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Designing Culturally Responsive Organized After-School Activities

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Abstract

Organized after-school activities promote positive youth development across a range of outcomes. To be most effective, organized activities need to meet high-quality standards. The eight features of quality developed by the National Research Council's Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth have helped guide the field in this regard. However, these standards have largely been defined in terms of universal developmental needs, and do not adequately speak to the growing ethnic and racial diversity within the United States, which is further complicated by issues of power and social class differences. Given U.S. population shifts and after-school funding priorities, the time has come to consider new ways to provide organized after-school activities that are responsive to youth's culture and everyday lives. The goal of this article is to explore how we can help ensure that after-school activities are culturally responsive and address the specific needs of the youth who participate in these activities. Based on theory and empirical evidence, we provide proposed practices of cultural responsiveness for each of the eight features of quality for program structure and staff. The article

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concludes with future directions for research and strategies to implement culturally responsive practices and harness resources.

Keywords
after-school activities, organized activities, after-school programs, culture, ethnicity, culturally responsive, cultural competence

High-quality organized after-school activities support positive youth development, in part, because they provide a safe setting with empowering experiences where youth feel valued for who they are and what they can contribute (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009; Vandell, Larson, Mahoney, & Watts, 2015). But what if activities are positive spaces for some youth, but not all? In fact, some adolescents reported feeling misunderstood, marginalized, and discriminated against when they were at organized activities (e.g., Lin et al., 2016). Such experiences are all too common for many ethnic/racial minority and immigrant adolescents in schools and other U.S. institutions (e.g., Gay, 2010); and due to the increasingly diverse adolescents that activities serve (Jones-Correa, 2011), it is not surprising that conversations around such issues in organized activities are emerging. The central question becomes, how do researchers and practitioners help ensure that after-school activities are culturally responsive and address the specific needs of the youth who participate in these activities?

Drawing upon decades of research, the National Research Council's (NRC) Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth identified eight features of organized activities that practitioners can use to promote positive youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). This seminal work has guided research on program quality for all types of organized after-school activities, including after-school programs, extracurricular activities, community-based programs, and lessons (Vandell et al., 2015). Although the committee focused on universal needs as an initial step, they noted the importance of cultural specificity suggesting that "one must take the local cultural context into account as programs are designed and evaluated" (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p. 68). Yet, very little work on program quality has focused on the importance of culture, how youth's culture might be explicitly addressed in organized activities, and the effects of culture in activities on adolescent outcomes. Simpkins and Riggs (2014) provided a list of illustrative practices on how culture might matter in activities, but the piece was brief and did not systemically examine culture in regard to each of the eight features. The goal of this article is to draw on theory and existing research across multiple disciplines to explore how culture may matter for these eight features in an effort to

provide an initial conceptual framework on culturally responsive organized after-school activities.

A Framework for Designing Culturally Responsive Organized After-School Activities

What is culture and how does it matter in organized activities? Culture includes the patterned ways of dealing with the environment or social context, as a toolkit of symbols, beliefs, values, and practices (Suárez-Orozco, 2015). An individual's culture is dynamic and influenced by a variety of factors including one's ethnic/racial heritage, social class, and surroundings (e.g., Gay, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Developmental scholars argue that an individual will thrive in a given setting when the individual's interactions with the setting are mutually beneficial (Deci & Ryan, 2011; Eccles et al., 1993). In the integrative model of child development, García-Coll and colleagues (1996) emphasized that ethnic/racial minority youth development is enhanced in settings that support and align with adolescents' culture. For example, students have better educational outcomes when they have same-ethnic/racial teachers and when their cultural practices (e.g., native language) were embedded within the school setting, materials, and lessons (García-Coll & Marks, 2009; Gay, 2010). Although issues of person-environment fit such as these are relevant throughout the life course, adolescents may be particularly attuned to issues around cultural fit. From 13 to 19 years of age, adolescents contemplate who they are and how they fit within society (Erikson, 1968). Part of that process is the exploration and resolution of one's ethnic/racial identity, which may increase the salience of issues related to racial, ethnic, and cultural fit for adolescents (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Past research considering culture in doctor-patient and teacher-student interactions often draw on the term *cultural competence*. However, the word competence implies a static set of skills or knowledge that providers need to acquire to effectively work with people, which may unintentionally promote stereotypes (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). In contrast, the term *cultural responsiveness* takes into account the multiplicity and fluidity of cultural practices, beliefs, and knowledge, and conveys a dynamic, synergistic relationship between the provider (in this case, organized activities) and adolescent participants. Adolescents' cultural practices and identity, for example, change over time as they develop, acquire more experiences, and their surroundings evolve. Moreover, there is extensive diversity among adolescents who share the same group status (e.g., first-generation immigrants). Gay (2010) described culturally responsive teaching in schools as that which

> filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their [youth's] cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master. It is radical because it makes explicit the previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes. (p. 26)

We draw on this understanding to argue the need for culturally responsive organized after-school activities. Adolescent co-constructing the activity with staff is essential to providing culturally responsive activities. Throughout the text, we highlight the role of youth voice and discuss this form of youth agency in-depth in the final section of this article.

