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Positive Youth Development, Thriving, and Social Engagement: An Analysis of Gender Differences in Spanish Youth

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Abstract

The framework of Positive Youth Development (PYD) arose from a strength-based conception of the transition to adulthood. Although previous literature has provided evidence for some PYD correlates, little is known about gender differences in PYD and its outcomes in thriving and social engagement, which could improve interventions' effectiveness. Thus, this study aimed to examine gender differences in PYD dimensions (i.e., competence, confidence, connection, caring, and character), individual thriving (i.e., psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles) and social engagement, and to examine the associations between them. Data from the 'PYD in a Cross-National Perspective Project' in Spain were collected by administering a paper-based self-report to students from high school and university. Results showed greater scores in connection, caring, and character in women, as well as greater social engagement and academic adjustment. Men presented higher competence and confidence, more frequent physical activity and better psychological adjustment. Furthermore, more PYD was related to greater social engagement, better psychological and academic adjustment, and healthier lifestyles. Some practical implications for program design may be derived, which underscore the need to promote the five PYD dimensions equally in female and male youths in order to improve their individual thriving and social engagement. (197 words)

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Emerging adulthood has been proposed as a developmental life stage that starts from late adolescence and has been extended to 29 years (Arnett, Zukauskiene, & Sugimura, 2014). In this vein, Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne, and Patton (2018) stated that this youth transition to adulthood now lasts longer than ever before. Research on youth has mainly been directed by a deficit perspective, which has marked the design of policy and intervention in this population (Geldhof et al., 2014). The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework has emerged as a strength-based perspective on the transition to adulthood which conceives positive development as a consequence of the concordance of youth strengths with contextual developmental assets (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). PYD is proposed to comprise a total of five Cs, i.e., competence (which refers to a positive perception of efficacy in different domains), confidence (which means an overall positive self-worth), connection (i.e., having positive social relationships), character (i.e., having a sense of integrity and being respectful of the rules of culture and society), and caring (which refers to a sense of empathy and sympathy for others). Some cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have provided evidence for this five-factor structure (Bowers et al., 2010; Chen, Wiium, & Dimitrova, 2018), with positive associations between the five Cs.

The development of the '5Cs' of the PYD is associated with thriving, i.e., a life trajectory characterized by contributions to self, family, community, and civil society (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). This contribution has also been called the sixth C of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005). Benson and Scales (2009) argued that thriving represents a dynamic and bidirectional interaction between a person's competences and developmental contexts over time, which involves the stability of his or her

development towards an idealized personhood. The 4-H Study in the USA provided conclusions regarding how the participation in PYD programs promoted adolescent thriving across development (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2014). Thus, thriving is defined as a developmental and multidimensional construct (Benson & Scales, 2009) in which different outcomes may be described at different levels, i.e., at an individual level (with markers such as psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles), but also in terms of social engagement (e.g., with family, peers, and the community).

In this line, positive developmental cascades of PYD have been observed in the US (Lewin-Bizan, Bowers, & Lerner, 2010), so that positive parenting predicted intentional self-regulation, which was associated with higher PYD, and in turn PYD was prospectively related to social engagement. Thus, the literature has underscored many positive correlates of PYD, such as self-regulation skills, healthier lifestyles, resilience, academic success and adjustment, prosocial behaviour, social participation, fewer behavioural problems, and less emotional disturbance (Beck &Wiium, 2019; Branquinho & Gaspar de Matos, 2018; Catalano et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2007; Gaspar de Matos, Santos, Reis, & Marques, 2018; Olson & Goddard, 2015).

Gender Differences in Thriving Indicators and PYD

Furthermore, research to date has consistently noted some gender differences in psychological adjustment, lifestyles, and academic adjustment during the life stage of youth. More anxiety and depression have been reported in females (Essau, Lewinsohn, Seeley, & Sasagawa, 2010; McLean, Asnaani, Litz, & Hofmann, 2011), while no differences have been reported in subjective happiness (Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 2005). Concerning lifestyle, more physical activity has been observed in

male youth using objective measures (Trost et al., 2002), and also when performed as a leisure-time activity (Azebedo et al., 2007). Moreover, healthier diet has been observed in women and adolescent girls, with more frequent consumption of fruit and vegetables (Caine-Bish & Scheule, 2009; Wardle et al., 2004). With regard to academic adjustment, better academic performance has consistently been detected in women undergraduates over the last decades (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006), as well as greater levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Brouse, Basch, LeBlanc, McKnight, & Lei, 2010).

