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**Prevention Programming for African American Youth:
A Review of Strategies in CSAP's National Cross-Site
Evaluation of High-Risk Youth Programs**

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The purpose of this paper is to add to the knowledge base on prevention programming by explicating the characteristics of 12 programs (out of 47) serving African American youth funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). Findings show that African American youth exhibit lower use rates than most other ethnic and racial groups, but by the time they reach ages 16 to 18, use is prevalent. Data on correlations of risk and protective factors with substance use reveal a very similar pattern of rank order in the strength of correlations for African American youth with youth who are not African American in the CSAP sample. The African American programs integrated Africentric principles and themes into other prevention strategies: education-and-awareness, risk-and-protection, and positive-alternative-interventions. The analysis shows that Africentric programming contributes to higher rates of satisfaction and perceived program importance to youth participating in the African American programs, compared to African American youth in other programs.

During the past two decades, the “delivery of organized programming [has become] a core effort to prevent the proliferation of drug abuse” among youth (Donaldson et al., 1996, p. 868). The causes and circumstances of

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substance use among youth are “complex and context dependent” (Donaldson et al., 1996, p. 874), and program approaches and models that are found to be effective in one social context may be less effective in others (Dent, Sussman, Ellickson, & Richardson, 1996; Newcomb & Bentler, 1989; Tobler, 1986). Effective prevention in communities distinguished by particular racial and risk characteristics may require the use of practices responsive to the needs and opportunities characteristic of that setting.

The need for organized prevention programming that is culturally congruent with the context of African American young people has been argued from a theoretical perspective (Foster, Phillips, Belgrave, Randolph, & Braithwaite, 1993; Oliver, 1989; Randolph & Banks, 1993; Stevenson & Renard, 1993; Turner, 1997; Ward, 1995), and several studies have shown effects of specific programs designed to meet these needs (Belgrave et al., 1994; Cherry et al., 1998). Nevertheless, it remains true that “relatively little is known about the . . . prevention of drug abuse among ethnic minority populations” (Dent et al., 1996, p. 912).

The information and discussion presented here will add to the knowledge base on prevention programming for African American youth by identifying and explicating the characteristics of 12 programs providing prevention services to African American young people between the ages of 9 and 18. The programs are participants in a large national study of 47 prevention programs being conducted by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). Detailed process evaluation data from the CSAP study offer an unusual opportunity to assess the characteristics of programs being implemented for African American youth and to compare them with programs being implemented in other racial and ethnic communities.

Although much of the literature concerning racially or ethnically specific programming explicates the need and rationale for such approaches, this analysis focuses on a sample of programs as they are being implemented in African American communities. The development of a science-based prevention requires that the insights, situational knowledge, and experience of providers be melded with the findings and interpretations of rigorous outcomes research (Springer, 1999). The CSAP cross-site study supports

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systematic assessment of the actual practices of a sample of providers serving African American youth.

More specifically, the article presents data that confirm the consistent finding that substance use among African American youth shows a pattern rising through middle adolescence that is similar to, if somewhat lower than, the pattern found among youth in other racial and ethnic groups. Substance use is associated with risk and protective factors that are similar to the patterns found among non-African American youth in the sample. For those reasons, the programs described here use a mix of educational, risk and protection, and positive-alternative-recreation prevention strategies like those used in other programs.

The emphasis on culturally congruent (Aktan, 1999) programming, however, is a distinguishing characteristic of the 12 programs serving predominantly African American youth. Detailed data on program strategies and participants' perceptions are used to describe the ways in which Africentric themes are used in the programs, the functions of Africentric program components in strengthening prevention strategies, and the reactions of youth to participation in programs with an Africentric perspective.

THE CSAP NATIONAL CROSS-SITE EVALUATION OF HIGH-RISK YOUTH PROGRAMS

The CSAP National Cross-Site Evaluation of High-Risk Youth (HRY) Programs is a 5-year study begun in 1995 (Sambrano, Springer, & Hermann, 1997). The 47 participating HRY demonstration grantees funded were to implement and assess initiatives to prevent and reduce the use of alcohol and other drugs (ATOD) among at-risk youth. The evaluation is collecting data on more than 6,000 youth participating in programs across the nation, as well as on youth in comparison groups covering more than 4,500 similar but nonparticipating youth in the same communities. The study has several unique features: (a) the use of a common questionnaire (the CSAP National Youth Survey) at all sites; (b) data collection at four points in time, from baseline to 18 months after completing the program; (c) viable comparison groups at each participating site; (d) complete documentation of the amount and type of program contact each participant received (dosage); and (e) detailed information on program implementation and prevention strategy at each site.

The final study element identified above, the information on program implementation and prevention strategy, is of particular importance for the findings presented here. Data on program dosage and outcomes are still being

collected and prepared for analysis at the time of this writing, but the data on program implementation and strategy have been collected, entered into files ready for analysis, and summarized in brief case descriptions of each program in the study. Program descriptions have been collected by means of a unique site visit protocol developed for the CSAP cross-site study. The protocol combines structured information and narrative in a single conceptually organized site visit report. The structured information consists of checklists, closed-ended questions, counts, and other quantifiable information. The focused narrative questions coordinated with those indicators provide description, context, and the rationale for the categorizations. The rich site visit data include dimensions that describe program organization, management, implementation, and—most important for this analysis—prevention strategies. Those data form the basis for much of the analysis that follows.

