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AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE THAT COMMUNITY ASSETS HAVE ON THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT FEMALES FROM MICHIGAN

By

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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE THAT COMMUNITY ASSETS HAVE ON THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT FEMALES FROM MICHIGAN

By

Olivia A. Williams

African American women have had a unique role in America. Their contribution to their families, the community, and the work place continues to increase despite obstacles of discrimination, family pressures, and economic stress. For instance, African American women as a group possess the matchless characteristic of raising "other people's children" while raising their own, and simultaneously changing the course of civil rights in this nation. From an early age these women must learn how life and societal expectations intersect for them.

How do these women accomplish insurmountable goals? What is it that prepares young girls for a future full of challenges and strengthens them for their journey as women? Is it their faith? Does their relationship with the church provide the guidance, strength, and support necessary to face the huge expectations in society? Or is it their community, their friends, and family?

Could it be a combination of organizations, people, and experiences that furnishes their capacity for life? When do these life lessons begin? Adolescence is a time to practice and build the assets needed for adulthood. Understanding this stage of development for African American teenage girls can only serve as an aid to communities.

Although all of these questions deserve attention, this researcher explored only selected community assets for their effect on particular aspects of positive youth development in African American adolescent females.

The Search Institute's Attitudes and Behaviors Questionnaire for youths was administered to 2,136 African American adolescent female students. Sixteen variables were developed from the survey, including demographic variables (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level), community variables (faith participation, extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers), and outcome variables (civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status).

Four models using multiple regression analysis were tested. All four models were significant. Among seven community variables, participation in extracurricular activities was found to contribute most to the positive youth outcomes. Unfortunately, only 35% of the youth were found to be actually involved in those activities. In addition, of the demographic variables, father's educational level contributed most to the teens' positive self-concept.

To my mother, Otelia,

who taught me to have faith in God.

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"A mind that remains in the present atmosphere never undergoes sufficient development to experience what is commonly known as thinking" (Woodson, 1933/1996).

I give my appreciation . . .

To my dissertation committee, who have been a solid foundation of support throughout this entire process. The unwavering support of each member, Drs. Joanne Keith, Thomas Luster, Dennis Keefe, and Francisco Villarruel, will forever be appreciated. Joanne Keith always expressed hope and faith that I would reach this end. Thomas Luster taught me that I could learn new things. You are a brilliant teacher and scholar. Dennis Keefe could always be counted on to know the rules. You are a great advisor with ability to see connections and possibility. Thank you to Francisco Villarruel, "Chico," the great "linker."

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Finally, and most important, all reverence to my God. Without Him, I would fall. All honor, all glory, all praise be unto You.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Many of the studies on African American adolescent females have focused on teenage pregnancy. Of late, studies in the area of gang participation and drug use among this population have increased. Although these topics are of interest both socially and culturally, they represent only a fraction of the portrait of the total African American adolescent female population. Extensive research has been conducted on antisocial behavior within this and other populations (Elliott & Gresham, 1993; Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991). However, this type of showcasing has served only to reinforce stereotypes of African Americans, and of African American females in particular.

Although understanding antisocial behavior is useful to program and policy development, it would be equally productive for researchers to consider a more comprehensive approach, including prosocial behavior. Moreover, as useful as prevention programs are in the continuum of treatment, evaluations of those programs have not been able to provide evidence that those efforts prevented a problem behavior (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Advancing research in the area of promoting positive youth development can add a more balanced

perspective to the body of knowledge. In this study, the researcher addressed this need by taking a quantitative approach to show the community effects on positive development of African American adolescent females in Michigan.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The researcher's purpose in this study was to examine the influence that community assets have on the positive developmental qualities of African American adolescent females. Specifically, the researcher explored the effects of selected demographic predictors (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level) as well as community-asset predictors (faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers) on positive youth development, as measured by selected outcome or dependent variables (civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status).

The concept of assets is commonly used in human and community development. Even though asset development has been receiving much attention, African American youths, and females in particular, usually have not been the focus of this type of research. Overall, community assets for African American adolescent females can vary in strengths, types, and combinations. For that reason, this researcher examined the effects of selected community assets on the positive development of African American adolescent females. The study of asset development, both at the community and individual levels, is

new ground. Furthermore, few studies have focused on the strengths of African American adolescent females. Therefore, this study is unique in its examination of these youths.

Specific objectives of this study were:

1. To explore varying combinations of community assets for the purpose of predicting positive youth development.

2. To understand patterns of community participation by African American adolescent females who differ in terms of age and other demographic characteristics.

3. To examine the effects of community assets on African American adolescent females' civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status.

4. To build a theoretical foundation for strength-based studies of African American adolescent females.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The demographic characteristics of concern in this study were the youth's age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level. The community-asset variables were faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers. Both the demographic characteristics and community-asset variables were the predictor or independent variables in this study. The outcome or dependent variables

were civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status. The variables are described more fully in Chapter III.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1

To what extent do African American adolescent females report the presence of selected community variables, and do these variables vary based on demographic characteristics?

The analyses included each community variable, even though only selected community variables (see below) have been supported by the literature.

Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.1: Faith participation will be positively related to the age of the youth.

No hypotheses were generated related to faith participation, residence, family status, mother's educational level, or father's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.2: Extracurricular participation will be positively related to age, residence, and mother's education.

No hypotheses were generated related to extracurricular participation and family status or father's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.3: Positive peers will be positively related to age, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level.

No hypothesis was generated related to positive peers and residence.

Hypothesis 1.4: Parental school involvement will be negatively related to age, and positively related to mother's educational level.

No hypotheses were generated related to parental school involvement and residence, family status, or father's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.5: Supportive parents will be positively related to age and mother's educational level.

No hypotheses were generated related to supportive parents and residence, family status, or father's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.6: Supportive adults will be positively related to age, mother's educational level, and father's educational level.

No hypotheses were generated related to supportive adults and residence or family status.

No hypotheses were generated for supportive teachers and the demographic or community variables.

Variables: Demographic characteristics (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level) and community predictors (faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers).

Analysis: Correlation.

Research Question 2

To what extent are the community variables interrelated?

Hypothesis: Exploratory.

Variables: Demographic characteristics (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level) and community predictors (faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers,

parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers).

Analysis: Bivariate correlation.

Research Question 3

What are the relationships among community asset predictors and positive youth development outcomes for African American females when demographic variables are controlled?

Question 3.1: Is civic participation associated with community variables after controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

To expand the current literature, this analysis tested all community variables. Even though not all have been supported by the literature, the theoretical models suggest rationale to test.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3.1: Faith participation and extracurricular participation will have a positive effect on civic participation when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females.

Variables: Faith participation and extracurricular participation.

Question 3.2: Is positive future orientation associated with community variables when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3.2: Faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers will positively affect positive future orientation of African American adolescent females.

Variables: Faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, supportive teachers, and positive future orientation.

Question 3.3: Is positive self-concept related to community variables, when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3.3: Faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers will be positively related to positive self-concept of African American adolescent females.

Variables: Faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, supportive teachers, and positive self-concept.

Question 3.4: Is academic status related to community variables, when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3.4: Faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers will be positively related to the academic status of African American adolescent females.

Variables: Faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, supportive teachers, and academic status.

Assumptions

In conducting this study, the researcher made the following assumptions:

1. The environment helps shape the behavior of African American adolescent females (Ianni, 1996).

2. The African American females who participated in this study had grown up in an African American culture.

3. Both internal (developmental) and external (community) variables affect adolescent behavior (Search Institute, 1994).

Theoretical Background for the Study

Developmental Assets Theory

Framework. Developmental assets theory is grounded in the developing field of positive youth development theory (Larson & Richards, 1989). The foundational thought is that, by understanding positive youth development, researchers learn the elements necessary for healthy youths. A review of the literature indicated that asset development of youths has been examined primarily within the domains of resilience, prevention, and adolescent development (Scales & Leffert, 1999). The resilience domain was the most closely related concept available to begin the study of assets. Although resilience is a tool necessary for success, it also indicates the resistance of opposition. In other words, resilience starts with the premise that something worth resisting is present. An asset, on the other hand, is characterized as having a totally positive principle. Asset development has evolved into a science in which the addition and summary of supports that give life to resilience are explored. To wit, the more assets a young person has, the less likely he or

she is to engage in harmful behavior (Blyth & Leffert, 1995; Scales & Leffert, 1999). The Search Institute has been a leader in advancing the research in this area.

The prevention focus of asset development is applicable to the present study because asset development is not a treatment philosophy but rather a front-end action that communities, families, and youths themselves can take to reduce or prevent risk behavior (Beane & Lipka, 1980; Benson, 1997; Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Scales & Leffert, 1999; Zeldin & Price, 1995). Since the prevention movement became popular, it has been a source of frustration to the funding community because its evaluations have indicated no long-term effects (Scales, 1997). Asset development does not replace prevention but rather precedes it (Scales & Leffert, 1999). The existence of assets in youths prepares them for prevention programs. Both prevention and treatment programs still are needed, and developmental assets are part of the continuum.

Psychological foundations. Developmental assets are an essential feature of healthy development (Allen, Leadbeater, & Alber, 1990; Elliott & Gresham, 1993; Scales & Leffert, 1999). The premise here, as in finance, is that assets cancel out deficits. The goal is to increase the number of assets the youth has and to cancel out the risks. Community involvement in asset development is important, but it does not negate the necessity of the youths themselves being involved. By identifying assets that span multiple ecologies, the youth has available "supports" on which to draw in all ecosystems.

The Search Institute (1994) identified 40 developmental assets from eight domains. Those domains are support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, and social competencies (Scales & Leffert, 1999). There is scholarly literature in which the elements of assets appear as core strengths that lead to healthy development in youths (Scales & Leffert, 1999; Waters & Stoufe, 1983; Williams & McGee, 1991; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997).

Research applications. The eight overarching elements of the developmental assets theory are as follows:

1. The asset framework is a solidly supported way of communicating essential features of healthy development during adolescence.

2. Some categories of assets, as well as individual assets, have a stronger research base than others.

3. Although it is comprehensive, the framework of 40 assets does not capture everything young people need.

4. The assets are interdependent.

5. The asset framework raises numerous critical questions about adolescent development that remain for researchers to address.

6. The assets are important for all youths, but the levels and patterns of assets that work for individual youths in different contexts seem to vary.

7. Building developmental assets is only part of what communities need to do to ensure the healthy development of all adolescents.

8. Supportive and caring relationships are more fundamental to the process of enhancing or building assets than are programs (Scales & Leffert, 1999, p. 213).

The Search Institute's research has concentrated primarily on youth assets, which have been described as both external and internal. Researchers at the Institute have applied the asset-based model in several scientific studies (Scales & Leffert, 1999) that have included tens of thousands of youths in the United States. Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) conducted research on the explanatory power of developmental assets. They applied a mathematical model of developmental assets to the relationship of such assets to indicators of thriving in adolescents. Furthermore, Scales and others noted the strength of assets in contributing to multiple outcomes when testing this framework.

In another study, in which they tested the developmental assets framework, Leffert and others (1998) discussed evidence of a connection between external and internal assets and adolescents' behavior. In their study of assets and risk behavior, Leffert and others presented an argument regarding the cumulative effect that assets have on risk behaviors. In addition, they magnified the claim that youths need multiple experiences across the eight domains in order to influence total development.

The developmental assets theory has significant applications in communities (Benson et al., 1998; Scales & Leffert, 1999). In their publication on developmental assets and asset-building communities, Benson and others (1998) linked research and policy to support a community perspective of youth

assets. They introduced connections between communities and contexts in multiple cultures. Further, they gave examples of deterioration in communities and claimed that asset-based communities could provide practical opportunities for success.

In summary, the developmental assets theory informed this research in three major ways. First, it provides a strength-based framework with which to study any population. Second, it offers a scientific basis for believing that multiple assets in various contexts cumulatively produce positive behavioral outcomes. Finally, the theory has strong implications for connecting research to community-based applications. As a whole, the developmental assets framework is a rich theoretical approach to the study of youths.

Human Ecological Theory

Human ecological theory can be used to define humans in their environments (Thomas, 1996), focusing on the interaction between individuals and their environments (Muss, 1996). "Emphasis is given to the creation, use, and management of resources for creative adaptation, human development, and sustainability of environments" (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 426). As evidenced by this quotation, human ecological theory is broad and general; thus, it is applicable to the study of a wide range of topics related to people and their environments, including the present research.

Particularly applicable to this study is the theory's emphasis on the use and management of resources for human development. For instance, the study

of community influences (as resources) on the academic status (development) of adolescents connects the theory to the behavior. In other words, when combined, community assets give definition to a context for the youth. Further, the use and management of those assets (context) give direction to behavior. According to Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Muss, 1996),

> A setting becomes ecologically valid for research on human behavior and development only when the following two conditions are met: the psychological and social meaning of the subject's experience in the setting is investigated and becomes known to the researcher, and the subjective meaning of the research situation corresponds to the environmental experience to which the investigator wishes to generalize. (p. 322)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) articulated the concept of reciprocal interaction between the individual and his or her environment in his book The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. The theoretical proposition was that the individual affects his or her environment, while simultaneously, the individual's environment affects him or her. Neither is stagnant nor isolated from the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The quality of the interaction can vary according to the individual and the context. For instance, a 15-year-old female may be thriving in her 4-H club nutrition class, but be failing in her home economics class at the high school. A youth lives and functions simultaneously in multiple contexts. For example, she is someone's daughter, a student, and a sister simultaneously. To view the teen from this perspective allows the practitioner to understand the youth in a way that is congruent with her world (Glossop, 1988). Drawing from any of those contexts to understand the connections within furnishes rich implications for practice.