However, only very few studies have examined gender differences in the PYD dimensions, and to the best of our knowledge no study to date has jointly analysed gender differences in both PYD and thriving outcomes. In a study conducted in the USA, Zimmerman, Phelps, and Lerner (2008) concluded that girls reported greater overall PYD than boys. Concerning PYD dimensions, a study in Norway, Ardal, Holsen, Diseth, and Larsen (2018), recently showed that girls had more connection, character, and caring, while boys presented higher confidence. However, no remarkable difference was found in competence. Additionally, other studies have explored differences by gender in some related youth strengths. For example, previous research has noted that boys present greater overall self-esteem and self-efficacy than girls (Muris, 2001; Quatman & Watson, 2001), which may be due to an inaccurate underestimation in girls' self-perceptions (Beyer & Bowden, 1997). Regarding social relations, Bruwer, Emsley, Kidd, Lochner, and Seedat (2008) observed that girls reported greater perceived social support than boys from family, friends, or a significant other. Moreover, some studies have found that girls were more altruist, more empathetic, and more assertive than boys, presenting a greater frequency of indifferent prosocial behaviours, such as anonymous, compliant, and emotional (Carlo & Randall,

2002; Garaigordobil, 2009). Einolf (2011) concluded that women scored higher in measures of volunteering and charitable giving.

A gendered socialization within developmental contexts (i.e., family, peers, media, and educational centres) may explain these results, which transmit gender roles and inequities (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). Moreover, previous works have also associated differences in self-perception by gender, such as self-esteem, self-concept, and subjective well-being, with less positive assessments in females (Bleidorn et al., 2016). Perry and Pauletti (2011) argued that the transition to adulthood is a crucial life stage for gendered differentiation in interests, competence beliefs, self-concept and self-esteem, self-perceived personality traits, personal relationships, aggressive behaviour, and well-being. They highlighted the role of gender stereotypes in the development of those gender-typed characteristics. Furthermore, gender segregation also influences gender-typing, as indicated Mehta and Strough (2010). Gender segregation was related to greater reference-group identity, cooperative orientation, and communicative responsiveness in adolescent girls. In this vein, Van der Graaff, Carlo, Crocett, Koot, and Branje (2018) have recently shown that prosocial behaviour was longitudinally associated with more empathic concern only among girls, which is consistent with the stereotyped notion of prosocial behaviour and empathy expressions as feminine-acceptable actions. As noted in Menon, Schellhorn, and Lowe (2013), gender identity has a self-regulatory role in decreasing gender-atypical characteristics to protect adolescent subjective well-being. Thus, a gendered socialization may explain a differential development of PYD strengths, and differences in their correlates, such as individual thriving and social engagement. A different profile of PYD dimensions in girls and boys may emerge as a result of these gendered processes across development.

Study Justification

Most PYD research has been conducted with samples from the US and Northern Europe, while only very few studies have examined PYD in Spain, and they have only examined adolescents aged 12–17 years old, with no data collected from emerging adults (Antolín Suárez, Oliva Delgado, Pertegal Vega, & López Jiménez, 2011; Oliva et al., 2010). As well, no study to date has examined gender differences in PYD dimensions and their correlates in Spain. Furthermore, further development in public policies is needed to encourage the social participation and labour integration of Spanish young people. Only 27% of them reported collaborated with an NGO and up to 61% acknowledged little or no interest in politics (Comas Arnau, 2010). In the context of an overall loss of confidence in institutions, female youth seem to present a bit more positive opinion on international organizations, as well as a better valuation of the diverse forms of contribution to collective things as a citizen (FAD, 2015). This result may be related with a lower development of character dimension of PYD in male youth. The unemployment rate is around 28% in the population aged 16 to 29 years old (Spanish Institute for Youth, 2018a). These public policies are especially needed in Andalusia, an autonomous community in the south of Spain, where the unemployment rate is even higher, nearly 40% in this age cohort (Spanish Institute for Youth, 2018a). Moreover, in 2016, Spain presented a gender gap in women's and men's employment rate in full-time equivalent work of 16.5 percentage points (men: 68.1%, women: 51.6%), as well as a gender pay gap of 14.2%, i.e., the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of men and women employees, expressed as a percentage of the former (European Commission, 2018). These gender differences in employment rate and salaries may be associated to a lower development of competence dimension of PYD in female youth.

Furthermore, there was a remarkable gender gap in those employed in education, human health, and social work activities, with 23.4% of all employed women working in these fields compared to 7.4% of men, which reflects the segregation among tertiary students in this field of knowledge (47.7% of women and 23.7% of men). A higher percentage in women is also observed concerning care activities, such as educating children and caring for elderly people, or people with disabilities, and housework participation every day, with gender gaps of 12.1% and 42.6% respectively. These gender differences could be related to a lower development of caring and connection dimensions of PYD in male youth. However, opposite gender differences were observed in sporting, cultural, or leisure activities outside the home (gender gap: 6.2%) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). Up to 67% of female youth reported that gender inequalities are great or very great in Spain, while this percentage is 46.2% in male youth. Female youth indicated that they were in an especially worse situation than men are regarding salaries, accessibility to management positions in politics, companies, and universities, equal and fair treatment in social networks, opportunities to find a job, and the possibility of dissolving a relationship. More than half of female youth (53.1%) have suffered discrimination, compared to 30% of men, especially in the labour market, treatment by others, social networks, leisure places and shops, and their own families (FAD, 2017). Thus, these differences may be associated with a lower development of confidence dimension of PYD in female youth.

