

The Avalon Carver Community Center's Winners Sankofa Project:
An Evaluation of an African-centered Model of Culturally Specific Alcohol,
Tobacco and Other Drug (ATOD) Prevention Youth Practice



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Abstract

This study examines the effect of a culturally relevant, school-based intervention designed to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for ATOD use by promoting cultural assets, improving attitudes towards school, and increasing alcohol and drug awareness among 4th and 5th grade African American youth from 2008-2014. The intervention is a strength based, African centered model that promotes cultural values and awareness and identity development to mitigate the effects of discrimination and racism. The goals of the Winners Sankofa Intervention are: 1) to improve knowledge of and increase intolerance of drugs; 2) to strengthen cultural values; 3) to increase racial identity; and 4) to improve attitudes towards school of participating youth. Pre and post data were collected from 4th and 5th grade participants in the intervention and comparison groups. Measures of drug knowledge, Africentric values, racial identity, and attitude towards school were obtained. The outcomes from four self-report measures indicated significant program effects for program participants on all of the dependent variables. These findings provide evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Winners Sankofa Intervention as a “self-determination” strategy to prevent drug use and improve educational outcomes for African American pre-teen youth.

Keywords: culture-based intervention, program evaluation, African-centered, African American youth, elementary school youth, inner city youth, drug prevention

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Background

Alcohol and marijuana continue to be the leading substances of choice for inner city, African American youth. Risk taking behavior increases when combined with alcohol and marijuana use and the use and abuse of these and other substances have resulted higher rates of student dropout and lower educational attainment; higher unemployment and poorer employment outcomes; increased birth defects and infant mortality; child abuse and parental neglect; disintegration of families; increased suicide attempts and completed suicides; higher rates of criminal activity and incarceration (particularly of African American males); and higher prevalence of HIV and AIDS (Cummings, Wen & Druss, 2011; Unnever, 2011; Steffensmeier, Feldmeyer, Harris, & Ulmer, 2011; Jackson, 2010; Bloice, 2010; Beatty, Petteruti, & Ziedenberg, 2007; Schiraldi, Holman, Beatty, 2000). In recent years, social justice advocates such as Marian Wright Edelman argue that these risk taking behaviors of African Americans fuel the “prison pipeline” in the United States (Edelman, 2012).

History of the African-centered Model in ATOD Prevention

In the 1990s, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) publicly acknowledged the dynamic role that culture plays in healthy human development by publishing a Cultural Competence Series (Alexander, 1997). During this same period, the African-centered ATOD prevention model emerged as a cultural-specific strategy for ATOD prevention practice.

According to Nobles and Goddard (1993, p. 116), “Africa-centered is the term used to classify

the African and African American cultural system.” Central to this philosophy are traditional-based African cultural structures, e.g., ontology, cosmology, axiology, ethos, ideology, worldview, values and beliefs. These structures and supporting African-centered precepts guide the Winners Sankofa Project’s ATOD youth prevention curriculum and pedagogy.

The Winners Sankofa Project (WSP), formerly known as For Square Pegs Only (FSPO), was created for Avalon Carver in the late 1970s by Darnell Kofi Bell, a Los Angeles-based educator and community-activist. Located since 1984 on the campus of the Tom Bradley Magnet Elementary School in Los Angeles, this project’s remarkable history and successes with high-risk, African American children and youth reveal a legacy of timely, culturally-specific human and social services programming. Within Winners, the Afrocentric philosophy and African-centered social services theories provide the foundational frameworks for developing programs and services for African American children and youth.

Programs like Winners are not the norm in mainstream ATOD youth prevention practice. According to Bell, Anderson, and Grills (2011), there is a limited or narrow-band of research available within the National Institute of Health (NIH) that effectively examines the role of culture pertaining to people of African ancestry. In their analysis, mainstream ATOD agencies have not done enough to advocate for cultural competence frameworks in treatment and program evaluation. Nationally, this is a public policy issue that requires leadership for diversity and effective ATOD treatment and services.

Defining Culture in Public Health Prevention: A History of Politics and Marginalization

Numerous definitions of “culture” have been presented by myriad scholars; however, generally-speaking, culture can be defined as the, “Shared values, norms, traditions, customs,

arts, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people” (Linton, 1947; Berne, 1964; Bellah, et al. 1985; Light and Keller, 1985).

