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# Comparison of Developmental Assets of Early Adolescents in Two Urban Youth Programs

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Keesha Yvette Chapman entitled "Comparison of Developmental Assets of Early Adolescents in Two Urban Youth Programs." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.

Jo Lynn Cunningham, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Julia A. Malia, Greer L. Fox, Katherine Greenberg

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn Hodges

Dean of the Graduate School

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COMPARISON OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS OF YOUTH IN TWO URBAN  
YOUTH PROGRAMS

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Keesha Yvette Chapman  
August 2007

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the presence of developmental assets of youth participating in two programs that have similar goals but are organized differently. One program was structured around a theoretical and empirical model of youth development (i.e., developmental asset framework) and one program was not organized around this framework. Gender was examined to determine if differences in reports of developmental assets existed across programs in relation to gender.

Data were obtained from 40 youth between the ages of 10 and 14 participating in both programs. A 47-item questionnaire was administered to participants in small groups at program sites. The questionnaire consisted of items that were similar to asset descriptions of the developmental assets framework. A subsample (5 youth from each program) participated in the interviews at each program site. In the interviews, participants were asked to talk about each of the 40 assets in relation to three contexts (i.e., home, school, program).

There were no differences in the number of developmental assets reported by youth across programs on the questionnaire. There was no main effect or interaction effect for gender by program. The result showed that there was no significant difference between gender across program type. Within the context of home, interview participants in both programs reported experiencing 21 or more assets. For the context of program, all interview participants in

program type 1 indicated that they experienced 21 or more assets. All participants in program type 2 indicated that they experienced between 0 to 20 assets within the context of program. Within the context of school, 4 of 5 participants reported 21 or greater assets and 1 participant reported experiencing 0 to 10. In program type 2, one participant reported experiencing 11 to 20 assets and 4 reported experiencing between 21 and 30 assets within the context of school.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Importance of Topic .....	2
Conceptual Perspective .....	4
Conceptual Model .....	8
Conceptual Definitions .....	10
Purpose .....	12
CHAPTER 2	
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Developmental Assets Framework .....	14
Internal Assets.....	25
Youth Development Programs.....	33
CHAPTER 3	
METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	38
Hypotheses .....	38
Design.....	38
Sample.....	39
Instrumentation .....	43
Data Collection.....	45
Data Reduction .....	46
Data Analysis .....	48
CHAPTER 4	
RESULTS .....	49
Quantitative Data .....	49
Qualitative Data .....	60
CHAPTER 5	
CONCLUSIONS .....	76
Discussion.....	77
Limitations.....	83
Recommendations for Research.....	84
Implications for Practice .....	86
REFERENCES.....	88
APPENDICES.....	100
VITA .....	102

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1	
Developmental Asset Descriptions .....	5
Table 2	
Demographic Profiles of Participants.....	42
Table 3	
Means and Standard Deviations for Developmental Asset Domains .....	50
Table 4	
Means and Standard Deviations for Developmental Asset Categories .....	51
Table 5	
Means and Standard Deviations for Developmenta Assets by Gender .....	54
Table 6	
Analysis of Variance for Developmental Assets Categories .....	56
Table 7	
Analysis of Variance for Developmental Assets for Developmental Asset Items.....	57
Table 8	
Assets Reported in Interview for Program, School, and Home Contexts.....	62

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Youth face many challenges today. Many developmental outcomes can be sorely affected by these challenges. During the period of adolescence, youth are attempting to gain autonomy and establish their identities. This process does not proceed without influence and support from various individuals in multiple contexts. There is an interplay between the developing adolescent and other environmental factors. Home, community, educational, and social environments all play a key role in the process of development and potential outcomes. In healthy environments, youth often have many of the resources necessary to experience positive development. Even so, it remains important that youth experience positive relationships and support for healthy development. When environments are not optimal, youth suffer. In communities where resources are limited and the adults often have grown hopeless and apathetic, youth are often left vulnerable and exposed to the risks that can exist in these communities. To counter the negative effects many youth face in these environments, there is a need for adequate resources and systematic, comprehensive programming.

Community-based programs can provide the support needed by many youth today. Participation in programs with structured activities can provide youth with an environment and resources to avoid the potential pitfalls that often plague this developmental period; these activities can supply them with skills, support, and guidance from caring adults as well from other positive peers. These

programs also can provide a safe haven for youth during after-school hours and on weekends. Programs may serve many purposes. Some focus on academic achievement or meet social needs, whereas others take more comprehensive approaches to youth development. Through more comprehensive investigation of program organization and planning, professionals can improve their understanding of programming and subsequently create programs that are more effective and beneficial to youth, their families, and their communities.

### **Importance of Topic**

Though many youth live in environments where they have resources and support for healthy development, many youth do not have these things available to them. Many live in neighborhoods that are characterized by disorder, poverty, crime, limited support from external sources, and an overall sense of despair. When neighborhoods experience concentrated poverty and the resulting effects, the outcomes are negative and often harmful. Quite frequently, these neighborhoods go unnoticed by larger social entities and the outcomes are often deleterious. Wilson (1987) referred to inner-city dislocation as urban ghettoization. The negative impact of this phenomenon is not limited to the neighborhood residents but extends beyond the neighborhood's physical parameters. The symptoms become apparent through high levels of crime and violence, poor academic achievement of children living in the neighborhood, and limited adherence to conventional norms by members of poor neighborhoods (Hill & Herman-Stahl, 2002).

For optimal effectiveness, programs serving youth living in disadvantaged communities must include useful activities and be prepared to implement goals and objectives that will benefit the *whole* child. Program planning and organization should include aspects that will foster positive development as well as arm youth with skills that are transferable; these skills enable youth to function beyond the program environment. To offset the effects of marginalized environments, professionals can take a comprehensive approach to program development, an approach that will foster resilience in youth. One way this can be accomplished is through the use of models that have a scientific basis and have been supported through research.

The developmental assets framework provides a basis from which to begin solid program planning, building, and evaluation. The developmental assets framework, developed by Search Institute, includes a number of areas that are critical for positive youth development. Researchers at Search Institute have identified a number of factors that appear to contribute to healthy youth development. These assets are described as “building blocks that all youth need to be healthy, caring, principled, and productive” (Scales & Leffert, p. 52). The 40 developmental assets represent specific areas that promote positive, healthy development. Developmental assets are grouped into two broad domains referred to as internal and external assets. The external assets include examples of relationships or experiences that can be provided to youth in multiple contexts of their lives; the internal assets include examples of the internal qualities that must be cultivated by institutions in which youth are involved (Scales, 1999). To

ensure positive youth development, it is necessary that individual assets as well as asset categories be given direct attention and nurtured. Within the framework of assets, various needs of youth are identified, but there are also implications for youth programs, families, and other organizations to assist youth in developing and nurturing these critical aspects of development. Table 1 includes a list of the 40 assets and a description of each.

### **Conceptual Perspective**

The developmental assets framework is a theoretical model that is grounded in theories of child and adolescent development and has been supported empirically. Researchers at Search Institute combined research with an extensive review of the literature on adolescent development to determine the factors that fostered positive development in chaotic or distressed situations and how youth managed to thrive in the face of substantial challenges (Benson, 1997). Search Institute is a nonprofit organization where researchers conduct and disseminate knowledge to address the needs of children, families, and communities in order to promote positive development. The foundation for the framework is the literature on prevention. By understanding the protective factors that inhibit risk-taking behaviors (e.g., drug use, early sexual activity) in which many young people participate, the researchers at Search Institute were able to that inhibit risk-taking behaviors (e.g., drug use, early sexual activity) in which many young people participate, the researchers at Search Institute were able to

Table 1  
*Developmental Assets Descriptions*

Assets	Descriptions
<i>External Assets</i>	
Support	
Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.
Positive family communication	Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively; young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more nonparental adults.
Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.
Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
Empowerment	
Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.
Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
Safety	Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
Boundaries and expectations	
Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.
Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
Positive peer influence	Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
High expectations	Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Table 1 continued

Assets	Descriptions
<i>External Assets</i>	
Constructive use of time	
Creative activities	Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
Youth programs	Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community
Religious community	Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
Time at home	Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.
<i>Internal Assets</i>	
Commitment to learning	
Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.
School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.
Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
Bonding to school	Young person cares about her or his school.
Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
Positive values	
Caring	Young person places high value on helping other people.
Equality and social justice	Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
Honesty	Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”
Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or use alcohol or drugs.

Table 1 continued

Assets	Descriptions
<i>Internal Assets</i>	
Social competencies	
Planning and decision making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
Positive identity	
Personal power	Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
Self-esteem	Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
Sense of purpose	Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”
Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

*Note.* Copyright 1997 by Search Institute. Adapted with permission of author.

construct a framework that provides a practical approach to assist concerned adults working with youth to curtail or prevent risky behavior practices.

The literature on resilience is also critical to the developmental assets framework. In the adolescent literature, resilience is often used to describe youth who are able to overcome significant adversity and challenges. The setbacks that some youth face include poverty, living in violent or otherwise dangerous communities, poor academic environments, absent fathers, and drug-abusing parents. Youth who are resilient have competencies and skills to help them overcome obstacles that impede optimal development. The experiences and activities that are included in the assets framework are important aspects of youth development. Youth who are involved in environments where assets experiences and activities occur have the additional support needed to overcome limitations and setbacks (Benson, 1997).

### **Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model for this research includes three categories of concepts that are related to youth development. The categories are: (a) developmental context, (b) participant characteristics, and (c) developmental outcomes. Context of development is important to consider because youth development is influenced in multiple contexts. Home, school, and community settings play a role in shaping youth. The activities and experiences of youth in these contexts can influence developmental outcomes. For example, some youth live in settings where they are engaged in few positive experiences and

interactions and the program environment and a program setting is the only context in which they experience positive things. Therefore, the context of development logically may be seen as influencing developmental outcomes. Additionally, the amount of time youth spend in these developmental contexts, particularly in community-based programs, may be associated with developmental outcomes. It is plausible that youth who spend more time engaged in prosocial activities will experience more positive overall developmental outcomes.

Characteristics of youth are also important to consider. Because individual and group characteristics exist, it is necessary to consider the impact these factors can have on development. Age, gender, and race are characteristics that can influence youth development. For example, gender may be important to consider because of the potential association between various program activities and the perception that some developmental asset experiences may be influenced by gender (Anderman & Kimweli, 1997; Beutal & Marini, 1995; Scales & Leffert, 1999). Various youth characteristics may be related to how youth experience certain developmental outcomes. Therefore, it is important to consider these characteristics because of their potential association with youth developmental outcomes.

Developmental assets can be considered potential developmental outcomes. They are factors that promote healthy development. Theoretically, it stands to reason, that youth who experience assets, especially to a greater degree, will have more positive developmental outcomes. Therefore, it is

important to consider the developmental assets and how youth development can be influenced by the experience of developmental assets.

### **Conceptual Definitions**

The developmental assets framework is a comprehensive youth development model created by researchers at Search Institute; it is used to describe what youth need to experience positive development. If youth are involved in activities and environments that equip them with fundamental skills and adequate resources, it is more likely that they will experience more positive outcomes. Developmental assets are assumed to be essential resources and experiences youth need to become positively functioning adults. The developmental assets have been identified as critical to positive youth development.

External assets are the contextual experiences youth need to foster positive developmental outcomes. Internal assets are the internal resources and skills youth possess that serve as the basis for becoming positively functioning adults.

