl Power's beneficial yet more costly opportunities while also maintaining a household – many of which did so as single parents with multiple children on a low-income – often meant measuring their daughter's expectations in participating in program activities. *Caregiver #8 explained:*

I literally have to pay out of pocket [for daughter to participate in Girl Power's college tour]. I have to literally stipulate the things that I am going to do, and I am not going to do with my daughter. For real. Because she wanna go on every field trip, every program. No, my money don't pay like that. I still got rent and bills, baby.

### ***Sisterhood, Gender Roles, and Female Empowerment***

Caregivers (n=9) and two girls valued Girl Power's gender-specific focus that was represented by enrollment only for girls, an all-female staff, gender-specific activities (e.g., female health education), and emphasis on female empowerment (e.g., values in female independence). Caregivers particularly emphasized that the program was tailored to girls in their adolescence, providing a supportive space to foster girls' gender identities in ways that were congruent with their own values and experiences inclusive of female empowerment and more traditional female gender roles. Families also appreciated that Girl Power provided a space exclusively for girls to build trusting relationships with other girls who share similar intersecting identities and experiences.

**Gender-based Content.** Caregivers (n=9) also liked that Girl Power provided education about female development as their girls transitioned into adulthood, especially regarding topics related to female hygiene, such as menstruation and prevention of body odor. Caregivers expressed not feeling well equipped to explain these topics to their girls themselves. While nine caregivers and one girl shared Girl Power's goal in promoting female empowerment, nine caregivers also liked that Girl Power taught the girls about more traditional roles as well like female etiquette. One mother expressed that she felt her values aligned with Girl Power in teaching her girl how to be "a little lady". One girl, however, expressed a dissenting viewpoint. She said Girl Power values overemphasized gender roles and female etiquette, stifling individuality, and promoting sexist views on behaviors.

**Close Female Relationships.** Some girls (n=6) expressed feeling a closeness or "sisterhood" with their program peers and Girl Power staff, who could relate to their problems (e.g., dating) and offer support, and who they trusted to keep conversations private and confidential. Similarly, caregivers (n=8) liked that their girls could form strong female

friendships without the presence of boys, who may present a distraction. Girl #24 explained, “We’re like a family, so if you make one person feel [bad]...then we all gonna feel it...you just—like, one of my sisters now.” Caregiver #1 shared, “Yeah, they need something for themselves without the boys. You know, they can make them feel good about their self when they don’t have to have a boy to make them feel good.”

Additionally, Black caregivers (n=3) shared that their girls’ participation in Girl Power cultivated girls’ intersectional identity development via learning about Black female hair care through their relationships with other Black girls and Black women leaders. Black caregivers expressed satisfaction with staff and peers helping teach their daughters about ways to care for their natural hair, different hair textures, and valuing each other’s differences. Caregiver #2 shared:

You’ll be around the girls. They’ll give you more advice on how to take care of your hair. Maybe they might tell you, ‘Hey, you need to comb your hair.’ So—like bein’ around other girls, they’ll tell ’em different things they can do...to help them...That’s what I like.

### ***Positive Youth Development and Prevention in an Urban Context***

Several emergent subthemes focused on aspects of Girl Power that leveraged girls’ strengths and prioritized PYD and prevention. Most caregivers shared looking to Girl Power as additional support in raising their girls to be resilient, independent and build futures towards a healthy and fulfilling adulthood through educational and vocational learning, despite the urban and divested context in which they lived. Girls, perhaps due to their emerging adolescence, spoke less towards PYD and prevention, and more towards what Girl Power offered in the present – a space to be themselves and socialize with friends from the neighborhood.

**Resilience, Mental Health Promotion, and Risk Prevention.** Most caregivers (n=17) described factors related to resilience and mental health promotion facilitated their enrollment and satisfaction with Girl Power. They valued Girl Power's focus on promoting social skills and positive behaviors including communication, emotional awareness, and problem solving – and preventing risky behaviors (n=8) including conduct problems, school suspension, drug use, teen pregnancy, intimate partner violence, and juvenile justice recidivism. Specifically, Girl Power established clear rules, including being respectful of others and taking responsibility for their actions, to minimize negative behaviors and promote positive behaviors, which, caregivers (n=9) said aligned with their own values in raising their girls. Caregiver#1 expressed, “I want her interested in other things. And by comin’ here, I like what I see—and I like that they get to use their brain, the thinking, and they have other choices other than becoming’ teen moms.”

