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M.S. degree in Family and Child Ecology

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY-RELATED DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS TO POSITIVE VALUES AND SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

By

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY-RELATED DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS TO POSITIVE VALUES AND SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

By

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This study examined the relationships of three parenting processes, independently and jointly, to positive values and social competencies in middle school students. The processes, or "family-related developmental assets" studied were: maintaining standards (demandingness), positive family relationships (responsiveness), and positive family communication.

The study utilized secondary data from 10,623 Michigan middle school students who took the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior survey in 1998/1999. Stepwise regression procedures found that while all three parenting dimensions were positively associated with positive values and social competencies, positive family communication had the strongest predictive power. Positive family communication was the family variable most lacking among students.

Demographic variables were also entered into the analysis. Males scored significantly lower than females on positive values and social competencies, but not on family variables. Grade level, family structure, and mother's educational level showed some small but statistically significant relationships with outcome variables.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most parents want to raise "good kids"---children who are responsible, caring, honest, and hard-working, and who grow into adults with these same qualities. Society, naturally has a vested interest in these outcomes as well, so that competent, healthy adults with positive values and social competencies, become the next leaders to better society and effectively nurture the next generation. However, it is often the children and adolescents with risk factors who become the focus of research, with the main endeavor that of preventing or fixing serious problems, such as drug abuse or teen pregnancy. Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, and Benard (2001) state that a "cross-discipline, integrated look at nearly 40 years of research tells us that identifying and nurturing an individual's capacities rather than focusing on his or her deficits creates a capable, productive, and compassionate person" (p. viii).

Rationale for the Study

In the last decade or so, a new stream of research has begun to counter the problem-focused perspective outlined above. Such research can be found at the Search Institute in Minnesota which has taken a more positive, holistic approach towards youth development, studying what internal and external (family, school and community) variables comprise the "developmental assets" or "building blocks" required for all children to grow into healthy, responsible, caring citizens (Keith, Huber, Griffin, & Villarruel, 2002; Scales, 1999). These assets collectively are associated with thriving behaviors, and the research base from which the assets are identified demonstrates a wide

range of positive outcomes associated with most of the assets (Leffert et al., 1998; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000).

However, most of the initial studies examining the effects of developmental assets, as identified in Search Institute's 40 asset framework, have looked at the relationships between the number of developmental assets adolescents possess and the various risk behaviors they display, rather than examining the various associations with positive outcomes (Keith & Perkins, 1995; Leffert, et al., 1998). The large data set, generated by the surveys developed by Search Institute researchers, also presents an opportunity to look at processes that might be associated with desired outcomes, such as positive values and social competencies.

The Search Institute's asset framework was informed by a body of previous research performed on adolescence (Scales, Leffert, & Lerner, 1999). The assets of family boundaries and family support were identified and defined as representing family processes associated with numerous positive outcomes in youth (Leffert, et al., 1998; Scales, et al., 1999). These two family processes correspond to what Smetana (1995, p. 299) calls the "two orthogonal dimensions of demandingness and responsiveness" widely used in the typology of parenting styles developed by Baumrind (Baumrind, 1975, 1991).

Further, in the synthesis of scientific research supporting developmental assets, family support and positive family communication have often been dealt with as a unit (Scales, et al., 1999). However, although a substantial body of literature simultaneously looks at the parenting processes conceptually linked to family boundaries and family support, this same body of research does not routinely identify and utilize positive family communication as a core variable (Mattanah, 2001; Roberts & Steinberg, 1999;

Shucksmith & et al., 1995; Steinberg, 2001). While, positive family communication is addressed in some of the parent-education programming, along with limit-setting and relationship-building skills (Rick Kosterman, Hawkins, Spoth, Haggerty, & Zhu, 1997; Kumpfer & Tait, 2000), in the research literature, it is often examined alone (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000; Lytle, Birnbaum, Boutelle, & Murray, 1999; Miller-Day, 2002). This study capitalized on the opportunity to examine these three parenting processes together: family boundaries, family support, and positive family communication.

The importance of families to developmental outcomes for youth and children has been well documented (Kumpfer & Kaftarian, 2000; Scales, et al., 1999). The processes of maintaining standards (demandingness) and developing positive relationships (responsiveness) have particularly strong research backing. Thus the primary independent variables for this study became the three family processes of maintaining standards, developing positive family relationships, and having positive family communication. These processes may be affected by demographic variables, however, and this had to be accounted for in the study. Therefore, the demographic variables relating to the adolescent student were gender and grade level, while the demographic variables accounted for that represented the external influences were family structure and the educational level of the mother.

The study, itself, examined the relationships between positive parenting and positive values and social competencies in middle school students. The relationships between parenting styles and many developmental outcomes in children and adolescence have been studied extensively. However, studies examining the relationship between family dynamics and the outcomes of positive values and, to a lesser extent, social

competencies are relatively scarce (Scales, et al., 1999). The social competency assets have a stronger research base than the positive values assets (Scales, et al., 1999). Parenting styles have been related to various measures of social competence (Leffert, et al., 1998). Fewer studies evaluating social competence outcomes include positive family communication, the demandingness/standards dimension of parenting and the responsiveness or positive family relationships dimension.

This study, therefore, replicated and expanded on previous studies of the relationship between family variables and social competencies in youth. Positive values and social competencies, including good decision-making and interpersonal skills, are characteristics expected of adults as competent, productive citizens. Thus, positive values and social competencies were the dependent variables selected for this study.

Although Search data have been widely disseminated as summary data and the results have been used to inform policy and programming decisions, the data have been under-utilized as a research tool in order to better understand the relationship among the various assets (Leffert, et al., 1998). Search researchers themselves state: "Some assets, for example, may well function as precursors of other assets. Support may increase the internalization of positive values...Research is needed, of course, to deepen the understanding of interactions among the assets, their developmental sources, and the role they may have as mediators or moderators of behavior" (Leffert, et al., 1998, p. 227). This study began to address those gaps in the research.

Adolescence is a period of transition to adulthood. It is a critical period in which life-altering choices are often made. As a child progresses through adolescence, there are increasing opportunities for high risk behaviors and choices with potentially serious

consequences. There is also potential for constructive development. Researchers and practitioners, dedicated to the prevention of drug abuse, have developed and tested intervention programming aimed at the parents of early adolescents. These proven programs are designed to teach and enhance parenting practices and processes that have been shown to be effective in delaying or preventing drug and alcohol use (Hogue & Liddle, 1999; Rick Kosterman, et al., 1997; Kumpfer & Tait, 2000) and are usually intentionally targeted at the early years of adolescence, before serious, intractable problems have developed (Hamburg, 1997). The parenting processes taught in these programs are aimed at reducing high risk behaviors in adolescents and are the same skills and processes associated with positive outcomes in youth, namely warmth and relationship-building processes (responsiveness), better discipline skills (demandingness), and better communication skills (Hogue & Liddle, 1999; Kumpfer & Tait, 2000).

Relatively little research attention has been given to how family assets are related to the positive values and social competencies expected of "good kids." Given the ultimate goal of raising youth to be competent, caring adults with positive values and the important role families and parents have to play, this study examined the relationships of family-related assets to positive values and social competencies using available Michigan data from the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior survey.

Given the critical nature of the early adolescent years as a period where intervening in parenting processes can still effectively and positively alter outcomes for youth, this study analyzed only data from youth in middle school. It examined the relationships among demographics, family-related assets, and positive values and social competencies in middle school youth. The goal of this study was to understand better the

influence of family variables on positive values and social competencies and to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of family-related assets as reported by middle school youth.

See Figures 1.1 and 1.2 on the following pages for conceptual models of the study variables.

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Model Proposed for This Study

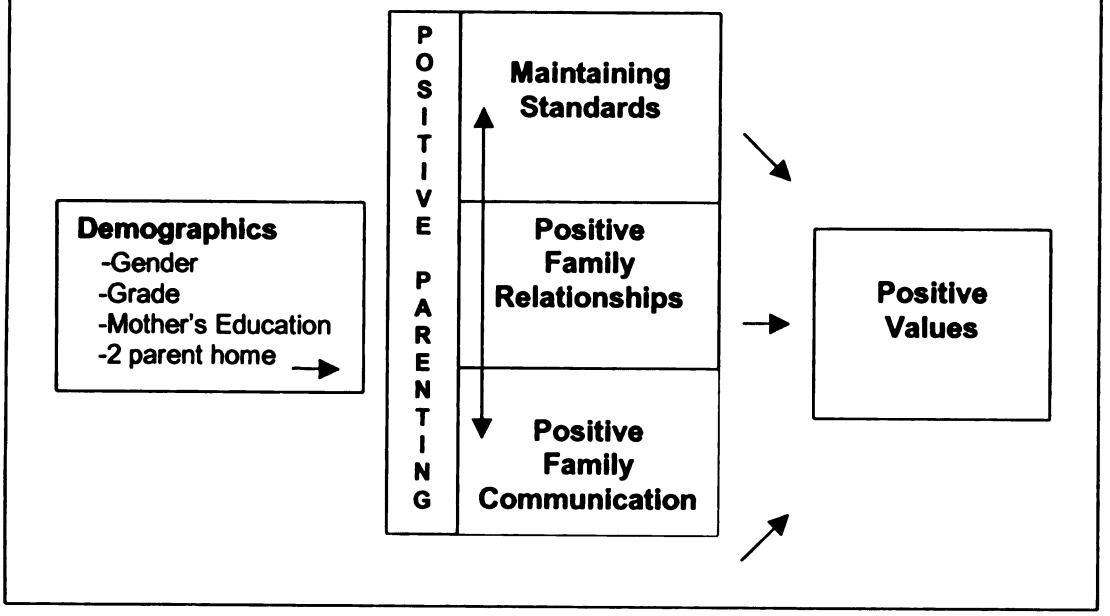
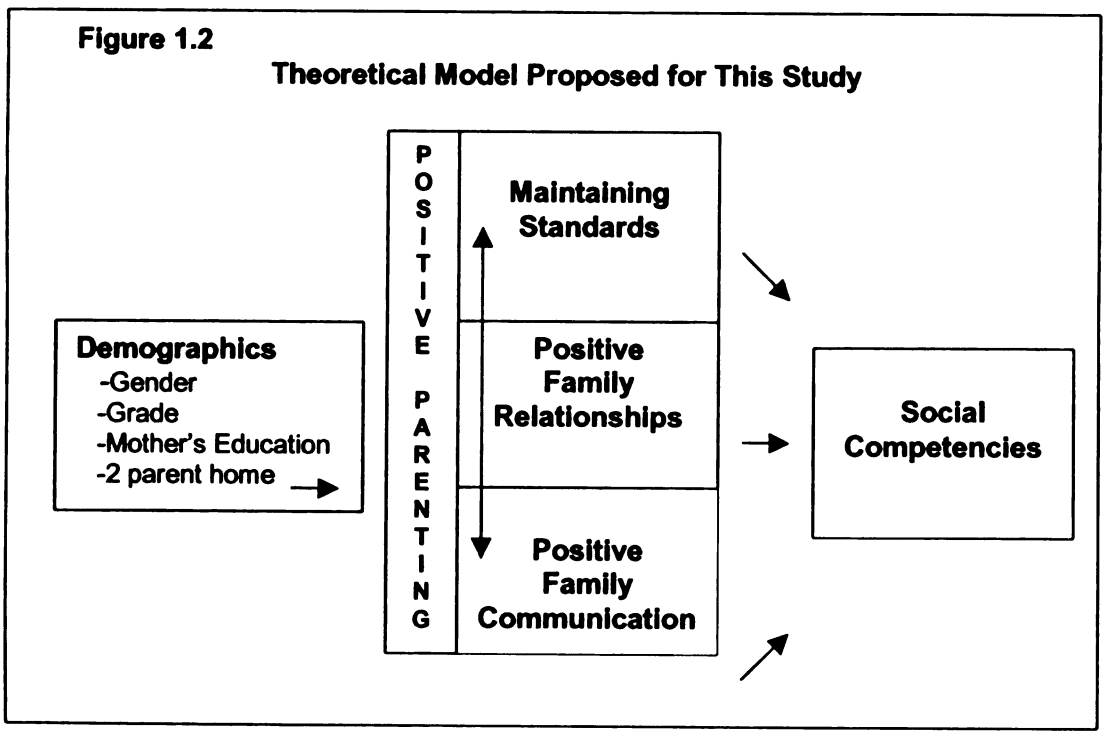


Figure 1.2

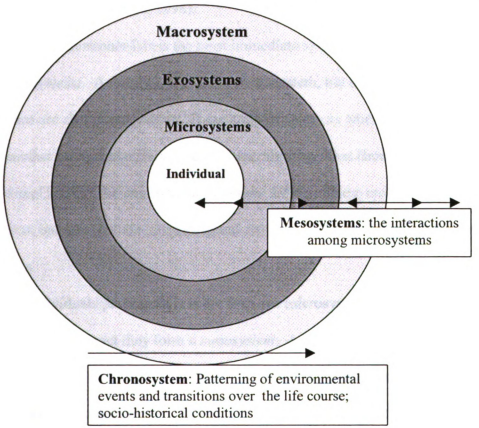
Theoretical Model Proposed for This Study



Theoretical Framework

Previous theories and approaches developed over the years have gradually been incorporated into a larger, more encompassing framework that acknowledges interacting systems from the intra-personal to the global level. This is the systems approach of Urie Bronfenbrenner's "ecological theory of human development" which has provided the theoretical framework for much of the research on adolescence over the past decades and is also the model for this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Gegas & Seff, 1990; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Figure 1.3 below is a model of Bronfenbrenner's theory (adapted from Santrock, 1996, p.51).

Figure 1.3. Bronfenbrenn er's Ecological Theory of Human Development



Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory sees each individual as embedded in multiple, interconnected systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). These systems can be visualized as nested systems, a smaller system within a larger system and both within even larger systems. The most basic system is the individual. The unique physical, mental, and psychological processes within an individual influence both that person's development and the environment in which s/he lives. This is especially important to keep in mind when studying early adolescents because puberty and maturation are creating large changes *within* the adolescent. According to ecological theory, changes within one system are bound to affect other systems, and adolescence, in particular, is a time of ongoing transition and change between individuals and their contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner & Galambos, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner labels the most immediate systems in which the individual resides as *microsystems*. A family is a primary microsystem, but schools, sport teams, clubs, and churches are also microsystems. These are environments where individuals interact with one another on a regular, face-to-face basis, forming, what Bronfenbrenner calls, the "proximal level of the environment" (Muuss, 1996). These environments have physical contexts, but also include interacting and changing patterns of relationships, roles, and symbols.

Individuals participate in more than one microsystem, however. When microsystems interact they form a *mesosystem*. A mesosystem is "a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 209). Parents may attend parent-teacher conferences or participate in fundraisers for sports teams or bands. Microsystems can

support and reinforce each other or provide conflicting or counteracting influences. For instance, a family and a church may reinforce a certain set of values, while a peer group may or may not support those values. Increased supportive linkages between various microsystems create a synergistic effect promoting positive youth development.

According to Bronfenbrenner, another system affecting development is the *exosystem*. This system is one in which an individual does not directly participate, but it none-the-less, affects him or her. For instance, a parent's place of employment affects how much money is available for a family and perhaps the level of stress within a family. These may significantly affect a child's life even though the child does not directly participate in the microsystem of the parent's place of employment. A school board is another exosystem that impacts the lives of adolescents.