SUBSTANCE USE AND PREVENTION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

Scholars, policy makers, and service professionals have clearly voiced their concern that “the devastating consequences of substance use have wreaked havoc in . . . the African American community” (Belgrave et al., 1994, p. 143). As noted above, substance abuse prevention programs aimed at young people have been a major part of community efforts to reduce the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs and to correspondingly diminish the negative impacts on the health and quality of life in the community. Data from the CSAP cross-site study and findings from the literature were analyzed to create this section, which presents a brief review of information (a) on the patterns of initiation and growth of substance use among African American and other youth and (b) on the concomitants of that initiation and growth. Implications for prevention programming are noted.

INITIATION AND GROWTH OF SUBSTANCE USE

Studies of the incidence and prevalence of substance use have consistently shown somewhat lower rates of use for African American youth than for White non-Hispanic youth and youth in most ethnic minorities. Recent statistics show a lower rate of substance use among African American youth than Whites and Hispanics. Findings from the data on youth 12 to 17 years old show that the percentage of youth who used any type of illicit drug within the

past 30 days was higher for Whites (10.9%) compared to that for Hispanics (9.9%) and African Americans (9.9%). The trends for 30-day use of alcohol were similar. The percentage of White youth who had used alcohol within the past 30 days was 20.9%, compared to 18.9% for Hispanics and 13.1% for African Americans (Department of Health and Human Services, 1998).

Despite lower rates of use during adolescence, studies also show that African Americans suffer more long-term effects than other youth do from using alcohol and illicit drugs (Dawkins, 1996). Whites were significantly more likely than non-Whites to use drugs at some time in their lives. Among lifetime users, there was no significant association between race and dependence. Among respondents with a lifetime history of dependence, Blacks were significantly more likely than Whites to exhibit 12-month dependence. Respondents in the other (largely Asian) racial category had the lowest odds ratios of all the contrasts (Warner, Kessler, Hughes, Anthony, & Nelson, 1995).

In short, although general population studies indicate that African American youth have relatively low rates of substance use, they are more likely than other ethnic groups to experience negative social and health consequences after starting a pattern of use. Because the personal and social costs of substance use are high for African American youth, the stakes for prevention are high as well.

THE CSAP CROSS-SITE SAMPLE

Across all 47 sites in the CSAP study, 3,485 (33.4%) of the youth are of African American descent. The rates of substance use reported by the HRY in this sample are consistent with the findings of general population studies. The African American youth in the sample (in both participants and comparison groups) report relatively low rates of substance use compared to other racial groups.

The results are summarized in Figure 1, which plots the percentage of youth in the baseline sample who reported using tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana during the previous month (30 days), by age and gender. Several points warrant emphasis. First, use rates for all racial/ethnic groups remain low and stable until age 12, when a sharp upward maturational trend begins for both genders. Second, use rates are lower for females than for males. Third, African Americans' rates and trends are similar to those for youth who are not African American. They are generally lower than rates for American Indians and non-Hispanic Whites but are typically higher than the rates for Asian Americans.

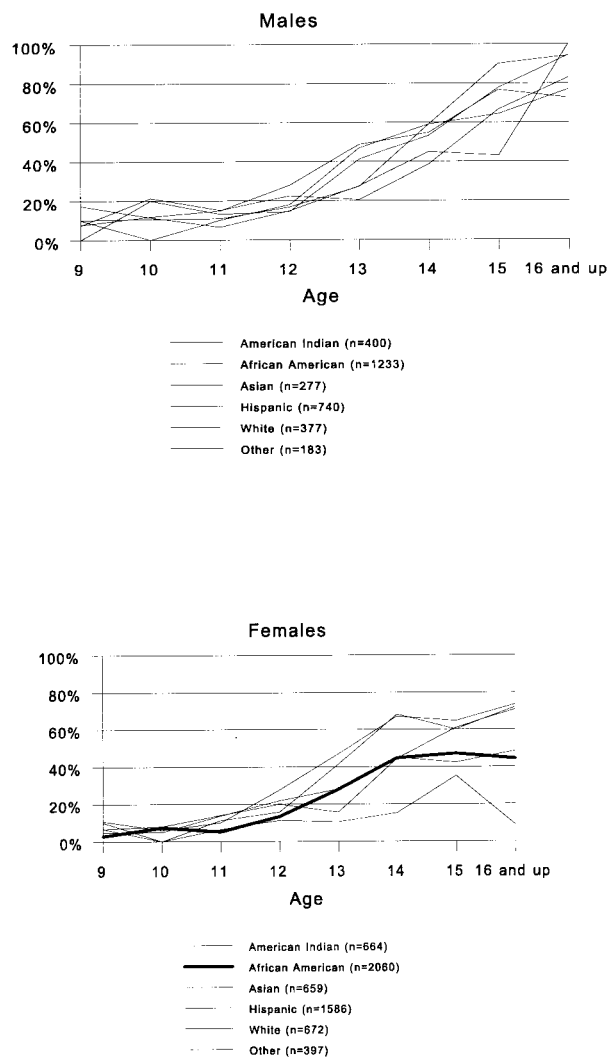


Figure 1: Percentage of Youth Using Tobacco, Alcohol, or Marijuana During the Past 30 Days, by Gender, Race, and Age