The external domain is comprised of four asset categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. *Support* assets refer to the amount of care, compassion, and concern youth experience in their environments (i.e., home, school, community). Also, communication is an important aspect of this category. Within the lives of youth, it is important that parents and youth be able to communicate positively and rely

on parents for advice and suggestions for handling issues. The *empowerment* assets can be described as the opportunities youth are given to be useful in their communities and society in general. Additionally, the extent to which youth feel safe in their communities is also of import in this category of assets. The category of *boundaries and expectations* refers to the parameters that are set for youth at home, school, and in the community. Within these contexts, appropriate behaviors and expectations are identified as well as the potential penalties for not adhering to these rules. The final category of the external domain is constructive use of time. *Constructive use of time* assets represent the experiences in which youth are involved. Within this asset category, important activities and the amount of time spent in activities and settings have been deemed as necessary for optimal development.

The internal domain is comprised of four asset categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. The *commitment to learning* assets indicate the internal drive youth have to achieve and strive for academic success. The *positive values* category addresses the principles and ethics that are important to the healthy development of morality. Scales and Leffert (1999) identify this category of assets as internal compasses that guide the paths of youth. *Social competencies* are the assets that primarily address the skills youth need to make thoughtful decisions, maintain friendships, resolve conflict positively, and to resist negative peer pressure. Furthermore, these skills have been identified as fundamental to long term development (Davila, Hammen, Burge, Paley, & Daley, 1995; Milgram, 1996). The *positive*

*identity* assets represent how youth feel about themselves as well as how powerful they feel within their own lives.

### **Assumptions**

The major assumption that serves as a foundation for this research is that many youth participate in community-based programs and this involvement can influence the developmental outcomes youth possess. Program participation provides an additional outlet for youth. Involvement gives them the opportunity to receive academic support, social support, and developmental support. Many researchers have found that programs designed to focus on strengths and overall development in conjunction with providing support and guidance fosters positive developmental outcomes (Larson, 2000).

A second assumption underlying this research is that the developmental assets can be fostered in multiple contexts. Several researchers have addressed the effects of context on the development of young people. Family, school, and community appear to have great influence on developmental outcomes. Thus, it is important to understand how these environments influence how youth experience developmental assets. Benson (2003) suggested that youth are influenced by “multiple developmental ecologies” that affect developmental assets and potential developmental outcomes (Benson. 2003, p. 35).

### **Purpose**

Although the literature on youth development models and science-based practice is flourishing, the research continues to be limited, particularly with

regard to the developmental assets. The purpose of this study was to compare the presence of developmental assets of youth participating in programs with similar goals but different foci: organized around the developmental assets framework or not organized around the framework. One program is explicitly organized around the developmental assets framework and one program is not organized around the framework. One question was central to this project: Is there a difference in the numbers of reported assets for children participating in a program designed around the developmental assets framework and those who are participating in a program that is not designed around the developmental assets framework? The question was addressed in the following components: (a) whether there was a difference in assets in relation to program, (b) whether there was a difference between assets in relation to gender and program, (c) whether there was a difference across programs in participant reports of where support for developmental assets occurred, (d) whether there was a relationship between the amount of program participation and the number of reported assets.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Today families need additional support to counter the negative influences that exist in society. The assistance of other caring, nonparental adults and the mobilization of communities and community programs are critical to healthy development of youth. Effective community programs designed to support youth appear to be organized with positive developmental outcomes in mind. One way to create effective youth programs is to consider the research about youth development already available. The developmental assets framework provides a foundation from which to begin effective planning and subsequent evaluation.

#### **Developmental Assets Framework**

The developmental assets framework is used to describe a number of the factors that contribute to positive and healthy functioning for youth. It also offers a comprehensive view of development. Development within the context of the family is not the only aspect that is viewed as key or critical, but development within all contexts (i.e., community, youth programs, schools, churches) is considered essential and contributory to developmental outcomes. Furthermore, the developmental assets framework has been used extensively to assess the needs of youth. The framework has provided community leaders, teachers, mentors, churches, parents, and other caring adults with information needed to assist programs, communities, congregations, and families to structure avenues

that create opportunities for young people as well as promote optimal development (Quane & Rankin, 2006; Scales & Leffert, 1999; Scales & Taccogna, 2001).

Some might argue that certain contextual conditions increase the likelihood that youth will experience poor developmental outcomes; however, when there are supportive contextual factors to shore up environmental deficits, youth outcomes and experiences are often more positive. For example, the school environment has been found to provide protective factors for youth. When youth perceive their school environment as a caring community, they have higher achievement levels and fewer absences and engage in less disruptive behavior (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Minnard, 2001). Many researchers have offered evidence to support the relationship between resilience and positive youth development. Tiet and Huizanga (2002) found that youth living in socially disorganized neighborhoods with high crime rates demonstrated high levels of resilience despite adverse environmental conditions.

### External Assets

The developmental assets framework is composed of external and internal asset domains with eight categories. The external assets include examples of experiences and activities that youth need from their families, communities, school, churches and other organizations to experience optimal developmental environments. Additionally, internal assets focus on the internal characteristics that must be cultivated by these institutions. The external categories include

support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time.

Support. In the developmental assets framework, support is identified as the first of the eight asset categories. Support is a very broad concept and has been defined in various ways. Some definitions focus solely on care and concern, and others include a financial or material component. Within the context of the developmental assets framework, support is used to describe the care, love, and acceptance that youth experience in their environments (Benson, 1997). Some might argue that support is especially important during the developmental period of adolescence. There are many changes occurring during this stage (e.g., social, emotional, physical), and quite often youth need the additional support from others to navigate the uncertain terrain of this developmental period. When adults show care and concern despite the attempts of youth to distance themselves, youth perceive those individuals as reliable and supportive (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

Family support is one of the central support assets within the framework. For young people family support can be of critical import. Parental and family support can shelter children from various negative outcomes. Supportive parents exhibit high levels of concern, care, and passion, yet they are able to give their children the ability to evolve into independent, positively functioning individuals. Parents who are supportive tend to employ a more authoritative style of parenting and authoritative parents are both firm and loving. They tend to

nurture their adolescents' evolving autonomy by giving them the freedom to make decisions and provide guidance when necessary (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Through bidirectional communication, firmly established rules and standards, recognition of rights for both parents and children, and use of nonpunitive forms of discipline, authoritative parents are able to provide their adolescents with support needed to become positive adults.

A number of positive outcomes in youth have been attributed to parental and family support. Supportive parents are often included in Baumrind's (1968) explanation of "authoritative parenting." Supportive parents are less punitive than nonsupportive parent, but they have expectations of respect coupled with higher expectations and responsiveness. Supportive parents set rules and foster communication by encouraging bidirectional communication, which helps to create a positive relationship between parent and adolescent. From the extensive review of the literature to uncover the areas that contribute to positive development, Scales and Leffert (1999) reported that support from parents has been associated with lower alcohol use, higher self-esteem and self-worth, less delinquency and school misconduct, fewer eating disorders, and higher grades and standardized test scores. In most cases, the family unit is an important aspect of a child's life. Parents who exhibited supportive behaviors assisted their children with positive identity formation (Brody et al., 2006; Hartos & Power, 1997; Wills, Gibbons, Gerrard, Murry, & Brody, 2003). When youth experienced identity formation in a positive fashion, they were less likely to indulge in risk-taking behaviors than their counterparts who did not experience the support

needed for optimal identity development (Mannes, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2005).

Supportive parents provide protective effects for their children (Moore & Gleib, 1995; Wenz-Gross, Siperstein, Uncth, & Widaman 1997). Wenz-Gross et al. (1997) examined 482 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade adolescents and found that lower levels of family emotional support were associated with lower academic self-concept. Additionally, the support children receive from parents can be fostered through the support parents receive themselves. For example, Ceballo and McLoyd (2002) found that social support for mothers had a “beneficial impact on parenting behaviors” (Ceballo & McLoyd, p. 1317). Parents who had social outlets and other individuals with whom they shared their feelings could help reduce the some of the stress of parenting, thereby providing parents with more emotional availability for the child (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). Parents’ displays of support affect how young people view themselves and their abilities (Wentzel, 1994). Also, to further substantiate the role of parental support in the lives of children, Best, Houser, and Allen (1997) found that educational attainment was predicted by parental encouragement of autonomy and connection.

Positive family communication is an asset within the support category. When adolescents can openly communicate with parents, they are more likely to share feelings and seek advice and guidance from parents (Scales & Leffert, 1999). With this type of communication, youth and parents can build relationships based on trust and support, and youth become more likely to seek assistance in

difficult times from parents rather than peers. If family environments are positive and supportive, young people have an increased chance of positive development and better outcomes (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Although parent-child communication is essential to a young person's sense of support, interparental communication is very important. Parents' open and violent arguments or feuds can have negative impact on their children. In such environments, young people experience parents exhibiting high levels of aggression and conflict. Adamson and Thompson (1998) found that children who witnessed open conflicts between parents experienced heightened sensitivity to conflict. They found that children responded to their parents' arguments negatively, with boys from high-conflict homes being especially affected; such instances can cause children to act out in various ways (Adamson & Thompson, 1998). The outcomes of openly expressed parental conflict can become apparent in school (e.g., failing grades) or in emotional and behavioral ways (e.g., acting out). Although negative communication is a key aspect of conflict, there are various dimensions of conflict that influence child outcomes such as severity, frequency, and duration (Cummings, 1997).

Though parent support is important to the development of youth, support from other caring adults is also important. Participation of at least one nonparental adult or mentor in the life of a young person is crucial (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). With the need for many parents to be employed outside of the home today, it is especially important that there are other available adults who are willing to provide guidance and support to youth. Quite often the

role of the parent is not seen by youth as one that is conducive to providing friendship and support; therefore, it is helpful if there are adults available to youth who will not be viewed as punitive or judgmental. Through an ethnographic study of 23 youth, Laursen and Birmingham (2003) found that caring relationships served as protective factors. The young people in the study expressed an interest in spending time with adults and that quasi familial relationships were very important in establishing a sense of belongingness (Laursen & Birmingham, 2003).

Often, these nonfamilial adults provide modeling and support. Though it is true that the parent/child relationship is critical and contributes to positive developmental outcomes, a caring adult can play a similar role (Scales, 1999). In specific settings, nonparental adults fulfill important roles (Scales & Gibbons, 1996). Teachers, coaches, and ministers serve in specific roles and often they are in a position to affect youth in a variety of ways. The relationships with nonparental adults can evolve in various settings. Whether formal or informal, the mentoring relationship has been shown to be important to youth development (Zimmerman et al., 2002).

Empowerment. The second group of external assets is the empowerment assets. Empowerment is used to describe a sense or feeling of power. In the case of the developmental assets, empowerment is conceptualized as “feeling capable of reaching goals, sufficiently powerful to resolve personal problems” (Scales & Leffert, 1999, p. 51). It is also considered a social act. The empowerment assets category is composed of four assets. Each asset

represents what youth need to feel empowered in their communities. The empowerment assets are not limited to youth perceptions of their abilities, but Search Institute includes service to others, valuable roles, and safety as a part of the definition. Empowerment contributes to the overall well-being of youth, particularly vulnerable youth who frequently lack the community support, safety and other resources needed to feel empowered (Scales & Leffert, p. 51). The concept of empowerment is often related to concepts such as autonomy, contribution, and youth leadership (Benson, 1997; Scales & Leffert, 1999).

