

## Resiliency During Adolescence: Considering the Role of Schools and Culture

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Those concerned with the mental health and education of adolescents have come to a consensus that schools need to incorporate as part of their structure of goals, curriculum, and instruction systematic efforts to promote students' social-emotional competencies and positive character development (Blankstein, 2009; Elias, 2009). Therefore, school-based preventive interventions are becoming more widespread and more widely studied. The promotion of resilience, typically defined as "a pattern of positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity" (Wright & Masten, 2005, p. 18), should be a core component of school-based prevention programming. However, the most important aspect of this topic is the need to consider the extent to which these interventions are being properly tailored to the full range of recipient populations. In particular, what do we know about school-based preventive interventions directed at youth who are members of ethnic and cultural minority groups? Given that ethnic and cultural minority groups can experience a disproportionate level of stressors, it is critical to evaluate the capacity for school-based programs to promote resilience (Cauce, Cruz, Corona, & Conger, 2011). Identifying the state of research and practice in this area is essential for educational equity and for the proper delivery of services to populations most in need.

The increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the United States has been most pronounced in the population of children and youth (Arrington & Wilson, 2004). According to the 2010

US Census, 31.9 % of children under the age of 18 are African-, Asian-, Latino-, and or Native-American, which is approximately 24 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Yet, despite this increasing diversity, culture is typically afforded a distal or indirect role in models of resilience. However, culture plays an important role in children's lives, and cultural factors can relate to and influence resilience and the impact of interventions, particularly among ethnic minority youth (Clauss-Ehlers, 2004).

### Definition and Scope: Focus on African-American and Latino Youth

#### Culture

Culture refers to the common language, history, symbols, beliefs, unquestioned assumptions, and institutions that are part of the heritage of members of an ethnic group (Roosa, Morgan-Lopez, Cree, Specter, & Neal-Barnett, 2002). There is much to be learned about the possible ways in which cultural practices enhance or interfere with attempts to promote and exercise resilience (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008). Forces within a child's ethnic culture may serve as a buffer against adverse social circumstances. Culture builds identity, sets norms for behavior, and provides a sense of group cohesion that is vital to a child's growth and development (Reyes & Elias, 2011). At the same time, sociocultural factors may hinder resilience. For instance, research indicates that certain cultural beliefs and practices, such as focusing more on spiritual than medical cures, can greatly influence the utilization of and response to medical, mental health, and preventive services and intervention adherence (Antshel, 2002; Reyes & Elias, 2011). This, in turn, will affect a child's recovery from an illness or disease or his or her fortitude when faced with potentially precipitating conditions. Finally, most resilience research has focused on Western-based outcomes and has not taken into account how resilience may be defined by different populations (Ungar, 2008).

### **African-American and Latino Youth Outcomes**

Much of the existing research indicates that African-American and Latino youth, the two largest youth ethnic minority groups, face significant challenges and engage in many risky behaviors that can hinder positive development and well-being (Cauce et al., 2011). (According to the US Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Hispanics or Latinos are individuals of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (OMB, 1997). The term Latino will be used in this paper to refer to those of Latino or Hispanic origin.) Many African-American and Latino children are exposed to a disproportionate amount of risk. Research reveals that 35 % of African-American and 31 % of Latino children live in poverty compared to 11 % of White children in the United States (Wight, Chau, & Aratani, 2010). Poverty has been linked to lower levels of cognitive functioning, social development, psychological adjustment, and self-esteem and poor academic achievement (Cauce et al., 2011). Ethnic or racial discrimination is also ubiquitous in the lives of many African-American and Latino children (Kuperminc, Wilkins, Roche, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2009; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007). Discrimination experiences can be demeaning and degrading and are linked to poor mental health and educational outcomes (Luthar, 2006).