Connections are an important feature of this study. Bronfenbrenner (1993) described four systems in this theory, each of which has unique qualities and contributes to the development of the individual. The first of these systems is called the *microsystem.* This is the youth's most immediate environment. The individual is present and is "face to face" with other pieces that make up the system, which could be peers, family, school, extended family, and neighbors.

The next system in Bronfenbrenner's model is the *mesosystem,* one of whose key functions is to connect two or more microsystems, such as home and church. The mesosystem is strengthened as more microsystems are connected and relationships are established (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

The *exosystem* is similar to the mesosystem in that it is characterized by connections between systems. However, unlike the mesosystem, the youth is not present. An example of this third system, the exosystem, is how the school board influences the youth. The youth is not present, but decisions made in this system still have a major effect on his or her functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

The last system in Bronfenbrenner's model is the *macrosystem.* The furthest away from the youth, the macrosystem has indirect effects on the teen's life. It supplies the rules by which each of the other systems might be influenced. The macrosystem includes indirect effects of public policy, laws, and religious or political influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

The *chronosystem* is one other system that is present in each of the previously named systems. It is an attribute of operation in the ever-developing person and the context. The chronosystem accounts for changes over time. It is

the influence of development that occurs in, and is a function of, both the environment and the individual. It accounts for factors such as developing technology, adolescent maturation, and historical and day-to-day changes. In essence, in human ecological theory, the chronosystem is used to explain the process of change.

Human ecological theory fits well with the present study because it provides an overarching structure to understand systems, the degree of their connectedness, and how they influence youths' development. Moreover, the theory supplies a scientific model for studying the integration of youths with their environment.

Other Thoughts That Influenced This Study

Developmental contextualism theory. Developmental contextualism theory is strongly influenced by human ecological theory (Muss, 1996); it maintains that development is the result of the reciprocal interaction between the environment and the individual. The reciprocal interaction of the two is the dynamic focus of the theory, and the process of that interaction is critical to scientific study. In short, behavior has meaning only when it is understood in relationship to its social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Lerner (1995) introduced the developmental contextualism theory as a life-span theory that takes adolescent development into consideration. Some of the relevant themes in the development of adolescents are:

1. The interaction patterns are continuous.
2. The influences of the changes over time are continuous.
3. The adolescent is a major contributing factor in shaping the context.

Context is more narrowly defined than are setting, surroundings, or environment. It includes peers, family members, leisure-time activities, physical settings, social components, the person, and changes over time. Furthermore, the multiplicity of context includes the physical and psychological, cultural, historical, institutional, and social aspects of the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 1995). Lerner reported that the multiple levels of context do not behave alone, nor is one level in charge of the others. Rather, the contrary is true; they are all connected and reciprocate with each other.

Although developmental contextualism theory does not include stages, it does emphasize a concept in human nature, called plasticity (Muss, 1996, p. 354). Plasticity can be defined as the fluidity or ever-changing nature of development in humans. Inherent in plasticity is a phrase commonly used in reference to this theory: "It all depends" (p. 344). Simply put, the theory is flexible. Behavior all depends on the context and the interaction of the adolescent with his or her environment.

A tenet of this theory is the mediated-effect model, which alleges that context and the maturational process together produce the changes in puberty. Context, media, parents, and peers, for example, mediate the influences of puberty and development (Lerner & Galambos, 1998).

Research applications. Developmental contextualism theory is valuable to this study because it recognizes the importance of cultural influences (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Culture plays an important role in defining development, giving clarity to the context and further defining the adolescent's behavior (Greene, 2000). "There is also diversity between and within all ethnic, racial, or cultural minority groups. Therefore, generalizations that confound class, race, and/or ethnicity are not useful" (Lerner, Lerner, Hess, & Schwab, 1991, p. 300).

In this study, the researcher examined African American adolescent females within multiple contexts of community. Developmental contextualism theory has the flexibility that allows scientific examination to be undertaken in any culture that has respect for diversity (Lerner & Galambos, 1998).

Because the researcher was concerned with the contributions that community-based assets make to the positive development of African American adolescent females, thought was given to the cultural underpinnings of development. According to Ianni (1996), Stevenson (1995), Plummer (1995), and Stevens (1997), the development of these youth is strongly influenced by racial identity. These authors suggested a view that was considered in the present study, namely, that African American adolescent females' development has an additional identity-development component as compared to that of mainstream populations. African American females negotiate their ethnicity when moving through the phases of their development (Stevens, 1997). According to Stevens's model, there is an inherent flaw in theoretical models that describe African American adolescent females' identity without considering the

complex "multi-textured socialization experience" (p. 147) of that identity. Multi-textured socialization experience pertains to the many layers of development. Furthermore, Stevens said the coexistence of positive racial development and personal identity is influenced by the environment (p. 162).

Because African American females develop in a particular way, African American adolescent females needed to be studied using a distinct framework rather than one geared to majority-group adolescents. This research was undertaken to address that need.

Strengths and Limitations of the Theories

As with all enduring theories, those discussed here have limitations (Thomas, 1996) as well as strengths. Developmental contextualism is reasonable and rational and, above all, is applicable to the study of ethnic populations. Although appropriate for studying ethnic populations, developmental contextualism could not be used in the analysis of this research since the data collected were not adequate for the application of the theory.

Conceptual Model for the Study

The conceptual model for this study is depicted in Figure 1.1. This model is a representation of community contributions to the positive development of African American adolescent females. Specifically, it represents the community assets that are believed to be necessary for the positive development of young African American females. Each of the assets in this model reflects one of the many contributions toward this outcome. The assets have varying amounts of significance and hold different values for the youth. Reciprocal interaction is

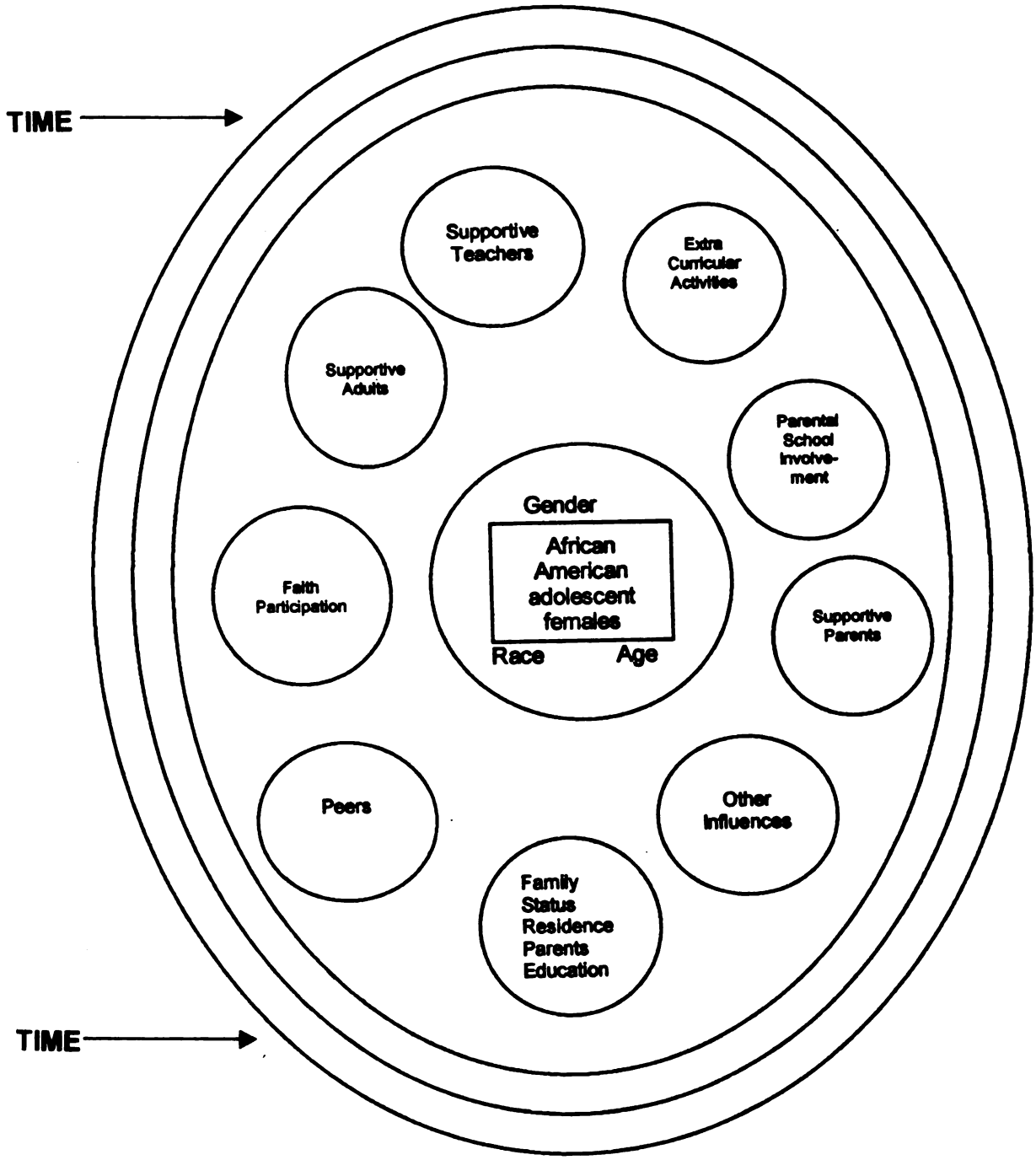

Figure 1.1: Conceptual model for the study. Adapted from Developmental Systems Theory: An Integrative Approach (p. 77), by D. H. Ford and R. M. Lerner, 1992, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

present, both among the assets and within the adolescent herself. However, the lines are not drawn in the model to reflect this interaction because how the youth interacts with her community will differ with each individual.

Importance of the Study

Policy makers and social scientists will benefit from this study by gaining an understanding of how personal and community assets contribute to adolescents' spending their time on socially rewarding activities. There has been a plethora of research on, and media attention to, teen activities that lead to punishment, disapproval, and harm. Hence, studying teens' activities is a useful approach to understanding youths' behavior. The study is expected to yield implications for social scientists and policy makers to use in developing communities that enhance teens' development of social accountability.

Crucial to planning is the accuracy of the information that supports its foundation. At every level of development, whether it be financial, programmatic, or human, there is a tremendous void in attending to the strengths of African American adolescent females. Knowing how communities can support these strengths can enhance theory and program outcomes (Ianni, 1996; Stevenson, 1998). This study is important and timely because it offers guidance that funders, planners, and practitioners can use to enhance the positive development of African American adolescent females.

In addition to providing practical insights, this study also will make theoretical contributions. Through an examination of how selected community

assets contribute to positive youth development, advancements can be made in understanding the needs of females and African American adolescents in particular. This will highlight criteria to be used in applied and scholarly science.

In combining the human ecological and developmental contextualism theories, a framework for studying community and human assets is created. A framework for application also is created for designing effective programs for African American adolescent females. It is critical for youths that community supports in every context are prepared to welcome the diverse needs of these youngsters. Only when asset-based studies are conducted on diverse youths will communities be prepared to meet those needs.

Definition of Terms

Key terms and concepts used in this study are defined in the following paragraphs.

African American church or black church: An "independent, historic, and totally black controlled denomination" (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 1).

Caring adults: Adults who support, encourage, and are involved in a young person's life.

Civic participation: Volunteerism.

Community: "The site for the relationships of citizens" (McKnight, 1997, p. 117).

Community assets: Supports for youths that are available in their communities.

Developmental assets: "The positive relationships, opportunities, competencies, values, and self-perceptions that youth need to succeed" (Scales & Leffert, 1999, p. 24).

Faith participation: Physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual involvement or acknowledgment of faith in God.

Human development: "A developmental contextual concept" (Lerner, 1995, p. 361). "Multiple, integrated levels of organization (ranging from biological through the sociocultural) reciprocally interact across time" (Lerner et al., 1991).

Positive future orientation: An inclination or direction toward the future; a positive outlook on goals, aspirations, and self-concept.

Positive peers: Those who have things in common with the youths, such as age, circumstance, and situation.

Positive self-concept: Favorable view of oneself based on the qualities that the student believes she possesses.

Positive youth development: Indicated by civic participation, a positive future orientation, a positive self-concept, and academic success; developmental tasks, skills, and experiences that result in socially acceptable behaviors.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

An underlying intention of this study was to influence researchers to refocus their perspectives on African American youths, females in particular. The study was undertaken in an attempt to influence researchers to shift their thinking from a negative aspect, which by its very nature is reactive, and to move toward a more positive or asset-based focus, which is naturally more proactive in addressing solutions to issues. Historically, researchers have viewed African American youths from a position of disadvantage (Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998). They have estimated that about one in five adolescents come from families with incomes below the poverty line. That number increases to about two in five for minority youths. Thus, when seeking to understand adolescents' social and personal development, it is difficult to ignore the issue of disadvantaged life circumstances.