RISK AND PROTECTION

The identification of risk and protective factors associated with substance use provides useful information for focusing the objectives and strategies of

prevention programs. For designers of programs for African American youth (or youth in other racial and ethnic groups), it is relevant to know whether there are specific risk or protective factors that are particularly important for the targeted youth. For example, are family factors more important as influences on substance use in one culture, whereas community factors are more important in another? Past research on predictors of substance use in racial and ethnic groups has produced mixed findings. Some studies have found differences in predictors across groups (Felix-Ortiz & Newcomb, 1992; Newcomb & Bentler, 1986); other research has found no differences (Donaldson et al., 1996; Flannery et al., 1994). Warner et al. (1995) found that Whites are significantly more likely than Blacks to ever use one of the illicit drugs, indistinguishable from Blacks in their probability of lifetime dependence after first use, and significantly less likely than Blacks to develop persistent dependence. Those results are similar to Kandel, Yamaguchi, and Chen's (1992) findings that Blacks are less likely than Whites to experiment with most drugs but are more likely than Whites to persist in using them.

The CSAP cross-site study collected data on (a) several dimensions of external risk and protective factors that are part of the environment that influences a child and (b) internal risk and protective factors that inhere in the awareness, perceptions, and behaviors of the youth themselves. Detailed discussion of the factors is beyond the scope of this study, but they encompass areas of risk and protection prominent in the prevention literature. Internal risk-and-protection dimensions include measures of (a) school bonding, (b) family bonding, (c) self-control, (d) belief in self, (e) self-efficacy, and (f) social confidence. External risk-and-protection dimensions include (a) family supervision, (b) family communication, (c) school prevention environment, (d) community protective environment, and (e) neighborhood risk. Table 1 presents the correlation between risk and protective factors and self-reported substance use for African American and other youth in the CSAP cross-site sample.

The correlations in Table 1 reveal two consistent patterns. First, the correlation coefficients are typically somewhat lower for African American youth than for other youth in the sample. The reasons are not evident. Second, and more important for the purposes of this investigation, the relative strength of the correlations between risk and protection factors, whether external or internal, and substance use is nearly identical for African American youth and members of other racial and ethnic groups. That is, ranking the factors by decreasing strength of correlation produces nearly identical orders; among external factors, family supervision yielded the strongest correlation for external risk and protection, and community protection (e.g., participation in organized activities in the community) yielded the weakest. In a parallel

TABLE 1
Correlations of Youth's Risk and Protection
With 30-Day Substance Use (Pearson's *r*)

	<i>African American (n = 3,449)</i>	<i>Other (n = 6,237)</i>
External risk and protection		
Family supervision	-.290	-.304
Neighborhood risk	.198	.290
School prevention	-.191	-.249
Family communication	-.109	-.102
Community protection	-.097	-.086
Internal risk and protection		
School bonding	-.245	-.304
Family bonding	-.206	-.215
Self-control	-.157	-.221
Self-efficacy	-.130	-.189
Belief in self	-.124	-.166
Social confidence	-.073	-.066

NOTE: All coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .001$).

among the internal factors, school bonding has the strongest correlation with substance use and social confidence the weakest. The consistency of findings provides evidence that the risk and protective factors for substance use for African American youth are similar to those for youth in other racial and ethnic groupings represented in the CSAP cross-site study.¹

SUMMARY

In summary, the data presented here suggest that substance use among African American youth at risk is low until the age of 12. As with youth who are not African American, use increases sharply in the mid-adolescent years (between 12 and 16), particularly among males. Between the ages of 16 and 18, more than 75% of African American males in the CSAP cross-site sample had used tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana in the past 30 days. That maturational pattern and the use rates are not substantially different than those for other racial and ethnic groups in the CSAP sample of youth at high risk.

The data also indicate that the underlying risk and protective factors that correlate with substance use among African American youth are similar to those for youth of other racial and ethnic lineage. The pattern suggests that the basic building blocks of positive youth development are similar across ethnic groups.

The similarity in substance use rates and correlates suggests that basic theories and strategies of substance use prevention are uniformly applicable across major racial and ethnic groups. It does not mean that the attainment of positive development can be effectively promoted in exactly the same manner across groups differing in their cultural and social circumstances. Although positive family supervision, for instance, is an important protective factor for youth across all groups, it may take different forms in different communities and cultures. Similarly, the referents important to building a positive self-image and belief in self may differ with racial or ethnic membership. The following section provides information on the ways in which African American service providers implement prevention strategies compared to the ways in which providers in other racial or ethnic communities implement prevention.

CSAP CROSS-SITE PROGRAMS SERVING AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

The CSAP cross-site evaluation offers an opportunity to document the practice of prevention programs that serve African American youth. For this analysis, programs with more than 80% African American participants are considered. Twelve of the 47 programs in the study meet that requirement. This section gives an overview of the provider organizations, their experience with prevention and African American youth, and the characteristics of the youth they serve.²

LEAD AGENCY CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCE

The agencies that administer and support prevention programs influence their implementation and content in numerous ways, from hiring and supervising staff to shaping objectives and procedures. The great majority (75%) of the African American programs in the CSAP sample are administered by community-based nonprofit organizations. The remaining programs are administered by institutions of higher education or for-profit providers. The specific missions of the organizations vary, but all are concerned with providing services related to mental health, substance abuse, education, or family circumstances to minority, and usually African American, communities.