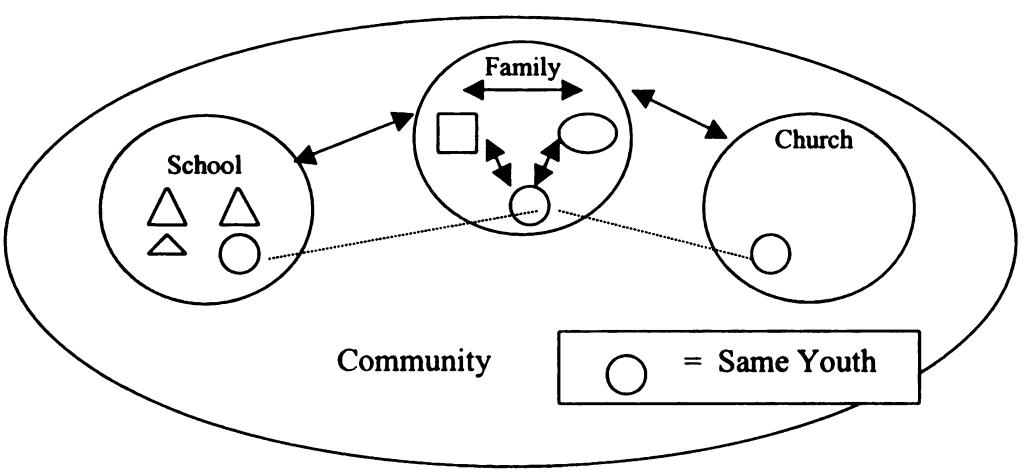
The *macrosystem* is the most distal system in Bronfenbrenner's theory. Macrosystems are broad societal systems consisting of the patterns characteristic of a given culture or subculture, including belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunities, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such systems. Increasingly, macrosystem variables are taken into account among researchers who may compare adolescents and families from various countries or cultures.

Bronfenbrenner also speaks of the *chronosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This refers not only to the developmental changes over time within an individual, but also changes over time within the environment. This allows an examination of the interplay between change (and continuity) within an environment and within the individual.

The study of adolescence is especially suited to an ecological perspective. Biological and physical changes are systemic changes within an individual. A transition

from elementary to middle school is a change in a microsystem environment. The macrosystem, American society today, has norms and expectations for adolescence, communicated in large part through the media, that are different from those of earlier generations, other cultures, and different from the norms and expectations for young children. The period of early adolescence fits what Bronfenbrenner refers to as an "ecological transition," where major changes are taking place in one or more systems, including role and environmental changes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The development of the survey used in this research project, the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior (the PSL-AB), was clearly rooted in ecological theory (Leffert, et al., 1998). It inquires about the multiple contexts that adolescents find themselves in and measures whether variables such as "boundaries" are present in family, school, neighborhood, and community contexts (Scales, Benson, Leffert & Blyth, 2000). See Figure 1.4 below:

Figure 1.4 **Youth Embedded in Interacting Systems.**



Other theories may explain certain processes in ways that are compatible with ecological theory. For instance "social control theory" explains deviant behavior as

resulting from the lack of positive connections to social institutions such as family, school, or organized religion and the lack of personal or internal controls (Dukes & Stein, 2001). Family interactional theory suggests that a close parent-child mutual attachment ultimately leads to more conventional behavior in the adolescent and less association with deviant peers (Brook, Whiteman, & Finch, 2000). Both of these theories broadly propose that interactions in one system impact other systems, which is an ecological principle (although they do not spell out the reciprocal, interacting influence). Bronfenbrenner's theory is not a developmental stage theory, but earlier work of developmental theorists such as Piaget and Erikson can be incorporated into ecological theory as some of the influences impacting development.

Application of Theoretical Framework to This Study

Research coming out of an ecological theoretical framework can never address all the relevant variables in one analysis. This particular study focused on the family system, while acknowledging that other systems impact youth and interact with the family system (see Figure 1.4 on previous page). With that in mind, this report examined the relationships between demographics, family variables, and positive values and social competencies in middle school youth. The family variables reflected the processes involved in maintaining standards, positive family relationships, and positive family communication and the relationships among the family variables were examined. The goal was to understand better the influence of family variables on positive values and social competencies and to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of family-related assets as reported by 6th through 8th grade students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Adolescence

Puberty

There is no question early adolescence, typically defined as ages 10-14, is a significant time in children's development, with complex and inter-related changes taking place in the physical, social, contextual, and behavioral domains (Hamburg, 1997; Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Petersen, Leffert, & Graham, 1995). Except for the first three years of life, no period during a child's life brings as much physical change. With the onset of puberty, a child's body changes into that of a man or woman. Hormonal changes bring on the development of secondary sex characteristics, sex drive, and mature reproductive capabilities (Petersen, et al., 1995). Along with these come marked changes in physical appearance and size. The appearance of breasts in girls and the deepening of the voice and the emergence of facial hair for boys are biological changes that are apparent to all, not just to the adolescent.

This process requires transitional adjustment on the part of individuals, parents, and peers (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Generally, boys tend to view the growth in height and strength and more "masculine" characteristics positively, while girls may view pubertal changes more negatively (Petersen, et al., 1995). Complicating the social scene is the fact that these changes do not occur at the same time or at the same rate for all children. For example, girls may start the process of puberty as early as 8 years old and as late as 13. Boys typically start a few years later than girls, sometime between 9 ½ and

14 ½ years old (Petersen, et al., 1995). An adolescent's adjustment can be affected by whether the onset of puberty for the individual is out of sync with that of his or her peers (Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995). The duration or tempo of puberty also varies considerably, ranging from 1 ½ years to six years, with puberty generally lasting about 4 years. The question remains, however, if this physical transformation normally brings with it turmoil and distress (for the child and/or the family system). Previously, the "storm and stress" among adolescents was taken as a given, especially among those of psychoanalytic orientation. However, research has shown that nonclinical families are not universally distressed (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Montemayor, 1986). Indeed, most of the research from the 1980's onward has suggested that, for most youth, adolescence is not a "particularly turbulent" time (Gegas & Seff, 1990, p. 942) and less than 20% show signs of serious problems that warrant adult intervention (Irvin, 1996).

"If most teenagers pass through adolescence relatively problem free, then why does such a negative stereotype of that age exist? (Irvin, 1996, p. 223)". In other words, why does the "storm and stress" myth persist? First, there is a large enough minority of students and families who experience significant distress for most people to be personally aware of such situations. Secondly, the risks of serious and potentially permanently damaging problems do increase during adolescence. Drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy are practically non-existent risks in early and mid-childhood, but are increasingly likely as a child goes through adolescence. By 17 years old about one-quarter (Hamburg, 1997) to about one-half of all youth have engaged in risky or harmful behaviors (Dryfoos, 1990; Keith, et al., 2002; Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Thirdly, while most adolescents do not exhibit serious problems, "Even well-adjusted, intelligent, and

reasonable adolescents do, on occasion, exhibit truly obnoxious behavior.... (T)hey are not like this all of the time, but probably all adolescents behave this way some of the time" (Newman, 1985, p.636). Puberty generally brings some increase in parent-child conflict and negativity (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Montemayor's (1983) article titled "Parents and Adolescents in Conflict: All of the Families Some of the Time and Some Families Most of the Time" expresses it succinctly. While adolescence is not a universally turbulent time for adolescents, most parents do experience increased stress, and the majority of parents find adolescence to be the most difficult stage of parenting (Gegas & Seff, 1990; Montemayor, 1986)). The increasing autonomy of the adolescent often causes parents to feel a "loss of control" and have increased fears for the safety of their child. Conflict, mostly over relatively minor issues, is a problem in some families. About 25% of parents in one study complained about such problems as defiance, arguments, tasks not finished, and conflict with siblings. Parent-child conflict increases between childhood and early adolescence, then tapers off after about age 15 (Montemayor, 1986).

Primary Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

Given the transitional nature of the early adolescent period and the adjustments both adolescents and their parents must go through, an understanding of the primary developmental tasks of adolescence is in order to set the context for this study. The changes and behaviors of adolescence are not simply, or even primarily, a result of increased hormone levels (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). In the cognitive domain (as originally theorized by Piaget) the younger adolescent is developing the capacity to use formal logic abstract reasoning (Muuss, 1996; Petersen, et al., 1995). While decision-

making capabilities are increasing, capabilities in one domain do not necessarily hold across all domains. Adolescents may not truly understand the risks involved in such behaviors as sexual activity and drug, tobacco, or alcohol use, often thinking "it'll never happen to me" (Scales, 1997). Understanding adolescent decision-making must take into account cognitive development, the knowledge the youth possesses, social and psychological factors, and cultural and societal influences (Gordon, 1996).

Identity formation. In the psychological domain, adolescence is a period where, according to Erikson's theory, the primary developmental task is identity formation (Muuss, 1996; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). This includes not only dealing with such questions as "who am I?" and "what do I want to become", but also forming a personal value system or philosophy of life. The beginning of identity formation is developed in social contexts with interaction and feedback from peers. Thus, adolescence is a period when the peer group becomes increasingly important.

Some research shows that attachment to the same-sex parent decreases slowly during adolescence (Buist, Dekovic, Meeus, & Aken, 2002). However, parental knowledge of their adolescent's daily activities and emotional support are associated with higher identity achievement (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Research also supports the notion that healthy identity formation involves a restructuring of the parent-child relationship, rather than a process of breaking ties and attachment to parents (Brook, et al., 2000; Liddle, Rowe, & Diamond, 2000; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Subsequent research has shown identity formation continues into young adulthood.

Social changes. On the social level, there are changes in social contexts for most early adolescents, such as the move from an elementary school to a middle school.

Increasing autonomy and individuation changes family relationships, but for the majority of adolescents, it does not require detachment from the parents (Steinberg, 1990; van Wel, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002). Peer relationships and time spent with peers becomes increasingly more important. The influence of peers, both positive and negative, is arguably more influential than that of parents, particularly during later adolescence, although parenting style and parental values influence the choice of peers (Petersen, et al., 1995; Pilgrim, Luo, & Urberg, 1999).

The "Asset Framework"

Optimal outcomes for youth include both avoiding the many risky or dangerous behaviors that compromise their health and well-being as well as developing the positive competencies and values needed for successful adult outcomes (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002). In regard to avoiding participation in potentially harmful activities, research (and programming) has focused on identifying risk factors for drug abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency, smoking, drinking, dropping out of school, etc. Partly in reaction to the research narrowly focused on youth "at risk" and problem-centered application and policy (Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001), some researchers have taken the approach of targeting the factors that "build best lives" for all youth (Keith, et al., 2002).

Researchers associated with the Search Institute have developed a framework that is used by communities to find positive ways to reduce risk and promote positive youth development for all youth. Its purpose is "to provide a language for core elements of positive human development" that would unite and mobilize communities behind a shared vision (Leffert, et al., 1998, p. 211). Since the early 1990's, researchers at the

Search Institute first identified 30, then 40 developmental *assets*—internal factors and external supports from communities, schools, families, and other adults that comprise the key ingredients all youth need to build constructive lives (Benson, 1997; Keith, et al., 2002; Keith & Perkins, 1995; Leffert, et al., 1998). The assets relevant to this analysis will be discussed in more detail later.

The premise of the Search asset framework is that it is not just one factor that is all-important. Rather, the larger the total number of "assets" a child has, the less likely he or she is to engage in risky behavior (Benson, 1993; Dukes & Stein, 2001; Keith & Perkins, 1995; Keith, Huber, Griffin, & Villarruel, 2003). Additionally, the more assets an adolescent has, the more likely he or she is to "thrive" (Scales, et al., 2000). Thriving was defined in this case as exhibiting leadership, having school success, valuing diversity, maintaining physical health, helping others, delaying gratification, and overcoming adversity. Over and above the variance accounted for by the demographic variables, 10% to 43% of the variance across ethnic groups was explained by the developmental assets (Scales, et al., 2000). With the exception of "overcoming adversity," the developmental assets had moderate predicting power. The assets, as conceptualized and identified by the Search Institute ("Search"), fall into two broad categories, internal and external. Within the external category are the assets of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. The internal assets are commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Search developed an instrument for assessing asset levels in youth from 6th through 12th grades, called the Search Institute Profile. The earlier version, which assessed 30 assets, has been given to over a 100,000 students. Across the United States,

99,462 students took the PSL--AB in the 1996-1997 school year alone (Leffert, et al., 1998). In Michigan, 20,872 students in 35 counties took the survey during the 1998-1999 academic year (Keith, et al., 2002). The results from Michigan follow the national trend and clearly show that students with more assets engaged in fewer risk behaviors. *Building Best Lives* (Keith, et al., 2002) shows the relative strengths and weaknesses of various assets among these Michigan youth.

While every developmental asset adds a "building block" (Keith, et. al., 2003) to the creation of a healthy, productive, young person, some of the assets are clearly more important than others, some have been researched more than others (Gambone, Klem,. & Connell, 2002, Scales, 1999), and some, if missing, are more easily developed than others. Search research identifies a broad range of factors that collectively correlate with positive outcomes for youth. These assets are supported by empirical research to varying degrees.

The assets of support (including family support), boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, and commitment to learning are asset categories supported by an extensive body of research (Leffert, et al., 1998). Leffert and colleagues admit that a "smaller base of empirical studies supports the empowerment and positive values categories," while the categories of social competencies and positive identity have a moderate level of empirical support (Leffert, et al., 1998, p. 212). A review of the research related to the particular assets addressed in this study follows.

"Positive Values" Assets

One of the strengths of the asset framework is that it assesses both internal and external assets. The internal assets include "positive values" and "social competence."

The more limited research base supporting the positive values asset category is weakened by lack of clarity concerning what is meant by *values*. The *Webster Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary* defines *value* as "something regarded as desirable, worthy, or right, as a belief or ideal." Values serve as "guiding principles...used to select and justify actions..." (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003, p.595). In this sense of the word, Search included 6 "positive values" as belonging to the 40 assets. These are *caring, equality and social justice*, *integrity*, *honesty*, *responsibility*, and *restraint*. Scales admits that this is not an exhaustive list of the potentially important values (Scales, et al., 1999). It does, however, reasonably reflect widely accepted values.

The PSL—AB measures values by, asking the student "how important is each of the following to you in your life?" Thus, these questions are not measures of behavior or living up to one's ideals and beliefs. An example of a discrepancy between values espoused by youth and youthful behavior is the fact that 85% of the undergraduate students in one study agreed that "basically I am an honest person" although 65% admitted to at least sometimes lying to their parents about their whereabouts while in high school (Knox, Zusman, & McGinty, 2001). Other items on the PSL: AB do measure *behaviors* that may reflect underlying values (e.g. "During an average week, how many hours do you spend ... helping other people without getting paid..."). However, these are not the items used to measure the positive values asset.

One study that measured a construct similar to the Search Institute's positive values and social competencies assets and its association with parenting style is a study by Gunnoe, Hetherington, and Reiss (1999). This study utilized data from 486 mostly Caucasian families with adolescents ages 10 through 18, who participated in the Non-

shared Environment (NSE) Study. Qualities, such as honesty, perseverance at hard tasks, empathy, trustworthiness, self-control, and obedience to parents, teachers, and police, were assessed by parental report and adolescent self-report. Parenting style was measured by trained observers. That study looked for the relationships of parental religiosity and parenting style to outcomes reflecting adolescent "social responsibility" and used stepwise regression analysis. The aspects of the study relating parenting style to measures of adolescent values and social competencies are informative to this study (Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999).

