CHARACTER STRENGTHS AND EMPOWERMENT OF ADOLESCENTS IN ANTI-RACIST PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify the 5 most evident character forces in 10 anti-racist projects, prepared by adolescents, most of whom are black, as well as to reflect on how these forces contribute to their empowerment in the fight against racism. After analyzing the projects, we highlight the actions described and the main impacts achieved in each one. The identification of character strengths was performed by 9 judges and the data were analyzed using the R software (version 4.3.3) and Fleiss' Kappa for evaluation reliability. The results showed that creativity, teamwork, hope, justice and social intelligence were the most evident forces and that of the 24 forces studied by Seligman and Peterson (2004), 20 were identified by the judges. In our discussion, we defend how much the highlighted character forces can contribute to the empowerment of adolescents in the fight against racism. However, we recognize the need for more empirical studies pointing out the relationship between these constructs in the struggle for the extinction of this evil, which causes psychic suffering for many black people.

Keywords: Character strengths, Anti-racist education, Adolescents, Empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

Character strengths are studied in Positive Psychology as positive personality traits. In their studies, Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified 24 universal forces and divided them into six blocks of virtues, namely: 1) wisdom (creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, love of learning, and perspective); 2) humanity (generosity, love, and social intelligence); 3) fairness (impartiality, leadership and teamwork); 4) temperance (forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-control); 5) courage (bravery, perseverance, integrity and vitality) and 6) transcendence (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor and spirituality).

Adolescence is pointed out as a phase of changes and transformations that occur in the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects (Cavallaro et al., 2023). In addition, it is the phase considered to be the most conducive to the development of character strengths, defined as their strengths, qualities, and virtues (Barros et al., 2022; Park & Peterson, 2009). This is the period in which the adolescent begins to show new interests, develops his identity, has less resistance to peer influences and experiences instabilities in self-confidence and faces many challenges. However, it is also a phase in which it shows great potential for empowerment (Barros et al, 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2022).

The word empowerment consists of a neologism derived from empowerment, which in English means authority/power given to someone to do something. In the Aurélio dictionary, empowerment is defined as the action of becoming powerful, of coming to possess power, authority, domination; example: process of empowerment of disadvantaged classes (De Holanda Ferreira, 2010). In Psychology, the expression empowerment was used for the first time in 1977 by the American psychologist Julian Rappaport, when he defended the need to give tools to certain oppressed groups so that they would have the conditions and autonomy to develop (Rappaport, 2002). In Brazil, already in the 80s, Paulo Freire made his version of the term disagreeing with Rappaport, because for him, empowerment is an act that the disadvantaged groups themselves should do, as a decision to take possession of an intrinsic power. The concept proposed by Freire became popular among educators, psychologists, and sociologists, and many social movements began to use it, including entities such as the United Nations (UN) (Baquero, 2012; Barros et al., 2022).

Based on this initial idea, other authors complemented and wrote about the term. For example, Carneiro (2013) adds that empowerment is an evolution of processes experienced by people and their communities that make them acquire skills to overcome

the difficulties that life presents them. The author states that due to human diversity, empowerment must be differentiated in its objectives and strategies. For him, empowerment occurs when interventions are made that consider structural, situational, ideological and political factors.

Kleba and Wendausen (2009), noticing that there are authors in defense of both sides, warn that empowerment seen as authorization, qualification or permission, runs the risk of serving as an instrument of control by privileged groups that would define by their own criteria to whom they should grant this power. Thus, the authors are against seeing empowerment as something that is granted to someone.

We also agree that empowerment cannot be provided from one person to another. It happens in a dynamic process in which each one empowers himself. Spaces conducive to this can be created by professionals or external agents in order to favor and encourage personal change with a more assertive positioning and protagonism of the subjects in the face of the circumstances of life. This leads this subject to leave the place of dependent, powerless and incapable, assuming the posture of someone willing to transform his reality by fighting for himself, with and for others for more autonomy and self-determination, taking the reins of his life and accepting to manage it in the best possible way (Kleba & Wendausen, 2009).