The programs targeting African American youth have significant experience serving youth at high risk. All but one of the programs have prior experience in serving the target community for their prevention programs. Five of the programs are continuations or modifications of a previous program

administered by the lead agency, and nearly all provide similar programs for the target population. Half of the programs provide other services to the African American community.

The study programs also have ties to other institutions in the communities they serve. Even though none of the lead agencies are school districts, six of the programs provide services in middle schools in the neighborhoods where the children live, and three of the programs provide services in public housing complexes or churches. Overall, the programs represented in this study are administered by very experienced agencies with extensive commitments to the African American communities they serve. Their base of experience for program design and implementation is strong.

PARTICIPANTS' CHARACTERISTICS

The CSAP cross-site data include information on 2,409 youth in the 12 programs serving predominantly (80% or more) African Americans. The program sample sizes range from 71 in a community-based program within a public housing complex to 586 in a program linked to a school setting. The percentages of African American youth in each of the 12 programs range from 83% to 97%. Although the selected programs serve predominantly African American youth, they also include small percentages of youth from other racial and ethnic groups (4.6% of the youth in the programs are of Hispanic origin; only small percentages of youth of other lineage are present).

As indicated in Table 2, the African American programs tend to serve younger children; two thirds of the participants are 11 years of age or younger. From a prevention perspective, the programs are recruiting youth before the period of rapid increase in initiation of substance use, so primary prevention approaches are applicable. Participants are also disproportionately female (65%), a reflection of the fact that four of the programs were funded to serve only female adolescents. Of the youth in the programs, 40% live in single-parent homes, 32% live with two adult caregivers (parents), one fifth live with extended family members, and 7% live in other types of households (e.g., foster care).

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

A basic objective of this analysis is to gain information on whether (and in what ways) the prevention strategies in African American programs implemented by experienced community providers differ from programs serving other racial or ethnic groups. The CSAP cross-site data provide an

TABLE 2
Profile of Youth Served by African American Programs in the
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Cross-Site Study

	n	%
Gender		
Male	831	34.5
Female	1,572	65.3
Age		
11 and younger	1,468	62.8
12 and older	941	37.2
Family structure		
Single parent	979	40.6
Two parent	774	32.1
Extended family	476	19.8
Other	180	7.5

opportunity to systematically compare the prevention strategies of African American programs with programs serving other racial or ethnic groups. The comparisons can be made both for strategies aimed at changing environmental risk and protection and for interventions involving youth directly.

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES

The prevention literature on African American youth emphasizes social and environmental factors that promote or inhibit ATOD use. The reduction of those risk factors and the strengthening of protective factors have served as a basis for prevention efforts (Cherry et al., 1998). The role of environmental risk suggests the importance of targeting the family, peer groups, schools, and communities to prevent African American youth from engaging in substance use.

The percentage of program effort spent on activities focused on changing external family, peer, school, or community environments (as determined through estimates by program directors) in African American programs compared with the percentage of effort in programs serving other racial and ethnic groups is similar. Though it is clear that providers understand the importance of environmental factors in shaping the lives of young people, it is just as clear that neither group of programs allocates a significant amount of program effort to actually bringing about environmental change. As with non-African American programs, more than half of the African American

programs devote less than 5% of their actual program effort to bringing about environmental change. Their allocation of effort makes sense in view of (a) the fact that the programs are designed to serve participating youth directly and (b) the fact that practically effective efforts to bring about environmental change require great outlays of effort and resources. Most of the effort focused on environmental factors is directed toward the family. Almost two thirds (61.5%) of the African American programs make some attempt to involve the family in meaningful programmatic activity.

As is frequently reported by community programs that provide direct services to children, parental participation has not been as successful as the programs hoped for or anticipated. Parents are more willing to participate in one-time or infrequent special events and celebrations than in regular support groups. In one of the HRY programs, for example, as many as 300 parents attended a special event, but only 8 to 12 attend parent support and education groups. Several programs have reduced the number of support groups and parenting education classes they offer because of poor attendance and lack of interest. When tempering the ideal programmatic accomplishments of a prevention program with what is feasible in programs that focus on youth, most youth programs focus their efforts on the participants' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors regarding important environmental influences rather than attempting to directly change the external factors themselves.

YOUTH INTERVENTIONS

The extensiveness of the program data collected in the CSAP cross-site study and in program plans allows analysts to systematically compare program strategies across sites. To facilitate such comparison, all of the program activities were placed in one of six major categories of program strategy. The categories were developed by means of reviewing prevention literature and synthesizing program activities in the cross-site programs. Brief definitions of each category are as follows:

- ATOD-direct information: inform participants about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs;
- ATOD-indirect information: inform participants about behaviors that are precursors of and consequences of the use or abuse of ATOD;
- academic and vocational support: develop participants' academic and vocational skills;
- targeted skills development: develop specific personal and social skills that are important for participants' social development;

- positive recreation and enrichment: have participants engage in stimulating and rewarding activities identified as leisure activities in an environment free of ATOD; and
- emotional and social support: support youth in dealing with personal and social problems and with issues that emerge from living in a high-risk environment.