Another study, less directly comparable to research using Search data, defined "prosocial values" as belief-based assessment of adolescents' perception of self--- an investment in socialized values, such as a sense of belonging, security, and a sense of accomplishment (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999). Their research indicates that these prosocial values are associated with fewer behaviors such as delinquency, risky sex, and drug use. Ludwig and Pittman studied prosocial values and self-efficacy among adolescents, looking for interaction effects (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999). They found that more prosocial values, greater self-mastery, and a feeling of trustworthiness were associated with less delinquent behavior, drug use, and risky sex. However, in contrast to the general benefit of prosocial values, increased feelings of personal power were associated with more delinquency, risky sex, and drug use.

In their summary of research related to developmental assets, Scales and Leffert list studies that support the following positive direct or indirect associations with positive values (Scales, et al., 1999):

- Higher levels of prosocial behavior

- Better means-end problem solving skills
- Better formal reasoning skills
- Higher conflict resolution skills
- Greater overall well-being
- Higher self-esteem
- More hopefulness
- Greater belief in male responsibility to prevent pregnancy
- Less inclination to have sexual intercourse, and greater use of condoms or other contraception
- Less affiliation with deviant friends less likelihood of being solicited to sell crack cocaine
- Greater competence among African American 9th grade males
- Greater competence among 9th grade females
- Higher grades and math and reading scores
- Higher perceived scholastic competence, less worry about school

Various factors influence the likelihood that adolescents adopt their parents' values. First they must accurately perceive what those values are. Studies show that adolescents' accuracy in perceiving parental values are associated positively with value agreement between the parents, and with parental warmth and responsiveness, but negatively with indifferent or autocratic parenting and with conflict regarding values. (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). Parent-child value similarity is also associated with parental warmth and responsiveness. Open, reciprocal communication, promotes the adopting of parental norms (Kelly, Comello, & Hunn, 2002). As previously mentioned, adolescent

social responsibility, measured as reportedly practicing values such as honesty, taking responsibility, and empathy, have been associated with parental religiosity and authoritative parenting (Gunnoe, et al., 1999).

Having positive values can be seen as one aspect of the broader category of moral development. While research based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development provides strong theoretical and research support that contends increases in moral reasoning are developmental (Muuss, 1996), there is nonetheless consistent research support indicating the influence of parents on the values of their children (Scales, et al., 1999). White (2000), for example, found support for the hypothesis that greater perceived connectedness or cohesion in the family system by adolescents would be associated with attributing greater influence to the family as a source of moral authority. Boyes and Allen (1993) found 10th and 12th grade youth who perceive their parents as "authoritative" were more likely to use post-conventional moral reasoning, with the effect greatest with the older youth. However, research findings are not entirely consistent (Pratt, Arnold, Pratt, & Diessner, 1999). These studies do not directly correspond to the asset framework's "positive values" which asks students the importance of specific values, rather than measuring the stage or complexity of moral thinking or the perceived source of moral authority.

"Social Competencies" Assets

Search categorizes five of the assets as social competencies. These are planning and decision making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution. Scales admits social competence is "a difficult concept to define, but it generally refers to adaptive functioning" in social situations that obtains

beneficial outcomes (Scales, et al., 1999, p.173). Research literature supporting the social competencies assets uses the terms "social skills," "social problem solving skills," "social orientation" (the adolescents beliefs and values regarding their own use of social problem solving skills), "social adjustment," "social performance," and "social competence" (Cavell, 1990; Kuperminc & Allen, 2001; Matlack, McGreevy, Rouse, Flatter, & Marcus, 1994; Scales, et al., 2000; Schoenrock, Bell, & Sun, 1999). The social competency assets of resistance skills and conflict resolution skills are often addressed separately in the research literature, and are particularly prominent in research focusing on prevention of alcohol and drug use and violence. Decision making is also researched as it contributes to adolescent risk-taking (Gordon, 1996; Rolison & Scherman, 2002).

Interpersonal competence is probably what most people would identify as the core dimension of social competence. The PSL--AB survey asks three questions to measure interpersonal competence. These involve asking the students how "people who know you well" would rate them on "caring about other people's feelings," "feeling really sad when one of my friends is unhappy," and "being good at making and keeping friends." The first two items measure aspects of empathy. Family cohesion, parental support, self-esteem, and communication were significantly related to empathy in adolescents (Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996). "Having friends" generally contributes to positive development, but Hartup adds the importance of clarifying the identity of the friends and the quality of the friendships in assessing the developmental significance of having friends (Hartup, 1995).

Interpersonal competencies are skills and attitudes that begin in early childhood, as children learn to share, to say *please* and *thank-you*, and to ask, rather than hit or

snatch, to get what they want. Robert Selman's stage theory of interpersonal understanding or social cognition (Selman & Schultz, 1990), maintains that children go through stages in which they gradually learn to distinguish the self from others and begin to take another's viewpoint while simultaneously maintaining their own. According to Selman, early adolescents, ages 10 to 15, are in the mutual perspective-taking stage. They are beginning to be able to step back and see social situations and interactions from a third-party perspective---a development which coincides with an increasing ability to process abstract thought. They are also beginning to reflect on their own inner processes.

Interpersonal competencies also affect the social dynamics of the adolescent's world as well as promote positive future outcomes. Scales and Leffert report the following findings associated in the literature with interpersonal competence and cultural competence (Scales, et al., 1999). (Scales reports that these constructs are usually dealt with together in the literature.)

- Protection against adversity
- Improved adjustment
- Positive self-esteem
- Perceived self-confidence
- Improved peer competence
- Peer acceptance
- Improved ability to form friendships
- Increased problem solving ability
- Decreased loneliness
- Decreased depression

- Decreased problem behaviors such as substance abuse
- Lower risk of negative consequences from early sexual activity among African-American youth

However, greater social competencies do not necessarily, or automatically, lead to positive outcomes. As previously mentioned, Ludwig and Pittman (1999) found that greater feelings of personal power (in contrast to self-mastery), were associated with more risky behaviors.

Other researchers use measures that correspond somewhat to Search's delineation of the internal assets. Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts measure "psychosocial maturity" which is defined as having three sub-dimensions of autonomy: *work orientation*, *self-reliance*, and *identity*. Identity includes self-esteem, internalization of values and clarity of self-concept (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Many researchers measure aspects of commitment to learning, self-esteem, locus of control, and identity development. A high level of parental responsiveness, in combination with either a high level of parental strictness or an absence of strictness, was associated with increased social competence (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991).

Family-Related Assets

In the Search Institute framework, family support and positive family communication are two separate constructs, or assets. In the 40-asset framework, "family support," "positive family communication," and "parent involvement in schooling," are designated as part of the external asset category of support. The asset of "family boundaries" is considered an external asset in the "boundaries and expectations" category. *Family boundaries* is defined as "family has clear rules and consequences and

monitors the young person's whereabouts." Gambone and associates (2002) take all the Search constructs related to family and lump them into one concept called *family support.* Much of the research literature uses the term "authoritative" to describe the "supportive parents" who are "emotionally close with their children, communicate openly with them, engage them in democratic discussions about family rules and decisions, and provide clear but sometimes negotiable boundaries and norms" (Scales, et al., 1999).

Interestingly, the findings from Michigan students taking the PSL--AB show overall (6th through 12th graders) 68% of the students report having *family support*—defined as "family life provides high levels of love and support," but only 28% report having *positive family communication* (Keith, et al., 2002). The percentage of 6th grade youth reporting positive family communication is 45%. For 12th graders, the percentage is only 17% (Keith, et al., 2002). Much of the research literature on the assets of family boundaries and family support is contained in the literature on authoritative parenting, which will be discussed in greater detail later.

Positive Family Communication

This asset is measured by the PSL--AB with the following three items:

- I have lots of good conversations with my parents: [*Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree,* or *strongly disagree*?]
- If you had an important concern about drugs, alcohol, sex, or some other serious issue, would you talk to my parent(s) about it? [*yes, probably, I'm not sure, probably not,* or *no*]
- In an average week, how many times do all of the people in your family who live with you eat dinner together? [eight possible responses: none through seven]

Other items, conceivably related to "positive communication," assessed whether parents asked about school or homework, and agreement with the statement that parents "often tell me they love me." Those items, however, are used to measure other constructs.

Parents report high levels of communication with their middle school students, although the research does not always identify the quality of the conversations. In a phone survey of 309 families of 7th and 8th graders, 80% of the parents reported talking about school work with their child almost every day (Lytle, et al., 1999). Chores around the home and getting along with other family members were the other topics most frequently discussed on a daily basis. Socio-economic status (SES) predicted differences in the amount of communication and the topics discussed, with lower SES families giving risk-reduction messages more frequently. For low SES families, the fourth most frequently discussed topic was avoiding alcohol and drugs, but for high and mid-SES families the fourth-ranked issue was safety. Not surprisingly, the topic least likely to be talked about on a daily basis for all SES groups was sexual activity. Overall, increased conversation was associated with lower SES. Significantly greater proportions of lower SES parents talked to their children about each issue on a daily basis as compared to mid and high-SES parents.

Much of the literature on parent adolescent communication focuses on parents talking to their child about sex, drugs, contraception, tobacco use or other risky behaviors (Jaccard, et al., 2000; Miller-Day, 2002). In a study of 67 teens ages 11-17, less than half spoke with a parent about alcohol, drugs, or tobacco (Miller-Day, 2002). However, in a large study using secondary data, 74% of adolescents had at least one conversation about the dangers of alcohol, although only 12-15% had a conversation with a parent about

various drugs or alcohol in the previous year (Kelly, et al., 2002). In a study of 751 African-American youth, ages 14-17, regarding parent-teen communication about sexual issues, the mothers perceived more communication with their teen than the teens themselves reported (Jaccard, et al., 2000). While it is unclear how much parents, in general, do communicate with their children about these issues, the research supports that communication of parental values does influence teens. For example, Jaccard, Dittus, and Gordon (2000) report that "the extent to which mothers communicate with their teens about sex is important in predicting adolescent sexual behavior" (p. 195). Perceived parental sanctions concerning drug use was associated with lower drug involvement (Kelly, et al., 2002).

Many different factors are associated with communication between an adolescent and his or her parents. Not surprisingly, a positive overall relationship between parents and teens is predictive of greater communication about sexual issues, including birth control (Jaccard, et al., 2000). Family cohesion (emotional bonding and family togetherness) is linearly related to positive family communication, defined as expressiveness, clarity, and problem solving (Perosa & Perosa, 2001). However, when it comes to talking about sexual issues, parents often have specific concerns or an uneasiness about talking about sex that inhibits conversations, even when the overall relationship is good. Additionally, communication alone was not sufficient for single mothers' accurate awareness of their adolescents' stressors. Monitoring promoted more accurate awareness of the adolescents' stressors in the mothers and mediated the relationship between mother's awareness and better adolescent adjustment (Hartos & Power, 2000)

Parenting Styles

The influence of parents and parenting style on children and adolescents has been studied extensively (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Lamborn, et al., 1991). Much of the research examining the parenting dimensions corresponding to the assets of family boundaries and family support is contained in the research on parenting styles. Much of this research has tested, refined, or expanded upon the seminal research of Baumrind (Baumrind, 1975, 1991). She developed terminology for three primary parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Authoritarian parenting is a style of parenting that is high on control and strictness, but low on warmth and acceptance. Permissive parenting is a style of parenting that is low on strictness and control, but high on warmth and acceptance. Authoritative parenting, the style of parenting most researchers and child development experts advocate, is one that utilizes behavioral control and standards or strictness coupled with high levels of warmth and acceptance. Baumrind used the terms, nurturance, control, and autonomy to define the primary dimensions or qualities of her rich portrait of the authoritative parenting concept (Baumrind, 1975). In addition, she identified a "Rejecting-Neglecting" parenting style (neither demanding nor responsive) and a traditional parenting style (father more demanding, mother more responsive) (Baumrind, 1991). Demandingness and responsiveness correspond roughly to the Search constructs of family boundaries and family support. An in depth examination of the authoritative parenting style is warranted as it encapsulates two of the three main independent variables in this study: maintaining standards and positive family relationships

Authoritative Parenting Style. Research has generally conceptualized authoritative parenting as mothers and fathers who are high on the dimensions of both demandingness/control and responsiveness. Jackson, Henriksen, and Foshee (1998), who developed a measure for assessing authoritative parenting, state:

> The demanding behaviors characteristic of authoritative parenting include setting and enforcing clear standards of behavior, actively monitoring and supervising a child's activities, maintaining structure and regimen in a child's daily life, and making maturity demands consistent with the developmental phase of the child. The responsive behaviors characteristic of authoritative parenting include being affectionate and accepting, providing comfort and support, being involved in children's academic and social development, and recognizing children's achievements (pg. 319).

Sometimes the "autonomy" dimension is also included (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Mattanah, 2001; Steinberg, et al., 1989). Although this typology is widely used, it doesn't capture the richness or breadth of the parent-child relationship, or spell out the processes or mechanisms that may impact the development of children and adolescents (Holmbeck, et al., 1995).

Researchers have used a myriad of terms for these two major components of demandingness/control and responsiveness in the authoritative parenting style. The first component of demandingness/control is the parenting process variously referred to in the literature as control, demandingness, strictness/supervision, limit-setting, or boundaries (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Mattanah, 2001; Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Scales, et al., 1999; Shucksmith & et al., 1995).

More recent research has sometimes distinguished between behavioral control and psychological control (Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Behavioral control is used to refer to making

and enforcing rules and monitoring a child's whereabouts or activities. This form of control respects the child's autonomy and is the beneficial form of control that is part of the authoritative parenting construct (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Psychological control negatively affects the child's development and refers to control by parental intrusiveness, guilt induction, and love withdrawal (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Psychological control is control by manipulation, love withdrawal, and guilt-induction and has as antecedents harsh parenting early in childhood and a mother's judgment of child externalizing behavior problems (Pettit, et al., 2001). An earlier proactive parenting style (aiming to prevent problems) was predictive of later monitoring behaviors. Pettit *et al* (2001) found that psychological control, but not monitoring, uniquely predicted adolescent anxiety and depression. Baumrind found that, overall, children of parents who exercised control had fewer behavior problems, but the type of control used was differentially associated with other child characteristics. "Children of assertive and rationally controlling parents, unlike those of restrictively controlling parents, tended to be more competent and communal (Baumrind, 1991, p. 148)." Psychological control does not predict monitoring and vice versa (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). The PSL—AB measures monitoring and behavioral control, but not psychological control; therefore the detrimental effects of psychological control should not be expected to be associated with the family assets measured by the PSL—AB.

The second component is variously labeled as responsiveness, acceptance, nurturance, warmth, and/or involvement (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Mattanah, 2001; Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Shucksmith & et al., 1995). This factor is associated with socially competent children, whether used together with

demandingness in an authoritative parenting style, or by non-demanding parents (Jackson, Henriksen, and Foshee, 1998; Baumrind, 1991). Some researchers refer to this dimension as "family support" (Galambos, 2003; Scales, 1999).