When youth live in communities where they experience limited support and value, they are more likely than their more positively functioning peers to participate in risky behaviors (Scales & Leffert, 1999). The empowerment assets identify specific needs of youth. Community values youth and youth as resources are two empowerment assets organized around community perceptions of youth and the roles available to youth in the community (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Communities where adults demonstrate interest and concern view youth as valuable to the community; youth in these types of communities are encouraged to contribute and they are respected. Furthermore, youth who fulfill useful roles within the community are provided with opportunities to participate, develop a sense of belonging, and contribute to change (Scales & Leffert, 1999). The empowerment assets (community values youth and youth as resources) are the least experienced by youth (Benson, 1997; Scales & Leffert, 1999). Youth are often viewed as problems in society. Popular and scholarly literature supports this belief (Benson, 1997). For youth to feel empowered and supported, parents

and other caring adults must show support and confidence in their abilities to make good choices and provided opportunities for youth to be of service (Scales, 1999). Several researchers have found relationships between adult support and lower risk of substance abuse, improved self-esteem, depression, delinquency, and negative peer pressure (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Resnick et al., 1997; Scales & Leffert, 1999).

Boundaries and expectations. The asset category of boundaries and expectations represents the rules and consequences that should be made clear to youth in their environments. These boundaries should identify what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Benson, 1997). This category of assets represents a clear specification about what is “acceptable, approved, celebrated, and what deserves censure” (Benson, 1997, p. 40). Furthermore, Scales & Gibbons, 1996 recommended that the adults involved in the lives of youth should not only make the consequences of infractions known, but they should also model the desired behaviors. Letiecq and Koblinsky (2004) found that fathers living in high-violence neighborhoods used modeling of specific behaviors as a survival strategy for their young. Though some of the fathers encouraged their children to “stand up and hit back,” many believed that if they demonstrated peaceful, nonviolent conflict resolution, they would also provide their young with survival strategies needed to survive in high-violence neighborhoods (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2004).

For a number of youth, their environments are populated with adults who do not model positive behaviors. These youth are left with few role models who

impart the knowledge and values or conduct themselves in a way that youth can emulate. Though they are expected to comply with established boundaries and expectations, youth are provided with inconsistent, unclear or insufficient signals (Benson, 1997). The responsibility of boundary setting is collective; adolescents share a responsibility with the adults involved in their lives (Benson, 1997). Boundaries and expectations are not limited to parental rules and regulations but they are important in other contexts, including schools and communities (Benson, 1997).

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**Constructive Use of Time.** Constructive use of time is another asset category under the external developmental assets. This category is comprised of creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time spent at home. Youth participation in any or all of these areas helps to reduce the probability that youth will engage in risky behaviors (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Benson (1997)

suggested that "involving children and youth in forms of structure is not just a nice thing to do; it is essential" (Benson, 1997, p. 42). Within these settings, adults are expected to promote positive behaviors and nurture skills through positive and constructive interactions.

Programs can provide a safe haven for youth during after-school hours and on weekends by providing youth with a positive outlet (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In impoverished neighborhoods, youth are often left to their own devices. In these communities, the resources are limited and the community adults have often grown apathetic, leaving youth vulnerable to the pressures that drive them to participate in behaviors that involve high levels of risk (Jarrett, 1996). The participation in structured activities and programs can provide youth with a place to avoid the potential pitfalls that adolescents fall into and these activities can supply them with skills, motivation, support, and other positive peers (Scales, 1999). Furthermore, structure in the lives of youth improves personal development and provides youth with adult connections that support or extend the involvement and capabilities of the family (Benson, 1997).

Under the constructive use of time category, families, caring individuals, and programs have been supplied with a listing of what is needed to foster healthier, more positive lifestyles among youth. Creative activities, such as music, drama, and art in various forms, have been associated with positive outcomes (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Participation in the arts or creative activities helps to foster discipline and skill in youth (Benson, 1997). Youth programs also provide youth with additional benefits. Like creative activities, youth programs

give young people more choices and outlets. An effective program can give youth the opportunity to participate in creative activities with positive adults and peers (Benson, 1997). The social interaction and exchange that occurs between youth and adults within a program setting promote the development of positive social skills necessary to be a positively functioning adult (Benson, 1997). Research on family influences has provided evidence for the notion that support from parents is greater than support from other sources such as school and neighborhood (Scales & Leffert, 1999). However, it is necessary that young people receive adequate support in all contexts to contribute to the “overall sense of support” perceived by young people (Scales & Leffert, p. 121).

### **Internal Assets**

The internal assets are defined as competencies and values that youth develop internally that assist them in becoming self-regulating adults (Scales, 1999). Unlike the external assets, which include environmental or contextual influences that affect youth development, the internal assets represent the inherent structures that youth possess (Scales & Leffert, 1999). That is to say, youth possess some of these assets naturally; however, these assets have to be nurtured within young people. When youth experience support and guidance from adults, peers, and organizations, these internal competencies will flourish (Benson, 1997). Commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity represent components of the internal asset category. These assets are fundamental to the process of development because, if they are

nurtured, the outcomes for youth improve and the likelihood increases that youth will become positively functioning adults (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

Commitment to learning assets. Commitment to learning is the first category in the internal assets domain. These assets represent a young person's dedication to learning and educational success; youth people who possess this asset value their abilities (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Commitment to learning is fostered through various means. The environment in which youth exists contributes greatly to this group of assets. Parents, teachers, school environment, economic well-being of the family, ethnicity, and gender all play a role in fostering the value that youth place on learning (Eccles, Early, Fraser, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). For example, young people living in poor families living with parents who do not value education may not place strong value on formal or academic achievement (McGrath & Repetti, 2000). For these families, it may seem more pertinent for the adolescent to consider working after high school where a commitment to learning job skills and competencies takes priority over academic achievement (McGrath & Repetti, 2000).

Parents seem to be influential in the lives of their young with regard to academic success, particularly mothers. Newman, Myers, Lohman, and Smith (2000) found that mothers of low-income, African-American young adolescents were very influential in the academic success of their children. The young adolescents participating in this study were considered to be "academically

promising” (Newman et al., 2000, p. 47). Of the high performers, 92% reported that their mothers were very supportive. Students who mentioned only one adult as being supportive tended to mention mothers more than they mentioned other adults (Newman et al., 2000). Mothers’ expressions of support and encouragement seem to provide young, disadvantaged adolescents with the desire to be successful in school.

*Positive values.* Positive values represent “widely shared beliefs that have benefits for both individuals and society” (Scales & Leffert, 1999, p.150). Caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint make up the positive values category of assets. Because some values that individuals hold can be viewed as negative, but represent an important belief (e.g. values of white supremacists), researchers at Search Institute were careful to identify this category as positive values (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Youth can experience support for the development of positive values in various contexts, home, community, school, and program. Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks, and Hoeksma (2007) found that youth who participated in organized youth sports were more likely to demonstrate prosocial beliefs and behaviors. Youth who demonstrated these behaviors had coaches who had good relationships with young athletes and exhibited high levels of sociomoral reasoning (Rutten et al., 2007). Reinders and Youniss (2006), through longitudinal analyses, found that youth who participated in school-based community service were more likely to demonstrate helping and caring behaviors. Also, the participants were more

likely to volunteer, vote, and be active in many forms of civic engagement (Reinders & Youniss, 2006).

Prosocial qualities such as caring, honesty, and interest in equality and social justice are only an aspect of the development of positive values. Youth who demonstrate positive values exercise restraint. Because the effects of drugs, negative, pressure, and sex can be harmful to outcomes of youth, restraint is an important aspect of youth development. Wallace and Fisher (2007) found that youth who had parents and peers who disapproved of substance abuse were more likely to express similar disapproval and exercise restraint from the use of substance. Similarly, Henry and Slater (2007) demonstrated the importance of peers and school. Henry and Slater found that students who attended a school where there were high levels of attachment to school by peers were less likely to use alcohol. Context, family, and peers play an important role in whether or not youth demonstrate positive values. Kuntsche and Jordan (2006) provided support for the role of context and peers; they found that youth who saw peers cannabis-intoxicated at school or taking cannabis to campus were more likely to use cannabis themselves. The abilities of youth to exercise restraint appear to be influenced by environmental factors.

**Social Competencies.** Social competencies represent the personal and interpersonal skills youth need to negotiate the abundance of choices, options and relationships they face (Scales, 1999). For young adolescents, these are the skills needed to make decisions, plan, and develop relationships with other

individuals. According to Benson (1997), social competence refers to adaptive functioning, in which young individuals may call on personal and environmental resources. Decision making, interpersonal and cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution together make up the social competencies category of assets (Benson, 1997).

Although adolescence is a period when many assume youth take more risks and participate in riskier behaviors, young people are beginning to experience situations that are novel to them (Larson, 2000; Scales, 1999; Scales & Leffert, 1999). It is plausible that their choices and responses to certain events evolve from limited experience and understanding. In a novel situation, they may be overcome by emotions, whereas adults have a basis from which to make better decisions because they tend to have more experience (Leffert & Peterson, 1996). Sexual activity is a key example of this; a young female may respond to pressure from a male peer to engage in sex without thinking through all of the possibilities, but an adult female in a similar situation may not feel the same pressure to respond without weighing possibilities and options.

Although the ability to make healthy, contemplated decisions is very important to adolescent development, there are other factors that must be considered as a part of this process (Best et al, 1997). Interpersonal and cultural competence are two areas that contribute to the development of social competence. The ability to understand and appreciate the differences and perspectives that exist among people and groups promotes greater social competence (Scales, 1999). Researchers have suggested that all children need

to develop an acceptance of themselves as well as a group identity (Scales & Leffert, 1999). For minority youth, development occurs within the standards of mainstream society, yet they learn to function within the context of their ethnic group. Racial/ethnic identity development is critical to youth development (McMahon & Watts, 2002).

Researchers have found that failure to develop an ethnic identity can weaken positive developmental outcomes. For example, Arroyo and Zigler (1995) found that when African-American adolescents did not identify with their race they experienced greater risk of psychological distress. Furthermore, McMahon & Watts, (2002) suggested that a strong positive ethnic identity was related to active coping, beliefs supporting aggression, and aggressive behaviors.

Resistance skills and peaceful conflict resolution are also among the social competence assets. Young people need role models who will assist in developing these skills. Adults involved in the lives of young people can nurture these skills through setting positive examples. Programs designed to foster these skills have some impact, but adult modeling plays a much greater role. Ennet, Tobler, Ringwalt, & Flewelling (1994) conducted a meta-analysis of DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and found that this program was not effective in preventing or reducing drug abuse, especially when compared to other approaches that were grounded in social skill-building. DARE's approach is primarily didactic and lacks the interactive teaching approach of other social skill building programs (Scales, 1999). With regard to resistance skills, it appears that

having greater knowledge of pressures that contribute to alcohol use helps young people exercise methods or resistance (Scales, 1999). When opportunities are rampant and harder to overcome, resistance strategies will help them avoid the temptation of participating in negative behaviors.

Positive Identity. Positive identity assets represent the last category of the internal assets. During adolescence, a primary developmental task is identity development. Young adolescents are entering a time when they will experience significant changes physically, emotionally, and mentally. Identity can be defined as an integrated view of oneself encompassing self-concept, beliefs, capacities, roles, and personal history (Scales & Leffert, 1999). According to Erikson (1968), identity emerges from experiences that youth have in various contexts. These experiences “merge to create a more evolved sense of self-identity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 211). Today, young people face many challenges and the difficulties in establishing an identity are immense.

Furthermore, peers have a significant impact on how youth perceive themselves. Youth, in an attempt to achieve popularity or improve relationships, adopt images that are not uniquely their own. For example, a young male might begin to smoke marijuana with other adolescent males to be a part of the group and to be viewed by others as popular. His self-image is largely determined by the perceptions that others have of him. Cooley (1902) described this as the looking-glass self. The looking-glass self is defined as “any idea, or system of ideas, drawn from the communicative life” (Cooley, 1902, p.179). Thus, the

information communicated to young adolescents about themselves becomes what they believe.