Data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System indicates that African-American and Latino youth were more likely than White youth to have been in and injured in a physical fight, threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, attempted suicide, and engaged in sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Latinas have the highest teen pregnancy rate among major ethnic groups in the United States (Cauce et al., 2011; Reyes & Elias, 2011). Latino youth also have the highest school dropout rate. Approximately 21.4 % of Latino youth drop out of high school, which is four times the rate among White youth (5.3 %) and nearly triple the

rate among African-American youth (8.4 %) (U.S. Department of Education & National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

While these statistics are alarming and point to grave concerns for the development of African-American and Latino children and adolescents, they obscure the fact many of these youth are developing quite well despite exposure to significant adversity in their social environments (Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Addison, & Cherry, 2000; Kuperminc et al., 2009). For instance, the vast majority of Latino youth – 78.6 % – *do* complete high school (Reyes & Elias, 2011). A critical question that lies before researchers, educators, and policy makers is how to improve the health, well-being, and achievement of more African-American and Latino youth. Interventions consistent with resilience theoretical models and research provide a promising means to guide school-based preventive interventions directed at least in part toward African-American and Latino adolescents (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

### **Theories: The Ecological–Transactional Perspective and Culture**

Resilience extends beyond the concept of a fixed individual trait or quality (Luthar, 2006) and is best viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses individual, relational, and contextual factors (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008). One major framework guiding resilience research is the ecological–transactional perspective (Cicchetti & Toth, 1997), which proposes that multiple levels of children’s ecologies influence each other and in turn influence children’s development. From such a perspective, appropriate, comprehensive, and developmentally sequenced preventive interventions can best be designed and implemented.

Cicchetti and Toth (1997) conceptualized ecological contexts as consisting of a number of nested levels with varying degrees of proximity to the child, including the macrosystem, exosystem, microsystem, and ontogenic development. The macrosystem refers to the underlying

mainstream societal beliefs and values. The exosystem includes the neighborhood and community settings in which families and children live. The microsystem refers to the family environment that children and adults create and experience. Lastly, ontogenic development includes the individual and his or her own developmental adaptation. Cicchetti and Toth (1997) hypothesized that these levels of the environment interact and transact with each other over time in shaping child development and adaptation. Because resilience is both an individual characteristic and a quality of an individual's environment that provides the resources necessary for positive adaption despite exposure adversity (Ungar et al., 2007), it becomes clear that school-based preventive interventions must be of wide scope if they are to be maximally and widely effective.

### **The Role of Culture in Interventions to Promote Resilience**

Families, peers, schools, and neighborhoods play an important role in children's socialization and development. As part of the socialization process, important cultural messages and values (from both dominant and minority culture) are transmitted to children that can either bolster or hinder resilient adaptation (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Garcia Coll et al. (1996) were among the first to consider the role of culture and diversity from a risk and resilience perspective. According to their integrative model of developmental competencies, socioeconomic status, culture, race, and ethnicity play an important role in the development of ethnic minority children. However, these factors are mediated by social stratification processes, such as racism and discrimination. The contexts that arise as a result of social stratification processes either promote or inhibit development (Garica Coll et al.). A key aspect of this model is the focus on adaptive culture or the ways in which ethnic minority children and families respond to promoting or inhibiting environments. Adaptive culture includes traditions and cultural legacies, economic and political histories, and migration and acculturation. Adaptive culture along with family structure and individual child

characteristics has direct and interactional effects on the developmental competencies that ethnic minority children and youth display (Arrington & Wilson, 2004; Garica Coll et al., 1996).

Clauss-Ehlers (2004) also proposed a model focusing on how culture can influence resilience known as the Culturally Focused Resilient Adaptation (CRA) model. According to the CRA model, resilience results from the interaction between individual characteristics, cultural background, cultural values, and facilitating factors in the sociocultural environment (Clauss-Ehlers). Cultural values play an important role, as they are believed to enhance resilience by building support and protective processes into communities. For instance, one important cultural value for many Latinos is *familismo*, which emphasizes providing economic and emotional support for family members, relying on family members for support, and perceiving family members as behavioral and attitudinal referents (Clauss-Ehlers; German, Gonzales & Dumka, 2009).

According to the CRA model, the cultural values present in a child's life come together to produce a sociocultural environment that either facilitates or interferes with the acquisition of competencies from interventions and their usage and generalization into everyday life circumstances (Clauss-Ehlers, 2004). An environment that facilitates resilience is one that supports mastery and competence, promotes health, and is in harmony with a child's objectives and needs. An interfering environment, on the other hand, may lack the resources to support child mastery and competence (Clauss-Ehlers).