**Positive Future Orientation, Educational Support, and Vocational Training.**

Caregivers (n=14) and two girls shared explicitly that Girl Power promoted positive future orientation, inspiring girls to seek and obtain higher education, healthy relationships, and careers, despite multiple adversities. For instance, one girl shared that Girl Power introduced her to and inspired her to pursue a career in computer programming. Girl #5 shared:

At the end of Girl Power ...You say, girls could be who they wanna be. That’s my favorite part ‘cause that’s telling me that I could be who I wanna be without somebody judging me... I wanna be a girl who code or who own or makes videogames.

Several caregivers (n=9) also appreciated that educational support – time to complete homework and receive tutoring, and opportunities to attend college tours – was available through program curriculum. One caregiver mentioned that she was glad Girl Power was housed in her daughter’s school, because it enabled their staff to improve communication between the

caregiver, girl, and teacher, fostering improvements in her daughter's academic achievement. Although many caregivers expressed satisfaction with Girl Power's educational curriculum, a few caregivers (n=4) wanted more options for girls to receive vocational training. Examples included gaining skills in cosmetology, hair styling (e.g., learning to braid Black styles), and "home economics" (e.g., cooking). Caregivers valued multiple opportunities and avenues for learning skills and trades that would equip their girls to be successful adults despite experiencing many adversities.

**Individuality, Self-Expression, and Motivation.** More caregivers (n=10) than girls (n=5) expressed Girl Power was a place where girls could "be themselves". They especially highlighted that Girl Power fostered their self-esteem and that staff attuned to their individual differences and needs. Girls (n=11) expressed feeling comfortable with one or more people at Girl Power and enjoyed socializing with their friends, who were often also friends from school. More caregivers (n=12) than girls (n=2) noted Girl Power motivated them to succeed or "better themselves". For example, one girl spoke about how mentoring a younger girl at Girl Power motivated her to be a good role model through positive behavior and academic achievement. Another girl described how "shout-outs" during group discussions helped her stay motivated with her goals. Girl #4 shared:

We do a circle ... our instructor she tells us what we do for the day or what happens and then she let us express ourselves. Then, at the end of the day she let us give everybody else shout outs of what they accomplish in Girl Power...We say... "Oh we glad that they got through the day," or we glad that they got to finish their project, or they got to finish their homework.

In sum, findings point to the importance of programming attuned to the individual, unique needs and intersectional identities (i.e., race, socioeconomic status, gender, adolescent development) of Black and Hispanic girls and families living in poverty towards increasing engagement and satisfaction, and fostering PYD.

### **Discussion**

The present study utilized a sequential mixed methods design to examine cultural and contextual factors towards girls' psychological engagement and caregiver satisfaction in Girl Power, an urban multi-site OST program for girls. While quantitative analyses minimally revealed that girls who perceived Girl Power as high in respect and understanding of their culture reported higher engagement and that girls' and caregivers' perceptions of cultural content did not emerge as related to higher engagement in quantitative analyses, qualitative analyses revealed greater variability and importance on cultural and contextual factors, highlighting the value of mixed-methods research in illuminating nuance. Qualitative analyses elucidated overlapping and consistent themes on culture, context, gender, and PYD and prevention programmatic features as considerations for engagement among both girls and caregivers. Differentiating subthemes between girls and caregivers further elucidated nuance within larger themes. While girls reported more on the importance of having a safe space to discuss coping with community violence and discrimination, advocate for their communities, and socialize with friends; caregivers valued program features fostering healthy development into adulthood for their girls (e.g., communication skills, future orientation, educational support), female empowerment, and program-facilitated experiences beyond their community. Together, findings support tailoring OST programs to the lived experiences and intersecting identities of Black and Hispanic girls and families in urban communities.