The positive identity assets are very important to the process of identity development (Benson, 1997). When these assets are nurtured, youth become better equipped to handle the stressors from peers and other social influences, and they feel good about themselves (Benson, 1997). Although all of the assets represent areas that are critical to the developmental process, positive identity assets are especially important because young people who have successfully resolved the challenges and issues of adolescence in a positive fashion have a greater chance at being able to cultivate the other assets (Benson, 1997).

Personal power and self-esteem are two of the assets within the positive identity category. Personal power is defined as a “feeling of having some measure of control over things that happen” (Scales & Leffert, 1999, p.196). Power is related to locus of control, which refers to the perception of a causal relationship between behavior and consequences (Scales & Leffert, 1999). That is to say, young people who see an outcome of behavior as outside of their control have adopted an external locus of control, whereas young people who view the outcome as being under their control have a more internal locus of control. For example, Miller, Fitch, and Marshall (2003) found that children who had chronic behavior problems scored higher on levels of external locus of control. They found that students who believe it is their choices that determine outcomes more than chance or external forces make more effective decisions (Miller et al., 2003). Therefore, they suggested that because they tended to hold

an external locus of control, the students in the alternative education program were more likely to exhibit chronic behavior problems.

The familial environment can influence how young adolescents perceive themselves and their abilities. Mandara and Murray (2000) examined the impact of marital status, income, and family functioning on 116 African-American adolescents. For both females and males, family functioning was a strong predictor of self-esteem. Parental marital status was not related to females' self-esteem; however, males with nonmarried parents were at risk for low self-esteem. Flouri (2004) provided further support for the influence of parents and other family members on self-esteem. Data were collected from mothers, fathers, and adolescent children; children's report of their fathers' involvement was positively related to children's self-esteem.

### **Youth Development Programs**

Youth programs designed to support positive youth development are very important to the developmental process. After-school programs, church youth programs, and community-based programs all play a significant role in the lives of youth (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). There is a considerable amount of variability among programs. Often, programs are designed to meet specific needs (e.g., to provide academic support, to provide spiritual development, to keep youth busy and off the streets), but few programs give attention to comprehensive developmental outcomes. Many adults involved with youth

programs have various thoughts about the purposes of programs in which they are involved (Halpern, 1999).

The program atmosphere in the most effective youth programs is youth-centered and one of hope, which is important to participants. The atmosphere mimics that of a caring family in which adults model positive, responsible behaviors and give youth room to develop in a safe and nurturing environment (Halpern, 1999). Program activities give youth opportunities to bolster skills and talents as well as introducing them to novel experiences. Roth & Brooks-Gunn (2003) suggested that activities that have links to education are important to programming. When these activities are presented in a manner different from that used in school, they are more effective (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Program participants and staff offer a wide range of purposes when asked about program purpose. Some have identified adult supervision, providing cultural enrichment, preventing involvement in risky behaviors, and providing recreational activities as important (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004). Though these activities provide a more positive alternative for many youth, many programs are not purposeful about promoting youth development (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004).

Youth can benefit greatly from programs that take a comprehensive approach to youth development for many reasons. It has become vital that families rely on additional resources and support for youth. The traditional family structure is diminishing, and more dual-earner and single-parent families are in existence (National Research Council, 2002). For many youth and families these

changes pose significant challenges. Youth development programs can support families, in ensuring that healthy development occurs.

Researchers have demonstrated the positive influence programs can have on youth. Program participation has been related to educational achievement, physical and sexual health, emotional and mental health, and overall well-being (Child Trends, 2002). Youth development programs meet the needs of youth in various ways. Effective programs have been identified by professionals and researchers as programs created to reduce problem behaviors and promote healthy overall development (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Other researchers have suggested that effective programs include curricula that address youth developmental objectives such as moral competence, prosocial norms, cognitive and emotional development, or bonding (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999). Others have suggested that programs targeting specific behaviors (e.g., smoking, substance abuse) are more important than focusing on academic achievement or relationship building (Biglan, Ary, Smolkowski, Duncan, & Black, 2000).

Many programs are focused on prevention; others are focused on intervention. Though no single approach to intervention and prevention will effectively engage all youth or meet the needs of all youth, effective programs include many components (Committee on Community Level Programs for Youth, 2000). Effective programming involves schools, churches, and community agencies; it also involves collaboration among families, schools, and community (Messias, Fore, McLoughlin, & Parra-Medina, 2005; Rubin & Billingsley, 1994). In

addition to addressing developmental needs directly, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) suggested that effective youth development programs have essential elements that help to foster positive youth development.

Many researchers have suggested taking a more comprehensive approach to working with youth. This approach is not limited to addressing the needs of youth but includes various aspects of their lives. Family and other contexts are important to youth. These contexts provide critical resources and socialization. Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, and Arthur (2002) suggested that any program efforts to support youth should be comprehensive and include an emphasis on parent education. Programs organized around theoretical models are grounded in theory and tend to be comprehensive. Many researchers have suggested that youth in programs organized in this manner provide youth with many benefits (Biglan & Ary, 1996; National Research Council, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Biglan & Ary (1996) found that youth who participated in a comprehensive community intervention had lower rates of smoking as compared to youth living in noncommunity intervention programs.

Youth participation in community programs always provides youth with positive opportunities and experiences, but it also serves as a protective factor for many youth living in disadvantaged communities (Quane & Rankin, 2006). Researchers have found that after-school, community-based programs contribute to the overall well-being of urban minority youth who are often at increased risk for poor developmental outcomes (Baker & Witt, 1996; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). In impoverished neighborhoods, youth are often exposed to antisocial

behaviors, poor adult role models, and peers who engage in high-risk, delinquent activities. For example, South, Baumer and Lutz (2003) found that youth living in neighborhoods where poverty was high were more likely to associate with and be influenced by peers who did not value education.

Schinke, Cole, and Poulin (2000) found that economically disadvantaged youth participating in a nonschool program where the focus was to enhance outcomes as well as include interactions with adults, leisure reading, writing activities, community service opportunities, and games to enhance cognitive skills experienced improved academic outcomes (i.e., higher scores on measures of reading, verbal skills, writing). Furthermore, teacher reports of overall school performance for youth involved in the intervention program were more favorable when compared to members of the control group (p. 59)

Thus, there is solid support for the benefits that youth experience within the context of youth development programs. Whether programs that are organized around theoretical or empirical models, such as the developmental assets framework, are more effective is less clear. Currently, research is limited with respect to benefits youth may experience when participating in theoretically and/or empirically based programs.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

This research was descriptive and exploratory in nature. The relationship between program organization and theoretical models has not been heavily examined in the literature and there is limited information related to the developmental assets framework and program examination; this study was designed to add to the existing information related to this topic.

#### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were central to this research: (a) There is a difference in the number of assets for youth participating in a program organized around the developmental assets framework and the number of assets for youth participating in a program not organized around the developmental assets framework, (b) there is a difference in developmental assets across programs in relation to gender, (c) there is a relationship between level of participation and the number of assets reported by participants, and (d) there is a difference in the developmental assets across the contexts of home, school, and program.

#### **Design**

The research design of this study was a group design. There were three independent variables for this study. The variable of program type had two levels related to how the programs were structured: One program was structured

around a theoretical model (i.e., the developmental assets framework) and one program was not organized around the model. Age and amount of participation were the other variables considered in this study. Although both programs were similar in approach and activities, they were different with respect to organization. The dependent variables examined in this study were the total number of assets, number of internal and external assets, and number of assets in each category.

### **Sample**

Two programs located in a midsize city in the southeast U.S. were selected for the study. Program 1 and Program 2 were two faith-based, inner-city youth development programs with similar goals; both programs were urban community-based programs. The programs served children living in relatively high-risk environments (e.g., high poverty, high crime). Program selection was based on program structure as well as the population served by each program. Program 1 was organized around a theoretical youth developmental model and Program 2 was not. Program 1 served approximately 650 children living in urban communities; the program had three sites located in north, east, and northwest areas of the city and the northern site was selected for this sample. Program 2 served approximately 60 children living in the northern part of the city. Program 1 served a variety of youth in terms of ethnicity and SES. Program 2, however, is located in an African-American community and the participants were predominantly African-American youth who lived in the surrounding housing development.

At enrollment, participants and parents in both programs were asked to give permission to participate in research projects that occurred within the program. Therefore, all eligible children were asked to complete the questionnaire for program purposes, but only children who returned parental consent for this project were included in this study.

### Full Sample

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher took consent forms to both program sites. Forms were distributed by one staff person at each site. A total of 43 forms were delivered through Program 1. In addition to distributing the forms, the program staff member contacted parents in an attempt to ensure that children delivered forms as well as to remind parents to review them and return the forms whether or not they were interested in participation. The researcher and program staff member collected 22 parent consent forms. Of the 22 consent forms, 2 of the returned forms did not include parental permission to participate.

A total of 24 forms were distributed through Program 2. The program staff member distributed the forms to all eligible participants. As forms were returned, the researcher was contacted to collect them. The program staff member asked parents of participants who had not returned forms to sign the forms indicating whether or not the child could participate. At that meeting, three parents did not give permission. One youth was not available to complete the questionnaire.

To be eligible for participation, youth had to be active program participants, and between 10 and 14 years of age with parental consent. The final sample included 40 participants (20 participants from each site). Participants in the final sample ( $N= 40$ ) included 13 females (32.5%) and 27 males (67.5%) who were participants in one of the programs during the summer of 2005. Demographic information is presented in Table 2.

### Subsample

From the total sample, 10 participants (5 at each site) were included in a subsample for additional examination. Selection of participants was based on level of participation and attendance. Children at each program who had a record of high, continuous participation were asked to take informed consent statements to parents. Although one participant for each age (10-14) was selected to be interviewed, two participants in each age category were provided consent forms. In the event that both participants returned forms, records were evaluated to determine which child had the highest level of continuous participation. Once participants were selected, the researcher asked a program staff member to assist in scheduling individual interviews. All participants signed assent forms prior to being interviewed. The final subsample ( $N= 10$ ) included 6 males (60%) and 4 females (40%). In Program 1, 2 interview participants (1 female and 1 male) were African-American, 2 participants (1 female and 1 male) were

Table 2  
*Demographic Profiles of Participants*

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Variable	Number
Gender	
Female	13
Male	27
Race	
White	12
Black	27
Other	1
Age	
10	12
11	7
12	9
13	10
14	2

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Note.  $N = 40$ .

Caucasian, and 1 participant (1 male) was biracial. In Program 2, all interview participants (2 females and 3 males) were African-American.

### **Instrumentation**

Two instruments (i.e., questionnaire and interview schedule) were used in this study. Both instruments were based on the developmental assets framework. The questionnaire included 47 developmental asset descriptions because some items were divided into multiple statements and the interview schedule included 40 items, one for each asset. The questionnaire was used to assess the number of assets youth reported across both programs, and the interview was designed to elicit information about context (i.e., where youth experienced assets or where assets were fostered).

In the 47-item questionnaire, each asset statement in the developmental assets framework was included with Likert-type response categories. In an attempt to avoid complex statements for participants, some asset statements were separated to create multiple questionnaire items. For example, the safety asset (young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood) was divided into three statements reflecting each individual context. The response categories included never (1), sometimes (2), often (3), and always (4). At the end of the questionnaire, demographic items were included for gender and age. The questionnaire is included in Appendix A. Similar to the questionnaire, the 40-item interview was organized around the developmental assets framework. Probes were included as a part of the interview schedule to make sure that

participants provide responses for all of the desired locations (i.e., home, school, program). The interview schedule is included in Appendix B.