It is critical that researchers conduct studies from a culturally cognizant point of view, so as to comprehend more fully the implications of their data (Hackett & Byars, 1996). Many researchers are recognizing the need to

broaden their ecological models of adolescent well-being (Chipuer et al., 1999), yet this trend is in its infancy. Bandura (1993) summarized the situation:

> People who have a low sense of efficacy in a given domain shy away from difficult tasks, which they perceive as personal threats. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. They maintain a self-diagnostic focus rather than concentrate on how to perform successfully. When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter, and on all kinds of adverse outcomes. Because they diagnose insufficient performance as deficient aptitude, it does not require much failure for them to lose faith in their capabilities. (p. 117)

The researcher's primary purpose in this study was to examine the influence that specific community assets have on the positive developmental qualities of African American adolescent females. It is known that some risk factors in social contexts may adversely affect the positive behavioral and emotional development of adolescents, but there is still uncertainty as to why this occurs (Barbarin, 1993). Spencer, Dupree, and Hartmann (1997) discussed the limitations of life span, risk, and competence theories. They claimed that often these theories do not offer a solid integration of the individual within the social or environmental context. Thus, social scientists must gain more insight into the inadequacies of these theories, especially as they relate to children of color (Stevenson, 1995; West, 1996).

Because African American adolescent females often are exposed to a society that is significantly different from that experienced by mainstream adolescent females, it is logical to assume that those different characteristics will have a unique effect on their development when compared to other youths (Harrison, Stewart, Myambo, & Teveraishe, 1995). The significance of Harrison

and others' investigation is that it substantiated the varying degrees of influence of adolescents' perceptions of their social support networks in different cultures. In developing and validating the Neighborhood Youth Inventory, Chipuer and others (1999) supported this claim. That is, youths may experience social networks differently according to the context–for example, if they were in church versus Junior Achievement.

The investigation of literature on this study had few to no results. Scientific research on the population of African American adolescent females is sparse. In addition, focusing on studies using an asset- or strength-based approach narrowed those results even more. Therefore, the literature review for this study is limited. The literature reviewed focuses on the demographic, community and outcome variables of interest in this study. An effort was made to apply studies on African American adolescent females first. When no studies were found on that population, literature on African American teens was sought. As a last resort, literature on teens in general was considered.

Demographic and Community Variables

A demographic variable that was used in this study, on which two pertinent studies have been reported, is parents' educational level. The researcher also considered the following community variables: (a) faith participation, (b) extracurricular participation, (c) positive peers, (d) parental school involvement, (e) supportive parents, (f) supportive adults, and (g) supportive teachers. Although literature relating to these topics is extensive, it

was difficult to identify investigations that were conducted from a prosocial perspective.

Parents' Educational Level

In her study of nonpregnant versus pregnant African American adolescents, Stevens (1997) found that mothers' educational attainment was an influential factor. She surmised that mothers' attainment of their educational aspirations might influence the social-mobility goals of their daughters.

Blair, Blair, and Madamba (1999) found that parents' educational level, along with family socioeconomic status and the extent of household resources, best explained youths' academic performance. In their study, several demographic characteristics were found to contribute to academic performance; however, parents' educational level had the strongest association.

Faith Participation

Faith participation traditionally has been a form of both social and familial involvement for African Americans (Hamilton, 1982; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Tate & Brown, 1991). Faith and religion have been mainstays in the African American community since its inception, and scientists have been seeking insights into the potential benefits of this faith to the African American meso-system and exo-system (Mattis, 2000). Mattis explored the difference between spirituality and religiosity. There is growing consensus that spirituality involves a personal commitment to a set of values based on the existence of a higher being, whereas religiosity is more simply adherence to some set of spiritual

values based on second-hand knowledge. In other words, the distinction is between making a conscious decision to live according to selected values or doing what one has been taught, regardless of one's own personal beliefs. Mattis sought to distinguish mainstream definitions of spirituality and religiosity from specific definitions among African American women. Considering the distinct roles of spirituality and religiosity, the overall findings of this study indicate how faith participation has been measured in specific contexts.

Research findings have indicated that formal spirituality (or the Black Church) is a primary contributor to values that create supportive and responsive family relationships (Brody, Stoneman, Flor, & McCrary, 1994). According to Brody and others, this support system is based in the formal religious structure that helps African American families cope with life and social stressors, such as financial and racial difficulties.

Brody and others also found that the involvement of African American youths in organized religion counters, to some degree, the environmental affronts to self-esteem and reinforces their views of personal efficacy. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) suggested that religion and spirituality are important venues for African American adolescent females who are seeking a better comprehension of their spiritual identity. They believed that there is an increasing acknowledgment of the importance of integrating religion and spirituality in every aspect of the lives of African Americans, especially women. Thus, religious experience or faith participation is critical in helping African American adolescent females develop their ethnic identity and ensuing feelings

of self-efficacy (Brody et al., 1994; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Spencer, Dupree, Swanson, & Cunningham, 1996).

Lepage-Lees (1997) studied 21 women who were described as mostly Caucasian and disadvantaged, living in the San Francisco Bay area of California. The author found that this group found it necessary to divorce themselves from their adolescent background and to assimilate as much as possible into the majority to achieve. They thought that their backgrounds reflected negatively on them and would serve as detriments to their success. This belief appears to be in direct contrast to that of African American women, who, as adolescents, seek a stronger connection to their background and ethnicity.

Markstrom (1999) indicated that European Americans who attended religious services scored higher in the categories "will," "hope," and "care" than did other ethnic groups. Her data also indicated that African Americans who attended religious services scored significantly higher in the area of ethnic identity that did any other ethnic group. This suggests that African Americans obtain unique benefits from faith participation and that one of those benefits, ethnic identity, is important in the development of healthy self-esteem and self-efficacy (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). It is important to note this because Jessor and others' (1998) findings indicated that hopelessness is a key risk factor for disadvantaged adolescents.

Stevens (1997) found that, when comparing pregnant and nonpregnant adolescents, the samples were significantly different on measures of church

affiliation. The results of her study indicated that African American girls' church participation mediated the risk of teenage motherhood.

Brega and Coleman (1999) also found that church involvement produced youths who were less likely to feel subjective stigmatization as a result of their African American race and ethnicity. Moreover, those youths who willingly chose to attend church were more destigmatized than those who had negative attitudes toward church. This finding seems plausible when one considers that faith participation traditionally has been a significant part of African Americans' culture and tradition. Overall, faith participation plays an important role as a community asset in the lives of African American adolescent females.

Extracurricular Participation

Limited literature exists on African Americans' involvement in extracurricular activities (Colson & Patton, 1994), and fewer studies are available on African American adolescent females' participation in extracurricular activities. However, two groups of researchers have explored the topic of African American teens' extracurricular participation (Busser, Hyams, & Carruthers, 1996; Caldwell, Smith, & Weissinger, 1992). Relevant findings from those studies are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Busser and others (1996) examined differences in youths' involvement in specific recreational activities. Their study included intersections of gender, grade, and ethnicity of those participating in community activities. They found that differences did exist according to these three variables. African American

females chose activities that were less physically strenuous, whereas their male counterparts were attracted to activities requiring more total body involvement. Furthermore, upperclass (grade) African American females were more interested in organized and structured activities than were their counterparts in lower grades. Overall, the researchers concluded that youths in neighborhoods with a specific ethnic make-up would benefit from the availability of certain types of recreational activities.

These findings may have implications for programming at the local level for African American youths (Kafajouffe, 1997). However, questions concerning the availability, accessibility, and benefits of extracurricular activities also deserve attention. Possible benefits for African American adolescent females' extracurricular participation, as well as the benefits of other community participation, were explored in the present study (Eccles, cited in Larson, 2000).

Peers

In considering the role of peer influence, Harrison and others (1995) compared the peer perceptions of adolescents from Zimbabwe and the United States. They found that adolescents in the United States placed a higher value on peer networks than did their counterparts from Zimbabwe. The researchers attributed this difference to a society that is more individualistic, where people are more apt to seek their own goals, as compared to a society where collective or communal progress is valued highly. A limitation of Harrison and others' work in terms of the present study is that they did not differentiate between European

American and African American value systems. It is possible that there are major distinctions between the two cultures (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Patrick and others (1999) discovered that peers typically encourage their friends' participation in extracurricular activities, especially when a talent is demonstrated. However, females admitted to receiving more negative feedback from peers than did males. Thus, the researchers concluded that social dissatisfaction was a meaningful contributor to reduced or curtailed participation.

Okoon (1997) suggested that if peer attachments could be strengthened, it might serve to increase adolescent females' self-esteem. Peer interaction on an organized level also can have positive results. In one study it was found that upperclass (grade) at-risk high school students who were paired with lower-class at-risk high school students tended to have improved attention in class, better attendance, and higher grades (Devlin-Scherer, 1997).

In a quantitative study, Jessor and others (1998) identified key risk factors for disadvantaged adolescents as (a) low expectations for success, (b) low self-esteem, (c) hopelessness, and (d) friends as models for problem behavior. Key protective factors or elements that mitigated negative meso-system influences included (a) attitudinal intolerance of deviance, (b) positive orientation to health, and (c) friends as models for conventional behavior. In other words, the prosocial behavior of peers can serve as a determinant of an adolescent's behavior (Attitudes and Opinions, 1997). Therefore, the types of friends an African American adolescent female chooses are key factors in her social-contextual experience.

Chipuer and others (1999) found that, contrary to their expectations, adolescents' perceptions of friendships were not related to length of residence in a particular neighborhood. Leffert and others (1998) found that the number of neighbors and friends from the neighborhood that adolescents cited was correlated directly to the youths' viewing the neighborhood as supportive.

Coates (1985) asserted that adolescents are intensively involved in building relationships, which often means more interaction with friends than family. This could account for the high degree of influence peers have with one another. But Coates viewed this influence from the perspective of day-to-day social contact, as compared to the long-term social contact that a family offers.

Parental School Involvement and Supportive Parents

The role of parents' involvement in school-related issues and activities and of supportive parenting is examined in this section. In a few studies, the two concepts were linked. Literature on these concepts is covered in the same section because of the overlap in research findings. Although information is available on the extended family exemplified in African American families, this researcher adhered to a more restrictive definition of family as including mother, father, legal guardian, and primary care giver. Using a broader definition would have stretched the parameters of this work beyond the limits of the collected data. Even with data on African American extended families, it would be a mistake to assume that a parental-type support system was available to the youth.

African American adolescent females demonstrate prosocial behavior when they are comfortable within their social environment (Stevens, 1998). The challenge is to determine what factors create a level of self-esteem and self-efficacy within them that will result in prosocial behavior. The importance of African American adolescent females' developing a strong racial socialization as they mature was discussed earlier. Positive maternal influence can still affect prosocial behavior even if the mother has not been able to rise above her own life situations, as long as she encourages her daughter to strive for higher aspirations. Carter and Wojtkiewicz (2000) found that 68% of their sample of African American adolescents named their mothers as the persons who were most supportive of them academically.

Stevenson, Reed, and Bodison's (1996) data indicated that prosocial development is directly related to youths' perceived kinship support system. They stated that youths not only need the support system with their parents, but that their kinship supports also are important.

Fletcher, Elder, and Mekos (2000) suggested that adolescents whose parents supported their participation in community activities tended to be more involved, and that this promoted prosocial influences and civic development. The authors also inferred that parents' modeling civic participation had a positive influence on children's desire to volunteer. In contrast, Rosenthal, Lewis, and Feiring (1998) found that family cohesion was not a predictor of adolescents' eventually becoming active in civic service. It is possible, though, that the

variables measured in these two studies were not complementary and that a comparison is thus inconsequential.

A study conducted by Turnage (1999) on urban African American adolescent females indicated that maternal trust was the strongest predictor of global self-esteem. In fact, maternal trust was 50% stronger than any other predictor viewed. Turnage concluded that adolescent girls needed to know that maternal trust was intact. When this was secure, the teens had more positive perceptions of themselves (Spencer et al., 1996).

Data collected in a recent study by Carter and Wojtkiewicz (2000) indicated that daughters may actually receive more help from parents than sons. Four of seven indicators revealed that parents paid more attention to their daughters than to their sons. However, a limitation of this study was that the authors did not discuss the type of additional attention parents provided to their daughters or why they gave them more encouragement and help than their sons.

Spencer and others (1996) found a strong correlation between what they referred to as "positive perceptions of parental hassles" and self-efficacy. That is, the youth understands that the parent is enforcing educational attainment for his or her benefit, and this actually increases self-efficacy. This notion was supported by Otto and Atkinson (1997). They expanded the concept by asserting that it is not necessarily the amount of time that a parent spends with the adolescent but rather the quality of time that makes a major difference. They found this to be true even in single-parent families. Further, according to Leffert and others (1998), home environments where parents are involved in their

children's lives have been shown to be related to increased achievement and desire for higher levels of educational attainment.

Also of relevance to this discussion is the different style of parenting that African American parents often exhibit, specifically, a more authoritative approach. Hill (1995) found that authoritative parenting produces positive family environments and that it is an acceptable form of expressiveness for fathers. Authoritative parenting has been linked to positive family characteristics such as cohesion, intellectual orientation, and success.

Stevenson and others (1996) discussed the importance of family conversations regarding racism in society as a means of enhancing cultural pride and increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy. This heightened awareness allows adolescents to better anticipate and mitigate racist encounters throughout life, thus improving their chances for success. Stevenson and others asserted that this rite of passage must come from the home (parents) and the greater community. This critical role of the home and parenting was emphasized by Coates (1985), who discussed the idea that self-esteem and self-worth are a part of the enduring notion of self-concept. This self-concept of the social experience is formed through long-term relations, namely, the family.