Culturally responsive organized activities reflect the idea that activities are complex, dynamic, and open systems with multiple developing and interdependent components (e.g., staff, program structure), which have direct and indirect influences on adolescents (Belsky, 1981) and are, in turn, influenced by adolescents as well as external forces (e.g., federal policies and shifts in local diversity; Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). To design culturally responsive organized activities, one must consider cultural responsiveness in all components of this system (Shivers & Sanders, 2011). We focus on program structure and staff, as they are the immediate conduits through which activities shape adolescents' experiences and development (Shivers & Sanders, 2011; Smith, Akiva, McGovern, & Peck, 2014). Program structure focuses on the type of programming provided (e.g., homework help, sport opportunities), the rules and norms that govern people's behavior (e.g., how staff allot time, behavior expectations), as well as opportunities for positive adolescent development, including connections with others (e.g., families, other organizations). In contrast, staff practices focus on staff's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and day-to-day interactions with adolescents, families, and each other. Youth-staff relationships are one of the central mechanisms by which activities influence adolescents' development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Culturally Responsive Program Structure and Staff

This section and Table 1 include the focal piece of the article, namely, where we propose a set of culturally responsive practices for program structure and staff that corresponds with the NRC's eight features of high-quality programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). These proposed practices should be viewed as preliminary because this topic is complex and minimal research exists. Moreover, organized activities are as diverse as the adolescents and families

Table 1. Practices of Cultural Responsive Program Structure and Staff.

Categories	Program structure	Staff
Physical and psychological safety	Have written policies and procedures about inclusivity that specify how the activity is welcoming to all adolescents and families Provide clear structure and procedures for all adolescents to address safety concerns (e.g., racially motivated victimization, bullying) with staff and feeling comfortable in doing so Ensure that policies (e.g., paperwork, English-only policies) do not marginalize groups Provide an environment that is safe, accessible, and welcoming to adolescents and families of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds Ensure all groups have equal status	Be aware of potential culturally based contributors to interpersonal conflict and manage conflict when it occurs Promote constructive culturally based conflict resolution among adolescents and staff Avoid use of language that is discriminatory, teases or makes fun of a particular group, or furthers stereotypes Positively counter practices degrading to particular groups, biases, stereotypes, and discrimination Address specific safety concerns of adolescents who are marginalized, victimized, or have other safety concerns (e.g., lack citizenship documentation)
Appropriate structure	Actively seek input from all families and adolescents concerning culturally appropriate structure in the program Ensure that all families and adolescents understand the program expectations and procedures Balance autonomy and structure that are consistent with adolescents' cultural norms Structure groups and relationships in ways that adolescents are accustomed to Adapt rules to recognize adolescents' responsibilities outside of the activity so that a particular group is not unduly penalized	Use behavior management strategies based on cultural norms concerning limit setting, rules, and monitoring Be flexible and adapt structural demands to align with adolescents' cultural background while maintaining overall structural integrity Co-construct rules and decision-making processes, as well as the structure of youth-adult with adolescents

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Categories	Program structure	Staff
Supportive relationships	Make all communication available in the languages and communication styles (e.g., email, level of eye contact) adolescents and families prefer Have relationship-building activities for staff and adolescents to get to know one another, including daily "check-in" times and more formal opportunities	Have positive attitudes about all cultural groups Focus and build on individuals' assets and strengths Foster partnerships with adolescents where both culturally diverse adolescents and staff are viewed as skilled, knowledgeable individuals Engage in culturally sensitive interactions with adolescents and families (e.g., sharing life experiences, culturally sensitive displays of emotions) Mentor adolescents on navigating their multicultural society and daily challenges that occur within and outside of the activity
Opportunities to belong	Provide opportunities, including leadership roles and decision-making opportunities, for all adolescents regardless of background Make activities a place where adolescents' multiple cultural and social identities are respected Structure activities to foster a sense of community through collaboration toward a common goal rather than competition across groups Structure the activities and groups to minimize marginalization or segregation among participants	Foster positive interactions and shared ownership among adolescents from diverse cultural groups Actively include diverse adolescents in all group-based activities Co-construct activity projects and decision between adolescents and staff that places youth voice at the center Assist adolescents in bridging cultural differences Cultivate a shared activity identity while honoring adolescents' unique identities
Positive social norms	Establish prosocial norms acceptable to all and do not to privilege a particular group Develop and cultivate program norms to integrate youth voice into the developing the list of norms Have written expectations and discussions with staff, adolescents, and families on positive social norms around cultural differences, diversity, and integration	Encourage prosocial norms and behavior among staff and adolescents Treat all participants, staff, and families with equal respect and consideration Promote adolescents' respect and value of diversity Have similar expectations for adolescents of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Categories	Program structure	Staff
Support for efficacy and mattering	Include youth voice in identifying ways to make the program culturally meaningful (e.g., relevant issue they can address, materials, physical space, family events, how they are taught/how the group is structured)	Encourage adolescents to express their needs, interests, and opinions, and support them with respectful feedback
		Do not avoid or dismiss adolescents' questions about their culture or others' culture
	Provide opportunities to connect programmatic content to their daily lives or the lives of those in their community in a culturally meaningful way so that they better understand the relevance of the activity	Support adolescents as they explore their cultural identity and resolve issues concerning culture
Opportunities for skill building	Provide opportunities for skill building (e.g., problem solving) that will help them successfully navigate multiple cultures and intergroup interactions as well as constructively handle bias	Seek teachable moments to discuss with adolescents their culture and others' cultures, teach adolescents strategies to bridge cultural differences in a positive manner, and about cultural capital to succeed in U.S. schools
	Teach adolescents about the history, traditions, and beliefs multiple cultures, including mainstream American culture, in order to enhance cultural knowledge	Be aware of potential cultural differences in valued skills (e.g., assertiveness)
Integration of family, school, and community efforts	Provide opportunities for all parents to be involved, get to know one another, and provide feedback on the program in ways that accommodate parents' schedules and ways of gathering	Know about the diversity and lives of adolescents and families in the area
		Provide outreach to families, especially for those that are "hard to reach."
	Consider adolescents' cultural events and familial obligations in the requirements and schedule.	Be sensitive to families' cultural values and work with families to bridge any cultural differences or conflicts with families
	Capitalize on culturally diverse community resources (e.g., Asian American History Museum)	Actively seek out and communicate with all families and other important people (e.g., teachers, religious leaders, *promotoras*) about adolescents' overall well-being