In the most recent iteration of these approaches, Kuperminc et al. (2009) proposed a cultural-ecological-transactional model for studying resilience among Latinos and other ethnic minority groups in the United States. In this model, the interaction between a child's culture of origin and the mainstream culture plays a central role in development. Thus, cultural factors, including values, behaviors, and norms, interact and transact with every level of a child's ecology and help shape outcomes (Kuperminc et al.; Reyes & Elias, 2011). This model suggests

that the culture of the school also provides a dynamic, transactional context that influences how interventions are likely to be received and whether the skills imparted by interventions are likely to be used in school and beyond.

## **Research: School and Cross-Cultural Resilience**

### **Cross-Cultural Research**

As noted above, most resilience research has focused on Western-based outcomes and definitions of what constitutes resilient adaptation. However, there is great variation across cultures in how youth cope even when faced with similar adversities (Ungar, 2008). One area of cultural resilience research focuses on broadening our understanding of how resilience is conceptualized across cultures and contexts. For example, the International Resilience Project (IRP; Ungar et al., 2007) used quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine individual, interpersonal, family, community, and cultural factors associated with building resilience in youth around the world. The total study sample included over 1,500 children from 14 communities on five continents (Ungar, 2008).

The qualitative component of the IRP consisted of face-to-face interviews with 89 youth, ranging in age from 12 to 23 from the 14 communities. These youth were identified by key community members as showing signs of successful coping despite having experienced at least three culturally relevant risk factors ranging from early pregnancy to cultural disintegration or genocide (Ungar et al., 2007). From the interviews, Ungar et al. identified seven tensions across cultures that youth must successfully navigate in order to adapt positively. The seven tensions include access to material resources, relationships, identity, power and control, cultural adherence, social justice, and cohesion. Although context-specific examples of each tension emerged in each participant's interview, the influence each tension played in the narratives varied widely. According to Ungar et al., resilient youth are those who find a way to resolve all

seven tensions simultaneously by effectively using the individual, family, community, and cultural strengths and resources available to them.

Although not highlighted in the work of Ungar and colleagues, schools may serve as an important context to help youth navigate toward resilience outcomes. Previous research indicates that schools play a key role in promoting resilience among at-risk, ethnic minority youth. In general, schools provide a space for children to learn and practice new skills that can build self-efficacy and promote resilience. Further, schools hold many possibilities for positive relationships with adult role models and mentors (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008). Having supportive relationships with adults is critical to resilience, and teachers, like good parents, function directly as protective factors in the lives of at-risk children (Luthar, 2006; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008).

### **African-American and Latino Youth Protective Factors**

In addition to examining differences and similarities in the definition and expression of resilience across cultures, some research focuses on identifying cultural risk and protective factors within specific populations of at-risk youth. As noted above, African-American and Latino youth face much adversity and frequently experience poor outcomes. Cultural beliefs, behaviors, and expectations that have been linked to positive adjustment for African-Americans include a strong spiritual/religious belief system, extended familial and fictive kinship bonds, a collective social orientation, and affective expressiveness (Utsey et al., 2007). For example, Taylor (2010) examined kinship support as a buffer against the effect of negative parenting practices (i.e., use of psychological control) on parent reported child internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Their sample consisted of 204 African-American mothers from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Kinship support was negatively associated with maternal reports of adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems. Results also revealed that kinship support moderated the effect of maternal use of

psychological control on adolescent internalizing problems (Taylor, 2010).

Latino cultural factors related to resilience often cited in the literature include *familismo*, *personalismo* (i.e., valuing civility such as the expression of politeness and helpful behaviors), *respeto* (i.e., respecting elders and authority figures), and having religious faith (Reyes & Elias, 2011). (Placing Latino youth in the United States under one heading may be problematic, as considerable variability exists among Latinos in terms of national origin, immigration and migration histories, as well as different levels of education, socioeconomic status, acculturation, and immigration status. Thus, it is misleading to suppose that all Latinos adhere to a monolithic, unidimensional “Latino culture.” Differences among Latinos likely impact the extent and nature of risk exposure and the availability of resources and protective factors Latino children and adolescents experience in their daily lives (Reyes & Elias). However, there are some shared characteristics among many Latino subgroups such as Spanish language, New World origins, shared values, and customs.) For example, German et al. (2009) examined whether the *familismo* values of Latino adolescents and their parents protected Latino youth from the negative effects of deviant peer affiliations. Their sample consisted of 598 Mexican American seventh-grade students. Results revealed that adolescent, maternal, and paternal *familismo* values attenuated the relation between deviant peer affiliation and teacher reports of youth externalizing behavior problems (German et al.).