Da Costa (2017) analyzed the contribution of Freirean thought in the process of youth empowerment of the Quilombola Community of Paratibe in João Pessoa – PB. Using a literature review and interviews, in order to understand the importance of strengthening the quilombola identity through an emancipatory education, the author concluded that the empowerment of the youth of that quilombo was mainly caused by the appreciation of their local culture, their history, recognition of their strengths, virtues and strengths. In an interview given to the author, one of the young leaders of the quilombo stated that they were ashamed of being black, of accepting their hair, their history, but with the integration into the project they began to value their roots and recognize what they had best.

This awareness of oneself contributes to the subject initiating a process of liberation, of search for knowledge, which leads him to recognize himself as a citizen, possessor of rights and to perceive the injustices around him. Once strengthened by the process of social transformation, it no longer accepts injustices passively as before. This liberation is authentic, because it humanizes the subject, contributing to his critical and social formation (Freire, 2002).

CONCEPT OF RACISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Racism is one of the injustices and violence that the whole society needs to fight. It is generated and perpetuated by colonialism, loaded with exploitation, produces physical, symbolic and, above all, civilizational violence that emotionally marks black people, distorting feelings and perceptions of themselves (Ambrosio et al., 2022; Campos, 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2024).

Racism occurs when a society favors a group of a certain ethnicity or color, discrediting the other because it considers them inferior, which becomes the victim of numerous frequent exclusionary practices that become naturalized over time, seen as normal (Campos, 2020; Santos et al., 2024). As a result of the social structure itself, racism is established in political, economic, legal and family relationships, generating serious consequences. These are easily perceived by the differences between blacks and whites in the division and access to resources such as work, health, housing, education, among others (Lima, 2019; Da Silva & De Oliveira, 2021).

Exemplifying these consequences already denounced in the literature, we can mention: the genocide of black youth caused by police violence, where countless stray bullets have black bodies as preferred targets, especially young people from the periphery and favela residents (Medeiros, 2019; Bueno et al., 2020); femicide whose main victims are black women (IPEA, 2024); the differential treatment given to black people seen as inferior and subject to jokes, prejudice and discrimination that make them vulnerable and naturally excluded from the best positions in the labor market and spaces of power (Lins et al., 2017). Because they are often seen and treated as non-human, they end up being the greatest victims of violence and extermination (Bueno et al., 2020).

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022) presents data that confirm how great the inequality between blacks and whites still is, among them we highlight: 1. Black people earned about 40% less than whites in formal jobs performing similar functions; 2. The unemployment rate for black and brown people was 11.8%, while for white people it was 7.5%; 3. The percentage of whites who declared that they had no education or completed primary education was 17.8%, while the percentage of blacks and browns with no education reached 33.8%. These data reflect historical and social inequalities in Brazil, where the black population faces greater difficulties in accessing quality education and often has to deal with the need to work from an early age, which impacts their educational trajectory.

Racism also generates serious damage to the mental health of black people. Santos et al. (2024) list some physical and mental symptoms that a person who is a victim of racism can manifest on a daily basis, which can be temporary or permanent, generated by a state of emotional tension, anxiety, and continuous anguish. The authors point out that constant exposure to racial discrimination increases emotional pressure, leading to repeated frustrations with the lack of opportunities and prospects for the future, which contributes to the emergence of physical and mental disorders, such as "rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, gastric ulcer, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, introspection, outbursts of violent anger and apparently for no reason, in addition to compromising identity and distortion of self-image" (Santos et al., 2024, p. 11).

ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Despite all the negative consequences caused by racism in our society, it is possible to perceive advances achieved as a response to the claims and struggles of the Black Movement, known as the set of historical social movements that fight for social equality and rights for the black population, for the end of racism and for racial equity (Sabino et al., 2022; Vieira & Silva, 2023).