they serve. Although some practices may resonate more strongly than others given a particular activity, we expect these proposed practices are relevant to a diverse array of activities, which parallels the idea that core aspects of program quality are applicable to all activities (Smith et al., 2014).

The proposed practices for each of the eight features were based on (a) existing measures of program quality, (b) our review of the current literature addressing the feature in a variety of adolescent settings including activities and schools, and (c) our collective knowledge of the field and experience with activities. Although our review covers literatures in psychology, sociology, education, and program evaluation, we could not adequately cover all studies given the length of this article. Our goal is not to provide an extensive review, but rather to propose possible ways in which race, ethnicity, and immigration may matter in adolescents' organized after-school activities. Therefore, our in-text illustrations spotlight examples from the organized activity literature, as they are most relevant.

It is important to note that as in the NRC report, there is overlap and complementarity among the eight features. Having supportive youth-adult relationships, for instance, bolsters a sense of safety. In addition, the specific examples we provide to illustrate what a particular feature might look like in practice may be relevant for more than one feature. For example, actively communicating with parents is important for establishing positive social norms, cultivating appropriate program structure, and integrating family, school, and community efforts. Therefore, many of the specific practices suggested herein may promote multiple features simultaneously.

Physical and psychological safety. A basic, necessary condition for adolescent learning and engagement in an activity is safety from physical harm or unfair treatment (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Given our goal to understand physical and psychological safety through the lens of culture, the practices listed in Table 1 focus on promoting positive intergroup relations, as well as preventing and addressing biases, power differentials, and discrimination. To address these issues in a culturally responsive way, staff need to talk with adolescents and their families to identify the pressing safety concerns of adolescents and the broader community. Although some adolescents may have experienced racial profiling or encountered mainstream institutions where they felt powerless or dismissed (e.g., Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), staff should not make assumptions about their experiences based on their group status. Adolescents' and families' concerns should shape activity practices. By being responsive to adolescents' concerns, staff can take steps to strategically ensure that any strife or inequality present more broadly does not occur in the organized activity.

Perhaps not surprisingly, we argue in Table 1 that having established policies and procedures to address issues, coupled with creating an inclusive environment, will be critical to creating structure that is responsive to adolescents' safety. As an example, consider how language and documentation policies might compromise adolescents' sense of safety. English-only policies may unintentionally alienate adolescents who are bilingual or whose primary language is not English. In such settings, adolescents may feel that the activity is not a safe space to express themselves through engagement in cultural practices, which may be an important part of their identities (Gast & Okamoto, 2016). Restrictive immigration policies have increased racial profiling and separated families due to deportation, prompting some families to be more cautious about their engagement in the community (e.g., Lin et al., 2016; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013). These heavy burdens have pushed many adolescents to be hyper-vigilant and even ask about what happens "if the police come" to the activity (Simpkins et al., 2013). Although there is no one clear solution, it would be helpful for staff to proactively consider the implications of their current policies. For example, staff might revisit the type of paperwork and documentation required to enroll, as it could be prohibitive for adolescents with parents without U.S. documentation.

One critical aspect of creating a safe environment is for staff to manage interpersonal conflict and disruptive behavior. Although negative interpersonal exchanges and ethnic/racial discrimination are reported infrequently in organized activities (Deutsch, 2008; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Lin et al., 2016), these experiences can have profound, lasting effects. Staff should not shy away from addressing these issues (Gutierrez, Larson, Raffaelli, Fernandez, & Guzman, 2016) and will need to do more than react to problems if they want to create a safe, inclusive environment. Being intentional in creating meaningful connections with youth and checking in about their concerns will promote positive relations among those at the activity. Many of the other seven features, such as supportive adult-youth relationships and providing opportunities to get to know peers, help create a safe, inclusive climate.