Supportive Adults and Supportive Teachers

Supportive adults and supportive teachers sometimes are referred to interchangeably in the literature. However, they represent two distinct

individuals in youths' lives. The literature on this support concept is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

It is important for adolescents to have supportive adults from outside the home in their lives (Scales, 1997; Stevenson, 1998; Stevenson et al., 1996). Harrison and others (1995) discovered that, whereas adolescent males rated their fathers as a primary influence in their lives, adolescent females perceived a variety of people, in addition to their mothers, as key parts of their social network. Further, Chipuer and others (1999) found that if adolescents knew their neighbors, both children and adults, it enhanced those youths' perceptions of their neighborhood as a supportive environment.

In his research, Chou (1999) emphasized the role "unrelated" adults play in the lives of developing adolescents. Chou examined the influence of uniformed groups outside of the home and school. He recommended that additional research be undertaken to learn more about the role these adults play in directing prosocial behavior in adolescents.

Other researchers have found that mentors and other caring adults can have a positive influence in producing prosocial behavior in adolescents (Housego, 1999; Larson, 2000; Lauland, 1998; Waller, Brown, & Whittle, 1999). Brookins (1999) believed that the difficulties girls experience during adolescence are a result of the girls' feeling a loss of power and control. Conversely, having meaningful relationships with caring adults enables these girls to learn skills and opens opportunities for them to experience meaning in life.

Much attention has been focused on the travails of adolescent males; yet only in the past few years have social scientists been attempting to better understand the needs of adolescent females. Supportive and caring adults are crucial for the healthy development of adolescent females as well as males (Echevarria, 1998). Echevarria discussed five areas in which adolescent females need guidance: (a) physical, (b) intellectual, (c) emotional, (d) spiritual, and (e) financial.

In her work with disadvantaged women who had high academic achievement, Lepage-Lees (1997) found that mentors were a key factor in their establishing self-efficacy. She also found that caring adults were more important to African American adolescent females who did not get pregnant, as compared to a similar group of females who did get pregnant (Stevens, 1997).

In a study conducted by Carter and Wojtkiewicz (2000), one third of the participants mentioned teachers as being supportive of their academic success. Supportive adults and teachers also are important in helping adolescents gain social coping skills, such as conflict resolution, team building, and leadership. These skills help build adolescents' self-efficacy (Gordon, 1995). Leffert and others (1998) asserted that adolescents require multiple supportive and interactive connections with caring adults. These connections must occur in diverse settings and from different support systems because building prosocial behavior is a cumulative process and requires stimulation from a variety of directions.

Outcome Variables

Civic Participation

Literature relating to the civic participation or volunteerism of African American adolescent females is sparse, at best. Although much research has been conducted on youths and volunteerism, it is important not to attempt to generalize all findings on mainstream youths as being complementary to social contextual idiosyncrasies of African American females (Harrison et al., 1995). Even though the following commentary contains information regarding mainstream studies, the focus is primarily on data specific to the target population of African American adolescent females.

Civic participation has been linked to positive youth development. On more than one occasion, researchers have discovered that youths who volunteer also evidence other positive outcomes. In his study on volunteerism, Housego (1999) found that volunteerism, as well as other factors such as caring attitude, school-community commitment, and participatory decision making, contributed to successful youth development. In addition, Mortimer (1992) found that civic participation enhanced girls' feelings of self-esteem.

Fletcher and others (2000) suggested that family socialization was a key influence on youths' involvement in extracurricular activities. Their Iowa study indicated that civic participatory examples set by the parents, in addition to encouragement from parents, tended to reinforce children's desire to volunteer.

In a longitudinal study on youths from birth to 18 years old, Rosenthal and others (1998) found no indicators that allowed early prediction of tendencies

toward volunteerism. However, the findings did indicate that females were likely to be involved in more activities than males and that those youths who participated in prosocial organizations also participated in civic activities.

Another study indicated that adolescents benefited from participating in social networks outside of family and school (Chou, 1999). Researchers also have validated that the more a person is involved in faith participation, the more he or she is involved in civic participation (Caldwell, Greene, & Billingsley, 1994; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Thus, the role of the meso-system in adolescents' development of prosocial behavior cannot be overestimated, but more research needs to be done on how civic participation influences prosocial behavior in adolescents (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). There is evidence that participation in community life, which includes civic participation, building relationships with supportive adults, and contact with multiple support organizations, serves as an important protective factor in the development of healthy adolescents (Leffert et al., 1998).

In the literature on African American adolescent females and civic participation, there is consensus that a strong meso-system can encourage the evolution of prosocial behavior (Larson, 2000). Larson discovered that civic participation can enhance the motivation for and concentration on positive youth development.

Stevens (1998) discussed this concept as he expounded on the need for practitioners to be more culturally sensitive when dealing with African American girls. Stevens made a case for understanding that African American adolescent

females have experiences and therefore development that are unique to their status in mainstream society.

Results from another study indicated that three motivation patterns are significant with African American high school students. Those patterns are cognitive, extracurricular, and material gain (Gordon, 1995). In his research, Gordon focused on the resiliency of African American students. He found that those who were most successful had a healthier cognitive self-concept, part of which was achieved through civic participation.

Further, Busser and others (1996) found that African American students were more likely to prefer activities that involved socializing than were Caucasian students. These researchers also stressed the different types of activities that European American students prefer, as compared to African Americans, such as outdoor versus indoor social activities. They attributed this distinction to a number of potential reasons related to ethnic socialization. West (1996) supported this view, emphasizing that, when volunteering in the community, African American youths preferred indoor activities, whereas their European American peers preferred activities held outdoors.

Positive Future Orientation

No literature was found on the future orientation of African American adolescent females. Although some studies have been conducted on the future orientation of non-African American adolescent females (Malmberg & Trempala, 1998; Seginer, 1992; Seginer & Halabi-Kheir, 1998; Seginer & Schlesinger,

1998), those studies are not reviewed here. As discussed in Chapter I, the development of African American adolescent females is believed to be distinct from that of adolescents from other ethnic groups. Therefore, study findings concerning the future orientation of populations other than this group are not generalizable to the sample for the present research.

Positive Self-Concept

Studies on African American adolescent females' self-concept have focused primarily on pregnant and parenting African American teens. No other studies were identified that pertained to this topic. Studies on the self-concept of pregnant African American adolescents are not relevant to the current study because the self-concept of a pregnant teen is affected by her pregnancy and therefore may not represent the self-concept of the adolescents in this sample.

The majority of literature on self-concept has been concerned with its relationship to academic performance (Byrne, 1988; Byrne & Shavelson, 1986; Gerardi, 1990; Mboya, 1989). Although the measurement instruments used in each study were different, the investigations had similar results. In the studies that were reviewed, higher self-concept was associated with higher grades.

Academic Performance

Although a number of studies have been conducted on youths' academic performance, few have focused specifically on the academic achievement of African American adolescent females. Much of the research on African American youths in particular involved males or youths who were described as

disadvantaged. However, some studies were found on the influence of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and community-school partnerships on academic performance, and they are discussed in this section.

Ethnic and racial differences must be considered when investigating influences on youths' academic performance (Blair et al., 1999; Luster & Okagaki, 1993). In their study, Blair and others noted the relationship between ethnicity and educational performance. They also found that socioeconomic status (parental education) was the strongest overall predictor of educational performance for the students of color in their sample. Most surprising for the researchers was the finding that, when extended family members were present in the African American students' homes, academic performance was higher. Thus, it would appear that supportive adults have an important influence on the academic performance of African American youths. Indirect parental influence also was associated with the African American students' school performance. However, it was not clear whether the parenting style or the parents' role modeling was the greater influence. Both parental support and parental school involvement were included as variables in the present study.

Studies focusing on the socioeconomic status, or poverty, of African American students as a sole contributor to academic failure may not have a complete framework for investigation. Krajewski and Sabir (2000) described a model for student academic success within the confines of poverty. They emphasized the collaborative power of community-school partnerships. The median family income for students in Krajewski and Sabir's study was $6,000,

99% of them received free or reduced-price lunches, and 90% of them walked to school from impoverished neighborhoods. These students also boasted scholastic scores of 2.5 to 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, and their scores had risen each year. The authors emphasized that partnerships among parents, churches, businesses, schools, students, and community health agencies were the key to these students' academic success. In the present study, an attempt was made to identify community components that contribute to academic success and other positive youth outcomes.

Studies indicating positive effects of community-school partnerships and collaborations have been emerging in the scientific community (Green, 1998; Kelsch, 1999; Krajewski & Sabir, 2000; Lang, 2000). Furthermore, researchers have formulated models for funders, program developers, and policy makers. Building on this research will enhance the understanding of how to support African American students in schools.

Summary of the Literature Review

The concepts examined in this study are not new to research on adolescents. However, researchers have only begun to apply these concepts to the population of normal, healthy African American adolescent females. An effort was made to identify literature representing the characteristics of the study sample. Overall, the literature pertinent to this study is either sparse or focused on pregnant African American adolescents. The current climate of social

scientists' contribution to African American youths underscores the importance of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The researcher's purpose in this study was to examine the influence that community assets have on the positive developmental qualities of African American adolescent females. Specifically, the researcher explored the effects of selected demographic predictors (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level) as well as community-asset predictors (faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers) on positive youth development, as measured by selected outcome or dependent variables (civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status).

The methodology used in conducting the study is explained in this chapter. The sample is described, and the data-collection methods are detailed. Next, the survey used in this study is discussed in detail. The variables of interest in the study are delineated, followed by the research questions and hypotheses tested in the study. Finally, the data-analysis procedures used in the study are explained.

The Study Participants

The sample for this study was taken from the Community-Based Profile of Michigan Youth Study (Keith & Perkins, 1995), which included 16,375 youths from 36 communities and 22 school districts in Michigan. Methods used to identify participating communities and schools for that study are explained below.

> Initially, a random sample of schools was drawn from the most accurate list of schools available. Recruitment of schools was two fold: (1) 4-H agents or home economists from the county offices of Michigan State University Extension approached selected schools in their areas, and/or Community Coalitions in Action project staff members made contact with selected schools. An insufficient number of schools from the random sample were willing to participate. However, many other schools volunteered to participate in the study; therefore, schools which volunteered were examined in this investigation. (Keith & Perkins, 1995, p. 4)

Teachers throughout Michigan schools were trained in administering the Attitudes and Behavior Questionnaire from a 26-page instruction manual from the Search Institute. All youth participants, who ranged in age from 12 to 17 years, were administered the survey in their classrooms, either in Fall 1993 or Winter 1994. Before taking the survey, the students were assured that their anonymity would be protected. In addition, the requirements of Michigan State University's Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) were met, both for the original study (Perkins, 1995) and for the present research (see Appendix).

Description of the Sample

From the Community-Based Profile of Michigan Youth Study, 2,136 African American adolescent females were selected for this research. Characteristics of the sample, including age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level, are discussed in the following paragraphs (see also Table 3.1).

Age. The mean age of the females in the sample was 14.09 years (SD = 1.42).

Residence. The majority of the sample (51.8%) was from a medium-sized city. A medium-sized city was defined as having 50,000 to 250,000 residents. Residence data were missing for 2.8% of the respondents.

Family status. Family status refers to the youth's living arrangement with the parents and was established with one question: "Do you live all or most of the time in a family with two parents?" Responses were "yes" or "no." The responses for family status indicated that 979 (45.8%) of the sample members lived with two parents. Family-status data were missing for 1.3% of the respondents.

Parents' educational level. According to Entwisle and Astine (1994), parents' educational level is a good indicator of socioeconomic status when

Table 3.1: Profile of participants (N = 2,136).

Characteristic	Number	Percent of Total Sample
Age		
12	285	13.3
13	530	24.8
14	564	26.4
15	355	16.6
16	263	12.3
17	139	6.5
Missing	0	0.0
TOTAL	2,136	100.0
Family Status		
Yes, live with two parents	979	45.8
No, do not live with two parents	1,129	52.9
Missing	28	1.3
TOTAL	2,136	100.0
Residence		
Rural	205	9.7
Small city	447	20.9
Medium city	1,106	51.8
Large city	318	14.9
Missing	60	2.8
TOTAL	2,136	100.0
Mother's Educational Level		
Some high school or less	228	10.7
Completed high school	608	28.5
Some college	488	22.8
Completed college	417	19.5
Graduate or professional school	138	6.5
Missing	257	12.0
TOTAL	2,136	100.0
Father's Educational Level		
Some high school or less	196	9.2
Completed high school	636	29.8
Some college	223	10.4
Completed college	301	14.1
Graduate or professional school	114	5.3
Missing	666	31.2
TOTAL	2,136	100.0

studying an ethnic population. Parents' educational level was measured by two questions, one concerning mothers and the other concerning fathers.

Mother's educational level: In this sample, 77.3% of those who reported their mother's educational level said that their mothers had completed their high school education or more. Of those, 55.5% had some college or more. These data were missing for 12% of the respondents.

Father's educational level: In this sample, 59.6% of those who reported their father's educational level said that their fathers had completed their high school education or more. Of those, 29.8% had some college or more. These data were missing for 31.2% of the respondents.

Data Collection

Original Data Collection

The sample for this study was a subset of participants from the Community-Based Profile of Michigan Youth Study (Keith & Perkins, 1995). The African American adolescent females in that study were used for analysis in the present research. This resulted in a sample of 2,136 African American adolescent females.