Dr. Kobi K.K. Kambon’s (1992, p. 215), *The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework*, defined culture as: “the institutionalized practices and products of a people’s cosmology-worldview evolving through their bio-geo-historical, and philosophical patterns in the world that are passed from generation to generation of the (racial) group; the operationalization of a racial group’s cosmology/worldview in the everyday life of the people comprising the group.” Kambon’s definition clearly suggests that sensitivities to cultural differences should guide the design and implementation of programs and services to diverse populations; unfortunately, it has not served as a stimulus for the creative development of culturally-specific ATOD programs and services in mainstream practice.

In 2006, the APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice directed the leading national health institutions to utilize evidence-based models in ATOD prevention practice (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006). The Task Force’s endorsement of the clinical (medical) model substantiates the field’s historical racial politics and resistance to diversity initiatives. Politics aside, the Winners Sankofa Project introduces an African-centered model for ATOD youth prevention practice that aims to counter the deleterious effects of poverty, school failure, substance abuse, incarceration, and the environmental context of racism (White Supremacy) and systemic (public policy) marginalization in American society.

Winners Sankofa Project: A Culturally-Specific Model for Community Self-Determination

The Avalon Carver Community Center’s (ACCC) embrace and support of the Winners Sankofa Project demonstrates innovative organizational leadership and understanding of the powerful role that African cultural influences such as “ethos” (beliefs) and “worldview”

functioning play in contemporary African American individual, family, and community life. In the Winners model, a series of culturally-specific assessment instruments are utilized to measure participants' emotional, cognitive, and social functioning, including participants' racial, cultural, and mental health beliefs and behaviors. The major goals of the project are as follows:

Goals

- To reduce the instance of substance abuse and other self-destructive behavior among African American youth associated with historical and contemporary trauma.
- To enhance African American youth's psycho-social functioning.
- To enable African American youth to develop a sense of confidence, competence, and consciousness.
- To improve participation in positive school-related activities.
- To encourage African American youth to have high aspirations.

The corresponding activities in the project are then designed to reduce the environmental (home/school/community) and social (family/peers/societal) risk factors associated with historical trauma such as Post-Traumatic Slavery Syndrome (PTSS) (DeGruy, 2005).

Assessing Protective and Risk Factors

In the Winners Sankofa Project, the African American's historical, social-cultural context and contemporary experience is strategically integrated into dynamic spirituality and rituals, culturally-relevant curriculum lessons, and holistic family-school-community activities as protective factors. The following "protective factors" are identified and assessed in Winners:

1. Positive and resilient (attitude)
2. Social competencies

3. Perception of social support from adults and peers
4. Healthy sense of ethnic self-identity
5. Cultural connectedness
6. Positive expectations/optimism for the future
7. High expectations
8. School motivation/positive attitudes towards school
9. Student bonding and connectedness (attachment to teachers, belief, commitment)
10. Academic achievement/reading ability and mathematical skills
11. Opportunities and rewards for pro-social involvement

In addition, the identification of debilitating risk factors that make it difficult for African Americans to function intra-personally, inter-personally and within institutions is also addressed.

These risk factors are:

1. Lack of ethnic self-identity, cultural anomie (traditional values and morals)
2. Poor self-esteem/Self-worth
3. Antisocial behavior and alienation/delinquent beliefs/general delinquency
4. Involvement in drug dealing
5. Favorable attitudes toward drug use/early onset of drug use
6. Early onset of aggression/violence
7. Intellectual or developmental disabilities
8. Poor refusal skills
9. Life stressors
10. Mental disorder/mental health problems
11. Low academic achievement

Winners' utilization of protective and risk factors assessments provides excellent data for the development and implementation of culturally-specific intervention strategies using the African-centered ATOD youth prevention model.

Gender

It is often cited in literature that girls out-perform boys on most measures of aptitude and achievement through mid-adolescence (Pomerantz, E. M., Altermatt, E. R., & Saxon, J. L., 2002; Varner, F., & Mandara, J., 2013). This study also examined whether results differed by gender on the four self-report measures.

Program Design and Curriculum

Curriculum

The centerpiece of the Winners intervention is its African-centered curriculum. It is delivered in modular form and consists of written activities, lesson plans, and extra-curricular activities. The project's curricular strategies support the psycho-social developmental needs of African American children, by strengthening racial identity and self-concept. The project's classroom and after-school activities and lessons are designed to focus on developing critical thinking prowess and writing skills using culturally relevant pedagogical strategies that inculcate knowledge of African and African American role models.

