CHAPTER 16

Positive Youth Development: Theory, Research, and Applications

PETER L. BENSON, PETER C. SCALES, STEPHEN F. HAMILTON, and ARTURO SESMA JR.

Positive youth development is simultaneously a field of research and an arena of practice. Linked more by shared ideals than by formal membership or credentials, positive youth development includes a growing number of programs, agencies, foundations, federal grant programs, policy initiatives, researchers, and youth-serving professionals committed to promoting competent, healthy, and successful youth. Collectively, they have generated ideas, data, and resources. At the same time, they have unleashed a wave of energy and action not unlike that of a social movement, with a multitude of community actors connecting to a broad set of principles, concepts, and strategies for increasing youth access to the kinds of relationships, programs, settings, and activities known (or assumed) to promote healthy development.

Positive youth development is an umbrella term that covers many streams of work. It is variously a field of interdisciplinary research, a policy approach, a philosophy, an academic major, a program description, and a professional identity (e.g., youth development worker). The "idea" of positive youth development reaches into a number of fields, including child and adolescent developmental psychology, public health, health promotion, prevention, sociology, social work, medicine, and education. Within the past few years, positive youth development has been a focal topic in a wide range of scholarly journals, including *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (January, 2004), *Prevention and Treatment* (June, 2002), *The Prevention Researcher* (April, 2004), and the *American Journal of Health Behavior* (July, 2003). Two established research journals, *Applied Developmental Science* and *New Directions in Youth Development,* help to ground the field.

Undergirding positive youth development is an important and growing line of scientific inquiry, including theory, research, and a set of conceptual models and frameworks that both guide and emerge from the

research. This chapter: (a) defines the concept of positive youth development; (b) presents a broad theory of this sphere of human development; (c) examines empirical support for a series of theory-driven hypotheses; and (d) proposes implications for theory reformulation, future research, and applications.

DEFINING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

As noted, the field of positive youth development encompasses a vast territory of disciplines, concepts, and strategies. One recent review of positive youth development (Benson & Pittman, 2001a) suggests four distinguishing features of this field. It is *comprehensive* in its scope, linking a variety of: (1) ecological contexts (e.g., relationships, programs, families, schools, neighborhoods, congregations, communities) to (2) the production of experiences, supports, and opportunities known to (3) enhance positive developmental outcomes. Its primary organizing principle is *promotion* (of youth access to positive experiences, resources and opportunities, and of developmental outcomes useful to both self and society). It is, as the term implies, *developmental,* with emphasis on growth and an increasing recognition that youth can (and should be) deliberate actors in the production of positive development. And it is *symbiotic,* drawing into its orbit ideas, strategies, and practices from many lines of inquiry (e.g., resiliency, prevention, public health, community organizing, developmental psychology).

Damon (2004; Damon & Gregory, 2003) argues that positive youth development represents a sea change in psychological theory and research, with observable consequences for a variety of fields including education and social policy. Three central themes are noted here. In Damon's view, positive youth development takes a strength-based approach to defining and understanding the developmental process. More precisely, it "emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people . . ." (2004, p. 15). There is more to this statement than initially meets the eye. It connotes a significant critique of mainstream psychological inquiry that is quite ubiquitous in the positive youth development literature. This critique is that understandings of child and adolescent development have been so dominated by the exploration and remediation of pathology and deficit that we have an incom-

plete—if not distorted—view of how organisms develop. This ongoing debate is addressed in more detail in the next section.

Second, Damon, like many other positive youth development advocates, holds up the centrality of community as both an incubator of positive development as well as a multifaceted setting in which young people can exercise agency and inform the settings, places, people, and policies that in turn impact their development. Finally, Damon notes that positive youth development, in its efforts to identify the positive attitudes and competencies that energize healthy developmental trajectories, is not afraid to identify values, moral perspectives, and religious worldviews as constructive developmental resources even though this "flies in the face of our predominantly secular social-science traditions" (2004, p. 21).

Several other accents or themes are increasingly prominent in the youth development literature. Two are particularly germane for positioning this field in intellectual and scientific space. A number of scholars argue that the definition of developmental success most deeply entrenched in public policy and practice conceives of health as the absence of disease or pathology. In recent decades, the dominant framework driving federal, state, and local interventions with youth has been that of risk behaviors, including alcohol use, tobacco use, other drug use, nonmarital pregnancy, suicide, antisocial behavior, violence, and school drop out (Benson, 1997; Hein, 2003; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine [NRCIM], 2002; Takanishi, 1993). While positive youth development advocates readily accept that reductions in these health-compromising behaviors are important markers of developmental success, there is simultaneously a growing interest in defining "the other side of the coin"—that is, the attributes, skills, competencies, and potentials needed to succeed in the spheres of work, family, and civic life. This dichotomy is well captured in the youth development mantra "problem free" is not fully prepared (Pittman & Fleming, 1991). Accordingly, an important aspect of current positive youth development science is the conceptualization and measurement of dimensions of positive developmental success. Among these areas of work are efforts to define indicators of child well-being (Moore, 1997; Moore, Lippman, & Brown, 2004), thriving (Benson, 2003a; Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., in press; Scales & Benson, 2004; Theokas et al., 2004), and flourishing (Keyes,

2003). Within this inquiry on positive markers of success, an emerging issue has to do with expanding the conceptualization of developmental success to include not only what promotes individual well-being but also what promotes the social good (Benson & Leffert, 2001; Benson, Mannes, Pittman, & Ferber, 2004; Damon, 1997; Lerner, 2004).