Utilization of Secondary Data

When using secondary data, the researcher needs to be mindful of the concepts that can be examined in the study. Such concepts are limited by the items included in the primary survey. This can be the principal limitation of analyzing secondary data (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985). Another challenge of using

secondary data is that the researcher must be mindful of the original purposes for which the data were collected (Patzer, 1995; Stewart & Kamins, 1993). Subsequent purposes should be as close to the original purposes as possible, in order to ensure validity.

All of the concepts considered in this study were consistent with the themes developed by the survey authors (Search Institute, 1989). For example, the concept of *extracurricular activities* in the present study was consistent with *structured use of time,* which was analyzed in the original Search Institute study.

Description of the Survey

The participants in this study were administered the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior Questionnaire (ABQ). This questionnaire contains 152 questions developed by the Search Institute (1989).

Initial Scale Development for This Study

The ABQ has been used by the Search Institute, as well as in other studies (Perkins, 1995). For the purpose of the present study, scales were created using selections from the 152 items.

From the 152 items in the ABQ, demographic, community predictor, and outcome constructs were developed. Five items (Items 1, 6, 11, 12, and 15) were used to elicit demographic information (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level). Twenty-three items (Items 25, 26, 28, 31, 34, 46, 48, 53, 55, 59, 73-77, 98, 141-145, and 150-151)

were used to create the seven community predictor constructs: faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers. Four constructs–civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status–representing outcome scales were created by using nine items (24, 56, 58, 62, 67, 68, and 127-129).

In total, 37 items were used to develop the 16 constructs that were the focus of this study. These constructs included personal and social descriptors or demographic variables (age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level), community predictor variables (faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers), and outcome variables (civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status). The demographic and community variables were the predictor or independent variables. The outcome variables constituted the dependent variables.

Description of Measures Used in the Analyses: Demographic, Community Predictor, and Outcome Variables

Operationalization of the variables of interest is described in this section. Included are definitions of the variables, as well as the measurement and coding of each variable. (See Figure 3.1.)

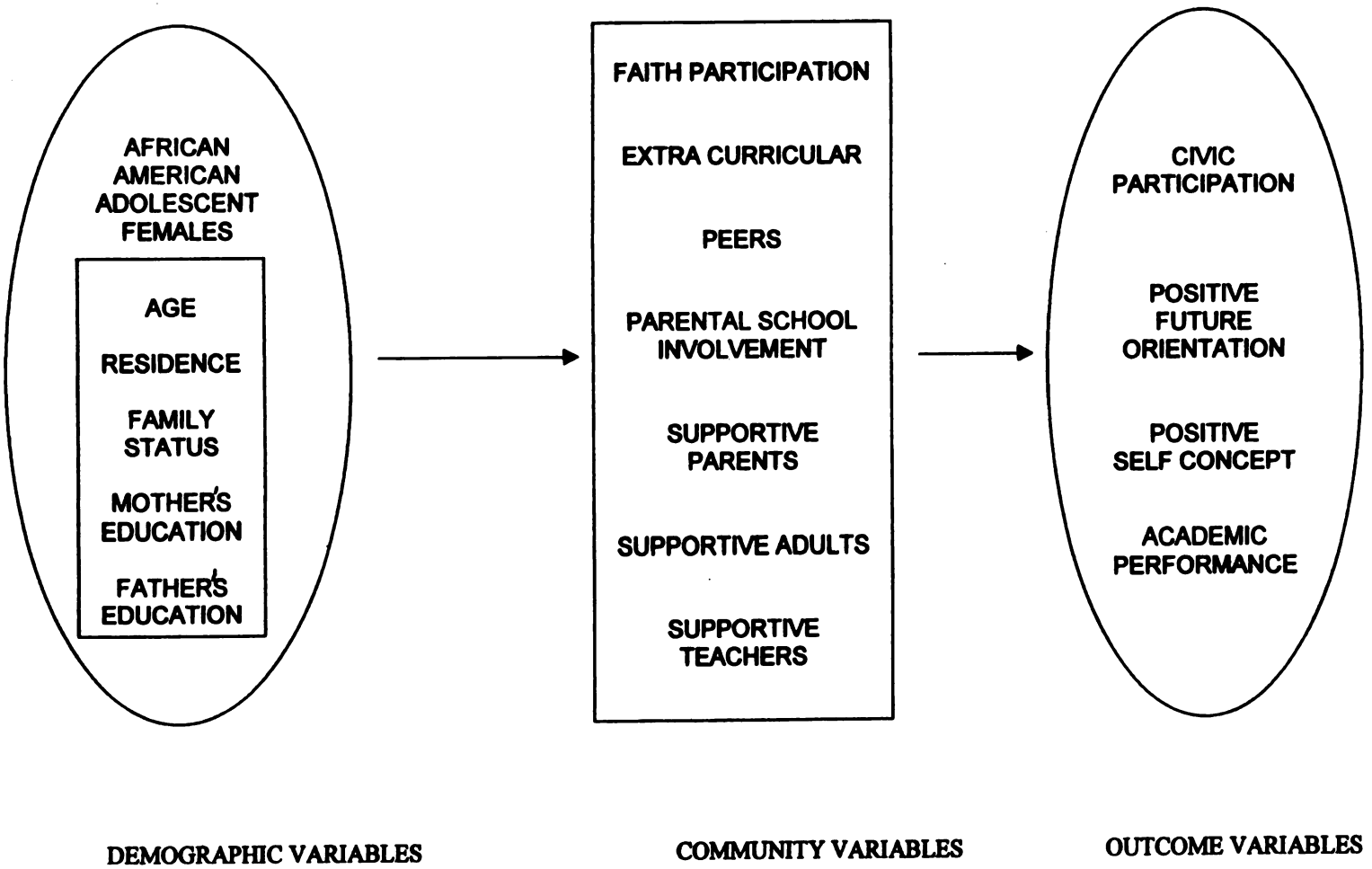

Figure 3.1: The study model, showing demographic, community, and outcome variables.

Demographic Variables

Five demographic variables were used in this study. They are age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level. The coding of these variables is shown in Table 3.2.

Age. Students reported their age by selecting the appropriate age category on the questionnaire.

Residence. Students indicated their residence by selecting the appropriate category from eight choices. The item was recoded to reflect four categories: *rural* (1) , *small city* (2), *medium-size city* (3), and *large city* (4).

Family status. Students chose the answer that best described their parents' residential arrangements (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The question "Do you live all or most of the time in a family with two parents?" was coded in a dichotomous manner (yes = 1, no = 0). A dummy variable was created to represent the "no" responses.

Mother's educational level. Students were asked to report their mothers' educational level. The six original categories were recoded as follows: *some high school or less* (1), *completed high school* (2), *some college* (3), *completed college* (4), *graduate or professional school after college* (5), and *don't know or does not apply* (6). Category 6 was treated as missing data.

Father's educational level. Students also were asked to report their fathers' educational level. They used the same response categories as they did in reporting their mothers' educational level: *some high school or less* (1), *completed high school* (2), *some college* (3), *completed college* (4), *graduate or*

Table 3.2: Demographic predictor variables.

Variable	Definition	Item	Responses	Recoding
Age	Chronological age of the teen	1. How old are you?	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	None
Residence	Geographic location where the teen lives	15. Where does you family now live?	1 = On a farm 2 = In the country not a farm 3 = On an American Indian reservation 4 = In a small town, 2,500 people in population 5 = In a town of 2,500 to 9,999 6 = In a small city (10,000 to 49,500) 7 = In a medium-size city (50,000 to 250,000) 8 = In a large city (over 250,000)	1 = rural (1-5) 2 = small city (6) 3 = medium-size city (7) 4 = large-size city (8)
Family Status	Parents' residential status	6. Do you live all or most of the time in a family with two parents?	1 = Yes 0 = No	1 = No 2 = Yes

Table 3.2: Continued.

Variable	Definition	Item	Responses	Recoding
Father's educational level	The educational level of the teen's father	11. What is the highest level of schooling your father completed?	1 = Completed grade school or less 2 = Some high school 3 = Completed high school 4 = Some college 5 = Completed college 6 = Graduate or professional school after college 7 = Don't know, or does not apply	1 = 1-2 2 = 3 3 = 4 4 = 5 5 = 6 6 = 7
Mother's educational level	The educational level of the teen's mother	12. What is the highest level of schooling your mother completed?	1 = Completed grade school or less 2 = Some high school 3 = Completed high school 4 = Some college 5 = Completed college 6 = Graduate or professional school after college 7 = Don't know, or does not apply	1 = 1=2 2 = 3 3 = 4 4 = 5 5 = 6 6 = 7

professional school after college (5), and *don't know or does not apply* (6). Category 6 was treated as missing data.

Community Predictor Variables

The community predictor variables comprised constructs informed by the literature on community attributes that should build positive youth development (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Seven constructs were created to test this model; they were faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers. Scores on the individual items were added to arrive at a total score.

Faith participation. Faith participation has been defined as one's belief or behavior that represents his or her faith (Brown, Tate, & Theoharris, 1990). Three items from the ABQ were used to create the scale for faith participation. Students responded to the question "During an average week, how many hours do you attend services, groups or programs at a church or synagogue?" using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *0 hours* (1) to *11 or more hours (5)*. They responded to the item "How often do you attend religious services at a church or synagogue" using a 4-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *about once a week or more* (4). Students responded to the final faith-participation item–"How important is religion in your life?"–using a 4-point scale ranging from *not important* (1) to *very important* (4). The Cronbach alpha for these items was .65. (See Table 3.3.)

Table 3.3: Measurement items for faith participation.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Faith participation	African Americans' faith world view is related both to their African heritage and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and afterwards. This encompasses the whole universe as sacred (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990)	77. During an average week, how many hours do you attend services, groups, or programs at a church or synagogue?	1 = 0 hours 2 = 1-2 hours 3 = 3-5 hours 4 = 6-10 hours 5 = 11 or more hours	1 = 0 hours 2 = 1-2 hours 3 = 3-11 hours or more
Faith participation		150. How often do you attend religious services at a church or synagogue?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Once or twice per month 4 = About once a week or more	1 = Never 2 = Rarely/1-2 per month 3 = 1 per week or more
Faith participation		151. How important is religion in your life?	1 = Not important 2 = Somewhat important 3 = Important 4 = Very important	

Participation in extracurricular activities. Defined as "structured and supervised out-of-classroom activities," participation in extracurricular activities was measured with four survey items. An example of a question used in this scale is "During an average week, how many hours do you spend playing sports on a school team?" In responding to each of these items, students used a 5-point scale ranging from *0 hours* (1) to *11 or more hours* (4). The Cronbach alpha for this scale was low, .41, perhaps because the questions concerned activities in different settings (community and school contexts; Perkins, 1995). (See Table 3.4.)

Positive peers. Peers are an indicator of behavioral influences, when research is conducted on adolescents. For this study, peers were defined as the participant's closest friends. Five items were used to measure this variable. An example is: "Among the people you consider to be your closest friends, how many would you say . . . do well in school?" Participants responded to these items using the following 5-point scale: *none* (1), *a few* (2), *some* (3), *most* (4), and *all* (5). The Cronbach alpha for this composite was .64. (See Table 3.5.)

Caring adults. The Search Institute referred to this construct as a component of the support asset (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Specifically, youths who have caring adults in their lives report the experience of feeling supported. In this study, the concept was measured using four constructs: parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers.

Table 3.4: Measurement items for extracurricular participation.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Extracurricular participation	Beyond relaxation, pleasure, or recreation; the provision of a sense of accomplishment and enhanced self-esteem (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber (1989, p. 8). Activities to include choir, music, sports, clubs, and band.	73. During an average week, how many hours do you spend in band, choir, orchestra, music lessons, or practicing voice or an instrument?	1 = 0 hours 2 = 1-2 hours 3 = 3-5 hours 4 = 6-10 hours 5 = 11 or more hours	Not recoded
Extracurricular participation		74. During an average week, how many hours do you spend playing sports on a school team?	Same as above	Not recoded
Extracurricular participation		75. During an average week, how many hours do you spend in clubs or organizations at school (other than sports)?	Same as above	Not recoded
Extracurricular participation		76. During an average week, how many hours do you spend in clubs or organizations outside of school?	Same as above	Not recoded

Table 3.5: Measurement items for positive peers.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Peers	What the student believes about her peers' behaviors	145. Among the people you consider to be your closest friends, how many would you say help other people?	1 = None 2 = A few 3 = Some 4 = Most 5 = All	Not recoded
Peers		144r. Among the people you consider to be your closest friends, how many would you say get into trouble at school?	Same as above	Reverse scored
Peers		143. Among the people you consider to be your closest friends, how many would you say do well in school?	Same as above	Not recoded
Peers		142r. Among the people you consider to be your closest friends, how many would you say have used drugs such as marijuana or cocaine?	Same as above	Reverse scored

Parental school involvement. This variable was defined as parents' showing interest in their daughter's education. The three items for this variable were scored in the same manner. The items were: "How often does . . . one of your parents help you with your school work, talk to you about what you are doing in school, go to meetings or events at your school?" In responding, participants used a 5-point scale ranging from *very often* (1) to *never* (5). The items scored in this manner were reversed before they were used in the scale. The Cronbach alpha for this construct was .64. (See Table 3.6.)