The lessons of the Winners curriculum address seven themes: 1) Self-Identity, 2) Self-Esteem, 3) Feelings Validation, 4) Substance Use & Abuse, 5) Leadership Development, 6) Decision-Making, and 7) Coping Skills. Workbook lessons target an important value or character trait and an African American or Latino role model associated with that trait, e.g., Assertiveness of Maxine Waters, Courage of Cesar Chavez, Eloquence of Jesse Jackson, Kingliness of Dr.

Martin Luther King, Magnificence of Marcus Garvey, Nationalism of Malcolm X, Opinions of Sonia Sotomayor, etc.

Classroom Activities

Classroom activities, facilitated by program staff, are taken from the intervention's curriculum, target 120 youth, and are facilitated in 6 classrooms per week over the entire school year from August/September thru May/June. Each classroom receives an average of 30 weekly sessions—lasting 55 minutes each. The lessons of the interventions for classroom participants are focused on participants' self-identity development.

Figure 1: Program Classroom at Tom Bradley Elementary School in 2013-14



After School Activities

The after school activities of the intervention are facilitated Monday to Thursday and include homework assistance workshops, ATOD (Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug) Awareness and Leadership Development Workshops—lasting 60 minutes each. Lessons from the Winners Curriculum Series with a leadership or a substance abuse focus form the basis for these workshops that target 25 youth referred by school staff. During the school year, an average of

30 ATOD, 30 Leadership Development and 120 Homework Assistance Workshops are facilitated as part of the after school programming.

Hypotheses

The Winners Sankofa intervention assessed four critical interacting variables in substance use prevention; racial identity, cultural values, school sentiment and ATOD awareness. The following are the four hypotheses associated with the evaluation of the Winners Sankofa intervention:

1. African American participants in the experimental intervention will have significantly stronger racial identity awareness at the end of the school year than African American youth in the comparison group as measured by the Children's Racial Identity Scale.
2. African American youth in the experimental intervention will have significantly stronger cultural values at the end of the school year than African American youth in the comparison group as measured by the African (Cultural) Values Scale.
3. African American youth in the experimental group will have significantly better attitudes towards school at the end of the school year than African American youth in the comparison group, as measured by higher scores on the School Sentiment Index
4. African American participants who receive the intervention curriculum will have significantly higher ATOD awareness scores at the time of post-test than those of African American youth in the comparison groups.

Evaluation Methods

Design

The research utilizes a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design to measure the extent of change as a result of the Winners Sankofa intervention. Intact 4th and 5th grade classrooms participate in the program as experimental or comparison groups; program participants are not randomized.

Sampling

Evaluators gathered data on 582 fourth and fifth grade students over four academic years.

Table 1, below, summarizes the sampling by grade level.

Table 1: Sample Size by Academic Year

Academic Year	Fourth Grade		Fifth Grade	
	Experimental Group	Comparison Group	Experimental Group	Comparison Group
2008-2009	71	29	74	0
2009-2010	66	15	48	21
2010-2011	58	18	33	16
2013-2014	51	11	58	13
Total	246	73	213	50

Researchers gathered data from 326 African American participants and 68 African American students in comparison groups and 133 Latino participants and 55 Latino students in comparison groups over four school years. Approximately half (52%) of the sample was male. Evaluation data were not gathered during the 2011-2012 academic year because of a late program startup, abbreviated services and our inability to secure control groups and the 2012-2013 academic year because no services were provided at Tom Bradley Elementary School.

Experimental Group

The experimental group consisted of intact 4th and 5th grade classrooms at Tom Bradley Elementary School in the Lemeirt Park area of Los Angeles. Table 2 summarizes the ethnic composition of the experimental group for the four years examined by researchers.