Appropriate structure. The structure of after-school activities includes (a) the rules and regulations that govern behavioral expectations and management, and (b) how relationships and activities within the program are arranged (e.g., individual vs. collaborative; egalitarian vs. hierarchical; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). A *developmentally* appropriate structure creates predictability, enables effective monitoring, and conveys a sense of safety to adolescents. It is equally important to consider whether the structure of after-school activities is

culturally appropriate. For example, Latino and Black parents may give more directives and monitor adolescents more closely than White parents, especially when there are group differences in socioeconomic status and cultural norms (e.g., Deutsch & Jones, 2008). As a result, a higher degree of staff monitoring may be comfortable and even expected for some adolescents, but perceived as overbearing to others. Many of the proposed practices in Table 1 focus on being adaptable as one of the challenges in providing culturally responsive structure will be exercising flexibility within consistent policies and practices.

At the program level, adolescents' and families' voices can help ensure that the program structure does not inadvertently disadvantage particular groups (Table 1). Many low-income, immigrant, and ethnic/racial minority adolescents, for instance, have moderate to extensive family obligations (e.g., Bejarano, 2005; Ginwright, 2005). Adapting rules to account for adolescents' competing responsibilities will not only help them remain eligible to attend but also convey respect for adolescents' lives (Simpkins et al., 2013). Activities can also be structured in ways that establish order and consistency. During the activity, for example, adolescents from more collectivistic cultures may prefer working as a team to achieve academic, athletic, or social goals, as opposed to individualistic goals. Considering both collectivist and individualistic ways of being will help staff structure the activity in a way familiar to adolescents, thereby providing a sense of predictability and comfort.

Staff are critical in this process, as they are in the primary position to adapt the structure of relationships, rules, and monitoring to align with adolescents' cultural background while still retaining the integrity of the overall structural goals (Table 1). The importance of staff in achieving culturally responsive structures, for example, is evident at sites of the Fifth Dimension, an after-school activity originally established as a university-community partnership (Cole & The Distributed Literacy Consortium, 2006). Certain sites struggled due to staff-youth and staff-parent mismatches, which emerged from differences among youth, parent, and staff conceptions of the appropriate staff-youth relationship structure. At one program site, staff expected youth to follow directives without question, whereas youth were accustomed to having their opinions heard and taken into account; at another site, parents disapproved of the staff's relaxed style and preferred that youth learn to respect and defer to adult authority. Small increases in staff authoritarian behavior at the latter site, while not compromising the essence of the program, helped ensure parents' trust of the program and, in turn, youth attendance.

Supportive relationships. After-school activities are settings for the development of interpersonal processes that promote close affective and instrumental relationships between adolescents and adult staff (Table 1; Eccles & Gootman,

2002; Watkins, Larson, & Sullivan, 2007). Supportive relationships within after-school activities can serve a compensatory function for other settings (e.g., schools) that are not positive developmental settings (Bejarano, 2005; Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Villarruel, Montero-Sieburth, Dunbar, & Outley, 2005). The care, trust, and support adolescents receive within community-based organizations produce not only a sense of community among adolescents and adults but also a sense of family (Ngo, Dyke, & LoBello, 2015; Wong, 2010).

Although supportive relationships emphasize interactions between staff and youth, thoughtfully structured activities provide the foundation for relationship building for adolescents with staff, other youth, and their families (Table 1). Incorporating a "check-in" time each day or "down time" to have a snack and talk with peers and staff allows adolescents to voice their opinions and discuss what is important in their lives (Wong, 2010). Culturally responsive activities can also serve as a bridge to help adolescents strengthen positive relationships with others. For example, a tutoring program serving Chinese immigrant youth organized a workshop on language barriers between youth and parents to address the issue of differential acculturation experienced by immigrant adolescents and their parents (Wong, 2010). This workshop provided a means for youth to gain better understanding of their parents' immigration experiences and build trust in the staff who provided the opportunity.

Staff investments in relationships with adolescents may take multiple forms, such as serving as cultural brokers, showing an interest in an adolescent's life and culture, focusing on strengths, and sharing life experiences in regard to navigating cultural identities (Table 1). Staff may advocate for and help adolescents from historically marginalized groups to navigate social institutions, such as schools as well as health care and legal systems (Wong, 2010). Supportive relationships with adolescents may also mean staff work in "blurred boundaries" between the professional and personal where staff give adolescents access to their thoughts and time beyond official program focus (Ginwright, 2005; McLaughlin, 2001). A Hmong youth leader, for instance, contributed to a Hmong American adolescent's understanding of her bicultural identity and religious practices by sharing her own personal experiences navigating different religious beliefs in family relationships (Ngo et al., 2015). Staff should follow adolescents' lead in constructing these relationships as acceptable adult-youth relationship dynamics differ across cultural groups and adolescents' comfort level (Villarruel et al., 2005; Wong, 2010; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O'Connor, 2005).