Supportive parents. The supportive parents variable represented how the student perceived her parents' support. One of the items was, "My parents give me help and support when I need it." Participants responded to the five items for this variable using a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). The items scored in this manner were reversed before they were used in the scale. The Cronbach alpha for this construct was .83. (See Table 3.7.)

Supportive adults (other than parents and teachers). The definition of supportive adults was identical to that of caring adults in the Search Institute literature. This variable was measured with one item: "If you had an important question about your life, how many adults do you know (not counting your parents) to whom you would feel comfortable going for help?" Respondents answered using a 5-point scale ranging from *none* (1) to *5 or more* (5). (See Table 3.8.)

Table 3.6: Measurement items for parental school involvement.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Parental school involvement	Parents who show an interest in, involvement in, and support for the educational success of their student.	28r. How often does one of your parents go to meetings or events at your school?	1 = Very often 2 = Often 3 = Sometimes 4 = Seldom 5 = Never	Reverse scored
Parental school involvement		25r. How often does one of your parents help you with your schoolwork?	Same as above	Reverse scored
Parental school involvement		26r. How often does one of your parents talk to you about what you are doing in school?:	Same as above	Reverse scored

Table 3.7: Measurement items for supportive parents.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Supportive parents	Adults in various settings where socialization occurs, who offer love, affirmation and acceptance (Scales & Leffert, 1999)	53r. My parents give me help and support when I need it.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Not sure 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree	Reverse scored
Supportive parents		59r. My parents often tell me they love me.	Same as above	Reverse scored
Supportive parents		55r. My parents are easy to talk with.	Same as above	Reverse scored
Supportive parents		46r. I get along well with my parents	Same as above	Reverse scored
Supportive parents		48r. I have lots of good conversations with my parents.	Same as above	Reverse scored

Table 3.8: Measurement item for supportive adults.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Supportive adults	The number of adults who support youths in ways that promote positive youth development	98. If you had an important question about your life, how many adults do you know (not counting your parents) to whom you would feel comfortable going for help?	1 = None 2 = One 3 = Three to four 4 = Four or more	Not recoded

Supportive teachers. Supportive teachers was measured with two items. On both items ("My teachers really care about me" and "My teachers don't pay much attention to me"), respondents answered using a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). The response scaling was recoded so that high scores reflected high levels of support. The Cronbach alpha for this construct was .54. (See Table 3.9.)

Outcome Variables (Positive Youth Development)

Civic participation. Civic participation was measured with three items: "During the last 12 months, how many times have you . . . been involved in a project to help make life better for other people; given money or time to a charity or organization that helps people; spent time helping people who are poor, hungry, sick or unable to care for themselves?" Students indicated on the ABQ the number of times they participated in each activity: *never* (1), *once* (2), *twice* (3), *3-4 times* (4), and *5 or more times* (5). Responses used in this scale needed no preliminary preparation before testing their reliability. The Cronbach alpha for this construct was .66. (See Table 3.10.)

Positive future orientation. This variable comprised two items, to which subjects responded using a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The questions are: "Ten years from now, I think I will be very happy" and "When I am an adult, I think I will be successful in whatever work I choose to do." Response options were reversed for scoring. The Cronbach alpha for this construct was .75. (See Table 3.11.)

Table 3.9: Measurement items for supportive teachers.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Supportive teachers	Adults in various settings where socialization occurs, who offer love, affirmation, and acceptance (Scales & Leffert, 1999)	31r. My teacher really cares about me.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Not sure 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree	Reverse scored
Supportive teachers		34r. My teachers don't pay much attention to me.	Same as above	Reverse scored

Table 3.10: Measurement items for civic participation.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Civic participation	An individual who performs some type of service of his or her own free will and without pay (Langston, 1996)	62. During the last 12 months, how many times have you been involved in a project to help make life better for other people?	1 = Never 2 = Once 3 = Twice 4 = 3-4 times 5 = 5 or more times	Not recoded
Civic participation		67. During the last 12 months, how many times have you given money or time to a charity organization that helps people?	Same as above	Not recoded
Civic participation		68. During the last 12 months, how many times have you spent time helping people who are poor, hungry, sick, or unable to care for themselves?	Same as above	Not recoded

Table 3.11: Measurement items for positive future orientation.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Positive future orientation	An inclination or direction toward the future; a positive outlook on goals, aspirations, and self-concept	128r. Ten years from now, I think I will be very happy.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Not sure 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree	Reverse scored
Positive future orientation		129r. When I am an adult, I think I will be successful in whatever work I choose to do.	Same as above	Reverse scored

Positive self-concept. The self-concept construct was measured with three items from the ABQ: "I am good at making decisions," "I stand up for my beliefs," and "I am good at planning ahead." Respondents answered each of these items on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). Response options were reversed before scoring. The Cronbach alpha for this construct was .49. (See Table 3.12.)

Academic status. Academic status was measured by having students select the category of grades that best represented their achievement. Responses on this measure were recoded to reflect a 4.0 grading scale. (See Table 3.13.)

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were posed to guide the collection of data for this study. For Research Questions 1 and 3, hypotheses were formulated to test the data gathered with the ABQ.

1. To what extent do African American adolescent females report the presence of selected community-asset variables (faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers) , and do these variables vary according to particular demographic characteristics of the subjects?

> Hypothesis 1.1: Faith participation is positively related to African American adolescent females' age.

Table 3.12: Measurement items for positive self-concept.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Positive self-concept	Favorable view of oneself based on the qualities that the student believes she possesses	56r. I am good at making decisions.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Not sure 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree	Reverse scored
Positive self-concept		58r. I stand up for my beliefs.	Same as above	Reverse scored
Positive self-concept		127r. I am good at planning ahead.	Same as above	Reverse scored

Table 3.13: Measurement item for academic status.

Variable	Definition	Item	Scoring	Recoding
Academic status	Grade point average of the student	24. What kinds of grades do you earn in school?	1 = Mostly A's 2 = About half A's and half B's 3 = Mostly B's 4 = About half B's and half C's 5 = Mostly C's 6 = About half C's and half D's 7 = Mostly D's 8 = Mostly below D's	1 = 0.5 2 = 1.0 3 = 1.5 4 = 2.0 5 = 2.5 6 = 3.0 7 = 3.5 8 = 4.0

Hypothesis 1.2: Participation in extracurricular activities is positively related to African American adolescent females' age, residence, and mother's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.3: Positive peers is positively related to African American adolescent females' age, family status, mother's educational level, and father's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.4: Parental school involvement is negatively related to African American adolescent females' age and positively related to mother's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.5: Supportive parents is positively related to African American adolescent females' age and mother's educational level.

Hypothesis 1.6: Supportive adults and supportive teachers are positively related to African American adolescent females' age, mother's educational level, and father's educational level.

Research Question 2: To what extent are the community-asset variables interrelated? No hypothesis was formulated for this research question because it was exploratory in nature.

Research Question 3: Are the community-asset variables (faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers) related to positive development outcomes (civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status) for African American adolescent females when selected demographic variables are controlled?

Hypothesis 3.1: African American adolescent females' faith participation and participation in extracurricular activities will be positively related to their civic participation, when selected demographic characteristics are controlled.

Hypothesis 3.2: African American adolescent females' faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers will be positively related to their positive future orientation, when selected demographic characteristics are controlled.

Hypothesis 3.3: African American adolescent females' faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers will be positively related to their positive self-concept, when selected demographic characteristics are controlled.

Hypothesis 3.4: African American adolescent females' faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers will be positively related to their academic status when selected demographic characteristics are controlled.

Data-Analysis Procedures

Analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows, version 7.5, 1997). Scaled scores were created for nine variables: faith participation, participation in extracurricular activities, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive teachers, civic participation, positive future orientation, and positive self-concept. Single-item variables included age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, father's educational level, and supportive adults.

The following steps were taken in analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics were run on all variables. Correlations were run among the predictor variables, as well as between the predictor variables and the outcome variables. Multiple regression analyses were run on the community predictor variables and

the outcome variables, while holding constant the demographic variables.

Results of these analyses are reported in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The researcher's purpose in this study was to examine the influence that community assets have on the positive developmental qualities of African American adolescent females. Three research questions were asked and appropriate analyses were conducted to answer those questions.

Several statistical analyses were conducted to answer the research questions. To answer Research Question 1, descriptive statistics were run and a correlation analysis was conducted among all of the predictor variables. Bivariate correlations among the community predictor variables were computed to address Research Question 2. Research Question 3 was answered by conducting a multiple regression analysis. In the following paragraphs, each research question and its related hypotheses are restated, followed by the results of testing the respective hypotheses.

Research Question 1

> To what extent do African American adolescent females report the presence of selected community variables, and do these variables vary based on demographic characteristics?

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the community variables. Responses indicating no participation (none or 0 hours) were not included in the calculations. The results are reported in Table 4.1 and are discussed in this section. The variables supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers all averaged responses above 80%, indicating that most of the youths in this sample reported the presence of supportive parents, adults, and teachers in their lives. The average response for extracurricular participation was low (34%) compared to the other community variables. Faith participation averaged 73%, and positive peers averaged 63%.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed among the community and demographic variables. Associations are reported in Table 4.2. The findings from the hypothesis tests pertaining to Research Question 1 are reported below.

Faith participation was unrelated to age (r = .02). Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported. No hypotheses were generated regarding the relationship between faith participation and the other demographic variables. However, there was a small but statistically significant negative correlation (r = -.11) between faith participation and family status (lives with two parents or does not live with two parents).

Table 4.1: Response frequencies for community variables.

Community Variable	Number of Participants	Percent of Participants
Faith Participation		
How many hours do you attend services, groups, or programs at a church or synagogue? (1 hour to 11 hours)	1,199	56.2
How often do you attend religious services at a church or synagogue? (rarely to once a week or more)	1,691	79.2
How important is religion in your life? (important or very important)	1,796	84.1
Extracurricular Participation (1 or more hours per week)		
How many hours do you spend . . .		
in clubs or organizations at school (other than sports)?	542	25.3
in band, choir, orchestra, music lessons, or practicing voice or instrument?	942	44.1
playing sports on a school team?	621	29.0
in clubs or organizations outside of school?	855	40.0
Positive Peers (a few to all)		
How many of your closest friends would you say . . .		
drink alcohol once a week?	956	44.8
have used drugs such as marijuana or cocaine?	887	41.5
do well in school?	2,006	89.2
get into trouble at school?	1,373	64.3
help other people?	1,650	77.3
Parental School Involvement (very often to seldom)		
How often does one of your parents . . .		
help you with your school work?	1,878	87.9
talk to you about what you are doing in school?	2,018	94.5
go to meetings or events at your school?	1,487	69.6

Table 4.1: Continued.

Community Variable	Number of Participants	Percent of Participants
Supportive Parents (strongly agree to agree)		
I get along with my parents.	1,984	92.8
I have lots of good conversations with my parents.	2,190	89.3
My parents give me help and support when I need it.	2,129	95.0
My parents are easy to talk with.	1,792	83.9
My parents often tell me they love me.	1,938	90.7
Supportive Adults		
If you had an important question about your life, how many adults do you know (not counting your parents) to whom you would feel comfortable going for help? (1 to 5 or more times)	1,880	88.0
Supportive Teachers (strongly agree to agree)		
My teachers really care about me.	1,884	88.2
My teachers don't pay much attention to me.	1,669	78.1

Extracurricular participation was unrelated to age (r = -.01) and residence (r = -.02). Thus, the hypothesis was not supported for these two variables.

On the other hand, extracurricular participation was positively related to mother's educational level (r = .07), but the magnitude of the relationship was small. Thus, the hypothesis was supported with regard to mother's educational level. That is, the higher the mother's educational level, the greater the participation in extracurricular activities by African American adolescent females. However, because the magnitude of the relationship was small, it was of little significance.

Table 4.2: Correlations among predictor variables.

Predictor Variable	Faith Participation	N	Extracurricular Participation	N	Positive Peers	N
Faith participation	1.000	2,134		2,132		2,047
Extracurricular participation	.272**	2,132	1.000	2,132		2,045
Positive peers	.164**	2,047	.105**	2,045	1.000	2,047
Parental school involvement	.154**	2,131	.166**	2,130	.220**	2,044
Supportive parents	.128**	2,134	.091**	2,133	.234**	2,047
Supportive adults	.149**	2,121	.107**	2,120	.082**	2,038
Supportive teachers	.093**	2,128	.075**	2,127	.202**	2,041
Age	.022	2,134	-.007	2,133	-.079**	2,047
Residence	-.020	2,076	-.021	2,074	-.023	1,991
Family status	-.107**	2,106	-.081**	2,105	-.085**	2,021
Mother's educational level	.034	2,114	.070**	2,113	.053*	2,028
Father's educational level	-.030	2,094	-.015	2,093	.028	2,009

Table 4.2: Continued.

Predictor Variable	Parental School Involvement	N	Supportive Parents	N	Supportive Adults	N
Faith participation	.157**	2,137	.128**	2,134	.149**	2,121
Extracurricular participation	.091**	2,130	.166**	2,134	.107**	2,120
Positive peers	.220**	2,044	.234**	2,047	.082**	2,138
Parental school involvement	1.000	2,133	.522**	2,133	.176**	2,119
Supportive parents	.522**	2,133	1.000	2,122	.217**	2,122
Supportive adults	.176**	2,119	.217**	2,136	1.000	2,122
Supportive teachers	.212**	2,128	.242**	2,130	.138**	2,117
Age	-.210**	2,133	-.109**	2,136	-.004	2,122
Residence	.005	2,073	.007	2,076	.016	2,064
Family status	-.135**	2,105	.094**	2,108	.006	2,094
Mother's educational level	.078**	2,113	.008	2,116	-.009	2,102
Father's educational level	.027	2,093	-.007	2,096	-.005	2,082

Table 4.2: Continued.