### **Complexity in the Value of Cultural Features in Out-of-School Time Programs**

While quantitative findings were sparse, qualitative findings illuminated that embracing cultural values with ethnic-matching staff and peers, and embedding activities through which youth learn about their culture may help to inspire goal setting and hopefulness among Black and Hispanic adolescent girls. The contrast between quantitative and qualitative findings point to the nuance and complexities of the role that intersectional, identities, including cultural, may play in engaging in programming for Black and Hispanic girls and their families. While quantitative inquiry examined broad domains in which culturally relevant programming may influence engagement (e.g., ethnic composition of peers, leaders), families shared perspectives that were more much more nuanced, in-depth, and specific on the ways which Girl Power provided a space to explore their intersecting identities inclusive of culture and more (e.g., exposure to Black female hair care, African scarf tying, Spanish language), contributing to their overall engagement and satisfaction in programming. Consistent with PVEST, adolescence is a peak developmental stage for ethnic identity development for Black and Hispanic youth (Spencer, 1997). Further, a longstanding literature has consistently found ethnic identity serves as a culturally specific protective factor for Black and Hispanic adolescents (see review Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Although many girls and some caregivers embraced culturally focused content and appreciated ethnic matching staff representation in cultivating identity development, it is worth noting that many were initially indifferent and a few disapproving.

### **Contextual Factors Differ for Girls and Caregivers in Engagement**

Several contextual facilitators and barriers related to program accessibility, safety from community violence, and community engagement emerged. While caregivers expressed that Girl Power provided a safe and supervised space from community violence – supporting a rich



literature pointing to afterschool programs as an ideal space for girls during peak hours for juvenile violent crime (OJJDP, 2018); girls expressed feeling supported and encouraged to discuss and cope with their experiences with violence and trauma. Families liked that their program site was located within their neighborhood schools and offered girls free transportation home. Similarly, families, particularly caregivers, expressed appreciation that most programming was free, although some caregivers were disapproving that some opportunities (e.g., college tour) required a fee. A few girls even expressed that they could talk openly and be vulnerable at Girl Power related to coping with trauma experienced from community violence. Indeed, a few prior studies have identified OST programs in divested communities as a critical setting for youth who experience community violence and trauma (Fashola, 2003; Woodland, 2008). The present study is the first, to our knowledge, examining the perspectives of Black and Hispanic girls and their caregivers on contextual facilitators of engagement, contributing novel findings to the OST literature.

### **Gender and Positive Youth Development are Important to Caregivers**

Although not an initial research question, gender-specific programming emerged from interviews and focus groups as a theme particularly among caregivers. Consistent with previous studies suggesting unique benefits of gender-specific programming for girls (Kuperminc, et al., 2011; Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014), some caregivers in particular valued that Girl Power offered gender-specific features, including female friendships, female role models, gender-based activities, and education about female development (e.g., hygiene). Hence, OST programs for girls may maximize benefits by incorporating gender-specific features into their curriculum.

The present findings also suggest that most caregivers living in urban divested communities enroll their girls in Girl Power to foster PYD trajectories. While girls valued Girl

Power for opportunities to socialize with their peers, many caregivers spoke about the program's strong focus on promoting PYD including emotional awareness, communication, problem-solving, social skills, and self-expression; and corresponding emphasis on preventing risky behaviors including drug use, fighting, teen pregnancy, and juvenile justice recidivism. Although many caregivers were satisfied with the educational supports provided (e.g., tutoring), a few wanted girls to receive more vocational and life skills training (e.g., cooking). Altogether, findings suggested that assessing and addressing the caregivers' needs for PYD programming may be particularly important for increasing engagement and maximizing program benefits for youth. Indeed, a rich literature suggests that OST programs can promote PYD for youth living in urban communities (Onyeka et al., 2022, Frazier, et al., 2013).

### **Limitations**

Findings should be considered in context of several limitations. First, the small sample size and single time point design preclude any causal interpretations or strong conclusions from quantitative analyses. Only about half (48% families; 31 families) of youth and caregivers enrolled in Girl Power consented to participate in the study. Although we recognize there may be some differences between study participants and families who were also enrolled in Girl Power but unable or chose not to participate in the study, it's noteworthy that the study sample demographics (85% Black/African American; 13% Hispanic; 2% not reported) closely match the overall demographics of Girl Power (80% Black/African; 20% Hispanic). Second, the psychometrics of some measures within the current sample revealed poor reliability, thus quantitative results should further be interpreted with caution. Third, although results were shared with participants, staff, and leadership, per convention of qualitative studies, we were unable to reconvene (due to COVID-19) with participants to discuss results prior to

consolidating our conclusions via a member check. Fourth, focus groups and individual interviews may differ in regard to social desirability bias, group dynamics, and richness of responses among participants. While it is unusual to combine data from both methods because of these notable differences, we allowed for both to ensure interested families with unpredictable, complex or competing work schedules could still participate. To ensure quality of analysis and interpretation each transcription was coded separately and analyzed for patterns, convergence between and within groups and methods (Rabiee, 2004; Kitzinger, 2004). Fifth, though data were collected from all participating adolescent-focused program sites, the sample size was too small to consider nesting of families within sites. Probing of the data on key variables (e.g., parental education, cultural content, engagement), however, suggested little difference between sites.