In turn, this interest in positive indicators covaries with an emerging accent on reconceptualizing the population target for improving the lives of children and youth. This is the debate about "at-risk youth" versus "all youth." In the early stages of the term's emergence, positive youth development tended to be positioned as a strategy—complementary to reducing risks—for preventing high-risk behaviors, particularly among that subset of youth particularly susceptible to the potential harm of poverty and dysfunctional families and/or communities. As work moves forward to expand the notions of health, well-being, and developmental success, and as these ideas merge with historical and sociological insights about pervasive societal changes, the positive youth development field increasingly calls for strategic national and community investments to strengthen the developmental landscape more generally (Bumbarger & Greenberg, 2002; Lerner, 2000; Lorion & Sokoloff, 2003). Ultimately, we might characterize this issue as whether the national priority should be to promote "good enough" development or to promote optimal development. In more poetic language, Lorion and Sokoloff (2003) offer that this choice is between "fixing" troubled youth and the view that "all soil can be enriched and all moisture and sunlight maximally used to nourish all flowers" (p. 137).

Several attempts have been made to articulate the core concepts and principles in the positive youth development field (Benson & Pittman, 2001a, 2001b; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999; Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004; NRCIM, 2002). A synthesis of these reviews suggests considerable consensus on these six principles:

1. All youth have the inherent capacity for positive growth and development.

2. A positive developmental trajectory is enabled when youth are embedded in relationships, contexts, and ecologies that nurture their development.

3. The promotion of positive development is further enabled when youth participate in multiple, nutrient-rich relationships, contexts, and ecologies.

4. All youth benefit from these relationships, contexts, and ecologies. Support, empowerment, and engagement are, for example, important developmental assets for all youth, generalizing across race, ethnicity, gender, and family income. However, the strategies and tactics for promoting these developmental assets can vary considerably as a function of social location.

5. Community is a viable and critical "delivery system" for positive youth development.

6. Youth are major actors in their own development and are significant (and underutilized) resources for creating the kinds of relationships, contexts, ecologies, and communities that enable positive youth development.

There are many published definitions of positive youth development. Indeed, most reviewers of the literature and many authors of positive youth development research articles generate new definitions. This proliferation of many definitions—as well as concomitant lack of consensus on a particular definition—reflects both the relative newness of the field as well as its profoundly interdisciplinary nature. Each definition focuses on some combination (and the interactions among them) of the core constructs displayed in Figure 16.1.

Figure 16.1 suggests that the core ideas in positive youth development include (A) developmental contexts (i.e., places, settings, ecologies, and relationships with the potential to generate supports, opportunities, and resources); (B) the nature of the child with accents on inherent capacity to grow and thrive (and actively engage with supportive contexts); (C) developmental strengths (attributes of the person, including skills, competencies, values, and dispositions important for successful engagement in the world); and two complimentary conceptualizations of developmental success; (D) the reduction of high-risk behavior; and (E) the promotion of thriving. The bidirectional arrows intend to convey the dynamic nature of person-ecology interactions prominent in recent expositions of positive youth development (Lerner, 2003, 2004).