Baumrind's description of authoritative parenting is parenting that is high on both demandingness and responsiveness. An interaction effect between demandingness/control and support/responsiveness is assumed by many scholars in the field, but that assumption has often been untested (Galambos, et al., 2003; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Much of the current research is built on a two-factor model of parenting that posits demandingness/control and responsiveness/acceptance as both positively related to adjustment (Kurdek & Fine, 1994). Kurdek and Fine tested that notion against the possibility that demandingness and responsiveness interact synergistically to promote adjustment. Another complex relationship they tested for was a curvilinear relationship between adjustment and acceptance and adjustment and control. Their study found acceptance and control both positively related to adjustment. For psychosocial competence and self-regulation, no complex relations were found for one sample, and only a curvilinear effect for family control found in the other sample. The form of control assessed in their study was limited to monitoring-type behaviors. Another study found a curvilinear effect for monitoring with respect to grade point average, but a linear relationship for other aspects of psychosocial development and mental health (Roberts & Steinberg, 1999).

The effectiveness of the authoritative parenting style and its *perception* by adolescents is affected by contextual variables, such as culture and the internal beliefs of both parents and children. In regard to the control dimension of authoritative parenting, it

matters not just how much control is exerted by parents, but what type, over what domains, and how it is legitimized in the eyes of the parent and the adolescent (Baumrind, 1991; Smetana, 1995; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Both parents and adolescents can differ over what areas or domains of life are legitimately areas over which parents should exercise control. Authoritative parents tend to view issues of morality and conventionality as domains in which they are legitimately obliged to make rules. They also tend to exercise more control over "multi-faceted and friendship issues" than other types of parents. However, they make different justifications for the control depending on the type of issue involved and clearly articulate their reasoning. Rational control is not perceived by adolescents to be restrictive (Baumrind, 1991). Permissive parents allow more domains to be under the adolescent's personal control (Smetana, 1995).

The authoritative parenting style occurs in a wide variety of familial, ethnic, cultural, and economic contexts (Lamborn, et al., 1991). Researchers have examined the relationships between authoritative parenting and numerous contextual, cultural, and demographic variables. Family income, parent education, family type, and ethnicity have sometimes been associated with authoritative parenting (Gunnoe, et al., 1999), while the importance of religion in daily lives and decision making processes, has been found to be associated as well (Gunnoe, et al., 1999). .

Authoritative parenting does tend to differ by family structure—an intact two parent home or a single parent home. Two-parent families are more likely than single parent families or step families to have authoritative parenting styles (Gunnoe, et al., 1999). Hartos and Power (2000) summarize the literature stating that communication and

monitoring are associated with fewer behavioral problems in youth from both two-parent and single parent homes. Single parents are more likely to have a "permissive" parenting style than parents in intact two-parent homes.

Researchers have tested the relationship of authoritative parenting to a broad range of outcomes or characteristics for children and adolescents. These include delinquency and violence, psychological distress, tobacco use, drug and alcohol use (Dornbusch, 1987; Fletcher & Jefferies, 1999; Jackson, Henriksen, & Foshee, 1998; Jones, Forehand, & Beach, 2000; Klein, Forehand, & Armistead, 1997; Lamborn, 1990; Laurence, D, & S, 1989; Leech, Day, Richardson, & Goldschmidt, ; Park & Bauer, 2002; Pilgrim, et al., 1999; Shucksmith & et al., 1995; Slicker, 1996; Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg & Elmen, 1986a; Steinberg, et al., 1989). Children with authoritative parents have been shown to score higher on "measures of self-esteem, self-control, adjustment at school, peer acceptance, and conflict resolution ability" (Jackson, et al., 1998). They are less likely to engage in delinquent or risky behavior such as substance abuse (Adalbjarnardottir & Hafsteinsson, 2001; Jackson, et al., 1998), and more likely to succeed in school , a fact that is well documented in the literature (Dornbusch, 1987; Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Laurence, et al., 1989; Mattanah, 2001; Steinberg & Elmen, 1986b; Steinberg, et al., 1989).

The previously mentioned NSE study of 486 mostly Canadian youth found authoritative parenting associated with greater adolescent social responsibility defined as "prosocial attributes such as honesty, perseverance at hard tasks, empathy, trustworthiness, self-control, and obedience to parents, teachers, and police (Gunnoe, et al., 1999, p. 210). This study found parental religiosity predicted authoritative parenting

and also had a direct effect on adolescent social responsibility, not mediated by authoritative parenting.

A study of 4,100 high school students examined four sets of outcomes by parenting style typology (Lamborn et al.,1991). The sample was diverse in terms of ethnicity, type of community, family structure, and socioeconomic status. Authoritative parenting was associated with adolescents scoring highest on measures of psychosocial development and academic achievement and lowest on measures of internalized distress and problem behavior. Authoritarian parenting, which is high on demandingness, but low on responsiveness, was associated with less school misconduct and less drug use and a more positive orientation toward school than were parenting styles characterized by high levels of responsiveness and low levels of demandingness. High levels of responsiveness without high levels of demandingness—the study labeled it an indulgent parenting style—was associated with high levels of self-confidence and social competence but more problem behavior and lower grade point averages and less school orientation. Overall, an authoritative parenting style was associated with more positive results than any of the other parenting styles, with equal or better scores on all outcome measures. A neglectful parenting style, low on both demandingness and responsiveness, was associated with poorest adolescent outcomes.

The relationship between authoritative parenting and moral reasoning or development has been studied in a relatively limited number of studies. Pratt et al. (Pratt, et al., 1999) studied a small sample of Canadian youth and found authoritative parenting to be associated concurrently with higher moral reasoning, supporting a previous study by Boyes and Allen (1993). However, an authoritative parenting style did not predict a

higher moral reasoning score two years later (at age 16). Students with authoritative parents were shown to be more responsive to parents' views (Mackey, Arnold, & Pratt, 2001). In general, a more supportive and democratic family style and the use of Socratic discussion techniques have been associated with higher levels of adolescent moral reasoning (Pratt, et al., 1999). These family dynamics are compatible with an authoritative parenting style, but—except for supportiveness---not usually measured or delineated as part of authoritative parenting.

The effects of authoritative parenting have been tested in a wide variety of contexts with diverse populations. Studies in England (Shucksmith & et al., 1995) replicate the findings of American studies. Some studies have shown differential effects of various parenting styles on developmental outcomes, depending on ethnicity (Chao, 2001; Park & Bauer, 2002). However, studies show benefits are associated with an authoritative parenting style consistently across many family structures, socio-economic categories and ethnicities (Steinberg, 1990). Authoritative parenting was associated with less involvement in substance use for Chinese, European American, and African American adolescents (Pilgrim, et al., 1999). Both authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles have been associated with positive outcomes among Chinese-Americans (Chao, 2001). The strength of various parenting processes have been shown to differ by ethnicity. White adolescents report higher levels of parental responsiveness, while African American adolescents report higher levels of parental control (Freeman & Newland, 2002)

Research Supporting Directional Impact

To zero in on the questions of "what matters most?" and "how much does it matter?" a recent meta-analysis by Gambone, Klem, and Connell (2002) is most helpful. Their extensive literature review and meta-analysis of re-configured longitudinal data sets provides solid answers. They confirm that the importance of "supportive adult relationships" is documented by the largest research base. The authors state :

> "the dimensions of support from parents that matter are: they offer help when needed, discuss school and future plans with their child, check up on homework, know what the child is doing with his/her time, know his/her friends, discipline consistently, and are emotionally supportive. When children have these supports they get better grades, are more engaged in school, have higher test scores, better attendance, participate in more extra-curricular activities, and are less likely to drop out.... are more likely to have adaptive coping mechanisms and less likely to engage in risky behavior." (p. 29 – 30)

Questions on the PSL--AB directly measure all of the dimensions listed above except whether the parent discusses future plans with their child. Search, however, assigns the dimensions to various asset categories: boundaries and expectations, family support, positive communication, parent involvement in schooling.

Longitudinal research provides support for a causal link between aspects of family-functioning (similar to those measured by the Search Institutes assets) and positive youth outcomes. The PSL--AB surveys and others which provide only cross-sectional data, cannot provide this support (Dukes & Stein, 2001; Gambone, et al., 2002; Shucksmith & et al., 1995). Controlled longitudinal studies of successful prevention-oriented parent-education programs in early adolescence also provide indirect support for the contention that assets, such as parental monitoring (boundaries) and positive communication, reduce the likelihood of risk behaviors, such as substance use/abuse in

teens. A random-assignment, longitudinal, and controlled study of the Iowa Extension's Strengthening Families Program: 10-14 showed fewer conduct problems among youth, increased parental effectiveness in setting limits, increased parental affection, and lower rates of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use among participating youth even years after completing the program. In fact, the differences between control and participating youth increased over time. A major component of the Strengthening Families Program:10-14 is teaching parents skills in setting boundaries and positive communication. The Iowa State University Extension website summarizes this NIMH, 1992-1997 study at http://www.extension.iastate.edu/sfp/sfpeval.html.

Preparing for the Drug-Free Years is another program which teaches parenting skills and has also been rigorously tested (Rick Kosterman, Hawkins, Haggerty, Spoth, & Redmond, 2001; Rick Kosterman, et al., 1997). Pre-and post intervention videos were made of family interactions. Statistically significant improvements in mother's proactive communication in general family interactions were found, as well as statistically significant improvements in proactive communication in problem-solving for both parents, and a decrease in negativity (Kosterman, et al., 1997). A four-year study utilizing random assignment showed both the Iowa Strengthening Families Program and Preparing for the Drug Free Years delayed the onset of initiation of alcohol use by adolescents over a minimal contact randomly assigned control group (R. L. Spoth, Guyll, & Day, 2002). Other rigorous studies of this and other programs that intervene preventatively in families of young adolescents demonstrate the power of family assets on healthy youth outcomes.

Demographic Variables

Previous studies, to be described subsequently, have sometimes found demographic variables, such as those identified in this study, to be significantly associated with either parenting styles and processes or with adolescent outcomes, such as positive values or social competencies. Thus, in this study examining the relationships of parenting processes to adolescent outcomes, accounting or controlling for the effects of demographic variables is warranted. The selection of demographic variables was restricted by the information requested by the PSL—AB surveys. The demographic variables in this study are the grade level and gender of the adolescent, the educational level of the mother, and family structure (two-parent home or other).

Grade Level

The study examined the data from middle school students, so grade level was an important demographic variable to include. The results of Michigan survey data on which this study was based was also analyzed by grade (Keith, et al.,2002). Most of the asset scores for external assets decline from 6th through 12th grades, with the exception of *safety, other adult relationships, high expectations,* and *youth programs.* For internal assets, generally the older youth scored higher. Most of the exceptions are among the asset items used in this study, namely *caring, restraint, equality and social justice,* and *resistance skills. homework, achievement motivation,* and *cultural competence* are also assets with lower scores for older students. For some of the positive values and social competencies, the "assets appear to decrease from 6th grade level, but show some increase later"(Keith, et al., 2002, p. 29).

Gender

Some studies found gender differences in assets related to parenting, with girls reporting more parental support and higher levels of monitoring (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Girls have been found to perceive parental values slightly better than males (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). In high school students, sons of recently divorced mothers reported less parental control than did daughters (Freeman & Newland, 2002). Analysis of data from the Nonshared Environment Study (NSE) repeatedly found girls more prosocial than boys (Gunnoe, et al., 1999). Michigan female students in the 6th through 12th grades taking the PSL--AB scored at least 8% higher on each of the positive values and social competencies items used in this study (Keith, et al.,2002). This is a reporting of descriptive differences, not statistical differences. They also scored 6% higher on family boundaries than male students. Other analyses of PSL--AB data have looked for sex (gender) by asset level interactions (Leffert, et al., 1998).

Mother's Education.

The NSE study also found mother's education, income, and family type to be significant control variables in stepwise regression procedures predicting authoritative parenting (Gunnoe, et al, 1999). SES was associated with differences in family communication, as previously mentioned (Lytle, et al., 1999). Lamborn et al.(1991) found an interaction between parental education and parenting style in predicting internal distress. The educational level of the mother may be associated with various parenting processes or outcomes as a function of the education or as a function of other factors associated with SES.

Family Structure

Again, in the NSE study, family structure was found to be a significant predictor of authoritative parenting for mothers, but not for fathers. The family structure options in that study were non-divorced families and step families (including blended families) who were together for at least five years. "National survey studies of family structure and children's outcomes consistently find that children raised in two-parent homes do better than children raised in single parent homes on measures of educational achievement and adjustment"(Jaffe, Moffitt, Capsi, & Taylor, 2003, p. 109).

Measurement Issues

Research on parenting styles has employed a variety of assessment measures. Two common methods are parents' self-assessment and the child's assessment of the parent. Both observer-rated parenting with combinations acceptance, autonomy-allowing,, and appropriate discipline and adolescent-reported perceptions of such are associated with similar prosocial outcomes (Johnson, Shulman, & Collins, 1991; Paulson & Sputa, 1996). However, the reports of parents and adolescents do not necessarily match. High school students rated their parents lower on all parenting dimensions than the parents themselves did (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). Likewise, researchers using the Community Asset Development for Youth survey with youth, their parents, and other adults in the community found that 24% to 35 % more parents reported teaching or supporting an asset than students reported having the asset (Keith, et al., 2002). For example, 88% of parents report supporting family bonding and communication, while 63% of the youth report having it. For setting limits for youth the percentages are 41% and 86% respectively. Hartos and Power (2000) also found mothers reported more

monitoring and better communication than their adolescents did. Thus, it is emphasized here that the measurements of parenting processes or family assets, as shown by the responses on the PSL—AB survey, are indicators of the student's perceptions and might well be lower than parental assessments of those processes.

Another issue is that some research measures do not differentiate between the father's parenting style and the mother's parenting style. While they are often moderately correlated, one study found 21% of 5th, 8th, and 11th graders reported "incongruent" parenting styles, with one parent authoritative and the other authoritarian/rejecting (Johnson, et al., 1991). Paulson & Sputa report mothers scored higher than fathers on both demandingness and responsiveness, as reported by both the teens and their parents (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). The PSL—AB does not differentiate between a mother's parenting and a father's parenting, asking instead about "parents" or "family."

As previously mentioned, the PSL--AB, from which the data for this thesis were utilized, has been used with over 100,000 students across the United States. However, the data collected is from predominantly White communities. The Michigan data set is 90% White (Keith, et al., 2002). There is some evidence in the literature that the Search assets might not be reliable constructs for inner-city, racially diverse populations (Price, Dake, & Kucharewskil, 2002). An analysis of data from 288 primarily African-American inner-city youth found that the construct validity of the Search categories was not supported, with weak internal consistency and stability reliabilities. These students took the survey a second time after a two week delay (Price, et al., 2002).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature has not identified research analyzing Search data for relationships found between parent-related assets and any of the internal assets. Although Search data have been widely disseminated as summary data and the results have been used to inform policy and programming decisions, the data have been under-used as a research tool to understand better the relationship between assets (Leffert, et al., 1998). This study utilized secondary data from 6th through 8th grade Michigan students who took the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors survey in the 1998-1999 school year. Using that data base, this study began to address those gaps in the research, focusing on the relationships of family variables to positive values and social competencies in middle school youth and looking at the relative strength and weakness of those assets. Based on the review of the literature, the following hypothesis and research questions were proposed for this study.

Research Hypotheses

⇒ H1.1: Higher levels of maintaining standards will be positively associated with higher levels of positive values and social competencies.

⇒ H1.2: Higher levels of positive family relationships will be positively associated with higher levels of positive values and social competencies.

⇒ H1.3: Higher levels of positive family communication will be positively associated with higher levels of positive values and social competencies.

⇒ H1.4: Positive parenting, the combination of all three parenting related variables will be positively associated with positive values and social competencies.