The relative emphasis that programs place on the different kinds of prevention strategy is related to the broad program theories about preventing substance use that underlie program activities. Informational activities about ATOD are grounded in traditional approaches to prevention, which are based on an expectation that knowledge acquisition will change behavior. Programs with heavy reliance on enrichment and recreational activities reflect a positive-alternatives prevention approach that emphasizes the importance of increasing youth's involvement in substance-free and meaningful use of leisure time in reducing their opportunities for substance use during the critical adolescent years. Programs using targeted skills development and social/emotional support represent prevention theory that focuses on strengthening protective factors in youth, with emphases on cognitive and psychosocial approaches, respectively. Finally, the academic and vocationally oriented activities emphasize the importance of participants' performance in school and their attitudes toward work as important domains of protection.

In site visits to each study program, researchers obtained estimates from program administrators and staff to develop program-level measures of the percentage of program time spent on each of the prevention strategies. Because of the similarity in methods, the direct and indirect informational approaches are combined for purposes of comparing programs.

The distribution of time across strategies for African American programs is very similar to that of other HRY programs participating in the CSAP cross-site evaluation. The African American programs spend slightly less time focusing on targeted skills development (23% vs. 27%) and just slightly more time on academic and vocational support than do programs serving other racial and ethnic groups. However, these differences are not statistically significant. Overall, however, the striking finding is the similarity in the amount of time devoted to each of the strategies of prevention across programs serving different racial or ethnic groups. Experienced providers in the African American community have designed and implemented programs with approximately the same overall profile of strategy types as non-African American programs. As a group, the African American programs share a tendency to stress risk and protective factors as an approach to prevention, with awareness strategies and positive alternatives playing supportive roles.

The profiles of African American and other programs resemble one another in their use of prevention approaches across racial and ethnic communities. The distribution shows an eclectic approach that balances strategies, with an emphasis on risk and protection. However, there is significant variation in strategy emphases within African American programs. For example, the portion of program time devoted to informational approaches ranges from a high of 60% in one program to a low of 9% in another. Likewise, the emphasis on recreation ranges from a high of 75% to a low of 5%. In other words, the variation in program strategies as reflected in just two categories is much greater within the African American programs than it is between the programs taken together and those serving other groups.

DURATION AND INTENSITY

The programs serving predominantly African American youth also vary in duration and intensity (measured as the number of contact hours per week). The programs plan from 2 to 7 hours of interventions a week. The programs also vary in duration, with four providing services for a school semester of 20 weeks or less. Six of the programs provide services for 28 to 36 weeks; two of the programs provide intervention services for more than 40 weeks. On the average, preliminary analysis of program contact data indicates that each African American child in the CSAP cross-site study receives approximately 65 hours of program contact, a figure very close to the average for all 47 programs in the study.

CULTURALLY FOCUSED PROGRAMMING

Besides characterizing program activities according to the prevention strategies identified above, the site visit data include information on whether a program includes “activities that are consciously designed to teach or to reinforce the cultural values, histories, or traditions of groups of participants from a common ethnic heritage” (Sale et al., 1997). The great majority (83.3%) of African American programs reported deliberately using culturally focused content in their prevention programs, compared to just half (51.5%) of the rest of the cross-site programs. Although African American programs use various prevention strategies and program designs that are similar to other programs in their focus on risk factors and program theory, they share a distinct emphasis on the use of culturally focused programming. That shared characteristic will be elaborated on in the remainder of this article.

SUMMARY

Systematic field study indicates that the 12 African American programs in the CSAP cross-site evaluation have been designed and implemented by organizations with a strong foundation of commitment and service experience in the African American communities they serve. The organizations have designed and implemented programs that pursue a mix of educational, risk-and-protection, and positive-alternative-activities approaches that is consistent with other programs in the study. Although there is significant variation between African American programs with respect to the emphasis on those generally recognized prevention strategies, the programs as a group do not emphasize programming that is distinct from that provided by programs serving other racial or ethnic groups.

However, the African American programs share the use of an Africentric perspective in the design and implementation of their prevention strategies. Ten of the 12 programs have an explicit cultural focus to their program content, a much higher level of commitment to culturally congruent programming than is found in the remaining study programs. The remaining 2 programs use Africentric materials to give their program space identity, and they use Africentric topics and themes to enrich their program approach. The strong appeal of the Africentric approach for prevention is confirmed by the fact that all 12 of the experienced providers make use of an Africentric orientation either as a core program focus or as a theme for enrichment. The following section elaborates the uses and functions of Africentric programming for the providers under consideration.

AFRICENTRIC PROGRAMMING

The prevention programs that target high-risk African American youth face challenges similar to those of other programs in the HRY initiative. Like the other programs, they use a range of interventions and delivery methods. However, the African American programs share the use of cultural orientation as a central component of their prevention programming. The detailed comparative data and the rich case descriptions included in the CSAP cross-site evaluation support a more detailed description of the ways in which cultural programming is accomplished in the African American programs and the functions it performs for the programs.