From the total sample, 10 participants (5 at each site) were included in a subsample for additional examination. Selection of participants was based on level of participation and attendance. Children at each program who had a record of high, continuous participation were asked to take informed consent statements to parents. Although one participant for each age (10-14) was selected to be interviewed, two participants in each age category were provided consent forms. In the event that both participants returned forms, records were evaluated to determine which child had the highest level of continuous participation. Once participants were selected, the researcher asked a program staff member to assist in scheduling individual interviews. All participants signed assent forms prior to being interviewed. The final subsample ( $N = 10$ ) included 6 males (60%) and 4 females (40%). In Program 1, 2 interview participants (1 female and 1 male) were African-American, 2 participants (1 female and 1 male) were Caucasian, and 1 participant (1 male) was biracial. In Program 2, all interview participants (2 females and 3 males) were African-American.

Reliability for this questionnaire is based on test-retest comparisons made by Cunningham and Redmon (2004). In a pilot study, 16 adolescents participating in the summer program at Program 1 were asked to complete a questionnaire similar to the one used in the present research several times. Participants included 10 African-Americans and 6 Caucasians between the ages of 11 and 13. The questionnaire results were compared using three different

methods of data collection: (a) questionnaire administered by staff member known to the youth and with participants' names included on responses; (b) questionnaire administered by research not known to the youth and with participants' names included on responses; and (c) questionnaire administered by researcher not known to youth and with only code numbers included in responses. The questionnaire was administered using these three conditions at 1-week intervals. There were no significant differences in responses over the three assessments.

The questionnaire was pilot tested with two children within the age range of the sample. One participant was a 10-year old female, and the other was a 12-year old female. Participants were asked if they thought any of the questions seemed awkward or unclear. One participant indicated that one statement (I believe it is important not to be sexually active) was somewhat awkward and hard to answer with the Likert-type responses. This was also true for the interview statement related to the same asset item. The other participant did not identify any statements as awkward or unclear.

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire adapted from the developmental assets framework was used to collect data in the initial phase of the project. Questionnaires were administered in small groups (no more than five participants per group) during regular program hours by the researcher. The questionnaire was administered in an unoccupied space at each site. Participants were provided an assent

statement which was read aloud by the researcher. After assent forms were signed and collected, the participants were asked to complete questionnaires. The researcher read the instructions and asked the participants to follow along with her as she read questionnaire statements. The researcher read the statements aloud, and participants were asked to circle responses that best described their experiences. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions or for clarification of questions. At the end of the questionnaire session, the researcher collected questionnaires and separated them based on whether or not parental consent had been signed and returned.

After the questionnaire phase of the project was completed, the researcher selected 10 of the participants (i.e., 5 per site) for additional data collection. For privacy and confidentiality, a small meeting room at each site was used to conduct interviews. The interview was divided into two sessions (about 30 minutes each) with each participant. The interview was structured in a conversational format, and each interview was audiorecorded. In addition, the researcher recorded notes on the interview schedule. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification. At the end of the second interview, each participant was given a gift bag that included water bottles, snacks, pens, pencils, and posters from a local university.

### **Data Reduction**

The developmental assets score was based on the 4-point Likert responses; however, the responses to the questionnaire were recoded into dichotomous

responses. This was done to indicate whether or not participants possessed or experienced individual assets. Responses of 1 and 2 were recoded to indicate that the asset was not experienced and responses of 3 and 4 were combined to indicate that the asset was experienced. After the data were entered twice, the two data sets were compared. Any inconsistent entries were checked against original questionnaires and corrected. The questionnaire data were entered into one Microsoft Excel file and then imported it into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical program.

With regard to the interview, aspects of the interview data were converted to numerical data. The interview probes yielded responses related to where participants experienced the developmental assets (i.e., home, school, and program). If participants indicated that assets were experienced in a specific context, the response was coded as 1. Individual assets were combined to create the asset categories (i.e., support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity). The categories of assets were collapsed further to create the asset domains (i.e., external and internal). If they reported that an asset was not experienced in a specific context, the response was coded as 2. Additionally, the researcher transcribed interviews and assigned pseudonyms to participants. The interviews were read by the researcher and checked to ensure that responses to all probes related to context were recorded correctly. A data file was created for each context. The responses to the probes were transferred to a Microsoft Excel data file. A response of yes or no, as

indicated in the interview checklist, was recorded for each of the three contexts. A 1 was recorded when a response of yes was given for any context. For a response of no, the number 2 was recorded. After the data were entered twice, the two data sets were compared. Any inconsistent entries were checked against original interviews and corrected. The converted interview data were entered into a Microsoft Excel file and then imported it into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical program.

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS Version 14 was used to analyze quantitative data. Descriptive analyses were computed, including means and standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. A  $p$  of .05 was used to determine significance for all inferential statistical tests. The researcher used multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test for group differences related to the central research question. The MANOVA was used to test for differences between programs in total assets, assets in each domain, and assets in each category. Additionally, differences by program in relation to gender were examined for total developmental asset scores, asset domains, and asset categories. Age was included in the statistical analyses as an additional variable. Pearson's  $r$  was used to examine whether there was a relationship between age and the number of assets reported as well as between the amount of participation and the number of assets reported.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Total asset scores were calculated for participants in each program. Participants in Program 1 had a mean of  $29.45 \pm 6.42$  and participants in Program 2 had a mean of  $27.10 \pm 7.07$ . Mean scores were also calculated for asset domains (i.e., external and internal) and asset categories for each program. The results are included in Table 3. The mean scores for each program and each asset are included in Table 4. With regard to gender, total asset scores for females participating in Program 1 were  $29.71 \pm 6.15$  and females in Program 2 had a mean of  $29.83 \pm 6.21$ . Total asset scores for males in Program 1 were  $29.31 \pm 6.79$  and scores for males in Program 2 were  $25.93 \pm 7.31$ . Means scores and standard deviations for asset domains and categories by gender and program are included in Table 5.

#### Quantitative Data

There were no differences between programs in number of assets,  $F(1, 39) = 1.21, p = .28$ . There were no differences between programs in number of external assets,  $F(1, 39) = 2.28, p = .14$ . Additionally, there were no differences between programs in number of internal assets,  $F(1, 39) = 0.04, p = .84$ . There were no differences between programs in asset category scores. These findings are summarized in Table 6. Also, as indicated in Table 7, there were no differences between programs in individual asset scores.

Table 3  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Developmental Asset Domains*

Assets	Program	M	SD
<i>Domain</i>			
External	1	3.05	0.42
	2	2.86	0.40
Internal	1	3.19	0.44
	2	3.16	0.48
<i>Categories</i>			
Support	1	3.20	0.56
	2	3.17	0.42
Empowerment	1	2.75	0.49
	2	2.57	0.65
Boundaries and expectations	1	3.26	0.49
	2	3.24	0.74
Use of time	1	3.01	0.56
	2	2.46	0.75
Commitment to learning	1	3.03	0.64
	2	2.90	0.56
Positive values	1	3.15	0.49
	2	3.17	0.63
Social expectations	1	3.13	0.48
	2	3.12	0.47
Positive identity	1	3.48	0.51
	2	3.48	0.57

*Note.* Program 1 represents program organized around developmental assets framework. Program 2 represents program not organized around developmental assets framework. *N* = 20 for each program.

Table 4  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Developmental Assets Categories*

Assets	Program	M	SD
<b>Support</b>			
Family support	1	3.75	0.55
	2	3.85	0.36
Parental family communication	1	3.00	0.97
	2	2.45	0.89
Other adult relationships	1	2.90	0.85
	2	3.15	0.93
Caring neighborhood	1	2.80	1.15
	2	2.80	1.15
Caring school climate	1	2.95	1.09
	2	3.10	0.91
Parent involvement in school	1	3.80	0.52
	2	3.65	0.67
<b>Empowerment</b>			
Community values youth	1	2.90	0.91
	2	2.60	1.04
Youth as resources	1	2.70	0.86
	2	2.45	1.05
Service to others	1	2.00	0.85
	2	1.90	1.02
Safety at home <sup>a</sup>	1	3.65	0.58
	2	3.40	0.57
Safety at school <sup>b</sup>	1	3.15	1.04
	2	3.40	0.82
Safety in community <sup>c</sup>	1	3.35	0.81
	2	2.90	1.02

Table 4 continued  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Developmental Assets Categories*

Assets	Program	M	SD
<b><i>Boundaries and expectations</i></b>			
Family rules	1	3.40	0.75
	2	3.55	0.76
Family monitoring	1	3.50	0.68
	2	3.15	0.87
School boundaries	1	3.75	0.44
	2	3.35	0.93
Neighborhood boundaries	1	2.30	1.17
	2	2.45	1.12
Parent role models	1	3.55	0.88
	2	2.45	1.27
Nonparental role models	1	3.25	0.76
	2	3.15	0.93
Positive peer influence	1	2.90	0.72
	2	3.40	0.82
Parent high expectations	1	3.65	0.61
	2	3.75	0.55
Teacher high expectations	1	3.50	0.68
	2	3.10	1.07
<b><i>Constructive use of time</i></b>			
Practice	1	2.55	1.27
	2	2.05	1.14
Youth programs	1	3.10	1.07
	2	2.90	1.12
Religious community activities	1	3.35	0.87
	2	2.65	1.22
Time at home	1	3.35	0.99
	2	2.25	1.02
<b><i>Commitment to learning</i></b>			
Achievement motivation	1	3.75	0.63
	2	3.75	0.63
School engagement	1	3.55	0.60
	2	3.40	0.82
Homework	1	2.70	1.03
	2	2.55	1.05
Bonding to school	1	2.55	1.09
	2	2.90	0.92
Reading for pleasure	1	2.60	1.18
	2	1.90	0.91

Table 4 continued

Assets	Program	M	SD
<b>Positive values</b>			
Caring	1	3.35	0.81
	2	3.50	0.82
Equality and justice	1	3.45	0.75
	2	3.45	0.88
Acting on convictions	1	3.15	0.87
	2	3.30	0.97
Standing up for beliefs	1	3.20	0.76
	2	3.15	0.87
Honesty	1	2.50	0.76
	2	2.65	0.98
Responsibility	1	3.30	0.73
	2	3.05	0.94
Restraint with sex	1	3.65	0.74
	2	3.50	1.00
Restraint with drugs	1	3.75	0.78
	2	3.50	1.00
<b>Social competencies</b>			
Planning and decision making	1	3.10	0.78
	2	3.30	0.80
Interpersonal competence	1	3.45	0.82
	2	3.10	0.85
Cultural competence	1	3.25	0.78
	2	3.25	0.78
Resistance skills	1	3.10	0.91
	2	3.00	0.97
Peaceful conflict resolution	1	2.75	1.07
	2	2.95	0.99
<b>Positive identity</b>			
Personal power	1	3.25	0.78
	2	3.50	0.76
Self-esteem	1	3.50	0.68
	2	3.55	0.75
Sense of purpose	1	3.60	0.68
	2	3.20	0.95
Positive view of personal future	1	3.60	0.68
	2	3.65	0.67

Note. Program 1 represents program organized around developmental assets framework. Program 2 represents program not organized around developmental assets framework.  $N = 20$  for each program. <sup>a</sup> Represents only a part of safety asset (#10). <sup>b</sup> Represents only a part of safety asset (#10). <sup>c</sup> Represents only a part of safety asset (#10).