Research Questions

1. What are the levels of each family variable among Michigan middle school students?
2. What are the levels of positive values and social competencies among Michigan middle school students?
3. How are family-related assets related to positive values and social competencies among middle school youth?
4. What are the relationships among the family related variables?
5. What are the relationships among demographic variables, family variables, and the positive values?
6. What are the relationships among the demographic variables, family variables and social competencies?

For each question the family variables are:

- Maintaining standards
- Positive family relationships
- Positive family communication

The demographic variables to be accounted for are:

- Grade
- Gender
- The educational level of the mother (which can be considered a proxy for SES)

- Family structure

Participants

The 10,623 participants in this study are a subset of the 20,872 Michigan students who took the *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior* survey in the 1998/1999 school year. The participants were predominately White, middle class students from two-parent homes in 35 Michigan counties. The participants were mostly from suburban areas, and small to mid-size cities, many in northern Michigan (Keith, et al., 2002).

The respondents who were in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades, the typical middle school grades, were the subjects studied here. The frequency by grade is as follows:

Table 3.1

Number of Students in Each Grade

Grade	Frequency
6th	1,589
7th	4,062
8th	4,972
Total	10,623

Measures

The initial data base for this study was the responses of Michigan 6th, 7th, and 8th graders on the 156 item PSL—AB survey, with only 37 items from the survey used. Of the items selected, 12 were selected as measures of the family variables. Thirteen items were selected for the positive values measure. Seven items were selected for the social

competence measure and five of the items, reflecting demographic data such as grade level, gender, and family structure, were used.

Demographic Variables

To reiterate, family structure, grade of the student, gender, and educational attainment of the student's mother were the demographic variables accounted for in this study. Ethnicity was not used as a demographic variable as the data set is 90% White, with only 2% American Indian, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Black/African American, 2% Hispanic origin, and 4 % multiracial. Grade was treated as a continuous variable and gender was scored as a dichotomous variable.

The Search item assessing "family structure" gives four choices: a two-parent home, a one-parent home (mother only), a one-parent home (father only), and living sometimes with one's mother, sometimes with the father. A substantial majority, 74.2%, reported living with two parents. Of the others, 12.4% reported living with their mother only, 2.6% with their father only, and 10.7% part-time with each parent. For the purpose of this study, family structure was measured as a binary variable: two-parent home, yes or no? Living with one's mother or father only, or part-time with each was recorded as "not a two-parent home." The students were asked to interpret "parents" and "mother" and "father" as referring to the adults "most responsible for raising you" whether they were foster parents, step-parents, or other relatives or guardians. The survey questions about parenting and family dynamics did not distinguish between mothers and fathers.

One survey item asked about the mother's education. This item can be thought of as a proxy for SES as well, since no direct reference to income level or SES was included in the survey. The survey responses were recoded into the following categories: 1= did

not complete high school, 2 = completed high school, 3 = some college, 4 = completed college, 5 = graduate or professional school after college. Very few mothers (7.6%) did not complete high school. The majority (64.7%) had at least some college, while 27.7% had only a high school education. Over 30% of the mothers (30.2% to be exact) completed college and 15.9% had graduate or professional school after college. This indicates a predominately "middle class" population.

Independent Variables

Three family dynamic variables were decided upon, based on review of the research literature, the Search construct categories, and the available items in the PSL-AB. Questionnaire items having face validity as representing the demandingness dimension of authoritative parenting were tested for reliability and used as the maintaining standards variable. Items were selected if they added to the reliability. The question, asking how many hours on an average school day the student spent at home without an adult present, was not used because the responses did not follow the pattern of a five-point scale.

Items for the positive family relationships and the communication variables were also first selected by face validity then tested for reliability. A few items that potentially could relate to more than one construct were tested for reliability with both sets of items determining the best match. For instance, "My parents often tell me they love me" was tested for reliability as part of the positive communication variable and the positive family relationships variable. The reliability score for the positive family relationships variable increased from .8257 to .8597 with the addition of that item, so it was retained as a positive family relationships item. The "positive family relationships" variable was

designed to correspond to the dimension referred to most often in the literature as "responsiveness" or "acceptance." It included items Search identified as "support." The term support was not used here as the label because Gambone and colleagues (2002) include monitoring and consistent discipline as dimensions of "support." Although positive verbalizations may possibly be a part of the expression of the affection, acceptance, comfort, and support that are a core elements of responsiveness, typical definitions of responsiveness, such as that of Jackson et al. (1998), do not mention communication. The 40-assets framework also treats positive family communication as a variable separate from support/ positive family relationships. Therefore, the third family construct measured here was "positive family communication," which was dealt with as a separate variable. The questionnaire items selected for each variable and the scale reliabilities for each family variable are listed in Table 3.2 on the next page.

The family variables were used individually as independent variables. In addition, as researchers have debated synergistic, additive, or independent effects for parental demandingness and parental responsiveness, a variable was created to reflect the combined strength of maintaining standards, positive family relationships, and positive family communication. All 12 family-related items were combined for a "positive parenting" variable, with the scores for each item added and then averaged. "Positive parenting" was used separately then as the fourth independent variable.

Table 3.2

Survey Items Used for Family Variables

Item number	Survey Item	Alpha if item deleted
	Items used for "Maintaining Standards": reliability = .7072	
51	In my family there are clear rules about what I can and cannot do. *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree.)*	.6190
43	If I break one of my parents' rules, I usually get punished. . *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree.)*	.6608
122	How much of the time do your parents ask you where you are going and with whom you will be? *(Never, Seldom, Some of the time, Most of the time, All of the time.)*	.6873
30	My parents push me to be the best I can be. *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree.)*	.6532
23	How often does one of your parents ask you about homework? *(Very often, often, sometimes, seldom, never.)*	.6720
	Items used for Positive Family Communication: Reliability = .7409	
135	I have lots of good conversations with my parents. *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree.)*	.5624
121	If you had important concerns about drugs, alcohol, sex, or some other serious issue, would you talk to your parents about it? *(Yes, Probably, I'm not sure, Probably not, No)*	.6910
22	How often does one of your parents talk to you about what you are doing in school? *(Very often, often, sometimes, seldom, never.)*	.7145
	Items used for Positive Family Relationships: Reliability = .8597	
49	In my family, I feel useful and important *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree)*	.8247
40	I get along well with my parents. *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree)*	.8269
44	My parents give me help and support when I need it. *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree)*	.8084
48	My parents often tell me they love me. *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree)*	.8257

Dependent Variables

The two dependent variables are positive values and social competencies. The positive values Search includes are caring, [promoting] equality and justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint. For each value, there are only one, two, or three questionnaire items, so reliability measures are not meaningful for each individual positive value. However, the reliability for all the items together is .8853. All questionnaire items added reliability to the construct except the two restraint items (which were reverse-coded to keep a positive scale). Without the restraint items, the reliability alpha = .8877. Interestingly, reliabilities increased further when each positive value item (including restraint) was tested with the items Search used to measure social competencies. However, it was decided that "positive values" and "social competencies" were more meaningful as separate constructs.

The items selected for the social competencies variable were the items Search used to measure the "interpersonal competencies," planning and decision making," and "resistance skills." Each of these items added reliability to the construct. Again, each asset was measured by only one, two, or three questionnaire items. The conflict resolution item was not included in this study because it was constructed such that it could not be converted to a likert-type scale; there were arguably three acceptable or "right" choices and two "wrong" choices. The reliability alpha for the social competence items selected was .7780. These reliability results justified using positive values and social competencies as the dependent variable constructs. The questionnaire items used for the social competencies variable and the positive values variable are listed in tables 3.3 and 3.4 respectively on the following pages.

All items were coded so that the desired or ideal response was given the highest response value (5) and the least desired response was given the lowest value (1). To obtain this, all of the questionnaire items used in the independent variables and the two restraint items used in the positive values dependent variable were reverse coded.

Table 3.3

Survey Items Used for Social Competencies

Reliability = .7780

Item number	Survey Item *(People who know me would say ...this is "not at all like me" to "very much like me")*	Alpha if item deleted
	Statements Related to Interpersonal Competence:	
69	Caring about other people's feelings	.7360
75	Feeling really sad when one of my friends is unhappy	.7652
76	Being good at making and keeping friends	.7661
	Statements Related to Decision Making:	
70	Thinking through the possible good and bad results of different choices before I make decisions	.7293
79	Being good at planning ahead	.7588
	Statements Related to Resistance Skills:	
68	Knowing how to say "no" when someone wants me to do things I know are wrong or dangerous	.7426
74	Staying away from people who might get me in trouble	.7514

Table 3.4

Survey Items Used for Positive Values
Reliability = .8853

Item number	Survey Item *(not important, somewhat important, not sure, quite important, or extremely important)*	Alpha if item deleted
	Statements Related to Caring:	
6	Helping other people	.8757
8	Helping to make the world a better place in which to live	.8730
13	Giving time or money to make life better for other people	.8730
	Statements Related to "Equality and Social Justice"	
7	Helping to reduce hunger and poverty in the world	.8752
10	Helping to make sure that all people are treated fairly	.8742
12	Speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights and opportunities)	.8774
	Statements Related to Integrity:	
14	Doing what I believe is right even if my friends make fun of me	.8755
15	Standing up for what I believe, even when it's unpopular to do so	.8796
	Statements Related to Honesty and Responsibility	
16	Telling the truth, even when it's not easy	.8734
17	Accepting responsibility for my actions when I make a mistake or get in trouble	.8763
18	Doing my best even when I have to do a job I don't like	.8791
	Statements Related to Restraint *(Strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree.)*	
37r	It is against my values to drink alcohol while I am a teenager	.8837
45r	It is against my values to have sex while I am a teenager	.8845

Procedures

The PSL--AB was given in 35 self-selected school districts during the 1998/1999 school year. Surveys were administered in a classroom setting according to standardized instructions. Generally, school districts administered the survey to all 6th through 12th grade students in attendance on the day the survey was administered (Leffert, et al., 1998). Students were assured their surveys would remain anonymous. After completing the surveys, the students put them in an envelope that was sealed and mailed back to Search Institute for processing.

SPSS 11.5 was used to perform the statistical operations administered in this study and multiple regression analyses were used to answer the proposed questions. Step-wise multiple regression procedures were first performed using the three independent variables of maintaining standards, positive family relations, and positive family communication. The step-wise regression was repeated including the demographic variables and the independent variables. Additionally, separate correlations were performed between each independent variable, including the combined positive parenting score, and each dependent variable. Frequency data was also tabulated for each variable, creating profiles of the strength and weaknesses of each family-related variable and each outcome variables for various demographic groupings.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study examined the relationships of the parenting processes to positive values and social competencies in middle school youth. The parenting processes were represented by the family variables: maintaining standards, positive family relationships, positive family communication, and positive parenting (which is the combination of the aforementioned family variables). Demographic variables were also accounted for. The results of this study clearly demonstrated that higher levels of positive parenting were associated with higher levels of positive values and social competencies as reported by middle school age youth. All the family/parenting variables individually and collectively were associated positively with both positive values and social competencies. This chapter will analyze the relationships between each variable, compare their relative importance, and answer each research question in turn.

Setting the context, the first two questions ask for descriptive results for each variable.

Research Question 1: What are the Levels of Each Family Variable in Michigan Middle School Students?

The results for all variables were skewed towards high scores. The mean level of positive family communication is 3.56—about halfway between "not sure" or "sometimes" and "often" or "agree." The mean level of maintaining standards and positive family relationships is 4.02 and 4.08 respectively—4.0 being a conventional cut-off point for "having" an asset measured by a five point Likert scale. See Table 4.1 below

for the descriptive statistics results for the family variables. A large majority, 68.4%, of all middle school students reported "having" positive family relationships, with scores of 4.0 or above. Most middle school students, 63.1%, also reported maintaining standards scores of 4.0 or above. Less than half (43.9%) of all middle school students reported positive family communication scores of 4.0 or above. Conversely, while less than 10% of the students reported low scores (below 3.0) for maintaining standards and positive family relationships, about 23 % of the students reported low levels of positive family communication.

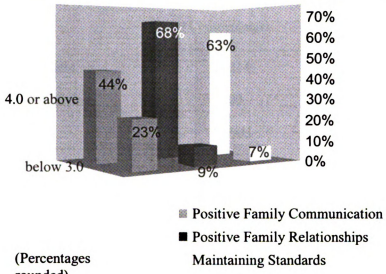
Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics for Family Variables

		Positive Family Communication	Positive Family Relationships	Maintaining Standards
N	Valid	10168	10298	10168
	Missing	355	225	355
Mean		3.5564	4.0828	4.0218
Median		3.6667	4.2500	4.2000
Mode		4.33	5.00	4.20

Figure 4.1 on the next page, shows the percentages of students reporting having the family-related assets at average scores of 4.0 or above compared to the percentages reporting scores below 3.0. For clarity and comparison purposes, the figure does not show "neutral" scores, those ranging from 3.0 to less than 4.0, therefore not showing the students whose responses averaged "not sure" or "sometimes."

Figure 4.1 *Percentages of Students Reporting High and Low Levels of Family Variables*



Research Question 2:
What are the Levels of Positive Values and Social Competencies Among Michigan Middle School Students?

About half of the students (51.9%) reported having positive values, with scores at or above 4.0. The mean score for positive values was 3.85. Many of the students (3,146 to be exact), did not answer one or more of the positive values survey items, so the number of cases used in the analysis was 7,477. It is not clear how the missing data affected the results. About a third of the students (32.7%) reported mean scores for social competencies at or above 4.0. The mean score for social competencies was 3.49. The number of cases analyzed for social competencies was 10,014. See Table 4.2 following:

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

		Social Competencies	Positive Values
N	Valid	10014	7477
	Missing	509	3046
Mean		3.4905	3.8545
Median		3.5714	4.0000
Mode		3.57	4.15

Research Question 3:
What are the Relationships Between each Family Variable and Positive Values?

As predicted in the hypotheses, higher levels of each family variable were associated with higher levels of positive values. Simple correlations yielded statistically significant positive associations between each family variable and positive values. The positive linear relationship between each family variable and positive values can be seen graphically in Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. It should be noted that there is no evidence of a curvilinear relationship for any of the variables--as tested for by some researchers, particularly concerning measures of "control" similar to the maintaining standards measure(Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Kurdek & Fine, 1994). This study does not show that any level of the positive parenting variables is "too much."