Among the advances already achieved, we will highlight the approval of Law No. 10,639/2003, which amended the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education by introducing the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture in Basic Education schools. The implementation of this law made it possible to include studies of the history of Africa and Africans, the struggle of blacks in Brazil, black Brazilian culture, blacks in the formation of national society and their contributions in the social, economic and political areas pertinent to the History of Brazil, which enables important reflections, as well as the development of anti-racist projects in the school environment (Gomes, 2011; De Jesus & Lopes, 2023).

Gomes (2011) highlights the importance of Law 10.639/2003 as well as Resolution CNE/CP 01/2004 and Opinion CNE/CP 03/2004 that regulated this public policy in ensuring that anti-racist education is worked on in schools, and it is up to schools with their various actors to address this issue effectively and in practice.

The school is one of the privileged spaces for the development of anti-racist education, since it is an institution that contributes to the critical and value formation of students (Hurd et al., 2023). It is also a favorable space for the revelation of talents,

strengths and skills that adolescents can use in the fight against racism. If well motivated, they will be able to demonstrate many of their character strengths that will be perceived through the actions performed by them (Peterson et al., 2007; Wagner & Ruch, 202\2).

Our objective in this study was to identify the 5 most evident character forces in 10 anti-racist projects, prepared by adolescents, most of whom are black, as well as to reflect on how these forces contribute to their empowerment in the fight against racism in order to contribute to studies on the benefits of character forces and their relationship with adolescent empowerment in the face of racism.

METHODOLOGY

The present work is characterized by being a documentary research where 10 anti-racist projects were analyzed, chosen because they have the following aspects in common: 1) they were prepared by adolescents, most of whom are black, proposing to combat racism and contribute to anti-racist actions in practice; 2) were awarded by Criativos da Escola, a program of the Alana Institute and Design for Change, a global movement that emerged in India and is present in 52 countries, inspiring more than 2 million children and adolescents around the world and which held editions of the award in Brazil from 2015 to 2021 (Gabriel, 2019); 3) they were public projects publicized by Portal Lunetas as anti-racist created by students. The article was published on 11/19/2020 (https://lunetas.com.br/projetos-antirracistas-criados-por-estudantes/). (Martins, 2020)

Documentary research is one in which the analyzed data originates from documents chosen as the source of collection of information that responds to the interest of the research. In this process, methods and techniques for capturing, understanding, and analyzing data can be used (Junior et al., 2021).

The selected projects were collected on the school's Criativos platform and on the Lunetas Portal and in some cases we spoke directly with the representatives of the schools, responsible for sending the projects to compete for the award. Even though they are public projects, we request authorization by e-mails to use the information disclosed in each media and we undertake not to identify any adolescent limiting ourselves to the analysis of only the actions described in each awarded project.

After a thorough reading of the documents, we summarize the most relevant information in table 1. To achieve our goal of identifying the 5 most evident character forces in the projects based on the actions carried out and described in each one, we used the

process of qualitative analysis by expert judges in character forces to attest to which were the 5 most evident in each project (Vazzoler-Mendonça et al., 2023). The chosen judges evaluated the projects according to their own judgments, objective and subjective, considering their knowledge on the subject (Pasquali, 2000).

We were careful to guarantee the anonymity of judges in order to avoid the personification of individual authority, favoring collective representation instead. By preserving the anonymity of judges, we seek to reduce the prestige bias and the risk of adopting suggestions simply because of the presumed authority of those who propose them (Fonseca et al., 2007).

Considering the criterion that something can only be seen as scientific if it is subject to discussion, we invited 14 judges by e-mails, with the following characteristics: 1. master's or doctoral degree; 2. training in Psychology or Education; and 3. self-reported knowledge of character strengths. People from the authors' relationship or who were appointed by the judges themselves were invited.

Of the 14 guests, 9 agreed to participate. The greater the number of judges, the lower the risk of subjective biases. Six judges may be enough, but it is better to have an odd number to avoid ties (Torlig et al., 2022; Pasquali, 2000). The number of judges we obtained is in accordance with the recommendations of the literature. To maintain the anonymity of our judges, they were identified as J1, J2, J3 to J9. After acceptance, they received summarized information on each project, highlighting the actions carried out, the objectives and the main results/impacts generated in each school community. Considering the 24 existing character forces and their concepts, each judge pointed out the 5 most evident forces in the projects.