Having a supportive relationship with an adult outside the immediate family can serve as an important protective factor. Relatedly, being imbedded in a positive school climate can also play an important role in promoting resilience. School climate refers to the psychological impact of the school environment on children and adults within the school (Cohen & Geier, 2010). Positive school climates are characterized by strong feelings of school safety, feeling cared for and respected by other members of the school community, a sense of belonging to the school community, and clear norms, goals, and values

that promote learning (Cohen & Geier). Research indicates that positive school climate is associated with higher academic achievement, improved self-esteem, lower levels of substance abuse, and reduced mental health problems among students, as well as lower rates of aggression and violence (Cohen & Geier).

### **Ethnic Identity and Racial Socialization**

Finally, some cross-cultural resilience research focuses of the impact of ethnic identity and racial socialization, as it has been suggested that how adolescents deal with risk circumstances is influenced by their perceptions of their own race/culture/ethnicity (Yasui & Dishion, 2007). Research indicates that students who identify strongly with their cultural group tend to do better in school (Yasui & Dishion, 2007). The concept of racial socialization has received attention for its association with positive identity attitudes and adaptive coping in response to racial discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006). In her 2009 study, Smalls explored adolescent African-American’s classroom engagement via the role of racial socialization on the part of the mother. Smalls (2009) defined racial socialization as the specific messages designed to communicate racial status around personal and group identity, intergroup relationships, and societal stigma. Results revealed a positive relationship between racial pride messages and academic engagement. Additionally, for adolescents who perceived their mother’s parenting style as democratic, receiving messages around racial pride was positively associated with their emotional engagement in school (Smalls). Thus, positive racial identity messages can potentially provide adolescences with resilience against negative racial stereotypes about intellectual ability that influence their subsequent achievement (Hughes et al., 2006).

### **Strategies**

The development of evidenced-based prevention programs require that the insights, knowledge, and experience of providers be united with the findings and interpretations of rigorous

outcome research. The overall strategy is one of collaboration and contextualization. Researchers and practitioners need to integrate an understanding of the sociocultural contexts in which children function into interventions if they are to truly be culturally relevant (Clauss-Ehlers, 2004). This includes having local stakeholders participate in the definition of meaningful and positive outcomes relevant to the youth being studied and taking the specific context into account when designing intervention procedures and evaluating resilient outcomes (Ungar, 2008). More specifically, interventions should reflect the attitudes, expectancies, and norms of the target population regarding particular outcomes (Marín, 1993 as cited by Villarruel, Jemmott, & Jemmott, 2005). This should include a careful analysis of essential social-emotional and character competencies valued in a particular cultural and community context, in addition to those shown by research to be essential for effective functioning in school, family, workplace, and community settings (Elias, 2009). Ethnic minority youth are more likely to accept and support the lessons and messages of an intervention if they recognize themselves in the program content (Kulis et al., 2005).

## What Works

Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs are a class of school-based interventions that address students' ability to interact with others socially. SEL can be defined as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively (Elias et al., 1997). School-based interventions that promote students' social and emotional learning represent a promising approach to enhance children's success in school and life (Elias et al.). Findings from a meta-analysis of SEL programs indicate that these programs can have significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies

as well as improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). However, none of the programs reviewed were culturally relevant interventions, despite working with minority populations. This does not discount the value of SEL programs, but it does indicate a substantial area of research and program development with room for improvement.

SEL programs that have been found to be effective with ethnic minority include the Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP; Farrell, Meyer, Sullivan, & Kung, 2003), the Violence Prevention Program, and the Life Skills Training (Botvin, Griffin, & Ifill-Williams, 2001). In addition to having demonstrated efficacy with ethnic minority youth, both programs have been found to be effective in more than three trials and can be considered evidence-based programs. In their 2003 study of RIPP for seventh graders, Farrell et al. found the intervention effective in a 97 % African-American population. In two schools, seventh-grade homerooms were randomly assigned to the intervention or to a no-intervention control group. RIPP-7 was implemented on a rotating basis during electives for those in the intervention group, while those in the control received electives as usual. Ten classrooms of students participated in the intervention ( $n = 239$ ) and 11 classrooms constituted the control group ( $n = 237$ ) with no statistical difference between the two groups on gender, race, age, or family structure (Farrell et al., 2003). The 12-session RIPP-7 curriculum focused on such SEL skills as respect others, speak clearly, listen to yourself, and value the friendship. Students who participated in RIPP-7 program were found to have fewer disciplinary violations for violent offenses during the following school year as compared to the control group (Farrell et al., 2003).