Table 5  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Developmental Asset Domains and Categories by Gender*

Assets	Program	Gender	M	SD
<i>Domains</i>				
External assets	1	F	2.93	0.43
		M	3.11	0.41
	2	F	2.97	0.43
		M	2.81	0.38
Internal assets	1	F	3.21	0.43
		M	3.19	0.46
	2	F	3.31	0.34
<i>Categories</i>				
Support	1	F	3.10	0.58
		M	3.26	0.57
	2	F	3.42	0.46
		M	3.06	0.37
Empowerment	1	F	2.58	0.52
		M	2.83	0.57
	2	F	2.72	0.74
		M	2.51	0.62
Boundaries and expectations	1	F	3.06	0.58
		M	3.37	0.42
	2	F	3.48	0.32
		M	3.14	0.45
Use of time	1	F	3.00	0.54
		M	3.02	0.59
	2	F	2.29	0.69
		M	2.54	0.77

Table 5 continued

Assets	Program	Gender	M	SD
<i>Categories</i>				
Commitment to learning	1	F	3.14	0.44
		M	2.97	0.73
	2	F	3.03	0.56
		M	2.84	0.57
Positive values	1	F	3.20	0.59
		M	3.13	0.46
	2	F	3.35	0.66
		M	3.10	0.63
Social competencies	1	F	3.13	0.53
		M	3.12	0.52
	2	F	3.23	0.23
		M	3.07	0.54
Positive identity	1	F	3.36	0.53
		M	3.54	0.50
	2	F	3.71	0.33
		M	3.38	0.63

Note. Program 1 represents program organized around developmental assets framework. Program 2 represents program not organized around developmental assets framework. ( $N = 20$  for each program)

Table 6  
*Analysis of Variance for Developmental Assets Categories*

Asset category	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Support	0.04	3, 36	.87
Empowerment	0.92	3, 36	.34
Boundaries and expectations	0.02	3, 36	.88
Constructive use of time	6.92	3, 36	.01
Commitment to learning	0.46	3, 36	.49
Positive values	0.01	3, 36	.91
Social competencies	0.01	3, 36	.95
Positive identity	0.00	3, 36	1.00

Table 7  
*Analysis of Variance for Developmental Asset Items*

Asset category	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Support assets</i>			
Family support	0.46	1, 38	.50
Parent communication	3.48	1, 38	.07
Caring adult support	0.78	1, 38	.38
Caring neighborhood	0.00	1, 38	1.00
Caring school climate	0.22	1, 38	.64
Parent Involvement	0.62	1, 38	.43
<i>Empowerment</i>			
Community values youth	0.93	1, 38	.34
Youth as resources	0.68	1, 38	.41
Community service	0.11	1, 38	.74
Safe at home	0.08	1, 38	.79
Safe at school	0.71	1, 38	.40
Safe in community	2.38	1, 38	.13
<i>Boundaries and expectations</i>			
Family boundaries	0.23	1, 38	.63
School rules	2.10	1, 38	.09
Neighborhood boundaries	0.15	1, 38	.70
Adult role models	0.06	1, 38	.81
Peer role model	4.20	1, 38	.04
High expectations	0.83	1, 38	.36
<i>Constructive use of time</i>			
Practice	1.70	1, 38	.20
Youth programs	0.33	1, 38	.56
Religious activities	4.32	1, 38	.04
Time at home	6.28	1, 38	.02

Table 7 continued

Asset category	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Commitment to learning</i>			
Achievement motivation	0.00	1, 38	1.00
School engagement	0.43	1, 38	.51
Homework	0.21	1, 38	.65
Bonding to school	1.20	1, 38	.28
Reading for pleasure	4.37	1, 38	.04
<i>Positive values</i>			
Caring	0.33	1, 38	.56
Equality and justice	0.00	1, 38	1.00
Integrity	0.05	1, 38	.82
Honesty	0.28	1, 38	.59
Responsibility	0.88	1, 38	.36
Restraint	0.72	1, 38	.40
<i>Social competencies</i>			
Decision making	0.63	1, 38	.43
Interpersonal skills	1.74	1, 38	.19
Cultural competence	0.00	1, 38	1.00
Resistance skills	0.11	1, 38	.74
Peaceful conflict resolution	0.37	1, 38	.55
<i>Positive identity</i>			
Personal power	1.04	1, 38	.31
Self esteem	0.05	1, 38	.83
Purpose	1.65	1, 38	.21
Positive view of future	0.06	1, 38	.81

## Gender

There were no differences in developmental assets in relation to gender,  $F(3, 36) = 1.12, p = .35$ . Furthermore, there was no difference in external assets in relation to gender,  $F(3, 36) = 1.60, p = .21$ , nor was there any difference in internal assets in relation to gender,  $F(3, 36) = 0.46, p = .50$ . With regard to asset categories, there were no gender differences found in support,  $F(1, 39) = 0.03, p = .86$ , empowerment,  $F(1, 39) = 0.91, p = .35$ , boundaries and expectations,  $F(1, 39) = 0.02, p = .89$ , constructive use of time,  $F(1, 39) = 6.94, p = .12$ , commitment to learning,  $F(1, 39) = 0.04, p = .53$ , positive values,  $F(1, 39) = 0.02, p = .88$ , social competencies,  $F(1, 39) = 0.00, p = .97$ , positive identity,  $F(1, 39) = 0.00, p = .99$ .

## Age

There was a significant difference in total assets reported by age across programs. There was a significant difference by age for the external assets domain,  $F(1, 37) = 6.37, p = .02$ , but not for the internal assets domain,  $F(1, 37) = 0.74, p = .40$ . With regard to asset categories, there was a significant difference found for support,  $F(1, 35) = 8.02, p = .01$ , and empowerment,  $F(1, 35) = 6.94, p = .01$ . However, there were no differences found for categories of boundaries and expectations,  $F(1, 35) = 1.36, p = .25$ ; use of time,  $F(1, 35) = 0.17, p = .67$ ; commitment to learning,  $F(1, 35) = 0.73, p = .40$ , positive values,  $F(1, 35) = 0.56, p = .50$ ; social competencies,  $F(1, 35) = 0.66, p = .42$ ; or positive identity,  $F(1, 35) = 2.84, p = .10$ .

## Program Participation

To determine whether a significant relationship was present between days of attendance and number of assets reported by participants, results of the Pearson's  $r$  was analyzed. For both program types, there was not a significant relationship between attendance and number of assets reported by domain or category, support,  $r(38) = .77, p < .05$ ; empowerment,  $r(38) = .49, p < .05$ ; boundaries and expectations,  $r(38) = .42, p < .05$ ; constructive use of time,  $r(38) = .19, p < .05$ ; commitment to learning,  $r(38) = .66, p < .05$ ; positive values,  $r(38) = .90, p < .05$ ; social competencies,  $r(38) = .95, p < .05$ ; positive identity,  $r(38) = .90, p < .05$ ; external,  $r(38) = .27, p < .05$ ; internal,  $r(38) = .98, p < .05$ . Because the results of the Pearson's  $r$  revealed no significant relationship between participation and number of reported assets, there were no further analyses conducted.

## Qualitative Data

The interview data from this research did not yield much in the way of qualitative data; however, the quantitative summaries of interview data were useful when examining the context in which youth reported experiencing the developmental assets. The interview data were examined with respect to context. In the interviews, participants in Program 1 reported experiencing more assets within the context of the program than did participants from Program 2. Within the context of program, participants in subsample of Program 1 reported experiencing 21 or more assets, and participants in subsample of Program 2

reported experiencing 20 or fewer assets. In the context of school, only participants in Program 1 reported experiencing 31 or more assets. Within the context of home, participants in both program types reported experiencing 21 or more assets. Table 8 includes the numbers of assets reported by each participant for each context.

### *Support Assets*

Youth in both programs reported experiencing all but one asset within the support category within the context of program. The five interview participants in Program 2 indicated that their parents did not receive encouragement from program staff to get involved with at school. This is reflected in the statement of a 13-year-old female participant when she said, “Nobody here talks to my mom about coming to my school; she just comes to school sometimes anyway.”

Within the context of school, only one participant from each program reported experiencing family support. Four participants from each program reported experiencing the asset of caring school climate within the context of school. Also within the category of support assets, the assets of positive family communication, other adult relationships, and parent involvement in schooling were reported as experienced by three participants from Program 1 and three from Program 2. The asset of a caring neighborhood was reported as being experienced by two participants in Program 1 and one participant in Program 1.

Table 8  
*Number of Assets Reported in Interview for Program, School, and Home Contexts*

Program	Participant	0-10 assets	11-20 assets	21-30 assets	31-40 assets
Program Context					
Program 1	Participant 1				X
	Participant 2				X
	Participant 3			X	
	Participant 4			X	
	Participant 5				X
Program 2	Participant 1	X			
	Participant 2		X		
	Participant 3	X			
	Participant 4		X		
	Participant 5		X		
School Context					
Program 1	Participant 1			X	
	Participant 2				X
	Participant 3				X
	Participant 4	X			
	Participant 5				X

Table 8 continued

Program	Participant	0-10 assets	11-20 assets	21-30 assets	31-40 assets
Program 2	Participant 1		X		
	Participant 2			X	
	Participant 3			X	
	Participant 4			X	
	Participant 5			X	
Home Context					
Program 1	Participant 1			X	
	Participant 2				X
	Participant 3				X
	Participant 4				X
	Participant 5				X
Program 2	Participant 1			X	
	Participant 2				X
	Participant 3			X	
	Participant 4			X	
	Participant 5				X

Notes. The table includes responses from youth regarding context in which they experience assets.  $N = 5$  for each program.

Within the context of home, the five interview participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of a caring neighborhood. In Program 2, three of the five interviewed participants reported experiencing this asset. One participant from Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of family support within in the context of home. Three participants from Program 2 indicated that they received support for this asset. The asset of caring school climate was experienced by three participants from each program. For the asset of caring school climate, three interview participants from each program reported experiencing support in the context of home. Positive communication is also an asset within the category of support; four participants in Program 1 reported experiencing this asset, and three participants in Program 2 received support for this asset. For the assets of other adult relationships and parent involvement in schooling, four participants from Program 1 reported experiencing support for these assets, and three participants from Program 2 indicated they experienced these assets.

### *Empowerment Assets*

Participants in both programs also indicated that they received support from the programs with regard to the empowerment assets. For example, when asked about the asset of service to others, a 10-year-old male participant in Program 2, stated that he was encouraged to do community service by program staff. He stated, "Yeah, we do stuff all the time here; we cleaned up the park last weekend, and we are doing rent-a-kid now." A 14-year-old female identified various service experiences in which she had participated with Program 1. She reported that she had been involved with feeding the hungry, picking up trash in

the community, and cleaning graffiti off of neighborhood buildings.

Within the context of school, four participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the assets of community values youth and youth as resources. No participants in Program 2 reported experiencing these assets. In Program 1, only two participants reported experiencing the asset of community service in the context of school. One participant reported experiencing this asset in Program 2. A 12-year-old male from Program 1 described his experience with the asset of community service at school as follows: "We pick up trash around the school and keep the school clean 'cause the school is in the community." Three participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of safety and five participants from Program 2 reported experiencing the asset of safety within in the context of school.

Within the context of home, the safety asset was reported as being experienced by all interview participants in both programs. The asset of community values youth was experienced by four participants in Program 1. In Program 2, no participants reported experiencing this asset. Four participants from each program reported experiencing the asset of community service within the context of home. All participants interviewed in Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of youth as resources, and three participants from Program 2 experienced this asset.