### **Practice and Programmatic Recommendations**

Despite these limitations, recommendations for OST programming tailored to Black and Hispanic girls' intersecting identities and experiences living in under-resourced communities may help engage racially/ethnically diverse families (Spencer, 1997). For instance, as girls reported experiencing community violence and discrimination, and caregivers reported values in PYD and prevention, an explicit focus on addressing traumatic stress and fostering PYD skills may be beneficial (Lane et al., 2017). Indeed, many OST organizations are embracing a trauma-informed approach to staff training and program delivery, and building staff capacity to model and teach socio-emotional learning (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2019). Caregivers also expressed interest in more vocational training opportunities. Recent examples of programs implementing job skills training and mental health enrichment experiences have shown promise and positive benefits for youth impacted by violence (Cromer et al., 2019).

Aligned with Spencer's PVEST (1997) model, families' interests in cultural programming were nuanced and rooted in matching cultural values, experiences, and staff who understand and can foster girls' cultural identity. Findings support the need for Black and Hispanic staff with lived experiences in urban communities as well as professional development training for youth professionals on cultural responsiveness and humility (Simpkins et al., 2016; Richmond et al., 2018). Congruent with findings from Ettekal and colleagues (2020) highlighting the complexities of culturally responsive youth programming among Hispanic youth, the present study – inclusive of racially/ethnically diverse Black and Hispanic families with backgrounds across African, Caribbean, and Hispanic diasporas – underscores the nuance of what it means to be culturally responsive. While some families voiced feeling supported, a few felt rejected for their cultural identities, and still others felt indifferent toward Girl Power's culturally responsive programming. OST programs that can provide a supportive space to embrace racially/ethnically diverse identities and share and celebrate a range of cultures may further elevate benefits for engaged families from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds.

### **Policy Recommendations**

On local, state, and federal levels, OST programs have received inconsistent funding over several decades (Vandell, 2013; Afterschool Alliance, 2014); however, given the present findings, and in an accelerating socio-politically divisive landscape limiting education and exposure for Black and Hispanic youth to cultural history and identity-nurturing opportunities, policymakers and funders are encouraged to increase investments in neighborhood resources like OST programs that support families living in divested communities (Morgan, 2021). Relatedly, findings from the present study support a rich literature highlighting the importance of professional development and workforce support in OST programming (Frazier, et al., 2019).

Policymakers and funders are encouraged to allocate resources to supporting a racially/ethnically diverse workforce by increasing livable staff wages; increasing youth educational and vocational opportunities (e.g., offering STEM courses), and equipping staff, through compensated time for training, with tools for nurturing their own and their adolescents' well-being.

### **Research Recommendations**

Future studies may expand and strengthen this work in several ways, by including a comparison group (e.g., non-participating neighborhood youth) to elucidate differences among families who do and do not engage in OST programs, as well as longitudinal designs examining these factors in engagement as well as their influence on indicators of wellness and PYD among girls and families over time. Future studies may also examine workforce (e.g., program leadership and staff) perspectives on cultural, contextual, gender-specific, and resilience and mental health features in OST programming including whether staff feel aligned and prepared to provide tailored programming for Black and Hispanic girls. Collaborations with OST program families, staff, and leaders – and especially community-engaged Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR; Cammarota & Fine, 2010) approaches – may strengthen the design and reach of practical and sustainable recommendations to maximize program engagement and benefits for Black and Hispanic adolescent girls.

### **Conclusion**

Taken together, the present study identified cultural, contextual, gender-specific, and PYD factors relevant to engaging Black and Hispanic girls and families in Girl Power's OST programming. Findings provide support for tailoring programming to Black and Hispanic girls and families' unique needs and intersectional identities to increase engagement and maximize positive youth development.