Rodriguez and Ballesteros (2019) concluded that 41% in youth aged between 25–29 and only 5.9 in younger ages had moved out of parents' house, while gender differences were also detected in youth aged 16-29 (women: 23.1%, men: 15.7%). The mean age of leaving parents' house has increased from 28.3 in 2009 to 29.3 years old in 2017, more than three years older than European mean (26.1). These authors also

examined the characteristics that Spanish young people attribute to each gender. Some differences were also reported: female youths are perceived as more intelligent, harder-working, more responsible and careful, more sensitive and gentler, and more sympathetic, but more discriminatory, more worried about body image, and homier; while male youths are considered more autonomous and calmer, more active and energetic, and more entrepreneurial, but more superficial, more possessive, and more dependent. These gender differences in the attributed characteristics may also reflect the development of a gendered PYD profile. Based on these data, the present study aimed to examine gender differences in PYD and its correlates in Spanish youth.

Aim and Hypotheses

Most research to date on PYD has validated the framework of Lerner et al. (2005) in samples from North America and Northern Europe, while evidence is needed in samples from Southern Europe. Thus, the present research aimed to examine PYD in a sample of Spanish youth from Andalusia. Furthermore, a deeper examination of gender differences in PYD and its correlates in social engagement and individual thriving (i.e., psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles) seem to be strongly indicated, since it could suggest the design of gender-specific interventions to increase effectiveness. Thus, this research has two aims: a) to study gender differences in dimensions of PYD, social engagement, and individual thriving, such as psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles; and b) to analyse the associations of PYD with social engagement and individual thriving.

First, consistently with previous research, we hypothesized that women present more connection, caring, and character, while men show more competence and confidence (Zimmerman et al., 2008; Ardal et al., 2018). It is also expected that women would report more social engagement, academic adjustment and healthy diet, while men

would present less depressive and anxiety symptoms and more frequent physical activity (Azebedo et al., 2007; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Caine-Bish & Scheule, 2009; Einolf, 2011; Essau et al., 2010; McLean et al., 2011). Second, greater PYD is expected to be associated with more social engagement, better psychological and academic adjustment, and healthier lifestyles, in line with previous results by Bowers et al. (2010), Durlak et al. (2007), Lewin-Bizan et al. (2010), and Gaspar de Matos et al. (2018).

Method

Data Collection Procedure

Spanish data from the 'Positive Youth Development Cross-National Project' (Wiium, 2018) were analysed in this research. Data collection was performed during April and May 2017 following a cross-sectional design. A sample of young people individually and anonymously completed a questionnaire during normal class time. All the educational institutions contacted agreed to join the study (i.e., high schools and universities). Moreover, all the respective students agreed to participate in the study, and written informed consent was required. The present study obtained the approval from University of [Anonymised]'s ethics board.

Participants

A sample of 768 youth participated in the study (60.5% women) aged between 17 and 29 (M_{age} = 19.50, SD = 2.27). They were enrolled in 10 educational institutions, both universities and high schools, in Andalusia (Spain), which were selected by convenience. Thus, a heterogeneous sample was collected by including different types of institutions (60% were private and 40% were public) and different habitats (60% urban and 40% rural). The participating classes were then selected at random within each educational centre. The samples of youth differed in the ongoing studies, so that

43.1% were enrolled at the last two years of high school, 38.1% were studying in the first two years of a degree in the university, and 18.8% were enrolled in the first or second course of professional training. Regarding nationality, most were Spanish (95.8%), while a few were from other European countries or from Latin America. Concerning cohabitation, most of the students lived with their parents, only with one parent, or with other adults (90.4%), while the remaining 9.6% lived with partners, flat mates, or alone.

Instrument and Variables

The self-report measure comprised several scales to assess positive youth development, social engagement, and psychological adjustment (i.e., happiness, depression and anxiety), and included some questions to evaluate academic adjustment and healthy lifestyles as well as certain demographic items.