Table 2: Experimental Group by Academic Year and Ethnicity

Academic Year		African American	Latino	Total
2008-2009	%	81%	19%	
	N	117	28	145
2009-2010	%	65%	35%	
	N	74	28	114
2010-2011	%	70%	30%	
	N	64	27	91
2013-2014	%	65%	35%	
	N	71	38	109
Total	%	71%	29%	100%
	N	326	133	459

Comparison Group

It was difficult to find schools that would participate as comparison groups for the study. Program staff had approached some other schools, but they were hesitant in making the commitment. Original comparison groups (in 2008 and 2009) had some ethnic diversity and were from South Central Los Angeles, but were primarily chosen because they would allow the data collection. In 2009 another school was used that was slightly closer to the intervention target school. However, in 2013, the program was fortunate enough to secure a comparison group that was very close geographically (only a mile or two away) and undoubtedly identical to the treatment group. Table 3 (below) presents the ethnic breakdown of comparison groups by academic year.

Table 3: Comparison Group by Academic Year and Ethnicity

Academic Year		African American	Latino	Total
2008-2009	%	48%	52%	
	N	14	15	29
2009-2010	%	61%	39%	
	N	22	14	36
2010-2011	%	44%	56%	
	N	15	19	34
2013-2014	%	71%	29%	
	N	17	7	24
Total	%	55%	45%	100%
	N	68	55	123

Measures

Four evaluation instruments were used to assess outcomes related to participants' racial identity, cultural values, attitudes towards school and ATOD awareness: 1) Africentric (Cultural) Values Scale, 2) Children's Racial Identity Scale, 3) the ATOD Awareness Scale, and 4) the School Sentiment Index.

Africentric (Cultural) Value Scale for Children

Developed by Belgrave (1993), the Africentric Value Scale for Children (AVSC) consists of 19 questions that address how African-American children internalize themselves and their community. Participants respond to the questions with yes, no, or not sure. Only the "yes" responses are counted and the higher the score, the higher the Africentric values. The scale ranges from 0 to 19 with 19 being the highest possible score. The AVSC has a reported reliability coefficient of .64 (Belgrave, 1994). It should be noted that questions containing the words, "African American and Black" in the original scale were replaced with "Latino and Brown" for use with Latino participants.

Children's Racial Identity Scale:

Also developed by Belgrave (1993), the Children's Racial Identity Scale is a nine-item instrument that focuses on how the respondent feels about being African American and about African Americans in general. Responses to the questions are yes, no or not sure. Only the "yes" responses are counted, except for four questions that are reverse scored. The higher the respondent's score the higher their racial identity. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale has been reported as .67 (Belgrave, 1997). The scale, similar to the AVS, was modified for use by Latino participants.

School Sentiment Index

The School Sentiment Index (SSI) developed by Instructional Objectives Exchange (IOX), consists of 80 statements regarding various aspects of school. An overall score for attitude toward school in general was obtained from this analysis instead of the subscale scores for seven other dimensions. The SSI, modified for the target population; was reduced from 80 to 25 statements. An internal consistency estimate based on the Kuder-Richardson 20 formula of $r = .72$ (N = 108) and a test-retest (two-week interval) reliability index of $r = .87$ (N = 151) was obtained for the Primary Level of the SSI. (Popham, 1972).

ATOD Awareness Scale

A twenty-item instrument that was developed by program staff to measure the impact of the ATOD Prevention and Educational workshops on the attitudes, opinions and behaviors of program participants. The ATOD Awareness Scale was developed from information associated with substance abuse taken from SAMHSA's Substance Abuse Awareness Fact Sheet and changed into True/False statements. The test-retest reliability for this assessment was $r = .87$.

Procedures

Classrooms were recruited during August and September to participate in program activities or serve as comparison groups for testing purposes. Pre-testing was conducted over 1-2 sessions and took place in September while post-testing was also conducted over 1-2 sessions and took place in May and June. The testing was administered by Avalon Carver staff members who are trained in African-centered education and cultural diversity. Between testing periods, participating 4th and 5th grade classrooms received an average of 30 Self-Identity Workshops (55 minutes each) facilitated on a weekly basis throughout the school year. Comparison group students received no services (from Avalon Carver). Naturally, informed consent forms were signed by parents of all participants and comparison group students.

Analyses

As is commonly done with pre-test/post-test conditions, paired sample t-tests were conducted to test for significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the two settings. Pearson *r* correlations were also conducted to examine the significance of the relationships between dependent variables.