Figure 4.2

The Relationship Between Positive Family Communication and Positive Values

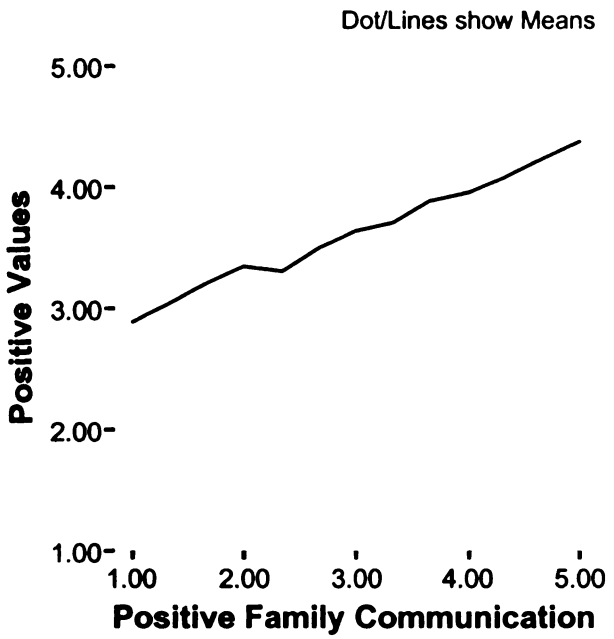


Figure 4.3

The Relationship Between Positive Family Relationships and Positive Values

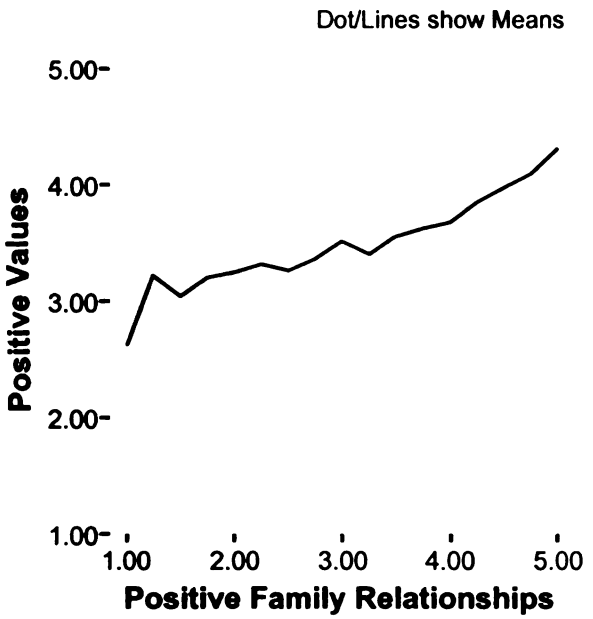
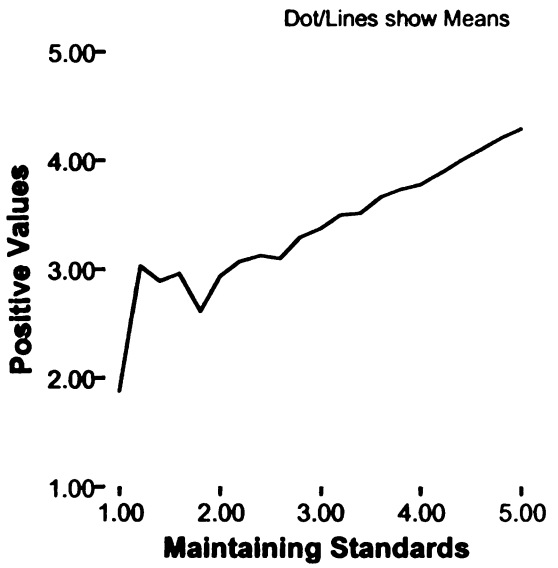


Figure 4.4

The Relationship Between Maintaining Standards and Positive Values



Positive family relationships had a Pearson correlation coefficient of r = .420 with positive values, significant at <.000 level (See Table 4.3 on next page). Maintaining standards was correlated with positive values with a Pearson correlation coefficient of r = .419, significant at p < .000. Thus, Maintaining standards and positive family relationships each account for about 17.6% of the variance in positive values. Positive family communication and positive values had a Pearson's correlation of .459, significant at the .000 level, two-tailed. Therefore, positive family communication had the strongest association with positive values, accounting for about 21% of the variance in positive values. Positive parenting (the average of all the parenting items) had a correlation coefficient of .504, significant at the .000 level. In totality, all the parenting variables combined account for 25% of the variance in positive values.

Table 4.3

Correlations between Family Variables and Outcome Variables
All Pearson Correlations, significant at the .000 level (two-tailed).

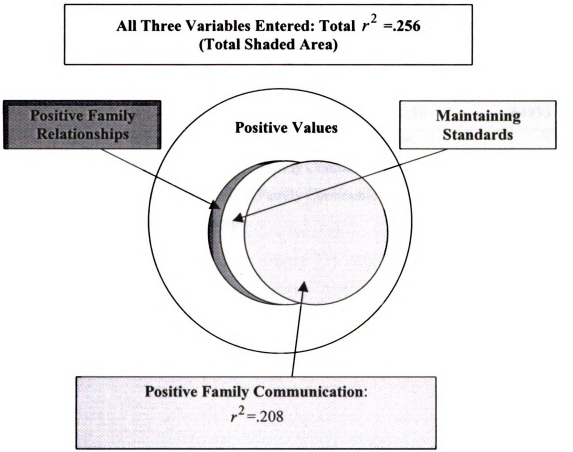
	Positive Values	Social Competencies
Positive Family Communication	.459	.469
Positive Family Relationships	.420	.436
Maintaining Standards	.419	.389
Positive Parenting Total	.504	.507

These relationships can also be seen in the results of the stepwise regression procedures done on the same data. See Figure 4.5 and Table 4.5 (a-c) on the next pages for results of the regression procedures. In the regression model, the strength of the communication variable is born out. All the relationships were significant at the .000 level, (see Table 4.4 (b). Positive family communication is the strongest predictor—see the betas in Table 4.4(c) for the relative weighting of the variables. Most of the relationship of maintaining standards and positive family relationships to positive values is accounted for in the regression model by their overlap with positive family communication. After the variance that overlaps with positive family communication is accounted for, then maintaining standards accounts for an additional 3.6% of the variance. (See the differences in the R square (r^2) values in Table 4.4 (a)). Most of the association of positive family relationships to positive values is absorbed in the

regression model by its overlap with the other family variables, but it adds an additional 1.2% to the variance in positive values that is accounted for by the regression model.

Figure 4.5

The Variance in Positive Values Explained by Family Variables: The Results of the Stepwise Regression Model



Tables 4.4 (a-c)

Results of SPSS Stepwise Regression for Positive Values: Only Family Variables Entered

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Table 4.4 (a)

Regression Model Summary for Positive Values

N = 6948

Model	*R*	*R* square	Adjusted *R* Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.456[a]	.208	.208	.67002
2	.494[b]	.244	.244	.65451
3	.506[c]	.256	.256	.64935

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

b. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Maintaining Standards

c. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Maintaining Standards Positive Family Relationships

Table 4.4(b)

ANOVA Results for Positive Values

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	819.385	1	819.385	1825.2	.000[a]
	Residual	3118.71	6947	.449		
	Total	3938.10	6948			
2	Regression	962.504	2	481.252	1123.4	.000[b]
	Residual	2975.59	6946	.428		
	Total	3938.10	6948			
3	Regression	1009.69	3	336.563	798.191	.000[c]
	Residual	2928.41	6945	.422		
	Total	3938.10	6948			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

b. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Maintaining Standards

c. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Maintaining Standards

Table 4.4(c)

Coefficients in Regression Model for Positive Values: Only Family Variables Entered

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.560	.032		81.185	.000
Positive Family Communication	.355	.008	.456	42.722	.000
(Constant)	1.897	.048		39.847	.000
Positive Family Communication	.254	.010	.326	25.795	.000
Maintaining Standards	.254	.014	.231	18.278	.000
(Constant)	1.711	.050		33.930	.000
Positive Family Communication	.192	.011	.246	16.869	.000
Maintaining Standards	.213	.014	.193	14.857	.000
Positive Family Relationships	.140	.013	.152	10.578	.000

Question 4: What are the Relationships Between Each Family Variable and Social Competencies?

Each family-related variable is also positively associated with social competencies, as predicted in the hypotheses. The graphs in Figures 4.6 through 4.8 show this positive association. Again, there is no evidence of a curvilinear relationship for any of the independent variable. Table 4.3 on page 61 lists the correlation coefficients. Positive family communication is associated with social competencies with a correlation

coefficient (Pearson) of .469 significant at the .000 level. Positive family relationships had the next highest correlation coefficient, r = .436, significant at the .000 level. For maintaining standards, r = .389, significant at the .000 level. Again, communication was the strongest variable, accounting for almost 22 % of the variance in social competencies. The correlation coefficient for the positive parenting variable is .507, significant at the .000 level, accounting for 25.7% of the variance. Stepwise regression confirmed positive family communication as the strongest variable, with positive family communication first, then positive family relationships and maintaining standards. (See Table 4.5 (a-c)). All were statistically significant at the .000 level (Table 4.5(b)). For social competencies, the relative strengths of positive family relationships and maintaining standards was reversed from that of the regression model for positive values. Positive family relationships explained another 3% of variance after that accounted for by positive family communication. Maintaining standards accounted for an additional 1.3% of the variance.

Figure 4.6

The Relationship Between Positive Family Communication and Social Competencies

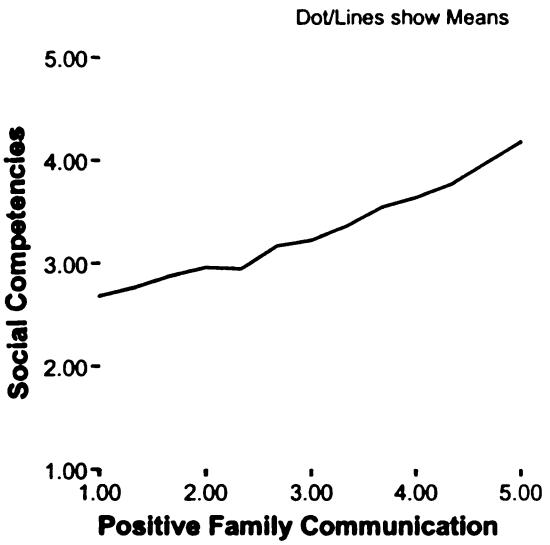


Figure 4.7

The Relationship between Positive Family Relationships and Social Competencies

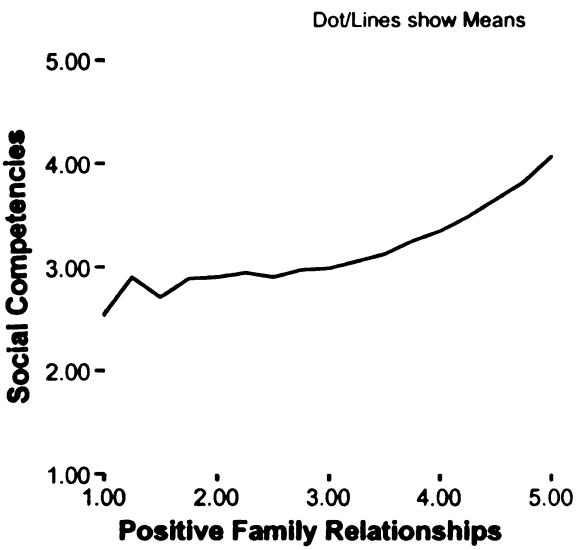


Figure 4.8

The Relationship between Maintaining Standards and Social Competencies

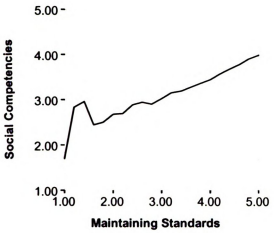


Figure 4.9

The Variance in Social Competencies Explained by Family Variables: The Results of the Stepwise Regression Model

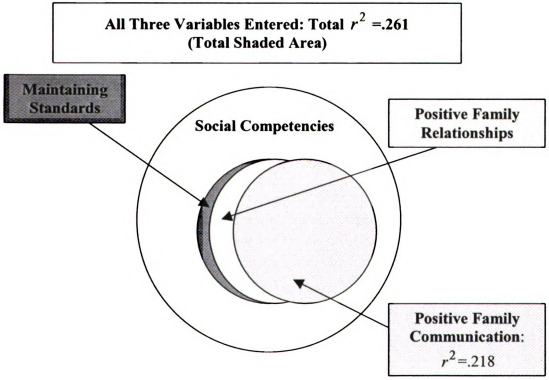


Table 4.5(a-c).

Results of SPSS Stepwise Regression for Social Competencies Only Family Variables Entered

Table 4.5(a)

Social Competencies Model Summary

N=9320

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.467(a)	.218	.218	.71845
2	.498(b)	.248	.248	.70472
3	.511(c)	.261	.261	.69849

a Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

b Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships

c Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards

Table 4.5(b)

ANOVA Results from Regression Model for Social Competencies

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1343.374	1	1343.374	2602.546	.000[a]
	Residual	4810.252	9319	.516		
	Total	6153.626	9320			
2	Regression	1525.987	2	762.994	1536.329	.000[b]
	Residual	4627.639	9318	.497		
	Total	6153.626	9320			
3	Regression	1608.010	3	536.003	1098.628	.000[c]
	Residual	4545.617	9317	.488		
	Total	6153.626	9320			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

b Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships

c Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards

Table 4.5(c)

Coefficients from the Regression Model for Social Competencies

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.115	.028		75.043	.000
Positive Family Communication	.389	.008	.467	51.015	.000
(Constant)	1.639	.037		44.149	.000
Positive Family Communication	.261	.010	.314	26.084	.000
Maintaining Standards	.228	.012	.231	19.176	.000
(Constant)	1.283	.046		27.927	.000
Positive Family Communication	.217	.011	.260	20.602	.000
Maintaining Standards	.187	.012	.190	15.389	.000
Positive Family Relationships	.169	.013	.144	12.966	.000

Question 5:
What are the Relationships Among the Family-Related Variables?

Simple correlations also show that the family variables are positively associated with each other. Parents and families with one of the family-related assets tend to have the other family-related assets also (See Table 4.6, next page). The association between positive family relationships and positive family communication is the strongest variable, indicating that families with positive relationships tend to have more positive family communication. However, the fact that far fewer families have positive family

communication (44%) than have positive family relationships (68%), indicates that the association between positive family relationships and positive family communication is not a perfect correlation. The stepwise regression models for both positive values and social competencies with the three family variables entered showed the overlapping relationships between the family variables. Positive family communication was the strongest family variable and hid most of the variance predicted by maintaining standards and positive family relationships. However, the models still showed additional predictive value for each family variable. (See Figures 4.5 and 4.9). Similarly, the correlation table on page 61 (Table 4.3) shows that the correlations between the positive parenting total and the outcome measures are greater than that between the each individual family variable and the outcome measures, supporting hypothesis # 4.

Table 4.6

Correlations among the Family-Related Variables
All Pearson's Correlations, significant at the.000 level,(2-tailed)

	Positive Family Communication	Positive Family Relationships	Maintaining Standards
Positive Family Communication		.663	.561
Positive Family Relationships	.663		.533
Maintaining Standards	.561	.533	

Research Question 6:
What are the Relationships among Demographic Variables, Family Variables, and Positive Values and Social Competencies?

A brief review shows that the demographic variables included were grade, gender, the educational level of the mother, and family structure (presence or absence of a two-parent home. The model proposed in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 theorized an indirect effect for these demographic variables on positive values and social competencies, namely that these demographic variables would influence parenting style, which would, in turn, affect the dependent variables. The results obtained only partially support this model, resulting in a more complex picture. Due to the large sample size, almost all the correlations between one variable and another were statistically significant. (See Table 4.7 on the next page.) However, some of the correlations were too small to be meaningful. A stepwise regression with all the demographic and family variables entered was done with positive values as the dependent variable (Table 4.8 (a-c)) and again with social competencies as the dependent variable (Table 4.9 (a-c)). Adding the demographic variables accounted for an additional 5.3 % of the variance in positive values, increasing the total r^2 from .256 to .309 (see Table 4.8(b)). Adding the demographic variables to the regression model for social competencies added another 6.1% to the total variance explained, increasing the total r^2 from .261 to .322 (see Table 4.9(b)). In the regression model for positive values, 5 variables were statistically significant at the .000 level (Table 4.8 (c). For social competencies, seven variables were statistically significant at the .000 level (Table 4.9(c).) The paragraphs following the output tables will take a closer look at the results pertaining to each demographic variable.