Positive Youth Development. The PYD Short Form (Geldhof et al., 2014) was used, which presents 34 items divided into five components or 5Cs: competence (6 items), confidence (6 items), connection (8 items), caring (6 items), and character (8 items). Sample items for these 5Cs were, respectively: 'I am better than others my age at sports', 'All in all, I am glad I am me', 'I have lots of good conversations with my parents', 'When I see someone being taken advantage of, I want to help them', and 'Accepting responsibility for my actions when I make a mistake or get into trouble'. Responses were scored on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 'almost never true or never true' (1) to 'always true' (5), from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5), from 'not important' (1) to 'extremely important' (5), or from 'not at all like me' (1) to 'very much like me' (5). The scale was back translated from English to Spanish by native speakers with accredited psychology expertise. Means were calculated for the 5Cs and the overall PYD score was calculated as the sum of those five means. The

overall PYD scale presented good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach α = .86). Confidence (α = .74), connection (α = .73), and caring (α = .86) also showed good internal consistency. Lower scores were obtained for competence (α = .69) and character (α = .65), which still displayed acceptable internal consistency.

Social engagement. In order to assess youth engagement with family, peers, and community, five items from the Positive Youth Development cross-national project (Wiium, 2018) were used: 'How many hours do you spend in a typical week volunteering or doing something without pay to make your community a better place?', 'How many hours do you spend in a typical week helping friends or neighbours?', 'How many hours do you spend in a typical week helping your family?', 'How many hours do you spend in a typical week mentoring others or advising peers?', and 'How many hours do you spend in a typical week participating in school/university committees or government?' Five response options were presented, '0 hours', '1 hour', '2 hours', '3–5 hours', and '6 or more hours', encoded from 1 to 5. These questions were back translated from English to Spanish by native speakers with expertise in psychology. The total score was calculated as the sum of the scores for the respective items, ranging from 5 and 25. Questionable internal consistency was detected, due to content differences among the indicators (α = .62).

Psychological adjustment. Three variables were measured as indicators of youth psychological adjustment in this study, subjective happiness, depressive symptoms, and anxious symptoms. First, the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) was administered in its Spanish adaptation (Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2014). This four-item scale showed good internal consistency reliability (α = .80). Second, the Spanish version of the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9; Kroenke, Spitzer, & Williams, 2001) was used to examine depressive symptoms. This

nine-item version showed good internal consistency in the present study (α = .85). Third, Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006) was administered to examine anxious symptomatology. This version with seven items presented excellent reliability (α = .90).

Academic adjustment. Two questions were included to assess self-perception of academic performance and feelings of boredom with high school/university, adapted to Spanish from the HBSC/JUnP study (Gaspar de Matos, Santos, & Reis, 2017): 'How would you rate your academic performance?', with five response options (*excellent*, *very good*, *good*, *fair*, and *poor*) and 'How often do you get bored in high school or college?', with five options (*never*, *occasionally*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *always*).

Healthy lifestyles. Three indicators from the Positive Youth Development cross-national project (Wiium, 2018) were used to examine the practice of physical activity ('I engage in physical activity, for at least 30 minutes, two or more times every week') and the consumption of fruits ('I eat at least one serving of fruit every day') and vegetables ('I eat at least one serving of vegetable every day'). Yes/No response options were offered for these statements.

Data Analysis Design

In order to address the first aim of the study, i.e., to study gender differences in PYD and thriving indicators, descriptive statistics were explored, and gender differences were analysed by *t*-tests and χ^2 tests. Holm-Bonferroni correction was used to control type I error in multiple comparisons, and multivariate variance analyses were conducted to control age and gender × age interaction effects. Then, regarding the second aim, correlation analyses were conducted to analyse the associations of PYD components and overall scores with social engagement (both overall and separate indicators),

academic adjustment, and psychological adjustment variables. Moreover, *t*-tests were applied to calculate differences in PYD by healthy lifestyles indicators. Differences by gender in these interrelations between PYD and thriving indicators were also examined by calculating the effect by gender interaction.

Results

Results of Aim 1: Analysis of Gender Differences in Study Variables

Gender differences in PYD and social engagement. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and gender differences in PYD and social engagement. Medium to high PYD scores were observed. Specifically, higher means were found in the caring and character dimensions, while the lowest was observed in competence. Multivariate variance analyses showed a significant gender effect on PYD dimensions, $F(5, 686) = 22.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, while no age group differences neither gender × age interaction were found. Men reported higher scores in competence and confidence, and women showed more connection, caring, and character. No gender difference was found in the PYD overall score. Regarding social engagement, participants indicated a greater engagement by helping their family and mentoring or advising peers. Thus, up to 82.8% of the sample reported helping their families and 76.7% indicated that they advised their peers, with a frequency of more than two hours a week. Multivariate variance analysis revealed that gender had a significant effect on social contribution indicators, $F(5, 719) = 11.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, while no effects were found by age, nor by age × gender. Thus, some gender differences were also detected, such that women reported more social engagement in the indicators of helping family, helping friends or neighbours, and mentoring/advising peers. Moreover, women also showed a greater overall score in social engagement than men. Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of social engagement indicators by gender.