Opportunities to belong. After-school activities contain opportunities to meaningfully include ethnic/racial minority adolescents by taking into account the

multiple dimensions of their social and cultural identities. This is significant, because schools often adopt assimilationist ideologies, which can frame non-mainstream cultures and ways of being as deficits (e.g., Bejarano, 2005; Diversi & Mecham, 2005). Moreover, ethnic/racial minority adolescents may experience pressure from their family and community to maintain ethnic/racial cultural practices (e.g., language), whereas mainstream society expects them to assimilate (Ngo & Lor, 2013; Lee, 2005; cf. Ngo, 2016). The conflicting demands can convey to ethnic/racial minority and immigrant adolescents that they do not belong in either culture (Camino, 1994; Roffman, Suárez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003). The practices in Table 1 focus on fostering adolescents' sense of belonging by creating connections to the community (e.g., minimizing exclusion, building an activity-based social identity) while also honoring their cultural identities.

Culturally relevant activities are structured in a way that adolescents feel comfortable expressing the complexity of their multiple, hybrid cultural identities (Ngo, 2016; Villarruel et al., 2005; Wong, 2010). Providing opportunities for adolescents to share positive cultural stories and experiences with marginalization, such as reflecting on expectations to befriend only same-ethnic peers, can help promote adolescents' comfort within activities (Ngo, 2016). Adolescent participation in decision making and more egalitarian partnerships with adults promote belonging by fostering program ownership and investment (Camino, 2000; Larson & Walker, 2010; Table 1). After-school activities are poised to "bridge differences" in ways that break down typical boundaries by structuring activities for adolescents from diverse backgrounds to work together and learn about the injustices faced by various groups that can promote changes in dispositions toward multiple dimensions of differences (Pettigrew, 1998; Watkins et al., 2007).

Staff play a critical role in constructing relationships and activities for adolescents to gain more connection, skills, and confidence (Kirshner, 2008; Larson & Hansen, 2005). Staff can promote adolescent belonging by following adolescents' lead, actively seeking input on project goals, and designing projects around adolescents' community concerns (Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001). Staff, for example, have engaged minority adolescents in activities such as activist campaigns where youth themselves made decisions about focusing on social-change issues (e.g., deportation) important to the conditions of their lives (Kirshner, 2008; Kwon, 2008). As facilitators and co-managers in these relationships, staff bring important experience, knowledge, and resources to help guide adolescent leadership, thereby enhancing adolescent ownership and investment (Camino, 2005; Larson & Hansen, 2005).

Positive social norms. Organized activities cultivate their own social norms or "way of doing things" through both the formal rules established by the activity and the informal values, habits, and expectations upheld by activity participants. Culture, including individuals' attitudes, values, and practices, is an important source of social norms. Although many cultures uphold similar moral values, there is often variability in individuals' expectations, habits, and ways of doing things. One central challenge in providing culturally responsive norms is being responsive to adolescents and families who hold different ideas concerning appropriate social norms. Activities could strive to align activity norms to each participant's cultural norms. However, such an approach is likely counterproductive. Rather, practices in Table 1 encourage prosocial norms, valuing diversity, and respect, as well as strategies for not privileging a single group.

Creating culturally responsive social norms at the programmatic level includes providing opportunities to experience a diverse array of cultural practices and traditions, grounding activity norms in youth voice, and clearly documenting these norms (Table 1). Although activity staff may be well-intentioned in their efforts to incorporate cultural celebrations, we suggest that staff involve adolescents and families in the process. An after-school activity organized a Cinco de Mayo event to celebrate Mexican culture, but was not well received by some Mexican-origin adolescents and parents because the families reported that the holiday was not traditionally celebrated in Mexican culture (Vest Ettekal & Simpkins, 2015). To avoid such misunderstandings, staff can prioritize opportunities for adolescents and parents to articulate their own cultural practices and traditions (Watkins et al., 2007). In addition to actively seeking input, clearly communicating the social norms of the activity with parents and adolescents through discussions and written expectations provides mechanisms to help ensure that everyone is "on the same page" and has come to a common ground on the activity social norms.

Staff can help promote culturally responsive social norms among diverse adolescents by focusing on equality, inclusion, and respect in their interactions with people and in adolescents' interactions among themselves (Table 1). Norms concerning respect for cultural diversity convey there are different ways of doing things that are equally valuable and that all adolescents are respected members of the activity. For example, ethnic minority adolescents who felt their ethnicity and culture were respected had higher activity retention, engagement, positive feelings, and prosocial interactions in activities (Deutsch, 2008; Vest Ettekal & Simpkins, 2015). Staff modeling positive social norms in their interactions with each other is another mechanism to promote respectful setting. Staff can help cultivate positive social norms

among diverse adolescents by being flexible, understanding of, and open to the array of social norms that adolescents bring into the activity.