Table 4.7

Demographic Variables Correlations with Family Variables, and Outcome Variables

	Grade	Gender	Mother's Education	Two Parent Home
Positive Family Communication	-.131**	.046**	.117**	.100**
Positive Family Relationships	-.121**	-.018	.140**	.104**
Maintaining Standards	-.083**	.012	.119**	.120**
Positive Values	-.145**	.249**	.082**	.080**
Social Competencies	-.094**	.239**	.145**	.095**

Pearson's Correlations
**significant at the .000 level

Table 4.8 (a-c)

Results of SPSS Stepwise Regression for Positive Values Family and Demographic Variables Entered

Table 4.8(a)

Statistically Significant Variables Entered in Order of Relative Strength
N = 6013

Model	Variable Entered
1	Positive Family Communication
2	Gender
3	Maintaining Standards
4	Positive Family Relationships
5	Grade

Table 4.8(b)

Regression Model Summary For Positive Values

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.453(a)	.205	.205	.66884
2	.507(b)	.257	.257	.64640
3	.540©	.292	.292	.63122
4	.554(d)	.307	.306	.62472
5	.557(e)	.310	.309	.62329

a Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication
b Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender
c Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Maintaining Standards
d Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Maintaining Standards, Positive Family Relationships
e Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Maintaining Standards, Positive Family Relationships, Grade

Table 4.8©

ANOVA Results for Positive Values

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	692.784	1	692.784	1548.631	.000[a]
	Residual	2689.483	6012	.447		
	Total	3382.267	6013			
2	Regression	870.688	2	435.344	1041.915	.000[b]
	Residual	2511.579	6011	.418		
	Total	3382.267	6013			
3	Regression	987.674	3	329.225	826.295	.000[c]
	Residual	2394.593	6010	.398		
	Total	3382.267	6013			
4	Regression	1037.078	4	259.270	664.318	.000[d]
	Residual	2345.189	6009	.390		
	Total	3382.267	6013			
5	Regression	1048.222	5	209.644	539.640	.000[e]
	Residual	2334.045	6008	.388		
	Total	3382.267	6013			

Table 4. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

b Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender

c Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Maintaining Standards

d Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Maintaining Standards, Positive Family Relationships

Table 4. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Maintaining Standards, Positive Family Relationships, Grade

Table 4.9 (a-c)

Results of SPSS Stepwise Regression for Social Competencies
Family and Demographic Variables Entered

Table 4.9(a)

Statistically Significant Variables Entered in Order of Relative Strength
N =8072

Model	Variable Entered
1	Positive Family Communication
2	Gender
3	Positive Family Relationships
4	Maintaining Standards
5	Mother's Education
6	Two-parent Home
7	Grade

Table 4.9(b)

Regression Model Summary For Social Competencies

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.468(a)	.219	.219	.71001
2	.519(b)	.269	.269	.68692
3	.551(c)	.303	.303	.67081
4	.562(d)	.315	.315	.66508
5	.567(e)	.321	.321	.66240
6	.567(f)	.322	.321	.66206
7	.568(g)	.322	.322	.66180

a Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

b Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender

c Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Positive Family Relationships

d Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards

e Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards, Mother's Education

f Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards, Mother's Education, Two-parent Home

g Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Gender, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards, Mother's Education, Two-parent Home, Grade

Table 4.9 (c)

ANOVA Results for Social Competencies

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1143.998	1	1143.998	2269.299	.000[a]
	Residual	4068.748	8071	.504		
	Total	5212.746	8072			
2	Regression	1404.822	2	702.411	1488.595	.000[b]
	Residual	3807.924	8070	.472		
	Total	5212.746	8072			
3	Regression	1581.834	3	527.278	1171.774	.000[c]
	Residual	3630.912	8069	.450		
	Total	5212.746	8072			
4	Regression	1644.047	4	411.012	929.202	.000[d]
	Residual	3568.699	8068	.442		
	Total	5212.746	8072			
5	Regression	1673.122	5	334.624	762.628	.000[e]
	Residual	3539.624	8067	.439		
	Total	5212.746	8072			
6	Regression	1677.215	6	279.536	637.736	.000[f]
	Residual	3535.530	8066	.438		
	Total	5212.746	8072			
7	Regression	1680.468	7	240.067	548.128	.000[g]
	Residual	3532.278	8065	.438		
	Total	5212.746	8072			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family

b Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication

c Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family

d Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards

e. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards, Mother's Education

f. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards, Mother's Education, Two-Parent Home

g. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Family Communication, Positive Family Relationships, Maintaining Standards, Mother's Education, Two-Parent Home

Grade

Social competencies and positive values were negatively associated with grade level. Youth in higher grades reported lower levels of social competencies and positive values (See Figures 4.10and 4.11). They also reported lower levels of each parenting variable. The correlations between grade and the family variables were statistically significant, although very small---the highest being with Communication (-.131) (See Figure 4.11.) For both social competencies and positive values the association with grade level was statistically significant and was retained in the stepwise regression model. See the preceding tables, Table 4.7, Table 4.8 (a) and Table 4.9 (a). Grade came in fifth--after communication, gender, positive family relationships, and maintaining standards for positive values. For social competencies the results were similar, again grade level came in last--seventh place.

Figure 4.10

Bar Graph Showing Mean Social Competencies by Grade Level

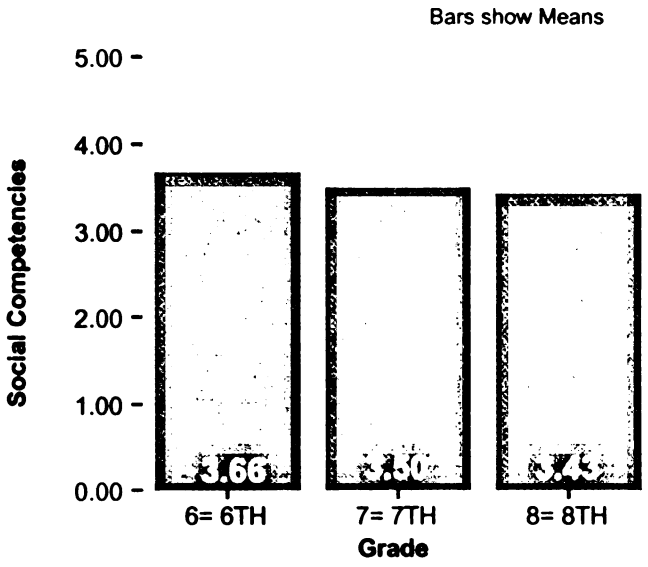


Figure 4.11

Bar Graph Showing Mean Positive Values by Grade Level

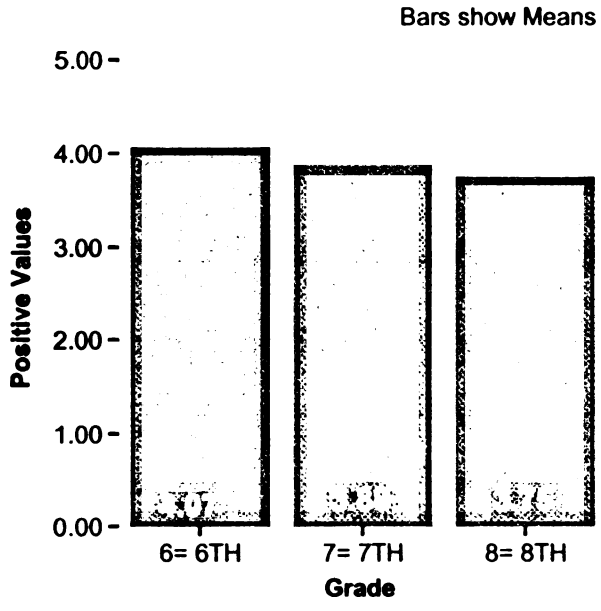
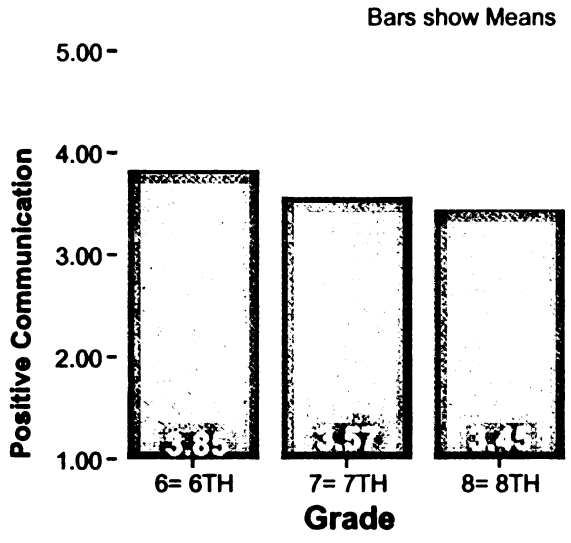


Figure 4.12

Bar Graph Showing Mean Communication by Grade Level



Gender

Gender was among the strongest independent variables, with males scoring significantly lower on both positive values and social competencies (see Figures 4.13 and 4.14). This is indicated by the Pearson's correlations of .249 and .239, respectively—both significant at the .000 level. Gender was also statistically significant in the stepwise regression models. In the regression model for positive values, gender explained an additional 5.2% of the variance after communication was accounted for. In the regression model for social competencies, gender explained an additional 5%. Gender had no statistically significant association with maintaining structure or positive family relationships. The association of gender with positive family communication did reach the level of statistical significance, but the correlation was so small (.046) that it is essentially meaningless, a product of the large sample size (Males had a mean communication score of 3.51. For females it was 3.60). Therefore, as measured by this

study, the effect of gender on positive values and social competencies is a direct effect, rather than one mediated through differing parenting styles for male adolescents and female adolescents.

Figure 4.13

Bar Graph Showing Mean Positive Values by Gender

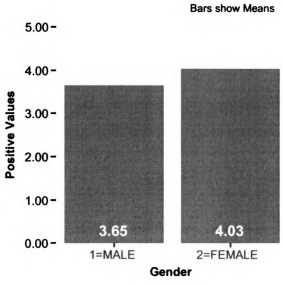
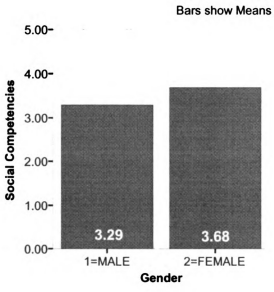


Figure 4.14

Bar Graph Showing Mean Social Competencies by Gender



Two-Parent Home

Family structure was coded binomially as the presence or absence of living in a two-parent home. The question asked did not differentiate between living with a parent and a step-parent and living with the student's biological or adoptive parents. Living sometimes with one's mother and sometimes with one's father was coded as not living in a two-parent (intact) home. Of the middle school students surveyed, 74.2% lived in a two-parent home. Living in a two-parent home had small positive associations with family/parenting variables and social competencies and positive values (See Table 4.7). The correlations were statistically significant at the .000 level, but again too small to contribute much to the overall picture. The strongest association was with maintaining standards, r =.120, mildly supporting previously reported findings that single parent homes monitor less or are less effective at maintaining standards. The associations of a

two-parent home with the parenting variables were stronger than the associations with the outcome variables, supporting the hypothesized model of demographic influence mediated by differences in parenting. For social competencies, however, the two-parent home variable was found statistically significant in the stepwise regression model, indicating it explained a tiny fraction of additional variance over and above that explained by family/parenting variables, and therefore, was not retained in the regression for positive values.

Educational Level of the Mother

All correlations for the educational level of the mother were again statistically significant, but of relatively minor importance (See Table 4.7). Families with more educated mothers were somewhat more likely to maintain standards, have positive family relationships, and have positive communication. Children of more highly educated mothers also scored slightly higher on social competencies and positive values. The regression model for social competencies retained educational level of the mother after the parenting variables and gender, adding an additional .006 to the *R* square value(See Table 4.9). In the regression models for positive values the educational level of the mother was not statistically significant. The strongest (but still weak $r = .145$) association of any *parent* demographic variable with another variable was the association of mother's educational level with social competencies. The educational level was not recorded as an interval or continuous variable, so the results are tainted by that fact. The survey responses were recoded into the following categories: 1= did not complete high school, 2 = completed high school, 3 = some college, 4 = completed college, 5 = graduate or professional school after college.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Conventional wisdom and scientific research has generally advocated a two-dimensional approach to parenting: love and limits, warmth and firmness. This study confirmed the importance of those two dimensions: maintaining or enforcing standards and warm, positive relationships. Both of these dimensions were associated positively with positive values and social competencies in the middle school youth surveyed. However, this study added an important factor to the composite of positive parenting that is often left out. It found frequent, positive, and open communication between adolescents and their parents to be the aspect of the parent-adolescent relationship most strongly associated with positive values and social competencies. It is also the most likely—out of the three parenting variables assessed in this study—to be weak or missing. This presents direction and opportunities for improving the outcomes for children. This chapter will review the major findings of this study and examine the implications for both future research and practical programming for families and adolescents.

Review of Major Findings

Findings About Family Variables

All the hypotheses proposed in this study were statistically supported by the results of this study. Higher levels of positive family communication, positive family relationships, and maintaining standards were each associated with higher levels of positive values and higher levels of social competencies, as reported by Michigan middle

school students taking the Search Institute's PSL--AB survey. It was also hypothesized that "students scoring higher on all three parenting variables will score higher on positive values and social competencies." This hypothesis was also supported. The correlations between the positive parenting total and positive values and social competencies were positive and were higher than the correlations between the individual parenting variables and the outcome variables. Thus, some additive effect is present. Having a parenting style that includes all three dimensions of parenting is associated with somewhat higher levels of positive values and social competencies than any single parenting dimension by itself. This adds to the considerable body of previous research demonstrating the positive effects of an authoritative parenting style. It also contributes to the research associating increased levels of developmental assets with positive developmental outcomes for youth.

Of the variables examined, positive family communication had the strongest relationship with both positive values and social competencies, although all the parenting/family variables were associated positively with the outcome variables. Positive family communication, maintaining standards, and positive family relationships also had a strong tendency to co-occur. Not surprisingly, families that had positive relationships with each other, where parents provide help and support when needed and often express love verbally, were also the families most likely to have positive family communication. Still, although over two-thirds of the students reported having positive relationships in their families, only about 44% reported having positive communication overall. Looking at the specific communication items measured, about half (52.1%) of the youth respondents in this survey reported that they would probably talk to their

parents about serious issues such as drugs, alcohol, or sex. Further, 60% agreed that they had lots of good conversations with their parents and 62% reported that their parents "often" or "very often" talk about what the child did in school. Clearly, there is considerable room for improvement on this dimension of parenting and family life.

In summary, the four most important findings concerning the parenting/family variables are as follows:

1. Positive family communication, positive family relationships, and maintaining standards were each found to have a positive relationship with positive values and social competencies.
2. Positive family communication was found to be strongest predictor of positive values and social competencies in this investigation.
3. The combination of all three parenting variables was found to strengthen the relationship with positive values and social competencies.
4. Positive family communication was found to be the weakest family variable for most middle school students surveyed.