Predictor Variable	Supportive Teachers	N	Age	N	Residence	N
Faith participation	.093**	2,128	.022	2,134	-.020	2,074
Extracurricular participation	.075**	2,127	-.007	2,133	-.021	2,074
Positive peers	.202**	2,041	-.079**	2,047	-.023	1,991
Parental school involvement	.212**	2,128	-.210**	2,133	.005	2,073
Supportive parents	.242**	2,130	-.109**	2,136	.007	2,076
Supportive adults	.138**	2,117	-.004	2,122	.016	2,064
Supportive teachers	1.000	2,130	-.049*	2,130	.054*	2,071
Age	-.049*	2,130	1.000	2,136	-.101**	2,076
Residence	.054	2,071	-.101**	2,076	1.000	2,076
Family status	-.062**	2,103	.065**	2,108	.011	2,050
Mother's educational level	-.041	2,110	-.157**	2,116	.018	2,058
Father's educational level	-.001	2,090	-.127**	2,096	.070**	2,041

Table 4.2: Continued.

Predictor Variable	Family Status	N	Mother's Educ. Level	N	Father's Educ. Level	N
Faith participation	-.107**	2,106	.034	2,114	-.030	2,094
Extracurricular participation	-.081**	2,105	.070**	2,113	-.015	2,093
Positive peers	-.085**	2,021	.053*	2,028	.028	2,009
Parental school involvement	-.135**	2,105	.078**	2,113	.027	2,093
Supportive parents	-.094**	2,108	.008	2,116	-.007	2,096
Supportive adults	.006	2,097	-.009	2,102	-.005	2,082
Supportive teachers	-.062**	2,103	-.041	2,110	-.001	2,090
Age	.065**	2,116	-.157**	2,116	-.127**	2,096
Residence	.011	2,050	.018	2,058	.070**	2,041
Family status	1.000	2,090	-.042	2,090	.081**	2,069
Mother's educational level	-.042	2,116	1.000	2,116	.377**	2,090
Father's educational level	.081**	2,090	.377**	2,090	1.000	2,096

Although no hypothesis was generated related to extracurricular participation and family status, family status was found to be negatively related to extracurricular participation (r = -.08).

Positive peers was negatively related to age (r = -.08) and family status (r = -.09). Thus, the hypothesis was not supported for these two variables. This finding suggests that, as these youths got older, they had fewer positive peers. The number of positive peers also decreased for African American adolescent females who did not live in two-parent homes. In addition, the hypothesis generated for positive peers and father's educational level was not supported by the data.

On the other hand, positive peers and mother's educational level were positively related (r = .05, significant at $p < .05$). This finding supported the hypothesis, indicating that the higher the mother's educational level, the more positive peers the youth had available. However, because the magnitude of the correlation was very small, further investigation is warranted.

Parental school involvement was negatively related to age (r = -.21). Thus, the hypothesis was supported for this relationship, indicating that as the age of the youth increased, parental school involvement decreased.

Further, parental school involvement and mother's educational level were positively related (r = .08), thus supporting the hypothesis. The higher the mother's educational level, the more she was involved in her daughter's education.

Although no hypothesis was generated relative to parental school involvement and family status, there was a negative relationship between the two variables (r = -.14). This would indicate that parents of youths from one-parent homes were slightly more likely to be involved in school than the parents of youths from two-parent homes.

The variable supportive parents was negatively related to age (r = -.11), meaning that as the youth got older, parental support decreased. Therefore, the findings did not support the hypothesis. Supportive parents was not significantly related to mother's educational level. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported with regard to this variable. Although no hypothesis was generated relative to supportive parents and family status, it was found that family status was negatively related to supportive parents (r = -.09).

The variable supportive adults was unrelated to age, mother's educational level, and father's educational level. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported.

No hypothesis was generated relative to supportive teachers. However, it was found that supportive teachers was negatively related to age (r = -.05, p < .05) and family status (r = -.06, p < .01), whereas supportive teachers was positively related to residence (r = .05, p < .05).

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

In summary, the correlations indicated a positive, significant relationship among many of the community variables. Several relationships between the

community variables and the demographic variables were not positive or significant.

Research Question 2

To what extent are the community variables interrelated?

To address this research question, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for the predictor variables were calculated, using data for the entire sample. The correlations were computed to determine the association among community variables. A minimum significance level of $p < .05$ was set to protect against Type I error. The findings are reported in the following paragraphs.

All of the correlations among the community predictor variables were positive and statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level (see Table 4.2). This indicates that the youths' scores on any one of the community variables were associated with their scores on other community variables. That is to say, as African American adolescent females' scores on any one of the community variables (faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers) increased, their scores on other of those variables also increased. No hypothesis was advanced for this question.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

As shown in Table 4.2, one correlation was above .50–that between supportive parents and parental school involvement ($r = .52$). Correlations

between .20 and .30 were found between extracurricular participation and faith participation (r = .27) and between supportive parents and supportive teachers (r = .24). All other correlations were under .20, demonstrating a low level of association.

Research Question 3

> What are the relationships among community asset predictors and positive youth development outcomes for African American females when demographic variables are controlled?

Multiple regression analyses were carried out for all outcome variables of interest in this study. Each regression model included 12 predictor variables: age, residence, family status, mother's educational level, father's educational level, faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers. The four outcome variables were civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status. The response frequencies related to the outcome variables are included in Table 4.3. The overall R^2, F values, significance levels, standardized betas, and unstandardized betas for each regression equation are presented in Tables 4.4 through 4.7.

A multiple regression statistic was computed for each of the four outcome variables of positive youth development. Caution was taken to ensure that all

Table 4.3: Response frequencies for outcome variables.

Outcome Variable	Number of Participants	Percent of Participants
Academic Status		
What kind of grades do you get in school?		
0.5	32	1.5
1.0	44	2.1
1.5	229	10.7
2.0	200	9.4
2.5	619	29.0
3.0	223	10.4
3.5	592	27.7
4.0	188	8.8
Civic Participation (once to 5 or more times)		
During the last 12 months, how many times have you . . .		
been involved in a project to help make life better for other people?	1,147	53.4
given money or time to a charity or organization that helps people?	1,278	59.8
spent time helping people who are poor, hungry, sick, or unable to care for themselves?	1,081	50.6
Positive Self-Concept (strongly agree to agree)		
I am good at planning ahead.	1,480	69.3
I am good at making decisions.	1,549	72.5
My parents often tell me they love me.	1,451	68.0
Positive Future Orientation (strongly agree to agree)		
Ten years from now, I think I will be very happy.	1,654	77.4
When I am an adult, I think I will be successful in whatever work I choose to do.	1,882	88.1

assumptions were met to use this procedure. This analytical model indicated how much change occurred in the dependent variable when increases or decreases occurred in the independent variable.

> Question 3.1: Is civic participation associated with community variables after controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

Seven variables were significant predictors of civic participation; they were faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive adults, age, and father's educational level. The F test for the overall model was significant at the .001 level. The R^2 for the multiple regression with the civic participation variable was .20, meaning that 20% of the variance in civic participation was explained by this model. (See Table 4.4.)

The hypothesis for Question 3.1, civic participation, was supported. Faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive adults, age, and father's educational level had a positive effect on African American adolescent females' civic participation. Extracurricular participation was the strongest predictor of civic participation, followed by positive peers, parental school support, and supportive parents.

> Question 3.2: Is positive future orientation associated with community variables when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

The next outcome variable considered was positive future orientation. The F test for the overall model was significant at the $p < .001$ level. The hypothesis for Question 3.2, positive future orientation, was supported. The R^2

Table 4.4: Multiple regression for civic participation of African American adolescent females.

Outcome Variable	Community Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Civic participation	Faith participation	.105***	.112***
	Extracurricular participation	.259***	.366***
	Positive peers	.126***	.098***
	Parental school involvement	.119***	.128***
	Supportive parents	-.012	-.008
	Supportive adults	.113***	.268***
	Supportive teachers	.030	.050

Outcome Variable	Demographic Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Civic participation	Age	.073**	.158**
	Residence	.041	.154
	Family status	.015	.094
	Mother's educational level	-.020	-.055
	Father's educational level	.062*	.163*

$F = 28.825$ $R^2 = .198$ $df = 12; 1397$

*Significant at $p < .05$. **Significant at $p < .01$. ***Significant at $p < .001$.

for this multiple regression model was .09, meaning that 9% of the variance in positive future orientation was explained by this model. Faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, supportive parents, and supportive teachers were associated with positive future orientation. Supportive parents was the strongest predictor of positive future orientation, followed by supportive teachers and extracurricular participation. Two variables, parental school involvement and supportive adults, were not significant, although the coefficient for supportive adults approached significance (p = .06). (See Table 4.5.)

> Question 3.3: Is positive self-concept related to community variables, when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

The third outcome variable examined was positive self-concept. All of the community variables were significant predictors of this outcome. The F test for this model was significant at the .001 level. Faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers were positively related to positive self-concept; thus, the hypothesis was supported. The R^2 for this multiple regression model was .142, meaning that 14% of the variance in positive self-concept was explained by this model. Supportive parents was the strongest predictor of positive self-concept (.20), followed by extracurricular participation (.08), father's educational level (.08), and parental school involvement (.07). (See Table 4.6.)

Table 4.5: Multiple regression for positive future orientation of African American adolescent females.

Outcome Variable	Community Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Positive future orientation	Faith participation	.069*	.038*
	Extracurricular participation	.079**	.056**
	Positive peers	.064*	.025*
	Parental school involvement	.045	.025
	Supportive parents	.134***	.042***
	Supportive adults	.049	.060
	Supportive teachers	.086**	.073**

Outcome Variable	Demographic Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Positive future orientation	Age	.034	.038
	Residence	-.002	.003
	Family status	-.003	.007
	Mother's educational level	.023	.032
	Father's educational level	.000	.000

$F = 11.159$ $R^2 = .87$ $df = 12; 1397$

**Significant at $p < .05$. *Significant at $p < .01$. ***Significant at $p < .001$.

Table 4.6: Multiple regression for positive self-concept of African American adolescent females.

Outcome Variable	Community Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Positive self-concept	Faith participation	.069**	.049**
	Extracurricular participation	.083**	.078**
	Positive peers	.057*	.030*
	Parental school involvement	.071*	.051*
	Supportive parents	.204***	.086***
	Supportive adults	.062*	.099*
	Supportive teachers	.065*	.074*

Outcome Variable	Demographic Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Positive self-concept	Age	.090**	.031**
	Residence	-.016	-.039
	Family status	-.027	-.114
	Mother's educational level	.008	.014
	Father's educational level	.078**	.138**

$F = 19.259$ $R^2 = .142$ $df = 12; 1397$

**Significant at $p < .05$. *Significant at $p < .01$. ***Significant at $p < .001$.

Question 3.4: Is academic status related to community variables, when controlling for selected demographic characteristics of African American adolescent females?

The final outcome variable of interest was academic status. The hypothesis was supported with regard to five of the seven community variables: faith participation, extracurricular participation, positive peers, supportive parents, and supportive teachers. Neither parental school involvement nor supportive adults was a significant predictor of academic status. The R^2 for this multiple regression model was .10, meaning that 10% of the variance in academic status was explained by this model. Extracurricular participation was the strongest predictor of academic status (.14), followed by positive peers (.12) and supportive teachers (.10). (See Table 4.7.)

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

In sum, the predictor variable explained more of the variance in civic participation than in the other outcomes (R^2 = .198). Positive self-concept was next (R^2 = .142), followed by academic status (R^2 = .101) and positive future orientation (R^2 = .087).

Community variables across each outcome variable. Each of the community variables was significant in at least one of the four regression models. Extracurricular participation, positive peers, supportive parents, and supportive teachers were significant predictors for three of the four outcomes. Faith participation, parental school involvement and supportive adults were significant predictors for two of the four outcomes. Even though they were not

Table 4.7: Multiple regression for academic status of African American adolescent females.

Outcome Variable	Community Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Academic status	Faith participation	.059*	.033*
	Extracurricular participation	.144***	.108***
	Positive peers	.116***	.048***
	Parental school involvement	-.028	-.016
	Supportive parents	.082**	.027**
	Supportive adults	.004	.048
	Supportive teachers	.104***	.093***

Outcome Variable	Demographic Predictor Variable	Beta	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient
Academic status	Age	-.069**	-.080**
	Residence	-.004	-.084
	Family status	.040	.133
	Mother's educational level	.021	.031
	Father's educational level	.042	.059

$F = 13.035$ $R^2 = .101$ $df = 12; 1397$

*Significant at $p < .05$. **Significant at $p < .01$. ***Significant at $p < .001$.

strong predictors, however, the theoretical model for community influence on positive youth outcomes was supported.

Demographic variables across each outcome variable. In two of the four regression models, age and father's educational level were statistically significant. The remaining demographic variables, residence, family status, and mother's educational level, were not statistically significant in any of the regression models.