### *Boundaries and Expectations*

Participants from both programs reported experiencing five of the six assets in the category of boundaries and expectations. In Program 2, five

interview participants reported that no one talked to them about following rules at home and the consequences for not following them. A 14-year-old male participant reported that the program staff and volunteers only talk about the rules of behavior for the program. He was unable to recall instances when staff or volunteers talked to him about rules for home or school. A 10-year-old participant also stated that he could not remember hearing staff or volunteers talk about following rules at home. He mentioned, "They only talk about following the rules and not getting into trouble at school."

Within the context of school, all participants in Program 1 reported that they experienced three of the boundaries and expectations assets within the context of school. Family boundaries, school boundaries, and positive peer influences were reported as experienced by all participants of Program 1. In response to the asset of school rules, a 12-year-old male in Program 1 commented, "Teachers are always telling us to act like we would act at home and if we not do that at home, we should not do it here either." For neighborhood boundaries, no participants reported that they experienced this asset. Four participants reported experiencing the asset of high expectations within the context of school. The asset of adult role models was reported as being experienced by two participants in Program 1. In Program 2, all participants reported that the asset of school boundaries was experienced within the context of school. The asset of positive peer influence was reported as being experienced by four of the participants in Program 2. The asset of family boundaries was reported by three participants within the context of school.

Within the context of home, in Program 1 and Program 2, all participants interviewed reported experiencing the assets of family boundaries and school boundaries. Two participants from each program reported experiencing the asset of neighborhood boundaries. The adult role models asset was reported as being experienced by all participants in Program 1. In Program 2, two participants indicated that they received support for this asset. Positive peer influence is also an asset within the category of boundaries and expectations. All participants within Program 1 reported experiencing this asset in the context of home. Two participants from Program 2 reported receiving support for this asset in the home environment.

#### *Constructive Use of Time*

Participants in Program 1 indicated that they experienced the assets in the constructive use of time category. For all assets in this category, at least three of five interview participants reported experiencing each. Participants in Program 2, however, reported that they spent little time in creative activities within the context of the program. An 11-year-old, indicated that she was on a dance squad at school and was learning to play the clarinet, but she did not participate in any activities within the program. A 12-year-old male participant, reported that he did participate in activities with the program and he only practiced football and basketball at school.

Within the context of school, four of the five participants interviewed from Program 1 reported that they experienced the asset of creative activities, and one participant from Program 2 reported experiencing this asset. Also within the

asset category of constructive use of time, the asset of youth programs was experienced by three participants from Program 1 and two participants from Program 2. Religious community is also an asset that two participants in program 2 reported experiencing within the context of school. For Program 1, the asset of religious community was not experienced by any participants for the context of school.

Within the context of home, all participants in both programs reported experiencing the asset of religious community. Three participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of creative activities. A 14-year-old female participant reported playing the piano. She described her mother's lack of support in nurturing this asset. She stated that she practiced more at school than at home. Because she was not required to practice at home, she would practice whenever she wanted to. Only one participant from Program 2 reported experiencing the asset of creative activities. The asset of youth programs was reported as being experienced by three participants from each program.

### *Commitment to Learning*

In the commitment to learning category, all participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the individual assets of achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, and bonding to school within the context of program. However, only three participants in Program 1 indicated that they were encouraged to read for pleasure within the context of the program. In Program 2, all participants reported that they did not experience the asset of achievement motivation within the context of program. One participant reported that she was

encouraged to learn new things, and four of the five indicated reported that the homework asset was fostered. One participant in program 2 reported that she was encouraged to read for pleasure within the context of the program.

Within the context of school, the assets of achievement motivation, school engagement, and homework were reported as being experienced by four of the five interviewed participants from Program 1. In Program 2, achievement motivation was reported as being experienced within the context of school by four participants. School engagement and homework was experienced by all five interviewed participants in Program 2. For both program types, bonding to school was reported as being experienced by all interview participants. The asset of reading for pleasure was experienced within the context of school by two participants in Program 1 and three participants in Program 2. An 11-year-old in Program 2 reported experiencing the asset of reading for pleasure at school; he stated that his teacher and librarian talked about reading a lot and had a reading class.

Within the context of home, the assets of achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, and bonding to school were reported by all interviewed participants from both programs. Reading for pleasure was reported as being experienced by three participants from each program. A female participant in Program 1 who did not report experiencing the asset told the interviewer that she was not encouraged to read at home and she did not read unless she had to read for school.

*Positive Values*

All participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the assets of caring, equality and justice, and honesty within this category. For the assets of integrity, responsibility, restraint, four participants in Program 1 reported experiencing these assets. One female program participant noted that a program staff member tells her that “it is important to always stand up for what is right, and if we know somebody is doing something wrong we should talk to someone about it.” For Program 2, all participants indicated that the assets of caring, restraint, and integrity were not experienced within the context of program. Only one participant reported experiencing the asset of personal responsibility, and two of the five reported experiencing the assets of honesty and equality and justice within the context of program.

Within the context of school, all participants from both programs indicated that they experienced the asset of restraint. An 11-year-old female participant in Program 2 mentioned her experience with DARE when talking about this asset. She mentioned that someone came to her school to talk about drugs and alcohol. Also within the positive values category, three of five participants from each program reported experiencing the asset of responsibility in the school environment. In Program 1, four of the five interview participants reported experiencing the asset of integrity in the school setting. In Program 2, five participants reported experiencing this asset. Also in Program 1, four of the five interview participants reported experiencing the assets of caring, equality and social justice, and honesty. In Program 2, equality and social justice and caring

were reported as being experienced by only two participants.

Within the context of home, the assets of honesty, personal responsibility, and restraint were reported as being experienced by all interview participants in both programs. The asset of caring was reported as being experienced by four participants from each program. Four participants from Program 1 indicated that they experienced support within the context of home for the asset of equality and social justice. Three participants in Program 2 reported experiencing this asset. An 11-year-old female in Program 1 described her experience with this asset: “My mom talks about helping people all the time and treating everybody good no matter what they look like or how they act.” Also within the category of positive values, the asset of integrity was reported as being experienced by all participants interviewed in Program 1.

### *Social Competencies*

Within this category, all participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of peaceful conflict resolution within the context of program. Four reported that they experienced the assets of resistance skills and interpersonal competence within the context of program. A 12-year-old stated with regard to interpersonal competence, that staff members “always talk about treating people good and treating everybody like our friends or like we want to be treated.” For the assets of planning and decision making and cultural competence, two participants reported that they experienced these assets within the context of program. For participants of Program 2, two participants reported experiencing planning and decision making, resistance, and interpersonal competence within

the context of program. For the assets of cultural competence and peaceful conflict resolution, only one participant reported experiencing these assets. The participant mentioned, in describing his lack of the experience with the cultural competence asset, that “nobody talks about that here at this program.”

Within the context of school, the asset of planning and decision making was reported as experienced by three participants from each program.

Interpersonal competence was reported as being experienced by two of the five interview participants in Program 1. In Program 2, three of the participants reported experiencing these assets. Also in the category of social competencies, the assets of cultural competence and peaceful conflict resolution were reported as being experienced by all interviewed participants in program type1. When asked about the asset of cultural competence, a 12-year-old male in Program 1 described his experience of this asset in the following manner: “Yep, we talk about people from other cultures and my teacher tells us that we should think about slavery and we should not make fun of other people like Arabs.” Three participants from Program 2 reported experiencing the asset of peaceful conflict resolution in the context of school. Two participants in Program 2 reported experiencing the asset of cultural competence in school.

For the context of home, four participants from each program indicated that they experienced the asset of peaceful conflict resolution. Three participants in each program reported experiencing the asset of planning ahead and decision making. Interpersonal competence was identified as an asset experienced by four participants in Program 1 and three participants in Program 2. The asset of

resistance skills was experienced in the context of home by all participants interviewed in Program 1. Three participants reported experiencing this asset in Program 2. With regard to the asset of cultural competence, four participants in Program 1 reported experiencing this asset in the context of home. A female participant in Program 1 stated that she did not talk much about this asset at home, but she had a friend that was “mixed.” She described her friend as a sister, and she stated that her family liked her friend.

### *Positive Identity*

For the assets of self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future within the assets of positive identity, four of the five participants in Program 1 reported experiencing support for these assets within in the context of program. Only three of the five indicated that they experienced the asset of personal power. In Program 2, the assets of personal power and a positive view of personal future were reported as being experienced by only one participant. The asset of self-esteem was reported as being experienced within the context of program by two participants. The asset of sense of purpose within this category was reported as being experienced by three of the five participants.

Within the context of school, in Program 1, three of the five interview participants reported experiencing the asset of personal power. In Program 2, four of five participants reported experiencing this asset. Within the category of positive values, participants in both programs reported experiencing the assets of self-esteem, sense of purpose, and a positive view of future. In responding about the asset of sense of purpose, a 14-year-old female participant in Program 1

stated, “People from Project GRAD are always talking about purpose.” Four participants from each program reported experiencing the assets of sense of purpose and a positive view of personal future. Three participants from Program 1 indicated that they experienced the asset of self-esteem. Similarly, three participants from Program 2 reported experiencing this asset in the context of school.

Within the context of home, all participants in both programs reported experiencing the assets of sense of purpose and a positive view of personal future. Three participants in Program 1 reported experiencing the asset of personal power. All participants interviewed from program 2 reported experiencing this asset. Three participants in each of the programs reported that they experienced the asset of self-esteem. One 10-year-old female did not report experiencing this asset. When asked about her experience with this asset, she stated that her family did not talk to her about feeling good about herself.

### **Comparison of Interview and Questionnaire Data**

Questionnaire and interview data were compared in order to assess the contexts in which youth report experiencing developmental assets. When comparison of developmental asset categories was made between questionnaire and interview data across all contexts, the asset categories of empowerment and social competencies were the only categories that were not present for all participants in both the questionnaire data and all contexts of the interview data. All other categories have equal means when questionnaire and all contexts from the interview are compared. Therefore, the only categories that could be

compared were social competencies,  $t(9) = -1.000$ ,  $p = .343$ , and empowerment,  $t(9) = 1.000$ ,  $p = .343$ .

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Though the results from questionnaire and interview data may appear to be inconsistent, this study has several implications for program planning and organization and professionals who work with youth. Because this study was exploratory in nature, it is appropriate to interpret the findings with some caution. Also, present findings need to be weighed carefully against existing limitations of this study.

#### **Treatment of Hypotheses**

The findings for this study produced varying results. In the quantitative analysis, the hypothesis stating that there is a difference in the number of assets for youth participating in a program organized around the developmental assets framework and the number of assets for youth participating in a program not organized around the framework was rejected; however, the qualitative data yielded support for this hypothesis. For the hypothesis, there is a difference in developmental assets across programs in relation to gender, this hypothesis was not supported through either qualitative or quantitative analyses. With regard to the hypothesis, there is a relationship between level of participation and the number of assets reported participants, this hypothesis was not supported through qualitative or quantitative analyses. The final hypothesis examined in this study, there is a difference in the developmental

assets across the contexts of home, school, and program, was supported through qualitative analysis.

### **Discussion**

Youth participating in community programs reported experiencing similar levels of developmental assets regardless of program construction (i.e., program organized around developmental assets framework or not organized around framework). When data are compared, it appears that there were no differences in the full sample but that there were differences across programs in subsample data. Because the subsample was selected based on high levels of program participation, the explanation may be that youth experience optimal benefits from programs using a formal model when participation and involvement in the program is high. High levels of participation may provide youth with more opportunities to experience developmental assets, particularly in programs that are organized around a model. The activities in a program organized around a model may be more frequent and consistent, whereas a program not organized around a model may provide informal and inconsistent asset-building opportunities.