-Table 1 and Figure 1 about here –

Gender differences in psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles. Psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles were examined as indicators of youth thriving at an individual level (Table 1). Multivariate variance analyses indicated no significant effects by age, or by gender × age on psychological and academic adjustment variables. However, gender did present a significant effect, $F(5, 659) = 11.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Regarding psychological adjustment, mild mean scores in depression and anxiety were detected, as well as moderate subjective happiness. Women reported more depressive symptoms and more anxious symptoms than men. No differences were found in subjective happiness by gender. Furthermore, self-perceived performance and boredom at high school were examined as indicators of academic adjustment. 47.1% of the participants perceived their performance as good and 36.6% as very good or excellent. Moreover, 29.9% indicated that they got bored often or always at high school/university, while 31.9% never or occasionally got bored. Significant gender differences were observed in perceived performance and boredom, so that women reported higher perceived performance (41.1% perceived their performance as very good or excellent vs 29.6% others) and lower boredom (24.7% often or always felt bored vs 37.9% others) than men.

Finally, physical activity and consumption of fruits and vegetables were studied as indicators of healthy lifestyles. Results indicated that 58.3% engaged in physical activity for at least 30 minutes two or more times every week, 58.9% ate at least one serving of fruit every day, and 59.6% ate at least one serving of vegetables every day. Men practiced more physical activity than women according to that indicator (69.6% vs 51%), $\chi^2(1, N = 768) = 25.78$, $p < .001$, $V = .18$. Small differences by age were observed

(with younger participants being a bit more active than older ones), $\chi^2(1, N = 760) = 5.76$, $p = .017$, $V = .09$, while the interaction age × gender did not present a significant effect. Finally, no gender differences were observed in the consumptions of fruit or vegetables. No remarkable differences by age group were observed in either fruit consumption or vegetable consumption.

Aim 2: Analysis of the Associations Between PYD, Social Engagement, and Individual Thriving Indicators

Interrelations between PYD and social engagement. Table 1 shows the zero-order bivariate correlations between PYD and social engagement indicators. The PYD dimensions were positively interrelated, with stronger associations between competence and confidence, and between caring and character. The caring dimension presented a small correlation with confidence and no significant correlation with competence. Concerning the association between PYD and social engagement, the results show that overall PYD presented a positive association with overall social engagement. Connection, caring, and character were positively related with participating as a volunteer, helping friends, helping family, and advising peers. Participating in committees was not related to PYD. Competence did not show any significant correlations, while only a very small positive association was observed between confidence and helping one's own family. Non-significant differences were observed between male and female participants in these interrelations. Thus, gender did not moderate the relationship between PYD and social contribution.

Interrelations between PYD, psychological adjustment, academic adjustment, and healthy lifestyles. Psychological adjustment was also associated with PYD in both male and female participants (Table 1). Subjective happiness presented positive correlations with competence, confidence, connection, and character.

Depression showed negative associations with competence, confidence, connection, and character. Anxiety was negatively interrelated with the PYD dimensions of competence, confidence, connection, and character. Very small positive relations were observed for caring with anxiety and happiness. Despite the gender differences observed in depressive and anxious symptoms, the associations between PYD and these symptoms did not differ by gender.

Furthermore, PYD was also correlated with academic adjustment (Table 1). Participants with higher scores in competence, confidence, connection, caring, and character presented greater self-perceived academic performance. Moreover, more confidence, more connection, and more character were related to less boredom in high school or university. Similar associations were observed by gender, with no gender moderation in the relationship between PYD and performance nor in the relationship between PYD and boredom. Finally, concerning healthy lifestyles, the results indicate that those young people who engaged in physical activity for at least 30 minutes two or more times every week presented more competence ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .63$, vs $M = 2.95$, $SD = .64$), $t(738) = -8.53$, $p < .001$, and more confidence ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .66$, vs $M = 3.63$, $SD = .61$), $t(737) = -2.06$, $p = .039$. No differences were observed in these associations with competence or confidence between male and female participants. Those participants who ate at least one serving of vegetables every day reported more character ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .47$, vs $M = 3.80$, $SD = .46$), $t(736) = -2.49$, $p = .013$. This result is consistent in both male and female participants with no significant gender moderation.

Discussion

This research makes several contributions. Concerning the first aim, some gender differences were observed in the PYD dimensions, social engagement, and

individual thriving. Specifically, women showed more connection, caring, and character, as well as more social engagement (i.e., more frequent help to friends and family, and more mentoring of others) and academic adjustment (i.e., more perceived performance and less boredom) than men. Furthermore, men showed greater scores in competence and confidence, less depressive and anxious symptoms, and more frequent physical activity than women. However, no gender differences were observed in healthy diet, neither in subjective happiness. Consistent with our hypothesis, some gender differences in the separate PYD components and their correlates were also detected. As noted by Leaper and Friedman (2007), gendered socialization by family, peers, media, and educational centres may transmit gender roles and stereotypes which would explain these differential outcomes. These conclusions are partly in line with the recent results of Ardal et al. (2018) in Norway, who found gender differences in confidence, connection, character, and caring, but not in competence. The similarities in competence among female and male Norwegian youth may be due to greater equity in the workplace and most women in higher education (Statistics Norway, 2018). Concerning the competence dimension, our result is instead consistent with the self-efficacy results of Muris (2001), as well as the discussion of females' underestimation of self-perceptions by Beyer and Bowden (1997). However, no differences in overall PYD were observed, contrary to the conclusions of Zimmerman et al. (2008). This contradictory finding may be explained by the differential pattern of gender differences found in the specific 5Cs in Spanish youth (i.e., greater confidence and competence in men, and greater connection, caring, and character in women), while American youth presented more consistent differences for female subjects.