Results

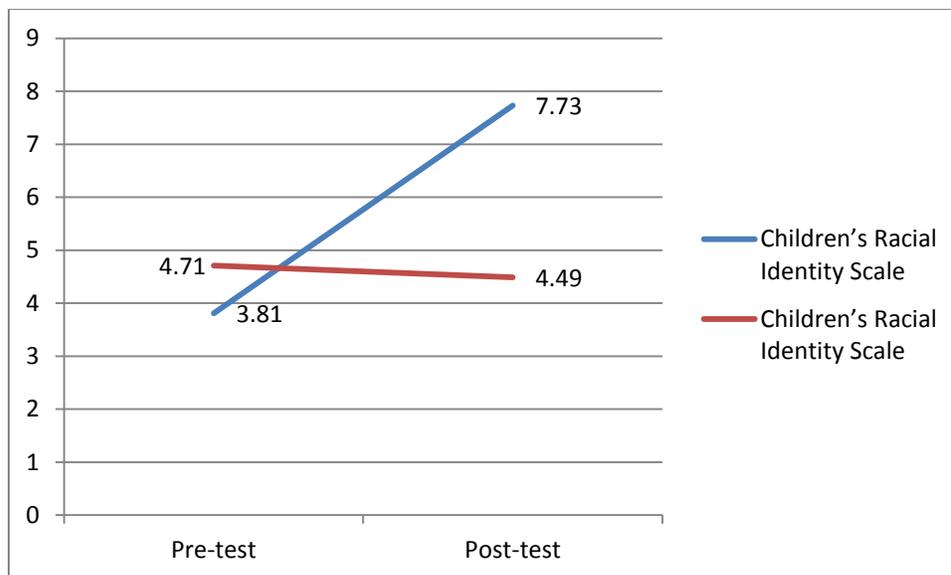
Hypothesis 1

African American participants in the experimental intervention will have a significantly stronger racial identity at the end of the school year than African American youth in the comparison group as measured by the Children's Racial Identity Scale.

Despite the differences at pre-test, African American participants in the intervention had significantly higher scores at post-test on the racial identity assessment than those in the comparison group. Figure 2 illustrates the comparison between the two groups at both intervals.

The Winners Sankofa Project had a significantly positive impact on racial self-identity in African American pre-adolescents. The experimental group showed significant growth of 3.92 points (44%) while the comparison group remained virtually unchanged (-.02%), confirming the hypothesis.

Figure 2: Children's Racial Identity Means at Pre-test and Post-test



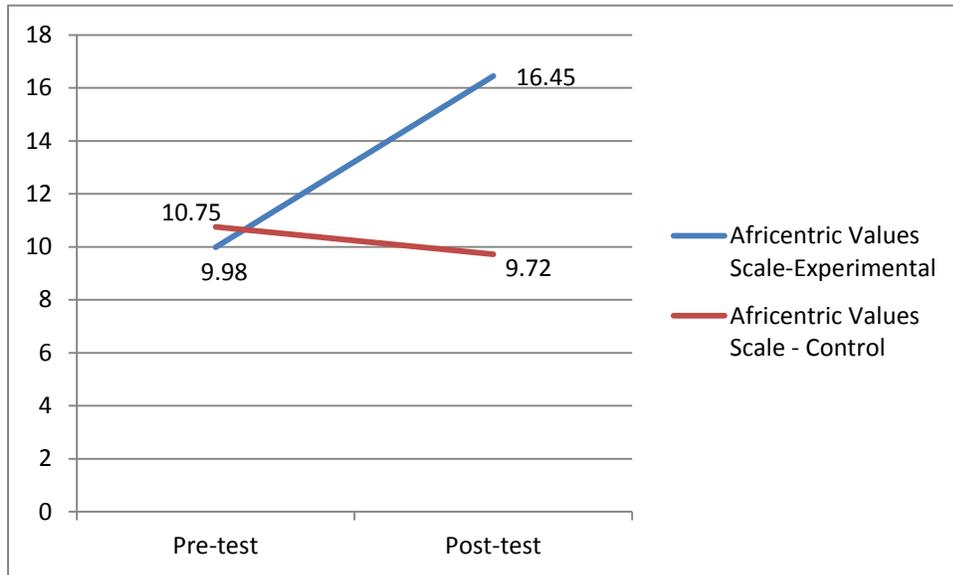
Hypothesis 2

African American youth in the experimental intervention will have significantly stronger cultural values than African American youth in the comparison group by the end of the school year as measured by the African (Cultural) Values Scale.