In their 2001 one-year follow-up of LST, a school-based drug abuse preventive intervention for primarily minority seventh graders, Botvin, Griffin, and Ifill-Williams found that participation in the program predicted significantly lower levels of drug involvement than the control group. LST taught students specific



cognitive and behavioral skills for self-esteem, resisting advertising pressure, managing anxiety, communicating effectively, developing personal relationships, and asserting personal rights. One-year follow-up results from this large study (2,144 in the intervention, 1,477 in the control condition) indicated that those who received LST reported less smoking, drinking, drunkenness, inhalant use, and polydrug use relative to controls (Botvin et al., 2001).

Programs such as those detailed above have improved the resilient attitudes and behaviors of at-risk minority youth. Thus, SEL programming has shown the potential to promote resilience in ethnic minority youth without the inclusion of cultural specific components. However, culturally specific programming can contribute to a meaningful involvement of youth in a prevention program. Aktan (1999), for instance, has observed that such cultural modifications produced notable improvement in group dynamics and in the liveliness of interaction, increased spontaneity and enthusiasm in program sessions, and improved ability to relate to program content. Aktan also reported that attendance improved, and given that a primary challenge for all programs working with youth is to have consistent involvement, such findings are significant. Springer et al. (2005) similarly found that minority students receiving culturally congruent substance abuse prevention programs were more receptive and responsive, and showed greater benefit, than when they received more generic programming. This suggests that even within effective SEL programming, improvements can be obtained by tailoring interventions to cultural contexts.

## What Is Promising

### Culturally Relevant Interventions for African-American Youth

*Improving Ethnic Identification.* In their study, Belgrave et al. (2000) included an Africentric component as a specific focus of their intervention, Project Naja (Belgrave et al., 2000). As defined by Belgrave et al. (2000), an Africentric

worldview consists of core values and traditions found among people of African descent and maintained through the Diaspora, including spirituality, harmony, collective responsibility, oral tradition, sensitivity to emotional cues, and an interpersonal orientation. In this study, at-risk African-American girls aged 10–12 were recruited for either the intervention or a comparison group. The schools from which these girls were recruited played a central role in recruitment and dissemination; thus, while the intervention itself was not specifically school based, schools were an active player in promoting and supporting the intervention.

The Project Naja intervention included a graduated series of activities and retreats including four months of weekly sessions designed to enhance and promote self-confidence, self-esteem, and gender and cultural identity, particularly by utilizing an Africentric approach (Belgrave et al., 2000). At the conclusion of the program, the intervention group scored significantly higher than the control on measures of cultural and self-identity. Project Naja strengthened the resilience of ethnic identity as well as other factors previously found to be protective, such as self-esteem and positive peer support, in conjunction with the provision of a skill-enhancing component for at-risk African-American girls (Belgrave et al.; Luthar, 2006). However, it should be noted that this study used a quasi-experimental design which resulted in a threat to validity regarding randomization, and information regarding the control group was not provided.

Subsequently, Belgrave (2002) evaluated the efficacy of a drug prevention program, the Cultural Enhancement Project. In this intervention, sixth graders in six schools in Richmond, Virginia, were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: tutoring, tutoring plus Life Skills Training, tutoring plus a cultural enhancement component, and tutoring plus Life Skills Training plus cultural enhancement (Belgrave). This programming was all school based and specifically included school tutoring. The cultural enhancement curriculum specifically involved Africentric content and methodology, while the

tutoring only condition served as the control. Thirty-two sixth-grade girls completed the cultural enhancement curriculum which consisted of 15 weekly sessions with content and methodology culturally relevant for African-American adolescent girls. At the conclusion of the intervention, the intervention group evidenced greater levels of ethnic identity and lower levels of relational aggression though drug outcomes were not discussed (Belgrave). This study again demonstrates the potential for interventions that include culturally specific components to positively impact youth's resilience, particularly when they are tied to effective SEL programs such as LST.