Findings From Demographic Variables

Gender was one of the strongest predictors in the regression models for both positive values and social competencies, second only to positive family communication. Males reported significantly lower levels of positive values and social competencies than females. The correlations between family variables and gender were not statistically significant (positive family relationships and maintaining standards) or so low as to have no real world significance ($r = .046$ for gender and positive family communication). In other words, these young males did not report differences from females in

parenting/family dynamics. This demonstrates a direct effect of gender on positive values and social competencies rather than an effect mediated by parenting style.

Grade level was associated with the family variables, and the positive values and social competencies variables, with small, but statistically significant *negative* correlations. Grade level was significant in the regression models for both positive values and social competencies. This contradicts a common hope or expectation of parents and educators that positive values and the various social competencies would improve with age. As this study involved only student-reported perceptions, it may be that the decrease is more perceptual than actual. Possibly younger children have a slightly more idealistic perception of themselves and their families than do older children. During the middle school years, with so much biological and social adjustment, it also may be that there is a slight overall increase in general negativity of attitudes and behavior. While most of the current literature discounts the notion of drastic upheavals and storm and stress across the board, this interpretation is not incompatible with prevailing research and knowledge about early adolescence.

The following summarizes the major findings regarding the demographic variables:

1. Gender was the strongest predictor of positive values and social competencies after positive family communication.
2. The mother's educational level and having a two-parent home had very small, but statistically significant, association with social competencies.
3. Grade level was slightly negatively associated with positive values, social competencies, and the family variables.

Implications

Positive Values, Social Competencies and Ecological Considerations

The development of positive values, morals, character, and ethics does not occur in a vacuum. Parents and families do not exist in a vacuum. Nor does the association with positive parenting account for all, or even most, of the variance in adolescents' values and social competencies. Ecological theory emphasizes context and the interplay between systems. Today's youth grow up in a society that conveys mixed messages about such values as integrity, honesty, restraint, and responsibility. Adults do not always provide good role models in restraint, good decision-making, or quality friendships.

An effort to promote positive values and social competencies among youth must address these factors as well. "Moral development, like all human development, proceeds through social experience" (Pace, 2003, p. 258). These social experiences ideally include consistent messages, positive relationships, and opportunities for both discussing and practicing the positive values promoted. This study has confirmed the importance of certain social experiences within the family for the development of positive values and social competencies. However, these opportunities and caring relationships with adults who are genuine role models can and should occur in a variety of settings. According to Pace, "connections to the sacred and the cultivation of spirituality are also important aspects to moral and character education" (2003, p. 259). Churches and faith-based institutions, extra-curricular youth organizations, schools, communities, and the media all have a role to play. They can directly support and enhance the development of character and competencies in youth by offering specific

character education, opportunities for service to others, constructive, character-building activities, and positive messages about values through a variety of media.

They can also provide support, encouragement, advice, and training for parents, thus changing the norm for parents of adolescents to "go it alone" (YMCA & Search-Institute, 2002). Parents and others involved in building assets among youth should be viewed as partners with a common goal (Simpson & Roehlkepartain, 2003). This study confirms that the advice and training for parents should include supporting parents in maintaining standards, developing positive family relationships, and promoting positive family communication, all of which are associated with positive values and social competencies in youth.

Program Development

The most important and useful implication derived from this study is that there is considerable room for improvement in the dimension of parenting and family life found to be most strongly associated with positive values and social competencies, namely, positive family communication. It is a dimension of family dynamics that can be strengthened through programs designed to teach families parenting skills. Programs like this have been developed for the primary purpose of preventing drug abuse. Two well-researched and proven programs are Preparing for the Drug Free Years and the Strengthening Families: 10-14 program put on by Iowa State University Extension (Rick Kosterman, et al., 2001; Rick Kosterman, et al., 1997; Kumpfer & Tait, 2000). These programs have not only been documented in controlled studies to reduce or prevent drug and alcohol use, but have also been documented to improve skills, such as setting appropriate limits, increasing proactive communication, strengthening bonds and

improving relationships between parents and their children (Rick Kosterman, et al., 1997; R. Spoth, Redmond, Haggerty, & Ward, 1995). These 5 to 7-week programs involved parents and their children and were intended as a universal preventative intervention for the general population. Other versions of the Strengthening Families Program were designed for specific ethnic audiences. While these parent-training programs were not designed specifically to improve positive values and social competencies, this study suggests that programs that improve communication between youth and their parents and help parents maintain or develop appropriate standards and improve relationships may, indeed, produce those positive benefits as well as reduce risk behaviors.

A large obstacle preventing parenting programs from having a broad societal impact is that few parents choose to attend them voluntarily (McCurdy & Daro, 2001). Most parents expect to "go it alone" (YMCA & Search-Institute, 2002). Recruitment issues, barriers to attendance, and parental attitudes and concerns are areas beginning to be studied by researchers. A preliminary study from Search Institute and the YMCA of the USA reported five key findings (2002):

1. Most parents do not turn to friends, family, or community resources for support in parenting.
2. Parents with good relationships with their partners are more likely to feel successful as parents.
3. Most parents interviewed do feel successful as parents most of the time.
4. Job demands, sibling rivalry, over-scheduling, and financial stresses are among the challenges that make parenting harder.

5. The things parents thought would help them include talking to other parents, being affirmed for their parenting, advice from trusted professionals, and having other trusted adults spend time with their children.

Additional studies found that time-related factors were the reason most often cited by parents for not attending preventative programs for parents of young adolescents (R. Spoth & Redmond, 2000; R. Spoth, Redmond, Hockaday, & Shin, 1996). Additionally, certain segments of the parent population have "relatively low levels of motivation" for attending such programs (R. Spoth, et al., 1996). Many parents perceive their children as "already doing fine" and do not believe their child is at risk, so attending a parent-training program does not seem worthwhile (R. Spoth, et al., 1996). An exploratory study of the concerns of parents of middle school students found that parents were not worried about issues like sex and drug use—at least in the middle to upper-middle class community studied (Lewis, 2002).

Findings from this study, particularly if confirmed and expanded by further research, could be used to provide increased motivation for parents to attend preventative programming. Parents who are not concerned about potential drug use by their children may be motivated to improve the levels of positive values and social competencies in their children—especially if they realize there is a tendency toward decreases in these areas in the middle school years. Parents could be informed that, even in families where children report positive relationships, there may be a lack in the positive family communication that is most strongly associated with positive values and social competencies.

Parents surveyed for the YMCA/Search Institute study expressed opinions that affirmation as parents, talking to other parents, and receiving advice from trusted professionals would be helpful to them. These are things that can be provided by parent-training programming. The results of this study can also be used to provide the affirmation parents desire, as well as motivation. Affirmation does come from students who report that their parents are generally doing well in the important dimensions of positive relationships and maintaining standards in their families. The motivation is that improving these areas and especially improving communication may make a significant difference in the development of positive values and social competencies. If parents are not worried, and therefore motivated by, concerns of high-risk behaviors, perhaps a more positive motivation might seem compelling. It makes sense to promote and develop programs that assist parents proactively during early adolescence, before problems that are more serious develop, and before communication deteriorates further.

This study also points to another area of program design that warrants attention. Programs, organizations, mentors, and models that promote positive values and social competencies are important during the middle school years. While this research highlighted the role of families in relation to positive values and social competencies, ecological theory suggests families benefit from the support of the larger community. The reported decreases in positive values and social competencies during the middle school years can be addressed on many fronts. Findings from the data set used in this study show that time spent at home and involvement in religious communities drops during the middle school years (Keith, et al., 2002). This presents a challenge: keeping

youth involved in activities and environments that actively promote positive values and social competencies.

In regard to gender, this study raised questions rather than providing answers. Further research is needed. The middle school males surveyed reported significantly lower levels of positive values and social competencies. The differences in mean scores for positive values and social competencies by gender persist in late high school, with mean scores of 3.27 and 3.20 for males and 3.68 and 3.67 for females. The middle school males did not report differences in the family and parenting dimensions studied, however. Males in middle school and high school also report lower levels of involvement in religious communities, achievement motivation, school engagement, service to others, and are less likely to have relationships with adults other than their parents (Keith, et al., 2002). How might males be encouraged to participate in constructive activities? Are our institutions, such as schools and places of worship, designed to accommodate and engage young males? How might virtues, character, social competencies, and spirituality be modeled and presented so that they appeal to young males? Where are the masculine role models for strength of character and caring? What role does the media play? What roles do fathers play? It is clear there is a need for answers and the will to implement them.

Program Evaluation

Programs for youth, if they are evaluated for effectiveness at all, hope and expect to see improvement in measured outcomes. This study, along with the larger study from which the data was derived, found decreases in many assets as grade levels increased. Whatever the explanation for the decreases with age, if this pattern holds up after further

research, it is important knowledge for program developers, program evaluators, parents, and all those working with early adolescents. If, in general, self-reported levels of developmental assets tend to decrease in the middle school years, then programming for adolescents that appears to have had no positive effect, may have indeed prevented an expected decrease in developmental assets. It will be important for evaluators and others to understand whether these self-reported decreases are functions of perceptual changes or reflections of actual decreases in assets substantiated by other objective measures. Further research that involves some objective measure of developmental assets by outside observers can illuminate these issues.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study utilized secondary data generated from the Search Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior survey. This imposed several limitations. First, the only questions available were those designed to suit the original researchers' purposes. The PSL--AB provided a broad overview of adolescent life, but generally often had only one, two, or three items to measure each construct. The greater clarity, depth, and precision that may have resulted from additional questions related to the variables in this study were not available. For instance, students were asked about the likelihood of punishment if they broke one of their parents' rules. They were not asked what type of punishment would be imposed, or whether it seemed reasonable and fair, or harsh and excessive. The research literature would indicate that those are important distinctions.

The survey questions about parenting did not distinguish between mother-child dynamics and father-child dynamics—another instance where additional depth or precision may have been illuminating.

Future research about the nature, extent, quality, content, and dynamics involving family communication in the adolescent years is clearly warranted. What types of communication are most associated with positive values and social competencies? What can families do or not do to promote that type of communication? What factors make it most likely that youth will talk to their parents about serious issues? How much does the quantity of daily "what did you do in school today" type of communication matter? These are questions for additional research.

Additional research is also needed to address the perceptual versus the behavioral components of the variables studied. How well would the perceptions of middle school students regarding their own values and competencies match the perceptions of adults who know them or with objective measures of behaviors? In other words, are the parenting measures studied associated with adolescents who actually behave more honestly, responsibly, and with more caring and integrity? Also, previous research indicates that adolescents' perceptions of parenting practices do not necessarily match the perceptions of the parents themselves. Do parents perceive more positive communication in the home than do their children? Do parents accurately assess whether their children would be likely to come to them with serious issues or concerns? Additional research is also needed to provide an observational or third-party measure to assess the decrease in assets with grade level found in this study. Extending this research past the middle school age group is also an important next step, to assess whether the decrease in assets, found in this study to be associated with increasing grade level, continues into high school.

Another limitation posed by the use of the PSL--AB survey is that all the survey items do not use the same scale for the response options. All the "positive values" questions except the two measuring restraint had *not important*, *somewhat important*, *not sure*, *quite important*, and *extremely important* as the response options. For the other dependent variable, social competence, the response options stated, "People who know me would say that this is...*not at all like me*, *a little like me*, *somewhat like me*, *quite like me*, [or] *very much like me.*" Most of the independent variable items used a Likert scale of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *not sure*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree.* Some of the items however had a response scale of *very often*, *often*, *sometimes*, *seldom*, and *never.* Differences between variables may be affected by differences in the possible responses offered.

Additionally, this study is limited to adolescent-reported measures. Data obtained by direct observation of the researcher or the reports of others are not available. Multiple sources of data would have been ideal. Shared source variance may produce overestimates of the relationship between family variables and the internal assets of adolescents (Jackson, et al., 1998). For example, an extremely optimistic or pessimistic child could over- or under-report both family related assets and internal assets. However, many researchers have concluded that both objective and subjective assessments of parenting practices provide important information to the researcher (Lamborn, et al., 1991; Muuss, 1996; Shucksmith & et al., 1995). The adolescents' *perception* of parenting practices may be more predictive of outcomes than the parent's actual behavior (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). The use of the subjective point of view is also consistent with ecological theory (Muuss, 1996).

The conclusions and results of this study can only be generalized to similar groups of adolescents. Because the Michigan data from the PSL--AB is primarily from small and mid-sized cities and suburban areas, the conclusions cannot be applied to large-city, urban populations. The respondents in this study were also 90% White/non-Hispanic. A broad base of previous research on the effects of parenting style finds an authoritative parenting style generally effective across many cultures and ethnicities, but also finds differences among communities. Additional research among diverse communities would ascertain whether these findings apply to other populations of youth and families. The responses cannot be assumed to be representative of communities with a different cultural or ethnic composition.

Research should also be connected to community development efforts, cooperating with and sharing information with those involved in policy-making, programming, and intervention. Findings must be made available to parents and others motivated to promote positive youth development. The Search Institute's PSL—AB survey was designed with these youth development goals in mind. Research should continue to inform program development and include studies of intervention effectiveness. Recruitment barriers and programming specific to particular populations are areas for research focus (Lerner & Galambos, 1998).

Another limitation to the analysis presented here is the uneven distribution of missing data. Thousands of cases—roughly a third of the data set—were not able to be used in statistics using the positive values variable. This was not the case for statistics using the social competencies variable. How this affected the outcomes is not known.

Comparisons between the positive values variables and the social competencies variables should be made cautiously for this reason.

This study was also limited by its cross-sectional nature. Although previous research on parenting, including longitudinal studies, lends credence to the notion of causality, this study could not make that claim. It is possible that parents with children, who, for some other reason, are higher in positive values and social competencies, are more likely than other parents to have positive communication, positive relationships, and maintain standards. Certainly, a common sense view would maintain that it would be easier to have positive relationships with children who are socially competent.

It is also possible that some genetic disposition toward constructive social dynamics and values (shared by the parents and their children) influences both the parenting styles of the parents and positive values and social competencies of their adolescent children. In fact, it seems likely that these possibilities do account for some measure of the observed relationships. An ecological perspective expects bi-directional influence. Reality is generally more complex than any one study can explain. Even the most recent and most extensive studies of the relationships between genetic influences, family influences, and non-shared environmental influences, do not fully resolve or explain these issues.

A large, longitudinal study of families with adolescents that included sibling and twin comparisons found genes and genetic *change* important factors, but also found more family or shared environment influence than the authors expected (Reiss, Neiderhiser, Hetherington, & Plomin, 2000). The best research portrays a complex, multi-facetted picture of adolescent development, with much of the detail still out of focus and unclear.

Yet, the stakes are high. A generation of socially competent youth with strong and positive values is needed to shape the society of the future. While research continues, working together and putting into practice the best knowledge we have about raising competent, caring, moral, young people, is essential.

APPENDIX

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

May 19, 2003

TO: Joanne KEITH
203 Human Ecology

RE: IRB # 01-307 CATEGORY: 1-4 EXEMPT

APPROVAL DATE: March 4, 2003

EXPIRATION DATE: February 4, 2004

TITLE: BUILDING UPON BEST LIVES: A STATEWIDE AGGREGATE

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 REVISION.

REVISION REQUESTED: May 14, 2003

REVISION APPROVAL DATE: May 16, 2003

Change in the study investigators. Additional investigators will include Bruce Haas and Barbara Hillaker. Changes in the data analysis.

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@msu.edu.

Sincerely,

Ashir Kumar, M.D.
UCRIHS Chair

AK: jm

cc: Franciso A. VILLARUEL
107 Human Ecology
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