African American participants in the intervention had significantly higher scores at post-test on the cultural values assessment than those in the comparison group. Figure 3 illustrates the comparison between the two groups at both intervals. The Winners Sankofa Project had a significantly positive impact on cultural values in African American pre-adolescents. This

comparison shows significant growth of 6.47 points (34%) for the experimental group vs. a loss of 1.03 points (-.05%) for the comparison group confirming the hypothesis.

Figure 3: Africentric (Cultural) Values Means at Pre-test and Post-test

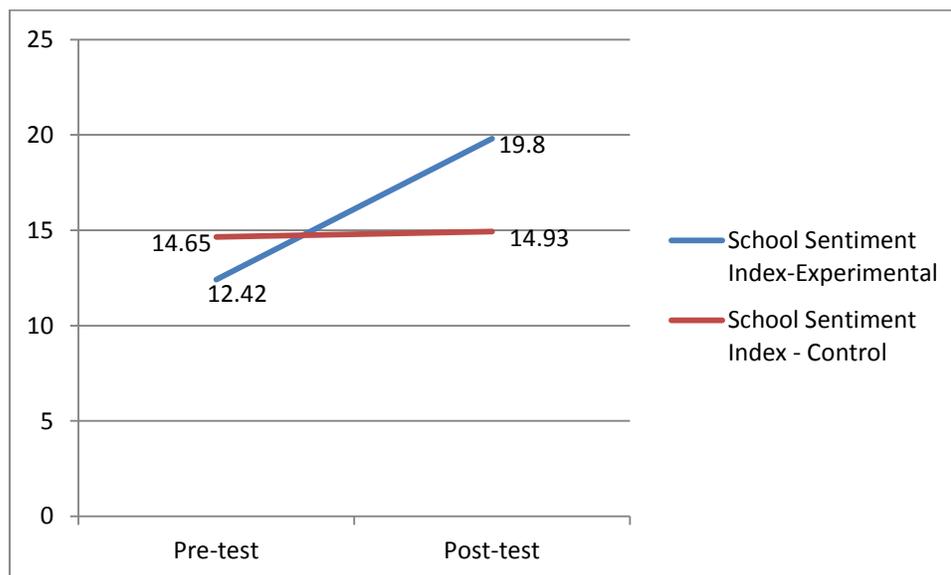


Hypothesis 3

African American youth in the experimental group will have significantly better attitudes towards school at the end of the school year than African American youth in the comparison group, as measured by higher scores on the School Sentiment Index.

African American youth in the experimental group had significantly better attitudes towards school at the end of the school year than African American youth in the comparison group, as measured by higher scores on the School Sentiment Index. The null hypothesis was successfully rejected with respect to School Sentiment for African American 4th and 5th graders. Figure 4 shows the significant differences between experimental and comparison groups on the School Sentiment Index. This comparison shows significant growth of 7.38 points (30%) for the experimental group vs. a gain of .28 points (.01%) for the comparison group confirming the hypothesis.

Figure 4: School Sentiment Index Means at Pre-test and Post-test



Hypothesis 4

African American participants who receive the intervention curriculum will have significantly higher ATOD awareness scores at the time of post-test than those of African American youth in the comparison groups.

It was expected that because of the relationship between racial identities, cultural values, attitudes toward school and drug avoidance, African American youth in the experimental group would have significantly higher ATOD awareness scores than those of African American youth in the comparison group. This was indeed the case. The null hypothesis was statistically rejected demonstrating that the recipients of the intervention have significantly higher ATOD awareness than their counterparts in the comparison group (Figure 5). This comparison shows significant growth of 7.08 points (35%) for the experimental group vs. a loss of .87 points (-.04%) for the comparison group confirming the hypothesis.