Support for efficacy and mattering. Activities support adolescents' sense of efficacy by providing youth-centered opportunities to exercise autonomy, make a difference, build on their strengths, and take on leadership roles. Such meaningful experiences foster positive identity, motivation, and achievement (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). However, what is meaningful and how adolescents approach challenges can vary by cultural background. Providing opportunities to thrive in a culturally relevant and meaningful way conveys to adolescents that their cultural heritage, interests, and experiences matter and empowers them to make a difference in their broader community and society. Examples of culturally responsive opportunities for empowerment include working on a service project in one's neighborhood, working with individuals from historically marginalized groups on a shared issue of interest, or learning about one's cultural background (Table 1).

Providing youth-centered activities that connect to adolescents' everyday experiences and interests is one way to foster efficacy, and is important for recruiting and retaining ethnic/racial minority adolescents (Table 1; Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Garcia & Gaddes, 2012). Indeed, including cultural content in programming that was meaningful to the lives of adolescent participants, such as reading stories written by Latino authors, fostered Latina adolescents' engagement in an after-school writing program (Garcia & Gaddes, 2012). In addition, activities that foster sociopolitical consciousness by engaging adolescents in social-change projects created opportunities for adolescents to take action and make a difference in their communities (Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Ginwright, 2005; Kirshner, 2008; Kwon, 2008). These types of practices demonstrate to adolescents that they matter and empower them to contribute to the betterment of society.

Openness to cultural explorations, such as cultural identity development and issues concerning culture, such as language, practices, and norms, is an important staff consideration related to efficacy and mattering (Table 1). Staff can be deliberate in building strong relationships with adolescents by providing a safe space for adolescents to practice using their voices (Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011). Staff can foster adolescents' contributions to the activity by inquiring about adolescents' interests, supporting adolescent autonomy, providing adolescents with respectful feedback, and involving adolescents in decision making (e.g., identification of projects, general rules, or mentoring younger peers through conflict resolution). These strategies promote youth voice, an essential predictor of positive development for marginalized adolescents (Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Perkins & Borden, 2006).

Opportunities for skill building. Adolescents develop skills closely tied to the activity topic, such as reading or drawing, as well as a variety of life skills, including emotion regulation, teamwork, and problem-solving skills in activities (Vandell et al., 2015). These life skills are among the most valuable assets young people gain from organized activities (Vandell et al., 2015). Important life skills that were not given much attention by the NRC were cultural skills (except in Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p. 326, Appendix B). Adolescents, particularly immigrant and ethnic/racial minority adolescents, have to learn skills to navigate multiple cultural worlds, including a dominant world in which their own culture, cultural assets, and identities are often marginalized and members of their group are subject to discrimination (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Villarruel et al., 2005). Organized activities hold great potential as settings for adolescents to develop strategies to reconcile cultural differences, code shift, and explore positive ethnic/racial identities (Ngo, 2016; Watkins et al., 2007). In addition, organized activities are a setting for nonminority adolescents to gain a deeper understanding of cultural difference and develop their cultural skills.

At the program level, culturally responsive activities can help to build adolescents' emotion regulation and problem-solving skills necessary to be "culturally flexible" with multiple cultural repertoires, expanding their own understanding of self and being able to successfully navigate beyond their own social and cultural comfort zones (Table 1; Carter, 2010). Many immigrant adolescents, for example, initially lack the academic cultural capital—the cues and codes of mainstream American culture—that schools privilege to realize their goals (e.g., how to approach teachers; García-Coll & Marks, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Recognizing the realities of deep material inequalities, racial discrimination, or trauma suffered due to migration may require more than simply providing opportunities. Rather, an underlying program emphasis on ethnic/racial exploration or the promotion of ethnic/racial identity, and pride while preparing minority adolescents to succeed, may be appropriate under certain circumstances, and has been shown to buffer minority adolescents from poor outcomes (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Staff's ability to promote culturally diverse adolescents' life skills depends on their ability to find teachable moments where they infuse their knowledge of various cultures into opportunities for skill development (Table 1). For example, explicitly teaching about cultures from historical and contemporary perspectives can promote greater perspective taking, enhancing empathy and facilitating interpersonal problem-solving skills (Ginwright, 2005). Sensitive topics, like effectively handling offensive exchanges or disagreements generated by cultural misunderstandings, might be better addressed during informal

one-on-one teachable moments, providing adolescents an opportunity to "cool off" and practice regulating their emotions (Gutierrez et al., 2016; Watkins et al., 2007). Staff can challenge the use of derogatory labels, and provide a one-on-one opportunity to safely delve into discussions about the origins of such labels, stereotypes, concerns/fears, and strategies to handle such interpersonal problems in the future (Watkins et al., 2007). Although such exchanges can be challenging and need to be handled thoughtfully, overlooking them can exacerbate the problem by giving the impression that staff endorse such comments or beliefs (Gutierrez et al., 2016), in turn creating a setting unfavorable to skill development because adolescents do not feel safe or respected.