Generally, the application of culturally congruent prevention programming for African American youth may be characterized as Africentric. As stated by Turner (1997),

The Africentric perspective implicitly contends that differences in culture, world view, and historical experiences exist between African Americans and European Americans . . . [and] the Africentric perspective delineates and explicates some of these differences, many of which have implications for the construction of paradigms of human behavior. (p. 36)

The Africentric orientation articulates “a world view, philosophical orientation, set of social standards, norms, and codes of conduct that reflect core African values that are essentially spiritual and communal in nature” (Foster et al., 1993, p. 127). Certain features are common to that orientation: “attendance to spiritual beliefs, the importance of relationships and the relationship-building process, and acknowledgment of culture as a force and a key determinant in day to day experience” (Foster et al., 1993, p. 127). Because Africentric orientation addresses culture as both a value-laden, highly principled philosophy and an ongoing contemporary dynamic that influences daily choices, it fits into the risk and resiliency framework of prevention programming that underlies many of the programs in the CSAP HRY initiative.

APPLICATION IN THE CROSS-SITE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

The Africentric orientation of the HRY prevention programs addresses the risk factors that pervade the environment of the youth participants and also promotes protective factors that are essential for healthy personal development. On one hand, the programs take on the contemporary mainstream culture and open up participatory discussions of its effects on African American youth, their families, and communities. Racism, media images, the contemporary condition of African American families, the impact of a consumer culture, the drug culture, gender roles, and the excessive emphasis on the individual are among the topics typically addressed across several program interventions: targeted skills development, support groups, and ATOD curricula (direct and indirect). On the other hand, the programs emphasize positive Africentric ideology, values, traditions, history, cultural appreciation, and rituals that support the philosophical orientation. Information, discussions, and supportive activities are incorporated into program strategies such as targeted skills development, support groups, enrichment activities, and ATOD curricula. The interventions least likely to incorporate a cultural orientation are those that promote academic development.

Generally, there are three broad themes of culturally focused programming in this sample of programs. The first approach addresses the potential of cultural tradition, values, and spirituality to serve as protective factors for African American youth and families (Gary & Berry, 1984; Maton &

Zimmerman, 1990). The second approach explores history and historical contribution as sources of identity and positive group differentiation. The third approach addresses contemporary culture as experienced by African Americans; it includes a range of topics related to external risk.

CULTURAL VALUES

Some programs emphasize traditional African American spiritual and communal values that guide life choices and promote the development of positive values and positive group identity. Those values countervail the consumerism and individualism that have created a breakdown in caring behavior in American communities (Ward, 1995). The values articulated in those programs may be the seven principles connected to the *Nguzo Saba*, the principles of African communal living created by Maulana Ron Karenga in 1965: *Umoja* (unity), *Kujichagulia* (self-determination), *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics), *Nia* (purpose), *Kuumba* (creativity), and *Imani* (faith). Values are also articulated by means of African proverbs, which (with the seven principles) serve as a basis for program content to demonstrate Africentric themes.

The programs' use of traditional, spiritual, and community values provides a larger framework—meaning—that guides life choices and promotes the development of positive values. Those values include (a) the interconnectedness of all things; (b) the oneness of mind, body, and spirit; and (c) collective identity versus individual identity and extended family networks (Turner, 1997, p. 46). Those values promote a focus on group identity, responsibility in the community, and positive group differentiation.

Eight of the African American programs in the cross-site sample explicitly used Africentric cultural values and themes in their programming, either through the principles of *Kwanza* or rite-of-passage programs that incorporate cultural and spiritual themes.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

The African American programs emphasize knowledge and appreciation of history, African American achievements, heroes/heros, and traditions, which are incorporated into program activities—celebrating traditional holidays and learning about historic African cultures, African American leaders and their achievements, history, and skills to convey African arts and crafts (e.g., dancing, drumming, fashion, artwork, posters of national leaders).

These activities enhance self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of accomplishment, and provide strong recreational opportunities.

Ten of the cross-site programs intentionally encourage knowledge and appreciation of African history and tradition as a systematic part of their curriculum and activities. Learning about African history and highly developed African cultures addresses issues of racial identity that African American youth confront, particularly as they approach and enter adolescence (Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997; Tatum, 1997). Strategies include lessons and activities that inform youth about historical African cultures and African celebrations, and learning about how to reproduce African-style arts and crafts (such as dancing, drumming, fashion, art). Rite-of-passage rituals are an important aspect of several programs. They often precede and conclude program activities, and they serve as a primary activity for special events.

The programs encourage knowledge and appreciation of the accomplishments of historical and contemporary African Americans in the United States, with the goal of enhancing racial identity and pride. Program strategies are diverse. They include field trips to museums and institutions that highlight contemporary African American history and the accomplishments of key historical figures, presentations by African Americans who have made significant societal contributions, presentation of information related to African American history, and the onsite presence of pictures and sayings of African Americans.

Without exception, the African American programs in the cross-site sample used material and themes from African American history as part of their program activities. One program that emphasized positive alternative activities involving performing arts, visual arts, and traditional handicrafts wove Africentric themes throughout the curriculum. Other programs used themes and celebrations from African and African American history for special enrichment events.