With regards to the second aim, our results indicated that more PYD was associated with greater social engagement (i.e., more participation as a volunteer, more

frequent help to family and friends, and more mentoring of others), especially the dimensions of connection, caring, and character. Moreover, PYD was related to better psychological (i.e., more subjective happiness and less depression and anxiety) and academic adjustment (i.e., more perceived performance and less boredom). More competence and confidence were positively associated with physical activity, while more character was related to vegetable consumption. These results are also consistent with our hypotheses and with the work of Durlak et al. (2007), Lewin-Bizan et al. (2010), and Gaspar de Matos et al. (2018) on positive correlates of PYD. Lerner et al. (2003) argued that the development of the '5Cs' of the PYD was positively associated with a transition to adulthood characterized by contributions to self, family, community, and civil society.

Despite these contributions, some limitations should be acknowledged. Because a cross-sectional design was used, our conclusions are only limited to associations, and no causal relations between antecedents and consequents can be established. Consequently, a prospective design would be recommended (Cole & Maxwell, 2003) as a line of future research to explore the existence of directionality of associations and the existence of reciprocal causal effects or cross-lagged interrelations between PYD and individual thriving/social engagement across youth development. Moreover, further analysis is needed to examine possible overlapping between 5Cs and thriving construct. This future research line is consistent with the study of Lewin-Bizan et al. (2010) on developmental cascades, thus reflecting the bidirectional conception of thriving in developmental systems theory (Benson & Scales, 2009). Further age examination is recommended, as well as gender x age interaction, to examine differences in PYD and its outcomes, by collecting a balanced sample aged 17-29. Moreover, our conclusions cannot be generalized to the population of Spanish youth since a convenience sample

was assessed. Moreover, a cross-cultural study may be recommended for future research because gender differences are influenced by social and cultural differences, in line with the commentary of Koller and Verma (2017). Finally, self-reports only provide individual subjective information, so the assessment of important others, such as partners, friends, or parents, could provide complementary data to further clarify youth lives, in line with the conclusions of Dirks, Treat, and Weersing (2007).

Implications for Practice

The contributions of the present research may suggest some implications for practice. In North America and Asia, PYD promotion programs have been shown to present positive outcomes in school, family, and community settings by promoting healthy development and reducing problem behaviours (Lerner, Lerner, Urban, & Zaff, 2016; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Thus, the frameworks for preventing risk behaviours and for promoting PYD may be integrated in program designs, as suggested by Guerra and Bradshaw (2008). Kim, Guerra, and Williams (2008) concluded that problem behaviour and health outcomes in youth follow two distinct behavioural patterns which are interrelated and share common developmental paths. Moreover, some characteristics have been described as increasing the efficiency of youth interventions. Catalano et al. (2004, p. 117) concluded that successful PYD interventions involve 'methods to strengthen social, emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and moral competencies; build self-efficacy; shape messages from family and community about clear standards for youth behaviour; increase healthy bonding with adults, peers, and younger children; expand opportunities and recognition for youth; provide structure and consistency in program delivery; and intervene with youth for at least nine months or longer.'

Our conclusions also suggest the need of performing gender-specific interventions to better promote PYD, social engagement, and individual thriving. Stock, Wille, and Krämer (2001) argued the need to examine gender-specific health behaviours when conducting health promotion actions in German universities. Concerning mental health, Patel (2005) argued that gender should also be a core component due to differential prevalence and consequences in burden and stigma. Lerner et al. (2014) showed that the results of PYD intervention programs varied as a function of socioeconomic status and gender. At high levels of involvement in PYD programs, girls from lower asset neighbourhoods showed higher levels of PYD, lower depressive symptoms, and less risk behaviour, while these positive outcomes were observed in boys from high asset neighbourhoods. Eichas et al. (2010) developed an intervention program called the Changing Lives Program within a community-supportive, gender-and-ethnic inclusive framework. This program aimed to develop PYD and prevent negative outcomes (both internalizing and externalizing behaviours) through the promotion of identity exploration and identity commitment. These authors concluded that the causal paths for the specific outcomes were moderated by gender and ethnicity via their effects on mediators (i.e., identity processes) rather than through direct effects on outcomes. In the process of self-construction and self-discovery during emerging adulthood, PYD interventions should promote equal opportunities for both genders to thrive by progressive cascading effects on behaviour problems that operate through effects on positive outcomes (Eichas, Kurtines, Rinaldi, & Farr, 2018).