Each judge had ten days to analyze the projects and send their perceptions about the most evident forces to the authors who processed the data using Fleiss's Kappa in the R software (version 4.3.3). The results and the discussion are described below.

RESULTS

The literature on this topic points to several ways to measure the level of reliability and agreement between judges, including techniques such as percentage, correlation, Cohen's Kappa coefficient (indicated for analyses by two evaluators/judges) and Fleiss's in SPSS or R (recommended for analyses with more than 2 judges), among others (Matos, 2014).

Initially, we used the percentage of absolute agreement technique, which is considered the simplest used in research and can be done manually. We calculated the number of times the judges pointed out the same perceived strength of character in a project and divided it by the total number of evaluations with variations between 0 and 100%, where the value of 75% is considered the minimum acceptable agreement and values above 90% are considered high (Matos, 2014).

A disadvantage of this technique is that it does not take into account the proportion of agreement due to chance. To avoid this risk, we also used Fleiss's Kappa coefficient, which considers the probability of random agreement (Matos, 2014). Kappa ranges between 0 and 1, where K<0.4 is poor; 0.4<K<0.75 is satisfactory to good; K>0.75 is excellent (Fleiss et al., 2013). According to the literature, Kappa is the most used method when the variables are nominal (Fonseca et al., 2007).

In table 1, we present the names of the 10 projects chosen, the objectives, the actions carried out and the main results/impacts generated in each context. We also present some characteristics of adolescents, found in the projects published in the researched media, without identifying them.

All the projects were developed in public schools and most of the adolescents responsible for their elaboration and execution were female. The theme ethnic-racial relations that addresses the issue of racism as well as the need to combat it appeared in all the projects chosen and recognized by the school's Creatives, as all were awarded or received an honorable mention for presenting a necessary and pertinent theme and for contributing to behavior change, greater respect and appreciation of black culture. Of the 10 projects, 9 were awarded in 2019, revealing that this year there was greater appreciation of this theme in the choice of projects selected for awards.

Table 1 - Selected projects awarded in the school's creatives

Project title (year of award)	City where it was held	Authors' characteristics	Goals	Key activities	Main results
Black Youth: Moving Structures 2019	Milagres (CE)	Black students in the 2nd and 3rd year of public high school	Discuss the genocide of the black population and exalt Afro-Brazilian culture.	Seminar "Black Lives Matter!"; Human rights workshop with the theme "All the dead were criminals: genocide or extermination of black people in Brazil?"; Philosophical coffee "We are many, we are millions, we are those silenced: what is black citizenship in Brazil?".	They observed that a large part of the school's black students began to assume their identities, recognizing and admiring themselves; Inclusion of content as determined by Federal Law 10.639/2003, in classes of all school subjects.
Curly Girls Movement 2019	Porto Alegre - RS	Black public school high school students	Rescue ancestry and strengthen the self-esteem of black children and young people by combating the racist games experienced by them	Debates and exchanges of experiences aimed at valuing the aesthetics of curly hair and skin color to rescue the Afro-Brazilian identity and the power of the feminine; Moments of celebration of black ancestry, Workshops, such as Afro dance (maculelê); Creation of a community and Afro-centered library through the collection of books on blackness.	Visibility by winning several awards; achieved a strong and empowered black representation, achieving the objectives of the project, which is now an institute.
Afro-Brazilian literature: (re)discovering our identity 2019	Natal – RN	Black public school high school students	Value Afro-Brazilian literature, in addition to highlighting themes such as racism, empowerment,	Studies on Afro-Brazilian literature; Turban courses; Photo essay focused on	They showed the importance of Afro-Brazilian literature by giving visibility to the chosen black writers who serve as a