The findings for Question 3 provide evidence regarding the importance of community in the prediction of positive youth development. The importance of community participation can be generalized to African American adolescent females in Michigan. In addition, extracurricular participation and supportive parents played significant roles in civic participation, academic status, positive self-concept, and positive future orientation. Father's educational level had an unexpected effect on positive self-concept.

Limitations of the Study

Preliminary analyses were run on each variable in the model. After descriptive statistics were run, two variables presented some concern. Those variables are father's educational level and extracurricular participation.

For the variable father's educational level, 31% of the data were missing. This presented some concern with regard to how the missing data might affect the outcome variables in the regression. To address this concern, father's level of education was eliminated from the model and the regression was run on the

outcome variables. Although the regression model lost about 400 cases by keeping father's educational level in the models, the amount of variance explained and overall significance of the models remained fairly constant. Furthermore, there was some slight advantage on some of the outcome variables of the model eliminating father's educational level. However, certain variables of conceptual importance lost significance in that model. After careful examination, comparing each variable's effect and significance on the model eliminating father's educational level, it was concluded that the model that eliminated father's educational level had some advantages and some disadvantages. However, father's educational level was too important to the model conceptually to eliminate it. Father's educational level was kept in the model with the acknowledgment of how the missing data affected the regression outcomes.

Consistent with previous research from these data on the variable extracurricular participation (Perkins, 1995), the composite variable was created. Although the alpha was lower than desired (.41), it proved to be one of the strongest community predictors. In light of recent literature on various contexts of youth participation (Eccles, cited in Larson, 2000; Larson, 2000), a post hoc examination was completed to determine whether single items rather than a composite for extracurricular participation were more significant than others.

Extracurricular participation included responses that covered sports and nonsport activities. Analyses were run on the outcome variables by separating the single items from the extracurricular composite variable (see Table 3.4). The

results were that items 75 and 76, which represented in- and out-of-school clubs and organizations, had a slightly greater effect on the overall model. However, in one of the outcome variables, future orientation, not one of the single items was significant. Effects on the other variables did not change.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In this study, the researcher examined community assets of African American adolescent females and the predictive association of these assets with the youths' positive behavior. Selected community-based variables along with specific demographic characteristics were investigated. The findings from the investigation led to recommendations for programs, policy, and practice.

Specifically, the following questions were addressed in this study:

1. To what extent do African American adolescent females report the presence of selected community variables, and do these variables vary based on demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent are the community variables interrelated?

3. What are the relationships among community asset predictors and positive youth development outcomes for African American females when demographic variables are controlled?

Answering these questions hinged on understanding the linkages between community assets and human (adolescent) development. It may not

seem logical to connect the two because family is the closest asset in youths' ecology. However, with dual-career families and the increase in diverse populations, communities are learning the importance of coming together to create villages in which to raise healthy children. Healthy neighborhoods help by creating an atmosphere that is safe and protective (Chipuer et al., 1999). According to the concept of a communal ethic of caring (Ianni, 1996), this relationship involves an interaction between individuals and institutions. Answering the questions addressed in this study helped in explaining the connections between the community and human development and offered clarity for building ecologies that speak to the needs of African American adolescent females.

Background

To provide data with which to address the research questions, 2,136 African American adolescent females from Michigan were asked 152 questions from the Attitudes and Behavior Questionnaire. From that survey, 16 concepts were identified and grouped into demographic, community, and outcome variables. A Pearson product-moment correlational analysis and levels of statistical significance were calculated for the entire sample to address Research Questions 1 and 2. Multiple regression was used to address Research Question 3. The results from the correlational analyses indicated the relationships among and between variables.

Although many studies have informed theory on how communities affect teens' behavior and attitudes (Villarreal & Lerner, 1994), few researchers have focused on community influences on African American adolescent females, in particular. Understanding community influences on the behaviors of this population will assist in promoting positive youth development. As reported in Chapter IV, the hypothesized results were related to the positive development of African American adolescent females.

Discussion of Findings

Significant Results

All of the community variables discussed in this section were correlated, although weakly, and found to be significant, meaning that they were more cumulative than singular. The youths in this study benefited from participating in more than one community asset. In other words, for the African American adolescent females in this study, participating in church, playing on the tennis team, and having peers who were involved in favorable behavior had a positive relationship with such developmental qualities as civic participation, positive self-concept, positive future orientation, and academic status.

In addition, several of the community assets made significant contributions to the outcome variables, and some assets contributed to more than one outcome variable. For instance, faith participation was a significant contributor to the outcome variables of civic participation, positive future orientation, positive self-concept, and academic status.

Low levels of participation in community assets like extracurricular activities indicated two things: These African American adolescents were not participating in those particular activities, and the instrument did not measure the activities in which they were likely to participate. In the survey, band, choir, voice, instrument, and team sports were given as examples of extracurricular activities. Adolescent females, in general, are still developing their participation in organized sports and, although they are participating to some extent, their opportunities are not as numerous as those of male youths. Moreover, African American adolescent females might be taking part in extracurricular activities that are more traditional in their culture. For example, in African American communities, sororities offer important support to young females. National program directives require that some predominantly African American sororities offer services to assist in the development of female teens. The youths taking this survey might have had limited reference points when associating the question with the examples given.

The Presence of Community Assets and How They Relate to Each Other

Correlational analyses revealed that two of the relationships hypothesized with regard to Research Question 1 were supported. Extracurricular participation was positively and significantly related to mother's educational level. That is, girls whose mothers had higher levels of education were more involved in extracurricular activities than those whose mothers had lower levels of education. Mothers with more education may be better informed and have

higher expectations for their daughters. They may encourage or require their daughters to be involved in extracurricular activities, believing that those out-of-classroom pursuits assist in reaching the goals they and their daughters have set for the future.

The variable positive peers also was positively and significantly related to mother's educational level. In this study, girls whose mothers had higher levels of education had positive peers for their closest friends. It would stand to reason that better educated mothers have a positive influence on their daughters' formation of positive friendships. Furthermore, mothers with more education may socialize with other mothers who have similar educational levels. Therefore, they may be more likely to have similar goals and thus encourage a relationship between their daughters.

Faith-based institutions have a "village opportunity" to provide positive experiences for youths. As was evident in this study, African American adolescent females who exhibited positive development were involved in church. Churches in the African American community traditionally have served as places of worship and education, worship and civic development, and worship and community mobilization. Recently, however, it has become common to meet youths who are unchurched or have never been churched. Yet church can provide opportunities that encourage multiple layers of preparation for success among adolescent females.

Community Variables as Predictors of Positive Youth Development Outcomes

All of the community variables (faith participation, positive peers, parental school involvement, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers) except extracurricular activities contributed to both positive future orientation and positive self-concept. This finding was particularly encouraging because of the role that fathers play in their daughters' development. Father's level of education was associated with the positive self-concept of the African American adolescent females in this study. Although the contribution of mother's educational level also was examined, it was expected that mothers would have a positive influence on the self-concept of their daughters. However, no literature was available that predicted the positive influence of fathers' level of education on their daughters' development.

Supportive parents, adults, and teachers all were associated with the youths' positive self-concept. These persons provide adult availability for teen girls. The girls in this study used the adult supports in their lives for discussing their problems, helping them make decisions, and providing encouragement.

All of the community variables contributed to the adolescents' academic status. Students who were benefiting from community assets were also successful academically. Students who showed the most academic gain were involved in church, had peers who exhibited positive behaviors, and had supportive adults available to them.

Implications for Theory

In Chapter I, the idea was developed that the developmental assets (Larson & Richards, 1989; Scales & Leffert, 1999), developmental contextualism, and human ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1993) theories create an appropriate framework with which to study the effects of community assets on African American adolescent females. Through a thorough consideration of the tenets, strengths, and limitations of these theories, their congruency was described. Implications for this theoretical framework, based on the study findings, are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Implications for the Developmental Assets Theory

The finding that faith participation, supportive parents, supportive adults, and supportive teachers, four out of the seven community variables, contributed to each of the four outcome variables is evidence of the value of using an asset-based approach to studying youths. The four community variables that were consistent across each outcome variable were elements of the adolescents' community that are both available and accessible. The traditional approach to examining youths in the context of risk behavior is but one approach to researching aspects of this population.

Implications for the Developmental Contextualism Theory

Another finding that contributed to the theoretical framework of this study is that participation in extracurricular activities contributed to each of the four

outcome variables. In the case of civic participation, extracurricular participation had the strongest relationship to this outcome. However, even though extracurricular participation played a significant role, it had the fewest participants. As stated above, the African American adolescent females may have needed more culturally relevant examples as prompts in answering this question. This would further inform the need to study youths within their context, especially when investigating populations cross-culturally.

Implications for the Human Ecological Theory

As described in Chapter I, the human ecological theory claims that ecological systems cooperate. The meso-system provides an example of that cooperation. The finding that all of the community variables in this study were related to each other has additional implications for this theory. Each community has its own unique assets, and their connectedness is a benefit to those who live there.

Implications for Policy

Three policy recommendations are considered, based on the results of this study. First, and most important, is the critical need for increased federal, state, and local funding for comprehensive youth programs. Schools, career and employment preparation programs, human service programs, neighborhood youth programs, and grass-roots organizations should be the emphasis of additional funding for development of new and innovative programs for youth. This researcher took a broad look at seven community assets to determine their

influence on positive youth outcomes. It was determined that each of the seven community assets had a positive effect on youth development.

Second, policy should consider standards that require programs to incorporate inclusiveness in their design. In other words, people of all ethnicities and each gender should have both availability and access to programs that extend beyond a "one-size-fits-all" design. Adolescent females have needs that are particular to their development. In addition, cultural celebrations exist within communities that provide strength, encouragement, and guidance for families. Designing programs that embrace those norms can serve to attract, retain, and graduate youth of all cultures.

Last, funding for additional research that encourages scholars to study asset-based science is necessary. There is an abundance of deficit- and problem-guided research, which currently dominates scholarly journals. However, few studies have been undertaken to guide programs toward positive outcomes of youth. In particular, asset-based studies of African American youth are scarce. Furthermore, if the funding for deficit, problem-based studies drives thinking in this direction, it only serves to perpetuate the cycle of problem-focused programs in communities. Social scientists should be encouraged through public and private funding to understand assets, strengths, and the social capital of our youth.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study led to several recommendations for future research concerning the measurement instrument. The data-collection instrument for this study was first used by the Search Institute in studying asset development in a large population of youths. It is commendable to risk peer review and approach social science from a new framework (asset development). Although this is the case in the use of the survey, there are reasons to revise it before it is used again with African American youths. First, the questions about extracurricular activities need to have referents that are more culturally relevant to African American respondents. Further, the questions concerning faith participation should be revised to reflect a more typical faith experience for African American youths. Last, items concerning civic or volunteer experiences may need to take into account such nontraditional volunteer experiences as volunteering in the church. Those experiences might include participation in the church choir, Black History celebration activities, or a sorority or fraternity.

Recommendations for Practice

It stands to reason that, in light of the study results, communities at large have a tremendous responsibility for the positive development of African American adolescent females. Communities that provide multiple opportunities for their youths stand to gain young people who are productive citizens. These teens spend time in civic activities, are successful academically, have a positive

future orientation, and have a positive self-concept. Their contributions cumulatively promote the positive gains experienced by the youths.

In this study, the community activities that promoted positive development in youths were all positively related to one another. Youths who participated in extracurricular activities also participated in faith-based activities. They had adults (parents, teachers, and others) who supported them. Finally, their closest friends chose to behave in positive ways. Thus, it seems that, to build positive development in youths, communities need to make multiple options available to youngsters. Youths are not involved in only one activity; rather, they choose to have several community connections.

Community developers, neighborhood organizers, schools, and others who have begun to collaborate (share their resources) are finding both cost benefits and consumer advantages because of their efforts. However, it is rare that these efforts have shifted their paradigms, with African American female consumers as the focal point of change. In fact, unless a program offers service specifically to pregnant or parenting teens, this population might not be addressed specifically.

The present study indicated that African American adolescent females are present in multiple community arenas and that they are benefiting from those experiences. Accordingly, it would behoove public and private programs to include the voices of this population when taking the pulse of the community. By ensuring that African American adolescent females are a part of the planning for community programs, services, and activities, developers will gain more

inclusive, comprehensive programs and assist in forming more productive youths.

Contributions of This Study

This study made contributions to theory, research, and practice. The developmental assets, developmental contextualism, and human ecological theories served as a framework for this study and furnished the theoretical discipline that guided the research design. What is more, the participants in this study were African American adolescent females–a population that has been understudied using a developmental assets framework. This study made a contribution to the scant literature on the assets of African American adolescent females. Therefore, this study also contributed to the body of knowledge related to both asset development and African American adolescent females.

APPENDIX

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

May 24, 2000

TO: Joanne KEITH
2 Paolucci Building

RE: **IRB # 97-276** CATEGORY: 1-E
RENEWAL APPROVAL DATE: May 24, 2000

TITLE: EXPLORATORY AND ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 13,000 ADOLESCENTS SPEAK DATA

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete and I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the **UCRIHS APPROVED THIS PROJECT'S RENEWAL.**

RENEWALS: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Projects continuing beyond one year must be renewed with the green renewal form. A maximum of four such expedited renewal are possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.
REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB# and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.
PROBLEMS/CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, notify UCRIHS promptly: 1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or 2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517 355-2180 or via email: UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright
Chair, UCRIHS

DEW: br

cc:

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