Finally, in their 2004 study of the Sisters of Nia program, Belgrave et al. once again found significant increases in ethnic identity for girls in the intervention group but not the comparison group. The Sisters of Nia intervention sought to enhance cultural identification by enhancing ethnic identity, promoting an androgynous gender role, and strengthening positive relationships while decreasing negative relationships with peers. The program was conducted as a small group intervention with 59 African-American adolescents ( $M = 11.82$  years). The comparison group received tutoring once a week for 30 weeks, while the intervention group received the same 30 weeks of tutoring plus an additional 15 weeks of cultural programming. The Sisters of Nia program was school based and provided one and a half hour sessions which focused on the cultures of being female and of African descent. In addition to increasing ethnic identity, findings showed that the intervention delayed and/or decreased relational aggression in comparison to the control condition (Belgrave et al., 2004). Although potentially limited in design and generalizability, these findings nevertheless suggest that participation in a cultural intervention can strengthen cultural beliefs and values, which can in turn promote resilience.

*Substance Abuse Prevention.* Harvey and Hill (2004) used a multifaceted approach for a preventive intervention with at-risk African-American male youth 11–14 years old. The MAAT Adolescent and Family Rites of

Passage Program was a strength-based program based upon an ecological framework and is designed to promote resilience in at-risk African-American youths specifically through an Africentric approach (Harvey & Hill). The program ran during the course of a school year and included an 8-week orientation followed by the subsequent Rites of Passage Program, which involved three components: after-school (three hours a day, three days a week), family enhancement and empowerment activities (two hours once a month and a retreat), and, finally, individual and family counseling. Data was collected on 57 participants over the course of a three-year period. Participating youths had statistically significant gains in self-esteem and knowledge about drug abuse, which were also greater than in relation to comparison groups. Although no statistically significant gains were seen pre- to posttest in racial identity and cultural awareness, there was a significant difference in these measures between participants and comparison youths (Harvey & Hill). These results demonstrate that at-risk African-American male youth can be benefited by culturally sensitive intervention designed to promote resilience.

### **Culturally Relevant Interventions for Latino Youth**

*HIV/AIDS Prevention.* Villarruel and colleagues developed a culturally based intervention to reduce HIV sexual risk among Latino youth. Before this intervention, relatively little HIV prevention research focused on Latino youth. The ¡Cuidate! (i.e., take care of yourself) intervention incorporates key aspects of Latino culture, including *familismo* and gender role expectations, such as *machismo*. These cultural beliefs are used to frame abstinence and condom use as culturally accepted and effective ways to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The intervention is also designed to increase HIV knowledge and understanding, identify attitudes and beliefs about HIV and safe sex, increase self-efficacy and skills for correct condom use, and negotiate abstinence and safer sex practices. ¡Cuidate! consists of six 60-min modules and is available in English and Spanish.



Although it was not developed as a school-based intervention, ¡Cuídate! can be delivered in community centers, schools, etc., by health educators, counselors, and health-care providers (Villarruel et al., 2005).

In a randomized controlled trial, Villarruel, Jemmott, and Jemmott (2006) compared ¡Cuídate! to a health promotion control group (i.e., focused on behaviors related to health issues affecting Latino youth). Participants were 656 eighth- through eleventh-grade students drawn from high schools and community-based organizations in Northeast Philadelphia. Of these 553 self-identified as Latino (predominantly Puerto Rican). The intervention was delivered across two days. Study analyses only focused on the Latino portion of the sample. At baseline, there were no differences in sexual behavior outcomes between the two groups. However, across the three follow-up periods (3-, 6-, and 9-month follow-up), students in the intervention group were less likely to report having sexual intercourse, multiple partners, and unprotected sex than those in the intervention group (Villarruel et al., 2006). Students in the intervention group also had more correct knowledge about HIV and had a more positive attitude about using condoms than controls (Villarruel et al.). These results are promising and point to the importance and feasibility of addressing cultural factors in interventions designed to reduce risky behavior in ethnic minority youth. One major limitation of this study is that the majority of the sample was Puerto Rican and self-selected. Further research is needed to determine whether the results of this study are generalizable to other Latino groups. Despite this, ¡Cuídate! is recognized by the CDC as an evidence-based intervention for HIV prevention.