Thus, gender-sensitive policy interventions are highly recommended to promote health across the life span (Grown, Gupta, & Pande, 2005; Östlin, Eckermann, Mishra, Nkowane, & Wallstam, 2007). Women empowerment is a mainstream development concern which may integrate changes in policies and informal norms, as well as in the

consciousness of the population and in equal accessibility to resources and opportunities (Cornwall, 2016). Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2006) underline the need to promote girls' agency and empowerment by fostering their self-expression and self-directed actions. Regarding social engagement, Branquinho and Gaspar de Matos (2018) have recently conducted a participatory action-research program called 'Dream Teens', which promotes in both male and female youth their social participation in the contexts of health, well-being, and active citizenship. Most interventions in Spain have focused to date on adolescents, with less attention paid to emerging adults. Developmentally appropriate practice is recommended to effectively promote healthy youth outcomes, considering the professionalization of youth work (Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2012). The Healthy Universities Network has recently been created to foster healthy lifestyles and well-being in Spanish universities (REUS, 2018). Furthermore, the Spanish Institute for Youth (2018b) has just organized several interventions to foster youth empowerment and social participation, e.g., international cooperation, youth associationism, creative and artistic activities, the exchange of youth experiences, and greater accessibility to information. Concerning gender equity in youth, in Spain, the Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities (2018) have performed interventions, such as the Technology Initiation in Equality, Creative Programming in Equality, Seminars on Women in Science and Technology, and Program of Co-Responsibility in family and educational settings, or an artistic poster competition on designing equality. Furthermore, other programs address equality in professional promotion and entrepreneurship, with a special focus on women in exclusion risk and from a rural context.

Consequently, the relationships found in a Spanish sample between PYD, social engagement, and individual thriving may suggest the implementation of programs to

promote youth strengths. Our conclusions on gender differences underscore that is necessary to include certain gender-specific actions to foster equal opportunities for girls and boys to acquire the 5Cs of PYD in order to enable the equal development of youth thriving.

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Table 1

Descriptive statistics, gender differences and associations between PYD and the indicators of individual thriving and social engagement

	M (*SD*)			Gender differences	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Total	Men	Women							
1.- Competence	3.19 (0.66)	3.36 (0.66)	3.07 (0.64)	$t(739) = 5.97$, $p < .001$	1					
2.- Confidence	3.69 (0.64)	3.77 (0.60)	3.63 (0.65)	$t(739) = 3.00$, $p = .02$	.52***	1				
3.- Connection	3.67 (0.56)	3.57 (0.56)	3.72 (0.55)	$t(748) = -3.59$, $p = .005$	.33***	.48***	1			
4.- Caring	4.07 (0.71)	3.84 (0.80)	4.22 (0.60)	$t(748) = -7.40$, $p < .001$	.02	.08*	.27***	1		
5.- Character	3.85 (0.47)	3.76 (0.50)	3.91 (0.44)	$t(739) = -4.40$, $p < .001$	.16***	.37***	.44***	.54***	1	
6.- Overall PYD	18.48 (2.00)	18.32 (2.13)	18.57 (1.92)	$t(692) = -1.61$, *ns*	.61***	.73***	.73***	.58***	.71***	1
7.- Volunteer for community	1.63 (1.09)	1.58 (1.11)	1.66 (1.08)	$t(753) = -0.97$, *ns*	.04	.04	.10**	.14***	.19***	.13**
8.- Help friends or neighbors	2.78 (1.25)	2.48 (1.24)	2.98 (1.23)	$t(747) = -5.35$, $p < .001$	.05	.01	.19***	.20***	.17***	.17***
9.- Help your family	3.68 (1.13)	3.48 (1.18)	3.81 (1.09)	$t(745) = -3.92$, $p = .001$	.03	.08*	.24***	.14***	.18***	.18***
10.- Mentoring others or advising peers	3.39 (1.12)	3.00 (1.15)	3.64 (1.03)	$t(744) = -7.95$, $p < .001$	.04	-.03	.18***	.25***	.21***	.19***
11.- Participating in committees or government	1.26 (0.71)	1.25 (0.72)	1.27 (0.71)	$t(753) = -0.32$, ns	.05	.01	.04	.01	.07	.06
12.- Overall Social Engagement	12.72 (3.40)	11.75 (3.53)	13.35 (3.16)	$t(725) = -6.34$, $p < .001$	.07	.04	.25***	.25***	.27***	.25***
13.- Subjective happiness	30.30 (4.66)	20.37 (4.62)	20.27 (4.70)	$t(730) = .28$, *ns*	.35***	.59***	.45***	.07*	.28***	.51***
14.- Depressive symptoms	9.22 (5.62)	8.38 (5.56)	9.77 (5.60)	$t(707) = -3.24$, $p = .019$	-.21***	-.39***	-.32***	.05	-.15***	-.29***
15.-Anxious symptoms	7.27 (5.26)	6.02 (4.70)	8.08 (5.44)	$t(728) = -5.25$, $p < .001$	-.13***	-30***	-.20***	.09*	-.08*	-.17***
16.- Self-perceived academic performance	3.21 (0.87)	3.04 (0.91)	3.31 (0.82)	$\chi^2(4, N = 768) = 18.59$, $p = .001$, $\gamma = .24$	.11**	.16***	.16***	.11**	.11**	.18***
17.- Boredom at high school/university	2.99 (0.92)	3.12 (0.98)	2.91 (0.88)	$\chi^2(4, N = 768) = 17.38$, $p = .002$, $\gamma = -.18$	-.01	-.10**	-.18***	-.04	-.14***	-.14***