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			black aesthetics and representation of Afro-descendants in relevant positions.	valuing black self-esteem; Literary interventions in the mailboxes of the school's neighborhood, in a medical clinic and in a condominium; In parallel, they promoted exhibitions on the life and work of black writers such as Conceição Evaristo, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Ryane Leão and Drika Duarte.	reference for the participants of the project; They contributed to improving self-esteem and self-acceptance, as well as the recognition of the black beauty of the participants in the photo shoot.
Quilombola community of Opalma on the agenda 2019	Waterfall – BA	Young black people from the Beneficent Association of the residents of Opalma - Quilombo do Engenho da Cruz	To publicize what life is like inside a quilombo.	Partnership with the Federal University of Bahia, to change this situation and share events in the region with the population; Recording of several videos showing the daily life of the community; Dissemination of the videos on a YouTube channel.	Visibility to the quilombolas who remain in the quilombo seeking to maintain the traditions of their ancestors.
More love, less war 2016	São Bernardo do Campo (SP)	15 students from a public school and 15 students from a private school having whites and blacks	To combat violence and spread love in the territory in which they live,	Storytelling in daycare centers; Abayomi black doll workshops to address racial diversity and the importance of respect.	It enabled the interaction between students from two different and distant realities; The students realized that it is possible to make dreams come true through unity.

Afroactives: let your hair down, hold the prejudice 2019	Porto Alegre (RS)	Black elementary and high school students touched by a letter written by a 10-year-old black girl telling how much she suffered from racism	To help black children with difficulty accepting their own hair and victims of racism by reflecting on intolerance, prejudice and racism.	Workshops, training and lectures on anti-racist education at school and appreciation of Afro hair, revealing their beauty; Creation of the Afroaffirmative calendar, where each month the great milestones of Afro culture are presented and also the biographies and achievements of black personalities. Protagonist students give lectures in other schools and events;	The project continued to be developed annually at the school, stimulating the belonging and appropriation of an entire historically invisible ancestry and improving the empowerment and self-esteem of black students.
Beyond Genes: Strengthening Black Cultures 2019	Cascavel-CE	Black public school high school students	Strengthening Black Identity and Culture	Debates on the racial issue in the quilombola community of BICA; Workshops to rescue the local culture.	They contributed to black people who were the majority of the population assuming their color in the self-declaration.
Potere: the place of the black woman 2019	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	Black public school high school students	Valuing the trajectory of black women in school	Record of their daily lives, through audiovisual artistic processes.	Revelation of many talents and strengths of the students with the realization of the photographic essay and artistic video. . Creation of the black female collective at school.
Trouble: our story becomes a scene 2019	São Vicente Ferrer (MA)	Black public school high school students	Awaken protagonism, nurture the sense of belonging and strengthen the	They created a theater company that portrays quilombola culture, their	They improved empowerment and a sense of belonging to the place where they live, enabling greater

			identity of black students.	experiences and stories.	appreciation of quilombola culture.
Quota is not alms: black-to-the-concept 2019	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	Black public school high school students	Present the veiled racism experienced in the daily life of students inside and outside the school environment.	They created a theatrical show portraying the issue of racial prejudice from the perspective of racial quotas.	They denounced veiled racism, bringing the topic to the debate, contributing to the reflection and change in behavior of the participants who understood the importance of quotas.

Source: The Authors, 2024

In figure 1 below, we present the percentage of times that each character force was mentioned by the 9 judges when analyzing the 10 projects. Thus, it is already possible to verify the 5 most evident forces in all of them.