CURRENT CONDITIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Another programmatic theme within the African American programs addresses the current circumstances of African Americans as a minority group in U.S. mainstream culture. Many programs focus on enhancing awareness of how the mainstream culture can impact the capacity to make healthy decisions. The impact of racism, media portrayal of African

Americans, gender roles, and the marketing of tobacco and alcohol to African American populations are among the topics covered in the curricula. The approach addresses the multiple risks and negative influences experienced by African Americans, gives their experiences a historical and social context, and sensitizes youth to sources of external risk that may be particular to them as members of a minority culture.

FUNCTIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICENTRIC PROGRAMMING

Whereas the three components identified above are conceptually distinct, programs typically mix them, though with different emphases. For example, programs using rite-of-passage curricula emphasize the use of spiritual, traditional, and community values, and they often include special ceremonies and rituals. Special names are given to program participants to enhance the youth's sense of identification with the traditional values in the curriculum. These programs include aspects of history, traditions, artistic achievements, and contemporary situations.

From a prevention point of view, the approaches emphasize differing functions of the programs. The first of these approaches emphasizes the development of protective factors by creating a meaningful focus for positive differentiation and identity. The principles and values articulated in the cultural tradition provide a context for the development of belief in self, self-control, family bonding, and accomplishment. The important purpose of adding the Africentric type of programming is not that it poses a radically different view of what the resilient or contributing youth may be but that it provides a personally and collectively meaningful context in which participants are spurred to develop positive, protective orientations and behaviors. A risk-factors-oriented ATOD curricula that is culturally specific or modified for the population, for example, might include a parallel discussion of a value or an ethos that stems from African cultures and spiritual traditions. The latter provide a larger philosophical lens through which youth may assess how negative behavior, such as using drugs, conflicts with traditional values and how traditional values can support healthy decision making when confronted with certain situations.

The second approach, focusing on African and African American history, provides an encompassing resource that programs can draw on to infuse their recreational activities (e.g., arts, crafts, physical exercise), enrichment activities (e.g., speakers and field trips), and program events with a relevant content that raises youth's awareness and strengthens their positive identity and pride. When contemporary issues are addressed, for example, the role of

relevant African American leaders is described as a way of providing youth with a positive example of strength and accomplishment.

The third approach, which explicates the current circumstances of African Americans in U.S. society, provides a meaningful context for increasing youth's awareness of various external risk factors. As part of an Africentric alternative, it gives youth a basis for identifying positive orientations and behaviors that connect a positive identity with community and tradition to give them a context for standing up against external risks. All three of the approaches provide a culturally congruent context for inculcating some aspect of prevention strategy and programming.

The use of culturally congruent Africentric programming by prevention programs does not replace informational, risk-and-protection, or positive-alternatives prevention strategies. To the contrary: Packaging programs to incorporate Africentric traditions and values, African American history, and awareness of the current circumstances of minorities in the United States enriches them with a concrete and relevant context for the inculcation of prevention strategies.

CULTURAL PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

One of the implications of the above discussion is that cultural programming contributes to a meaningful involvement of youth in the prevention program. Aktan (1999), for instance, has observed that program modifications designed to increase the cultural consistency of a prevention program serving inner-city African American families 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 (1999) also reported that attendance improved. As prevention providers know all too well, a primary challenge for all programs working with youth at risk is to engage them, to gain their willing attention and involvement. Stronger engagement of participants should be a primary outcome of culturally congruent program content.

For young adolescents, engagement may be manifest in (a) their satisfaction with the program (e.g., how much they like it) and (b) the degree to which they see the program as relevant and important to their lives. The youth participating in HRY prevention programs in CSAP's cross-site study were asked two relevant questions: (a) "How much did you like this program?" and (b) "Overall, how important has this program been to you?" If culturally congruent programming strengthens participant engagement and makes the program more relevant and meaningful to them, we would expect answers for

TABLE 3
Youth Program Satisfaction Perception of Program Importance

	<i>African Americans in African American programs (n = 1,718) (%)</i>	<i>African Americans in non-African American programs (n = 832) (%)</i>	<i>Other (n = 4,150) (%)</i>
Like the program			
Very much	65.4	42.2	44.0
Somewhat	25.5	37.5	39.1
Not much	5.3	9.5	9.4
Not at all	3.8	10.8	7.5
Perception of program's importance			
Very important	43.8	28.6	25.7
Pretty important	39.6	38.3	42.1
Not very important	10.4	19.0	18.1
Not at all important	6.2	14.1	14.1

NOTE: All coefficients are statistically significant ($p = .001$).

both of the questions to be more positive for African American youth in programs that are culturally congruent. To test that expectation, responses from African American participants in the African American programs can be compared with responses from African American participants in other programs (which did not use Africentric programming) and responses from youth of other racial/ethnic heritage (many of whom were in programs without a cultural focus). Table 3 displays the comparisons.

The data clearly show that the African American youth in the 12 programs discussed in this article liked their programs more than African American youth in other programs or non-African American program participants. The differences are substantial, with two thirds (65.4%) of the African American youth in the 12 study programs reporting that they liked their program very much, compared to 42.2% of the African Americans in other programs and 44% of the youth who were not African American.