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## Table 1

*Sample Demographic Characteristics Among Girls and Caregivers*

	Girl ( <i>N</i> = 24)	Caregiver ( <i>N</i> = 24)
<u>Age <i>M</i>(<i>SD</i>)</u>	12.7 (1.01)	34.5 (.80)
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	92%	87%
Male	0%	13%
Non-binary	4%	0%
Declined to Answer	4%	0%
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
Black/African American	71%	71%
Black/Caribbean American	8%	4%
Haitian	8%	8%
Bahamian	8%	8%
Black/African	4%	4%
Nigerian	4%	4%
Hispanic/Latino	13%	8%
Cuban	4%	4%
Dominican	4%	4%
Salvadorian	0%	4%
Panamanian	0%	4%
Dominican Republic	4%	4%
Puerto Rican	0%	0%
Honduran	4%	0%
Mexican	4%	0%
Multiracial/Multiethnic	13%	21%
Not reported	0%	4%
<u>Caregiver relationship</u>		
Biological Mother		71%
Biological Father		13%
Grandmother		13%
Adoptive mother		4%
<u>Caregiver Education Level</u>		
Less than High School Diploma		13%
High School Diploma		58%
University Certificate or Degree Below Bachelor's Level		17%
Bachelor's Degree		4%
Government Assistance*	38%	
Public Assistance**	79%	

*Note.* \*Families received income from government sources (e.g., unemployment, social security, disability). \*\*Families participated in public assistance programs (e.g., WIC, public housing).

Table 2.

*Qualitative themes, definitions, counts, and additional examples*

Theme		n	Youth Example	n
Subtheme: definition	Caregiver Example			
<u>Culture</u>				
Cultural Role Models: Program staff are same ethnicity or culture as participant and inspire them to achieve	“... I feel that when the girls come here... they respect the people who are here. And if they don’t show them respect, they have consequences. And to me Black women need to be held in a position of respect... if the girls see respect shown here—they’ll demand it from others.”	13	“[Having a staff leader with the same ethnic background] It’s good. ‘Cause she could probably relate on what happened. What happens to, uh, most of the kids... somebody talk about your race, if somebody could’ve been through that, and, like, they can share their own thoughts about it.”	9
<u>Context</u>				
Safety from community violence: Program provides safe space from community violence (gun violence, death by violence, fighting)	“They go somewhere it’s safe. At least you know from 2:20 to 5:30, 5:45, your child is safe...And they are with adults. Opposed to being at home, in your home, doing God knows what, with God knows who.”	3	“When I found out the friend died, they (Girl Power staff) was really, really comforting, because I found out during school.”	10
<u>Context</u>				
Experiences beyond the community: Same access to resources, information, benefits and opportunities in the program, despite socioeconomic status	“...I do like the fact that Girl Power does give them that same opportunities that I think about. It is more out here, and you don’t have to just close your eyes to what you see every day. There is hope. There is something better, you know?”	7	“[At Girl Power] we read books. We do fitness. Um, and we do a lotta fun – interestin’ things, not just fun things. We learn new things and stuff like that.”	1
<u>Gender</u>				
Female empowerment: Encouraging, supporting, teaching teens strengths of girlhood	“It’s [Girl Power is] good. It’s educational... Makin’ em to be an individual, a strong female, independent female, you know, pretty much.”	9	“Girl Power is actually [about] growing up to be an independent woman.”	1

Gender

Female relationships: Program provides place for female friendships and social supports, and role models	“Give her... that support to where she knows that, okay, let me talk to my girls, ‘cause I know my girls can understand where I’m coming from.”	8	“We have our Girl’s Talk... it’s like you could talk to people that been through a lot of stuff, and a lot of girls that’s in there, they’ve been through stuff that I can relate.”	6
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PYD and Prevention

Self-expression: Program allows teens to be themselves (e.g., felt comfortable)	“She can express her own feelings and things like that, and I think, um, Girl Power does help her to explore that.”	10	“We just [feel comfortable to] share our thoughts.”	5
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PYD and Prevention

Communication Skills: Program helps youth communicate more effectively with others (e.g., family, program staff, teachers)	“...What I wanted was... her to be able to communicate better her feelings.”	17	“[Staff member] be, like ...just calm down, take a breath, and be like, ‘Okay, what should I do?’ And then just tell them how you feel.”	4
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