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ns = non-significant

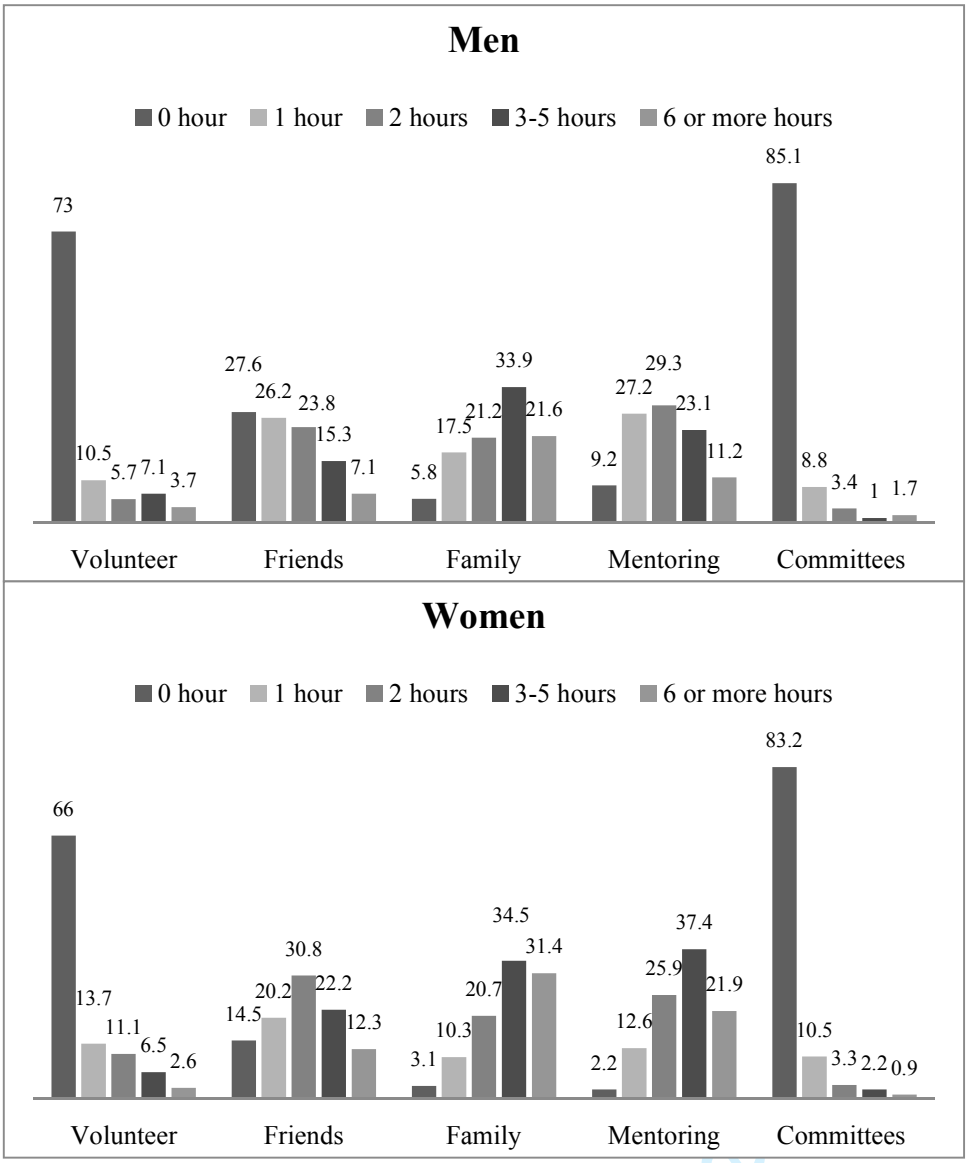

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of social engagement indicators by gender.