Integration of family, school, and community efforts. Strong family, school, and community integration engenders partnerships among these three settings characterized by a common purpose of promoting positive adolescent development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Activities adept at harnessing and coordinating family, school, and community settings are better equipped to leverage resources to promote adolescent development (Finn-Stevenson, 2014). This may be particularly helpful for ethnic/racial minority and immigrant adolescents who feel their home, school, and activity lives are comprised of different worlds, each with unique norms and expectations (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). We propose that the practices in Table 1 will enhance family and community involvement, which, in turn, can help the development and implementation of effective, culturally responsive activities. As such, activities with clear aims to engage culturally diverse families can connect with youth in meaningful ways by infusing parent knowledge into opportunities for socialization and learning (Bryan, 2005).

Actively cultivating family-school-community integration has increasingly become a primary mission of many organized activities. For example, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) share a specific directive to increase parent-school-community involvement, especially among low-income, ethnic/racial minority families who may face cultural and language barriers (James-Burdumy, Dynarski, & Deke, 2007). One successful example of involving families is family dinner nights, where staff facilitate adolescents' communication with their families to resolve tensions between their family lives and school lives (Riggs & Medina, 2005). Parent workshops are another mechanism for parents to offer their perspective and feedback on the activity, learn about the activity, be involved, and get to know one another. Activities can partner with local community organizations to develop collaborative opportunities that they could not achieve on their own, such as dance classes, family aid/assistance, student academic support, and service

learning projects (Bryan, 2005; Finn-Stevenson, 2014; Vandell et al., 2015). Complementary services promote adolescent development through opportunities for skill development and removing additional stressors and systemic barriers to growth (Taylor & Adelman, 2000).

Engaging community partners and culturally diverse families can be challenging for staff. With regard to families, staff may need to reach family members who speak different languages, lack trust in mainstream institutions, or have little or no experience with organized activities (Gast, Okamoto, & Feldman, 2016; Larson & Walker, 2010; Simpkins et al., 2013). To engage "hard-to-reach" families, staff may need to connect with families through nontraditional means such as home visits or other community centers (e.g., churches, cultural centers). Seeking out and communicating with families, as well as working with community partners to address families' unique needs, will enhance the potential of an activity to promote the overall well-being of adolescents and their families. For example, staff can serve as translators and advocates, increasing communication and understanding across families, schools, and community members (Riggs & Medina, 2005). These outreach efforts will help staff identify families' needs and tailor partnerships to meet those needs.

Moving Forward

The framework proposed in this article is based on theory and empirical findings, but this topic is complex and will require a body of systematic research to develop a comprehensive list of practices. The existing research on cultural responsiveness is limited in general, and even more so in regard to organized activities. This section provides an agenda for research, policy, and practice.

Future Directions for Research

The proposed framework for designing culturally responsive organized activities requires continued specification through studies using quantitative and qualitative methods. The most fundamental research question is whether, in fact, adolescents in more culturally responsive organized activities demonstrate more positive outcomes than those in organized activities that are less culturally responsive. In addition, empirical questions remain concerning which indicators in Table 1 matter most and when culturally responsive organized activities matter most: for whom, under what circumstances, and for what outcomes (Simpkins, 2015). For example, culturally responsive organized activities may have a larger, immediate influence on activity-specific outcomes (e.g., diversity of membership, high-quality staff-youth interactions) compared with

broader aspects of adolescent development (e.g., achievement tests) as development is ultimately determined by a variety of settings. There is a particular need for qualitative research that illuminates the nuances of settings, behaviors, and interactions important for understanding culture and cultural change. Moreover, this research is driven by the need to develop best practices for organized activities that ultimately improve adolescent outcomes. As such, researcher-practitioner partnerships, in which information flows bidirectionally, can help ensure that the research questions are relevant and cover the full scope of the issue staff face (e.g., whether the eight features capture all central aspects of culturally responsive activities), and thereby improve the potential long-term impact of research on practice (Tseng & Nutley, 2014).

Practice and Policy Recommendations

The landscape of organized activities includes activities with a variety of goals and content. We see this variety as an advantage, and are not suggesting that organized activities change their goals. Rather, we urge stakeholders, from local activity directors to state and federal policy makers, to consider the subtle ways that culture matters within organized activities to increase program effectiveness in the sphere of development they currently aim to promote. The tricky part is how to translate culturally responsive recommendations into practice. We hope our framework will help guide what we see as a continuing conversation between researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