Figure 5: ATOD Awareness Scale Means at Pre-test and Post-test

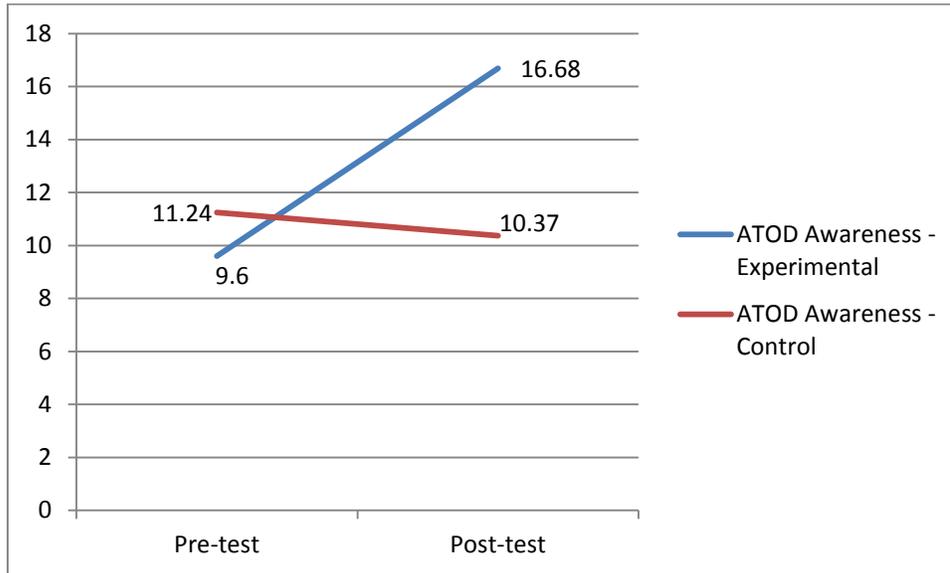


Table 4 reveals that the experimental group achieved significant gains while the comparison group had no growth or even a slight recession from pre-test to post-test on all of the assessments.

Post-test means of the experimental and comparison groups were compared for each of the assessments. Even though the comparison group was significantly higher than the experimental group at pre-test, the experimental group is significantly larger than the comparison group at post-test on all measures.

Table 4: Pooled Sample Mean Differences in Pre-test and Post-test Scores for African American Students on Four Assessments

	Experimental (n=305)		Comparison (n=68)	
	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{O}_1	\bar{O}_2
Children's Racial Identity Scale	3.81	7.73**	4.71	4.49
Africentric Values Scale	9.98	16.45**	10.75	9.72
School Sentiment Index	12.42	19.80**	14.65	14.93
ATOD Awareness Scale	9.60	16.68**	11.24	10.37

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

We can see in Table 5 that all of the dependent variables are significantly correlated at post-test ($p < .01$).

Table 5: Correlations among the dependent variables at post-test

		AVS	SSI	ATOD
CRIS	Pearson Correlation	.67	.44	.65
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00
	N	365	351	365
AVS	Pearson Correlation		.47	.73
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.00
	N		353	369
SSI	Pearson Correlation			.49
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.00
	N			353

Secondary Findings

In addition to the primary hypotheses, researchers also examined data on two other groups to investigate the need for further research. Because of the number and size of the original

classes, these simple analyses could be conducted. Group means were calculated by gender and race to see if the scores of African American girls were similar to those of African American boys and to see if the mean scores for Latino students were similar to those of African Americans.

African American Girls

As expected, girls' scores were comparable or slightly higher in both the experimental and comparison groups on the four assessments. However, the differences were not statistically significant. Table 6 presents the mean scores for girls and boys for each of the dependent variables.

Table 6: Mean Scores for African American Girls vs. Boys on Four Measures

		Experimental				Control			
		Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
CRIS	Mean	3.90	7.89**	3.74	7.61**	4.68	5.03	4.75	3.85
	N	128	128	170	170	37	37	31	31
AVS	Mean	9.95	16.57**	10.00	16.36**	10.76	10.11	10.74	9.25
	N	130	130	172	172	37	37	31	31
SSI	Mean	12.41	20.17**	12.43	19.50**	14.81	14.57	14.46	15.36
	N	134	134	168	168	37	37	31	31
ATOD	Mean	9.33	17.10**	9.80	16.37**	11.35	10.51	11.11	10.20
	N	129	129	173	173	37	37	31	31

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Latinos

Because of the growing number of Latino students in our targeted elementary school, researchers were interested in the impact of an African-centered, culture-based program for Latino youth. For each program measures and in both experimental and comparison groups, Latino participant gains and losses were comparable to those of African American youth. The

fact that gains were seen between Latino experimental and comparison groups supports the development of an expanded curriculum or even a parallel one, targeting Latinos.