Figure 1 - Prevalence of forces in projects
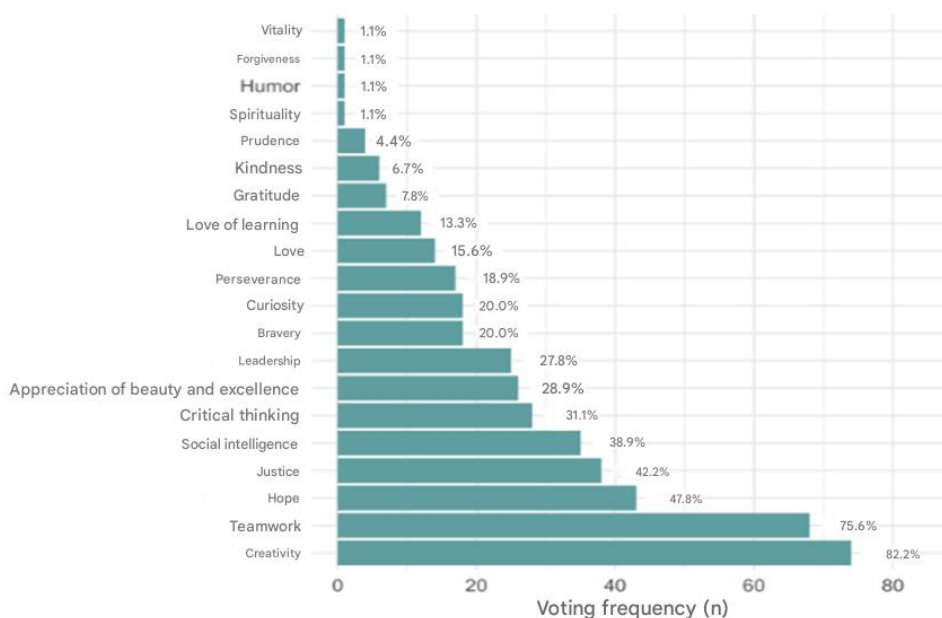
Source: Survey data

In the 10 projects analyzed, the judges identified 20 of the 24 character strengths described in the researched literature. Only 4 forces were not identified in any project, namely: self-control, perspective, integrity, and humility.

It was not possible to calculate the kappa value for the 4 forces that the judges did not identify in the projects. Considering this limitation of the kappa calculation, Gwet's AC1 coefficient was also calculated (Gwet, 2008). This coefficient, unlike kappa, is not influenced by the homogeneity of the sample, and is pointed out as an appropriate alternative to kappa in these situations (Xie, 2013).

Table 2 - Fleiss's Kappa for Evaluation Reliability, by Character Strength

Strength of character	Fleiss's Kappa	Gwet ICA
Love	0.302	0.751
Love of learning	0.111	0.733
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	0.081	0.359
Self-control	---	**1,000**
Kindness	0.018	0.860
Bravery	0.010	0.534
Integrity	---	**1,000**
Creativity	-0.083	0.553
Curiosity	0.115	0.583
Hope	-0.035	-0.031
Spirituality	-0.011	0.977
Gratitude	-0.046	0.825
Humor	-0.011	0.977
Perspective	---	**1,000**
Social intelligence	-0.017	0.079
Justice	-0.070	-0.020
Leadership	-0.052	0.295
Humility	---	**1,000**
Critical thinking	0.054	0.290
Forgiveness	-0.011	0.977
Perseverance	0.057	0.583
Prudence	0.019	0.909
Teamwork	-0.008	0.410
Vitality	-0.011	0.977

Source: Survey data

DISCUSSION

We decided to analyze anti-racist projects developed by teenagers awarded in the Criativos da Escola challenge because this program was created in 2015 with the aim of

encouraging children and adolescents to perceive themselves as protagonists and agents of transformation of their own stories and realities, with protagonism, empathy, creativity and teamwork as pillars (Gabriel, 2019). Creativity and teamwork are among the 24 character strengths studied by Positive Psychology and at least 6 judges noticed the presence of both in the 10 selected projects.

The 24 character strengths are positive traits, manifested in feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. They are not considered completely innate or immutable. The studies of Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggest that they are the result of a combination of biological, environmental and cultural factors. The authors believe that while individuals may be born with predispositions to develop certain character strengths, these strengths can be shaped and strengthened or weakened throughout life through experiences, education, social interactions, and intentional practices.