Approaches to creating cultural responsive activities. A recent in-depth study of 10 nonprofit, youth-serving community-based programs described three main approaches that programs used to address diversity (Okamoto, Gast, & Feldman, 2012). The first was a *universalistic approach*, which emphasized commonalities across all adolescents in terms of needs and experiences, such as highlighting shared interests and fostering a common group identity (e.g., we are all part of X community program or Y basketball team). Other programs adopted an *ethnic-specific* approach that focused on the unique cultural needs of the adolescents served, which involved a comprehensive understanding of the ethnic, immigrant, and/or refugee community's unique historical, cultural, and socioeconomic situations. Finally, yet another group of organizations took on a model of *multiculturalism*, which acknowledged a need for culturally tailored programming, but addressed and celebrated ethnic diversity among all adolescents. Okamoto and colleagues (2012) concluded that the optimal strategy is to incorporate aspects of all three approaches.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, organized activities can simultaneously emphasize commonalities adolescents share, promote connections to adolescents through ethnic-specific approaches, and emphasize the value of diversity. To be clear, the universalistic approaches we endorse focus on finding connections among adolescents, which can include identifying shared interests and experiences, as well as fostering a sense that adolescents are all part of the same activity group, to build comradery and a shared activity-based identity. This approach is distinct from colorblind approaches where individuals assert that ethnicity/race does not matter, which can perpetuate group differences (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013). Settings that emphasize *both* a common group identity and individuals' ethnic/racial identity can support positive intergroup relations and reduce prejudice (for a review, see Killen & Rutland, 2013). Such an approach requires staff to take extra steps to learn about adolescents' unique identities and understand the everyday experiences of marginalized groups (e.g., structural racism). Simultaneously, organized activities need to address common values and experiences that adolescents share and the fluid nature of culture for adolescents and families.

Harnessing resources to realize culturally responsive goals. Staff currently have access to several key resources within their activity and community who can help address these issues. Throughout this article, we have emphasized youth and family voice. Without adolescents' and families' participation, activities will not survive. More than that, adolescents and their families have assets, expertise, and experiences that can enrich an activity, which in turn could produce larger youth impacts. Adolescents can harness their energy and resources to help codesign activities with staff. In addition, soliciting input from the community will help staff understand if they are failing to reach particular segments of the local population, and keep them apprised of local issues and resources (Simpkins et al., 2013; Villarruel et al., 2005). Staff also can rely on each other as a vital resource. Staff can use the list in Table 1 as a springboard for reflection and discussion, and to make adjustments without fear of sanctions from the larger organization or funder. Creating space for a safe, open dialogue among staff about their current challenges and possible strategies, perhaps as a standing part of staff meetings, will help staff be better prepared to address these issues (Ginwright, 2005).

Designing and maintaining culturally responsive organized activities will take continued concerted effort from staff *and* upper level administration. Although we focus here on staff and program structure, it is unlikely culturally responsive activities will be possible without support from the larger organization. Many activities are part of larger organizations (e.g., Boys and

Girls Clubs of America, community centers, and schools) that determine activity goals, philosophies, and infrastructure (Baldridge, 2014; Shivers & Sanders, 2011). Trying to achieve goals that are at odds with the larger organization can make staff's work challenging to say the least (Baldridge, 2014). Organizations can serve as advocates, providing resources and expertise to support staff's efforts to create and maintain a culturally responsive activity. For example, Big Brothers/Big Sisters (n.d.) recently formed advisory boards to help cultivate culturally responsive mentoring, hiring, and training to better serve Latino and Native American youth. Support from the larger organization will be necessary as translating many of these culturally responsive recommendations into daily best practices will be challenging. Implementing practices, such as cultivating a feeling of equal status among all adolescents, into daily practice is complex when entrenched power hierarchies exist outside of the activity (e.g., White privilege). Advisory boards can bring together expertise to tackle the challenging issues around implementation. In addition, local, state, and national organizations can play a key role in providing initial and ongoing training for staff.

Although there have been calls for regular training programs to prepare schoolteachers to work effectively with diverse students (Gay, 2010), fewer calls have been made for the training of organized activity staff. We view training as a vital component as many of the topics discussed in this article are emotionally charged and can be intimidating discussions for staff to initiate (Gutierrez et al., 2016). If culturally responsive strategies are not executed in a thoughtful manner in the activities, it is possible that organized activities can perpetuate stereotypes, accentuate intergroup differences, alienate the adolescents they are trying to reach, and amplify cultural divides (Bejarano, 2005; Vest Ettekal & Simpkins, 2015). Initial and ongoing training coupled with informal opportunities for staff discussion will help support staff's confidence and ability to address these issues. Statewide-organized activity conferences and workshops, if conducted sensitively and effectively, provide a venue for professional development.

Conclusion

Organized after-school activities are influenced by changes in the broader context and will need to adapt to attract diverse adolescents and effectively promote positive youth development. Due to demographic changes in the U.S. population and recent shifts in educational policies, there exists an urgent need to consider the role of culture in organized activities. We argue that cultural responsiveness is inseparable from quality and should not be an add-on or separate component (Gay, 2010; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Shivers

& Sanders, 2011). High-quality organized activities are designed "*to and through* their [youth's] personal and cultural strengths" (Gay, 2010, p. 26). In order to achieve this goal, staff will need to cocreate the activity with adolescents and place the voices of adolescents, families, and the communities at the center of programming. Our framework for culturally responsive organized activities includes concrete practices for the integration of cultural responsiveness into program structure and staff across the eight features of quality that can be used to guide efforts in research, practice, and policy.

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