There were no differences in the total sample for developmental assets across programs in relation to gender. Females and males reported similar numbers of assets across programs. On average, females in both programs reported possessing about 74% of the developmental assets. On average, boys in Program 1 reported possessing about 73% of the developmental assets, and

boys in Program 2 reported possessing about 64% of the developmental assets. In general, the responses to the items in the questionnaire reveal that females and males perceived their environments as positive and asset nurturing.

Although some researchers have suggested that the pathways to fostering assets are complex with regard to gender, it remains critical that both males and females experience high levels of asset-nurturing opportunities, gender notwithstanding. In order to become positively functioning adults, males and females need to experience assets to the same degree. For example, males are not expected to demonstrate caring behaviors in the same way as females. Benson (1997) concluded that about one-third of males complete high school carrying the values of helping others, whereas about half of females leave with this value. Therefore, it appears that asset-building opportunities are important to both young males and females.

It is also important to recognize that as adolescents' age, their risk and susceptibility to certain behaviors increase in relation to gender. For example, McCarthy and Brown (2004) found that adolescent males' drinking behaviors were associated with drinking in early adulthood. Males who began drinking in late adolescence were more likely to indulge in harmful and binge drinking in early adulthood than males who drank early during adolescence (p. 716).

With regard to age, the negative association found between participants' age and the support assets suggests that youth might perceive support as limited. Researchers in the field of child and adolescent development have discovered that this is a time that many young individuals are beginning to seek

autonomy from parents and other adults in their lives (e.g., Barber, 1992; Baumrind, 2005; Herman, Dornbusch, Herron, & Herring, 1997). It is quite likely that youth who perceive support as limited are in this transitional phase, and they are limiting the efforts of the adults attempting to provide support. Settings beyond the family environment are also affected by these changes in youth. The neighborhood and school settings are also contexts that are important within this category. This is similar to Morrissey and Werner-Wilson's (2005) suggestion that, as adolescents get older, they become more skeptical of adult institutions such as communities and schools.

In this study, there was a negative association between age and the number of assets in the empowerment category. The empowerment category of assets consists of community values youth, youth as resources, services to others, and safety. In a broad sense, these assets address aspects of youth development related to community. With the exception of safety, the other assets in this category are directly related to how useful and valued youth feel in their communities. It appears that age might influence how youth experience communities with regard to feeling valued and useful. As youth age, they may feel less valued by adults in their communities because adults have lower levels of expectations for youth today. Farkas, Johnson, Duffet, and Bers (1997) found that most adults reported not placing high value on youth and that they had limited confidence in them. Furthermore, 60% of U.S. adults surveyed believed youth would not make the country a better place (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

Safety is also an asset within the empowerment category. In this study, youth involved in the programs did not perceive their environments as safe. It stands to reason that youth would report feeling less safe at older ages because they are experiencing greater levels of independence. The increasing autonomy can be overwhelming, particularly in communities similar to those identified for this study. Neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and risk for delinquency and violence can be problematic for youth safety. Youth in low-SES communities experience various risks to their safety. For example, Jarrett and Jefferson (2003) suggested that physical and moral risks exist for youth living in high-risk neighborhoods. They argued that for these youth, threats to physical safety can come in the form of bodily injury, shootings, gangbanging, and fights, whereas threats to moral safety can occur through internalization of untoward behavior (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003).

The freedom that appears to increase with age makes these threats more conceivable. Although the definition of safety within the developmental assets framework seems to be limited to physical safety, it is important to give attention to safety beyond physical threats. Threats to emotional and mental health are of critical importance as well. In this investigation, participants, who were between 10 and 14 years of age, were at a pivotal point of development (i.e., in early adolescence); therefore, it is possible that youth in this age group, who are experiencing more freedom and independence, do not feel safe in their environments. An examination of younger children or older adolescents could produce different results.

In the current study, program attendance was not significantly related to the number of assets youth reported on the questionnaires. Literature in the field of youth development provides conflicting evidence of the effects of participation. For example, Vandell and Pierce (1999) found that students who had higher attendance rates in an after-school program were reported by teachers as having better work habits and being less likely to engage in aggression as a strategy for conflict resolution. Pettit, Laird, Bates, and Dodge (1997) found that children who experienced moderate amounts of time in after-school programs were more competent in social settings when compared to peers who received less than 4 hours of per day after-school care.

Participation can have positive effects on youth developmental outcomes. It is plausible that involvement in activities in a positive, safe environment is a strength of regular participation in community-based programs. Although it is probable that youth receive much of their support for the assets within the program setting, it is conceivable that that they are also experiencing a significant amount of support for the developmental assets in other contexts.

Participants in both programs indicated that home was one context in which several assets were experienced. This finding may be inconsistent with some of the literature regarding youth living in low-income neighborhoods. Many researchers have suggested that poor neighborhoods contribute to increased involvement in risk-taking behaviors and poor overall outcomes for youth living in these neighborhoods (Holloway & Mulherin, 2004; Moore & Chase-Linsdale, 2001). Despite these negative outcomes, there are youth who appear to

overcome the odds. There are factors that contribute to this success in spite of the challenges. Quite often, parents in these marginalized communities play a valuable role in assisting their young. Parents who have the skills and abilities to keep their children safe from the dangers and risks associated with living in poverty contribute to the positive outcomes some youth experience in these environments.

According to Furstenberg (1993), many parents demonstrate parental competence by commanding and maintaining the respect of their children, through transmission of positive values, and by implementing goals; this occurs despite the high levels of stress that these parents experience. These parents have resources on which they rely to promote prosocial values and behaviors and to keep their children safe. For example, Furstenberg described the strategies of resourceful parents who wanted to help their children resist the local culture; one parent encouraged her child to feel different from (i.e., to feel better than) neighbors (p. 238). For other parents, it was more important for children to feel different and to experience a different way of life. These parents send their children to schools outside of the community, which is a part of the process of “guiding them to where the resources are outside of the community” (p. 252). It is plausible that parents who enroll their children in community-based programs view the program as entrée into a social world different from the one in which these families exist.

## Limitations

One key limitation of this research was sample size. The two programs included in this project were not large programs as compared to some other programs; one was still considerably larger than the other. A larger sample of programs and participants might offer more variability in responses. Furthermore, although the questionnaires were administered in small groups and participants were told that their responses were confidential, some youth may have answered items in a socially desirable manner or one that was very similar to their peers. A larger sample could give the researcher the opportunity to administer the questionnaire in a larger setting or larger groups, thereby limiting the level of intimacy and ability to take cues from peers regarding responses.

With regard to measures, in this study both instruments used were closely constructed around the developmental assets framework. Essentially, the descriptions of assets were converted into statements for the questionnaire. It is possible that greater understanding might be gained by revising the current measures. For example, a broader interview schedule that includes general questions related to the framework and not solely a duplication of the framework could elicit richer qualitative data. If participants were asked open-ended questions about each asset category, this might provide more insight into where participants receive the support for assets, but it might also provide information about their general understanding or perceptions of asset categories. Also related to the instrumentation, there were some inconsistencies within the interview questions. Some questions were structured to elicit responses

regarding the occurrence of assets and a few questions were structured to elicit responses about where the assets were fostered. Obviously, these questions can elicit different responses; therefore, revisions to the interview schedule are warranted. The measures would be strengthened through closer examination of reliability and validity.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Use of a larger sample of participants is recommended for future research. The limited racial and socioeconomic variability of the sample in this study permits very little useful information about generalizability to a diverse population; thus, related research could include a more diverse sample and a possible exploration of the differences that might exist across different groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES). Although this study was focused on the use of the developmental assets framework, other youth developmental models are available. Future researchers might examine the usefulness of other models. Additionally, further research endeavors might include a comparison of developmental assets of youth who participate in community-based programs and their peers who do not participate in such programs. New research might include an examination of developmental assets in the contexts of home, school, and community aspects individually and more specifically. For example, qualitative data could include probing that is more detailed with regard to specific contexts, thereby giving youth the opportunity to give more detail about their

specific experiences of various contexts, not limiting assets to absence or presence in a particular context.

Also, it is important that researchers give some attention to the relationship between theory and practice. Academicians often use theory to guide research and further the knowledge of specific theories. On the other hand, practitioners can rely on the knowledge disseminated by these experts and attempt to bring these theories to life through practice. Jarvis (1999) suggested that practice contributes to the process of theory building. For example, staff members working in a youth program can construct a theory of practice by creating experiences and/or opportunities, testing them, and reflecting over the outcomes that were generated. Jarvis (1999) suggested that much of the practical knowledge that practitioners possess is not contained in reports or scientific periodicals; therefore, there is a body of information to which individuals in institutions do not have immediate access. This practical or firsthand knowledge may be more relevant when considering programming efforts for youth, but this may only be true when practitioners have taken the time to consider the needs of the participants and how to meet those needs through careful planning, implementation, and evaluation of their efforts. These efforts contribute to useful theory specifically for practice and it is conceivable that the things learned through practice prove to be more useful than theory that practitioners often find challenging to connect to practice.

## Implications for Practice

The present research has practical implications for professionals working with youth in youth development programs. Based on the findings, it is possible for youth to experience developmental assets despite the organization of the program. Whether the program and related activities are grounded in theory or research appears to be less important than giving youth the opportunity to interact with other youth who demonstrate prosocial behaviors (e.g., developmental assets) and adults who are caring and responsive to them.

In conjunction with a program, parents can be proactive in fostering assets. Programs are in a unique position to assist families in ensuring that developmental assets are also being nurtured beyond the program context. Through child participation, program staff has access to parents and families. This access gives staff opportunities to interact with families, providing the guidance and support that is essential in maintaining home and program continuity. Subsequently, through this type of mentoring, programs can educate parents about the developmental assets, as well as help parents support their young in developing assets.

Also within the context of school, educators and administrators can partner with programs, community agents, programs, and participants to ensure that youth are being supported within all contexts. Because many of the participants in the project reported experiencing the assets in the context of school, it seems that schools play an important role in nurturing the assets. School-based experiences provide additional support for youth, and the school

environment is as important as other contexts with regard to asset development. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff can address needs in an informal fashion. Given the evidence of this research, efforts do not have to be based on scientific models of youth development. Attempts can occur in an informal manner, but caring, positive adults have to be aware of the assets and how they can influence the lives of youth.

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**APPENDICES**

## APPENDICES

### [Appendix A - Questionnaire](#)

Click the above link to open the questionnaire in a separate .pdf file.

### [Appendix B - Interview Schedule](#)

Click the above link to open the interview schedule in a separate file.

## VITA

Keesha Yvette Chapman was born on October 10, 1972 in Birmingham, Alabama. She graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in December 1996. In the fall of 1997, she began work on her Masters of Education at Tennessee State University. Upon completion of her M. Ed., in December 1998, she returned to Birmingham and began working at UAB/TASC (Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime). While at UAB/TASC, she worked with substance users and individuals involved in the criminal justice system. Her principal duties included writing treatment plans to present to judges on and supervising clients who were considered habitual offenders.

In August 2000, she left UAB/TASC to pursue her Ph.D. in Human Ecology at The University of Tennessee. She began as a graduate assistant in the Department of Child and Family Studies (CFS). She worked in the child development labs as a classroom graduate assistant and as an administrative graduate assistant. In 2003, she began working on a research project with two faculty members in CFS. She was a research assistant for the Knoxville Area Family and Child Study (KAFACS) under the supervision of Dr. Greer L. Fox and Dr. Mary Jane Moran. In 2005, she began teaching two courses ("Diversity in Family, School, and Community" and "Human Development") for CFS.