In terms of stability, character strengths are relatively beneficial, but not entirely fixed. They can be designed and improved over time, especially if they are cultivated in a conscious manner (Park & Peterson, 2009). Thus, while character strengths may have a biological basis, they can be largely influenced by the environment and be modified over time (Peterson et al., 2007). "Character Strengths are those aspects of your personality that distinguish the best in you and are collectively responsible for your greatest accomplishments and completeness" (Doman, 2021, p.27).

Wagner et al. (2021) evaluated character strengths as traits, stable over time and investigated the frequency with which they were perceived in different contexts, concluding that there were situations where a certain strength was more evident than others. This was observed in the 10 projects analyzed.

Of the 20 character forces identified in the projects by the judges, we will discuss with greater emphasis the 5 that appeared in most of them. They are: 1. creativity (appears in 82.2% of the projects); 2. teamwork (appears in 75.6% of the projects); 3. hope (appears in 47.6% of the projects); 4. justice (appears in 42.2% of the bills) and 5. Social intelligence (appears in 38.9% of the projects).

First on the list is creativity. In Positive Psychology, it is seen as a fundamental capability and as an essential aspect for human well-being (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). It is defined as the ability to generate original and useful ideas, to think flexibly, and to approach problems in an innovative way. Creativity is not only limited to the production of works of art or revolutionary inventions, but also manifests itself in all areas of life, from solving

everyday problems to expressing ideas and emotions in new and meaningful ways (Oliveira et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2021).

We believe that creativity is an important tool in the fight against racism, as it allows us to address the problem in innovative and effective ways, as was done in the 10 awarded projects. It is also possible to perceive its relationship with the empowerment of adolescents when they reveal their creative potential. Judge 9 (J9) recorded in his written analysis that he observed the presence of creativity in all projects that promoted workshops, training and lectures on anti-racist education with appreciation of Afro hair, demonstrating creativity in the search for innovative ways to face prejudice and promote inclusion.

The students made creative approaches through art, music, theater, literature, video production and others to educate and raise awareness about the history of racism, its current manifestations and its consequences, promoting reflections and behavior change. In addition, the students also fostered the creation and dissemination of alternative narratives undoing racial stereotypes and prejudices through the production of films, documentaries telling the reality of blacks in the country. They carried out community interventions, promoting inclusion and racial equity through dialogue and engagement, building bridges between different groups, and promoting solidarity and mutual support.

Teamwork was the second character force that was most perceived by the judges in the projects. In Positive Psychology, teamwork is seen as an effective way to promote collective well-being and success (Park & Peterson, 2009). It involves collaboration between individuals who share common goals, values, and a sense of purpose. We observed that teamwork was fundamental for the success of the projects analyzed, since it contributed to the creation of meaningful connections, enabled the appreciation and knowledge of the individual strengths of those involved in each action, which well used contributed to the achievement of the objectives proposed in each one. Within this context, this strength of character contributes to motivation, job satisfaction, and team commitment (Gander et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2020).

In combating racism, teamwork plays an important role, as it is a collaborative approach that brings together people with different experiences and perspectives to tackle the problem effectively and comprehensively. In the projects in question, we saw how much teamwork helped in this regard. There was a search for external partners, the establishment of alliances between groups and organizations such as NGOs, community groups,

educational institutions, companies, and government agencies that came together to promote racial equality and social justice (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Wagner et al., 2021).

Hope is in third place on the list of character strengths most perceived by judges in the 10 projects analyzed. The judges identified this strength in the projects in which adolescents promoted actions to recognize and value black beauty and in those in which they held debates on structural racism and gender inequalities, showing hope for positive changes and for a more egalitarian and inclusive future for the black population in schools. By awakening the protagonism and nurturing the sense of belonging of black students, adolescents suggest a hope for a better and empowering future for this community (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019).