Table 7: Pooled Sample Mean Differences in Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Latino Students on Four Assessments

	Experimental (n=118)		Comparison (n=55)	
	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{O}_1	\bar{O}_2
Children's Racial Identity Scale	3.77	7.63**	3.87	4.11
Africentric Values Scale	9.91	15.81**	10.13	8.36*
School Sentiment Index	12.53	19.44**	12.65	12.76
ATOD Awareness Scale	10.14	16.44**	10.15	8.89

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Limitations

There is a positive interaction between ethnic and cultural identification, the internalization of cultural values and substance abuse among adolescent African Americans. However, additional studies are needed to examine whether this type of empowerment actually leads to an increase in academic achievement and a reduction in future substance use.

The constructs: racial identity, cultural values, school sentiment and ATOD awareness are conjointly addressed in the curriculum and conduct of the Winners Sankofa intervention. Because of the nature of this multi-faceted program, it is difficult to determine the unique contributions of each aspect of the Winners intervention to each outcome.

An additional problem exists for any study examining the impact on ATOD prevention. Ultimately, only longitudinal results will be able to prove the efficacy of any prevention

program. Short of that, researchers must continue to use and refine assessments that try to predict future behavior. More work needs to be done to improve these early intervention instruments

A final concern might be the inclusion of secondary findings associated with Latino participants in an African-centered intervention. The inclusion of the program's findings on its Latino youth reflects the potential universality and global impact of African-centered prevention on people that share similar life experiences and a similar worldview. Communities are no longer racially isolated and we find more communities of African American and Latino youth living together and attending school together. Researchers in this study found that Latino youth exposed to an Africentric curriculum and intervention demonstrated positive gains when compared to Latino youth in program control groups. It would be interesting to examine if African American youth on a predominantly Latino school campus and exposed to a Latino-centric curriculum/intervention would experience similar positive results.

Discussion

Racial identity has been cited as a factor that protects against substance use (e.g., Brook, Balka, Brook, Win, & Gursen, 1998) and that minority adolescents and young adults who have high levels of racial identity appear to be able to resist or delay substance use initiation, have more negative attitudes toward substances, and are more likely to perceive substance use as being non-normative among their racial group than are youths who have low levels of racial identity (Belgrave, Brome, & Hampton, 2000; Corneille & Belgrave, 2007; Pugh & Bry, 2007). It is also noted that Black youth who felt more positive about their racial group reported less alcohol use, especially among those for whom race was more central to their identity (Caldwell, Sellers, Bernat, & Zimmerman, 2004). The findings in this study corroborate these earlier discoveries.

Several studies also confirm that racial identity and achievement are positively related. Aultschul, I., Oyserman, D., & Bybee, D. (2006) found that three aspects of racial identity—feeling connected to one's racial, ethnic group, being aware that others may not value your group, and feeling that one's group is academically achieving—were related to better grade-point averages. Macintosh and Miller (1999) found that a strong racial identity was related both to higher educational involvement and self-reported grade-point averages.

This evaluation examined the impact of an ATOD prevention program for 582 African American and Latino youth in Central Los Angeles that promoted cultural assets while improving attitude towards school and alcohol and drug awareness. Results showed that participants in Winners had: significantly higher racial identity and cultural values; significantly better attitudes towards school; and significantly higher ATOD awareness than similar youth in a comparison group.

The positive findings in this evaluation are attributed to the Winners program's utilization of environmental and cultural agents that protect African American youth from the many adverse effects of racism, including substance abuse and school failure. While it is logical that a culturally specific curriculum would have a large impact on racial identity, other factors which may also contribute to the program's success are:

- Images, language and symbols that resonate with African American children
- Utilizing staff from the same community as the participants
- Trained professionals that are mentors—students interact with staff at many levels.

Staff has often helped individuals with personal challenges and individual goals.

- Integration of role models with tutoring. This helps students not only with academics, but provides consistency that likely improves attitudes toward academics.

In this project, the use of an African-centered ATOD youth prevention model demonstrates that African Americans can be educated and empowered for self-determination using culturally-relevant theory and pedagogy (Goddard, 1993). The success of Winners provides a timely alternative model for human and social service practitioners and mental health professionals who are seeking to design culturally-specific programming for African Americans and Latinos.

Today, the woeful lack of diverse models and culturally-specific programming and services in mainstream ATOD agencies and organizations remains a major public policy and leadership problem. Nonetheless, for African Americans, looking to and learning from “our” past must become the foundational imperative and a lesson for nurturing and preparing our youth for educational and life success. Finally, the traditional African proverb teaches, “*Until lions tell their tale, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.*” This is Self-determination!

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