*Substance Abuse Prevention.* Hecth and colleagues developed *keepin' it REAL*, which is a multicultural, school-based substance abuse prevention program for children aged 12–14. *keepin' it REAL* is recognized as an evidence-based treatment by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The program consists of 10, 45 min lessons that are taught by trained classroom teachers, with booster sessions delivered the following school

year. *keepin' it REAL* is designed to help students assess the risks associated with substance abuse, enhance decision making and resistance strategies, improve anti-drug normative beliefs and attitudes, and reduce substance use (Kulis et al., 2005). One of the goals of this program is to match prevention messages to the cultural norms of the targeted group by integrating values identified as most salient for success in communicating with youths from that group (Kulis et al.).

Kulis et al. (2005) examined the efficacy of three different versions of *keepin' it REAL* with Mexican and Mexican American youth: (1) a Latino version, primarily reflecting Mexican American and Mexican values; (2) a version grounded in European American and African-American values; and (3) a multicultural version that incorporated half the lessons from the Latino and non-Latino versions. The Mexican American and Mexican values that incorporated into the program curriculum include *familismo*, *respeto*, *personalismo*, *simpatia* (e.g., niceness), and action orientation (i.e., emphasis on evidence of one's intentions through their actions), as well as Mexican cultural narratives (Kulis et al.). Participants were drawn from 35 middle schools in Phoenix, Arizona. Schools were randomly assigned to participate in either the Latino version, non-Latino version, or multicultural version of the program or a control condition. Students participated in the program during the seventh grade. Pre- and post-assessment data was obtained for 3,402 Mexican and Mexican American students. Results revealed that compared to controls, students in the each of three intervention conditions reported smaller increases in the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. Students in the intervention conditions also reported a significant increase in refusal confidence, whereas control students reported less confidence in their ability to refuse. There were no significant differences in outcomes between the three interventions. However, when compared to controls students receiving the Latino and multicultural versions of the program reported more positive outcomes.

The results of this study suggest that tailoring interventions to reflect Latino cultural values

may be an effective way to prevent substance abuse among Latino youth. One major limitation of this study is its exclusive focus on Mexican and Mexican American youth. While there is much overlap in cultural values and beliefs across Latino ethnic groups, it is not clear whether this intervention would be applicable to non-Mexican Latino youth.

### What Does Not Work

The school environment can have a significant impact on the outcomes associated with school-based programs. Even the most efficacious school-based prevention programs, like the children they are designed to serve, can be considered at risk for failure when placed in disadvantaged, high-stress environments (e.g., impoverished inner-city school district) (Gager & Elias, 1997). This is not to say that empirically supported programs cannot be successfully implemented with at-risk students in high-risk schools. However, there are certain practices that can diminish program efficacy. For example, programs that are short term and not embedded into the culture of the school are unlikely to have the breadth and depth of impact to change negative student trajectories. Programs that do not have explicit components and plans for fostering maintenance and generalization of skill gain are also unlikely significantly alter student outcomes (Gager & Elias). It is also important for programs to find ways of recognizing and addressing conflicts between the culture of the program, the school's culture, and the culture of the home and community. Putting youth in the middle of a clash of cultures may make gangs and other antisocial activities appealing safe harbors, as youth may want to avoid choosing sides.

### Conclusion

Researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of culture and its potential impact on resilient outcomes among youth. Additionally, researchers are moving toward a more contextual

view of resilience where resilience is both an individual characteristic and a quality of an individual's environment that provides the resources necessary for positive adaptation (Ungar et al., 2007). Schools are an important aspect of children's ecologies. Consequently, school-based preventive interventions are becoming both more widespread and more widely studied due to legitimate concerns for the mental health and educational outcomes of adolescents.

An area within this field that has had identifiable success involves the incorporation of systematic efforts to promote students' social-emotional competencies and positive character development (Blankstein, 2009; Elias, 2009). Given the disproportionate level of stressors that ethnic and cultural minority youth can experience, it is critical for school-based programs to promote resilience in these groups (Cauce et al., 2011). SEL-related programming has been shown effective in improving the resilient attitudes and behaviors of at-risk minority youth despite the lack of the inclusion of cultural specific components. However, an area of future challenge and opportunity for both researchers and practitioners will be to incorporate culturally specific components into preventive interventions for adolescents – something shown to be effective in controlled research studies – in ways that will take into account the increasing demographic diversity in schools.

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