The second question, concerning the youth's perceptions of how important the program is to them, is a more significant indicator of their degree of engagement because it indicates personal salience. Positive answers to the question would confirm that the program had achieved the objectives of meaningful and personal communication that culturally congruent programming is expected to. Overall, youth's responses were less positive on the second question; fewer youth found the programs important than found them

enjoyable. African American youth in the study programs, however, were much more likely to find their program to be personally important than either of the other groups of youth were. The percentages of each group who found their programs to be not very or not at all important are revealing. Approximately one third of the African American youth in non-Africentric programs (33.1%) and of the non-African American youth (32.2%) expressed those negative assessments of their program, but only 16.6% of the African American youth in study programs found their program relatively unimportant.

In summary, it is clear that African American youth in the study program are much more satisfied than and find much more personal salience in their programs than other youth in the sample, including African American youth in non-Africentric programs. Although the configuration of the data does not allow us to draw the definitive conclusion that the Africentric components of the programs produce the higher level of comfort and personal meaning for youth, the fact that the Africentric perspective is the common distinguishing characteristic of the higher approval programs argues strongly that Africentric programming strengthens program appeal and salience for African American youth. For providers who face the daily challenges of providing meaningful prevention services for youth at high risk, this is a finding with great importance for the design of prevention programming.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The initiation and growth of substance use among youth is a complex process deeply entwined with other aspects of youth development. Both scholars and providers of prevention activities have increasingly come to recognize that effective prevention must be meaningful in the larger social and cultural contexts of the communities that impact and shape their development. This article has used the unique analytic opportunities provided by data from the CSAP National Cross-Site Evaluation of High-Risk Youth Programs to add to the growing fund of knowledge on how providers can design and implement programs that engage African American youth in ways that have meaning for and relevance in their lives.

Analysis of data on rates and trends in substance use among African American youth compared to those of youth who are not African American indicated basic similarity across groups. Although African American youth did exhibit somewhat lower rates of initiation than most other ethnic and racial groups, the basic trend in use is similar across groups. By the time African American youth reach ages 16 to 18, use is prevalent. Data on correla-

tions of risk and protective factors with substance use reveal a very similar pattern of rank order in the strength of correlations for African American youth with youth who are not African American in the CSAP sample. The patterns suggest that the basic age-related growth in substance use and the basic building blocks of positive development that are related to use are similar across racial and ethnic groups.

The experienced designers of the African American programs in the CSAP sample confirm the position that prevention theory and strategy have basic applicability to their programs and implement a mix of education and awareness strategies, risk and protection strategies, and positive alternatives strategies that is very similar to the mix found in study programs serving youth who are not African American. The programs are also unanimous in the use of Africentric principles and themes in their programming. Analysis of the prevention programs serving predominantly African American youth shows that providers use Africentric content to serve an important function in strengthening prevention strategies and making them more meaningful in the lives of African American youth.

Prevention programming that is Africentric reaches out to African American participants in three ways. First, programs use Africentric values and beliefs to "mediate and decrease risk factors and increase resiliency and protective factors among high risk youth" (Cherry et al., 1998, 322). Africentric content is viewed as playing a mediating role to make a broad risk-and-protective-factors theory applicable and relevant to African American youth. Second, programs use information about the contemporary circumstances of African Americans as a minority culture in a mainstream culture to foster resistance to external pressures that participants face. Programs attempt to convey a meaningful construction of positive contemporary African American cultures to counter those external risks. Again, Africentric themes play a mediating role in making risk-and-protection theory relevant to the daily lives of youth at risk. Third, African and African American history and culture provide themes, materials, and activities intended to create positive identity, positive differentiation, and continuity in learning and enrichment activities.

The success of Africentric programming in creating a more meaningful and relevant environment for participating youth is confirmed by substantially higher rates of satisfaction and perceived program importance to their lives among African American youth participating in the African American programs, compared to African American youth in other programs or youth who are not African American. In summary, this study has (a) confirmed that Africentric programming is widely applied by providers who serve African

American youth, (b) indicated how culturally congruent programs can serve multiple functions in making prevention strategies more meaningful to the lives of participating youth, (c) documented that cultural materials are an important resource for program activities and continuity, and (d) suggested that Africentric programming contributes to African American youth's satisfaction and program engagement. This assessment of Africentric programming confirms its appeal and usefulness for enhancing substance abuse prevention among African American youth.

NOTES

1. These findings of basic structural similarity in the external and internal risk and protective factors associated with substance use among African American and other racial/ethnic groups is substantiated in simultaneous-equation models (LISREL) constructed on the basis of the baseline data from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's (CSAP's) cross-site study (Sambrano, Springer, Sale, Turner, & Hermann, 1998).

2. CSAP's participation agreement with programs prohibits the identification of specific programs in reporting data. The 12 programs that provided data for this article were Learning for Life (Nashville, Tennessee), Club Hero (Atlanta, Georgia), AKOMA (Washington, DC), Thank Goodness I'm Female (TGIF; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Collaborative Prevention Education Project (CPEP; Albany, Georgia; Columbus, Georgia), Grandma's Kids (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Ujima (Miami, Florida), Project HELP (How Empowerment Liberates Parents) and Project NAJA (Washington, DC), Across Ages (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Project Lincoln Heights (Cincinnati, Pennsylvania), and Sisters for Life (Washington, DC). The following project officers provided oversight and guidance to the 12 programs: Jeanette Bevet-Mills, Evelyn Copeland, Jeanne Diloreto, Francis Johnson, Tommy Johnson-Waters, Jan Kirby, Charles Rukus, and Patricia Sabry.

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