Justice was the fourth most observed force in the projects. Positive Psychology is concerned with the promotion of social justice, which involves ensuring equal opportunities, fair and equitable treatment, and the protection of human rights for all members of society. This includes combating discrimination, social exclusion, and inequality of access to resources and opportunities (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

The fifth most perceived force was social intelligence, which consists of knowing what to do to adapt to various social situations, as well as being aware of the motivations and feelings of others and oneself (Gander et al., 2019; García-Álvarez et al., 2020). In the projects analyzed, the adolescents demonstrated this strength by understanding and positioning themselves willing to discuss the social dynamics related to racism and its consequences, as well as revealing skills to address these issues in an effective, sensitive and empathetic way. In fact, another concept for social intelligence is related to empathy. So that putting yourself in the place of the other, even seeking to feel the pain of those who suffer discrimination for having afro hair and black skin is a demonstration of this strength.

One of the judges reflected on the strengths he identified in the projects, highlighting his view that behind all the activities proposed and carried out by adolescents is love.

When analyzing the name, the summary and the main ideas of the projects, it was possible to identify that they constitute initiatives that represent a robust manifestation of self-love, appreciation of identity and fight against prejudice and racial discrimination. By promoting the appreciation of Afro-Brazilian culture, awareness of structural racism, and the search for equality and social justice, the students involved demonstrate bravery, kindness, and hope to build a more inclusive and respectful society. Each initiative, whether through

anti-racist education, the appreciation of Afro aesthetics or the recognition of quilombola cultures, contributes to the strengthening of black identity, the empowerment of communities and the advancement in the struggle for rights and recognition. Finally, it should be noted that one of the great forces behind all these initiatives was love (J9).

Although love appeared in only 15.6% of the projects analyzed by the 9 judges, this reflection of J9 is consistent with our way of thinking. Love is part of the virtue of humanity and consists in valuing intimate relationships with others, in particular those in which sharing and care are reciprocal. It is characteristic of those who seek to be close to people, value relationships, friendships and demonstrate solidarity (Peterson et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2021). We observed that in most of the projects, adolescents showed love for others by dedicating their time and effort to help other blacks overcome difficulties of acceptance and combat racism. They empathized with others and designed their projects to spread love and combat violence in their territory, seeking to create a more positive and welcoming environment for all, especially those in suffering.

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of young black people to fight racism is an important and necessary process of self-knowledge and self-confidence. It can happen from reflections, studies and also with the development of intentional techniques to enhance character strengths. In this way, we realize that empowerment has a strong relationship with character strengths, because the more evident and developed they are, the more the adolescent will be able to express himself, demand equal rights for whites and blacks and show himself against all types of injustice.

Of the 24 character strengths described in the literature studied, the judges' analysis identified 20 of them in the selected projects. This leads us to defend the hypothesis that the enhancement of character strengths can contribute to the anti-racist empowerment of adolescents who will intentionally be able to use all their strengths, especially the most evident ones aimed at the objective of combating racism. Aware that they have all the strength of character within themselves, adolescents will go through the entire process of self-knowledge, perceiving themselves as an important subject for themselves and for the group of which they are part, beginning to have an understanding of their social, cultural and economic position. There is a process of self-acceptance, which finally transforms this into a benefit for the collective, a moment in which it breaks with a posture of

accommodation and passivity, starting to exercise, with autonomy, a posture of protagonist (Gomes, 2011).

Based on statistical and comparative research, a study by Ifer (Folha Racial Balance Index) in the 2022 edition concluded that Brazil will still need 116 years for blacks to have access to the same opportunities that whites have (Wellington & Wellington, 2022). We believe that it is possible to accelerate this equality and achieve equity and equality more quickly through anti-racist education and the enhancement of character strengths, which in addition to contributing to the emotional and social well-being of adolescents also enable greater personal empowerment in the face of racism. Armed with these forces, adolescents will be able to promote movements of collective awareness and deconstruction of distorted values and learning to introduce new values that consider empathy, solidarity and the appreciation of difference.

We also recognize the importance and need for more scientific works that encourage the debate on this theme, generating the production of academic knowledge by researchers from all areas, especially Psychology, in the search for strategies to reduce all psychic suffering caused by racism in black people.

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