We know of no definition that encompasses all of this conceptual territory. But the fullness of these constructs is evident when integrating a representative sample of published definitions. Several accent the nature of the child (B). Damon (2004), for example, offers that "the positive youth development perspective emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people—including young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those with the most troubled histories" (p. 17).
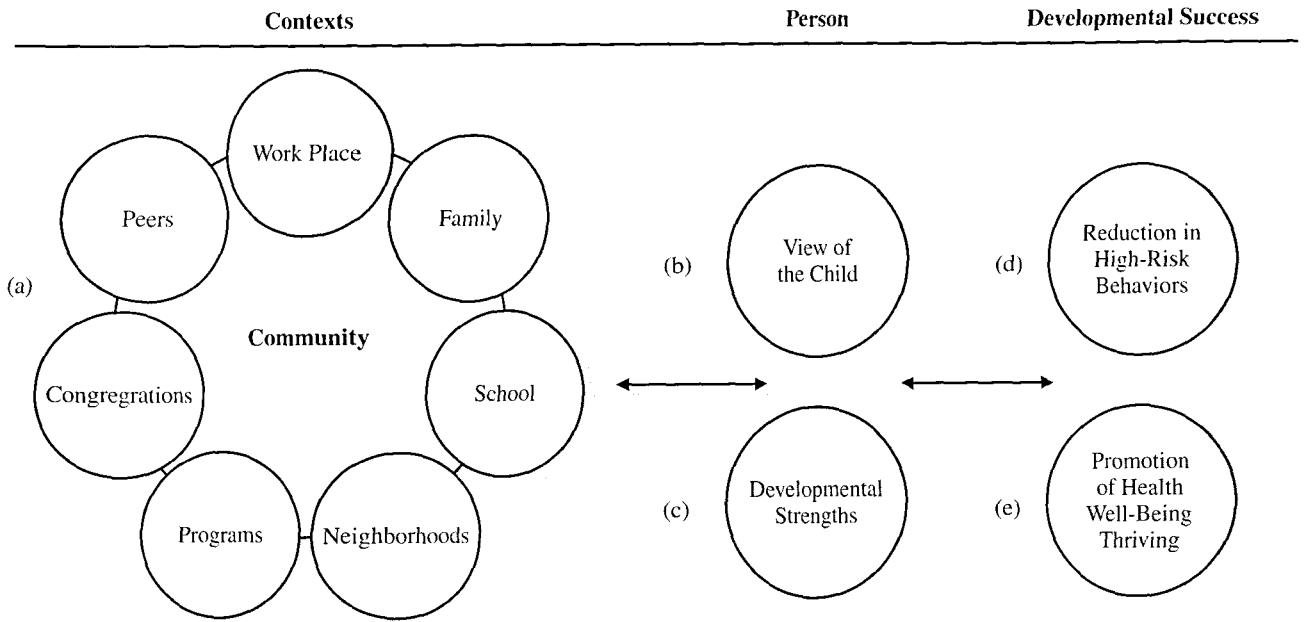
Contexts   Person   Developmental Success

Figure 16.1   Core positive youth development constructs.

Hamilton (1999; Hamilton et al., 2004) noted that the term has been used in three ways. His first definition reflects, like Damon, an articulation of the nature of the child (B in Figure 16.1): "youth development has traditionally been and is still most widely used to mean a natural process: the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act on the environment" (Hamilton et al., 2004, p. 3). His second definition picks up the role of contexts (A in Figure 16.1) in the development of strengths (C): "in the 1990s the term youth development came to be applied to a set of principles, a philosophy or approach emphasizing active support for the growing capacity of young people by individuals, organizations and institutions, especially at the community level" (Hamilton et al., 2004, p. 4). Finally, youth development also refers to a "planned set of practices, or activities, that foster the developmental process in young people" (Hamilton et al., 2004, p. 4). These practices occur within the context portion (A) of Figure 16.1 and can be delivered via programs, organizations, or community initiatives.

Catalano et al. (1999, 2004) conducted a major review of the positive youth development field with support from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Among its purposes were to "research and establish both theoretical and empirical definitions of positive youth development" (Catalano et al., 1999, p. ii). Arguing that no comprehensive definition of the term could be found, they cre-

ated a definition that named the objectives of positive youth development approaches. Hence, positive youth development seeks to promote one or more of the following: bonding, resilience, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioral competence, moral competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, positive identity, belief in the future, recognition for positive behavior, opportunities for prosocial involvement, and prosocial norms. This definition, then, focuses on describing the territories of (C) developmental strengths and (E) well-being in Figure 16.1.

In 2002, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine released the influential report, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (NRCIM, 2002). Though this report did not offer a clear definition of the term, its focus was on defining (and advocating for) two of the constructs in Figure 16.1: "the personal and social assets" young people need "to function well during adolescence and adulthood" (p. 3) and the features of positive developmental settings. These two represent constructs C and A in Figure 16.1.

Larson (2000) contrasts positive youth development with developmental psychopathology and suggests the former is about "how things go right" while the latter focuses on "how things go wrong." Hence, his focus is on positive youth development as a line of inquiry regarding "the pathways whereby children and adolescents become motivated, directed, socially competent,

compassionate and psycholocally vigorous adults" (p. 170). The pathways organically link contexts (A), developmental strengths (C) and developmental success (D and E). In a similar vein, Lerner's definition (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000) contrasts pathology—reducing and asset-building approaches. "Preventing the actualization of youth risk behaviors is not the same thing as taking actions to promote positive youth development (e.g., the inculcation of attributes such as caring/compassion, competence, character, connection, and confidence). Similarly, programs and policies that prevent youth problems do not necessarily prepare youth to contribute to civil society" (p. 12).

Some recent definitions place additional accent on the processes and dynamics of designing and mobilizing developmental contexts (A in Figure 16.1) to enhance C, D, E, and their intersection. Benson and Saito (2001), for example, suggested that "youth development mobilizes programs, organizations, systems and communities to build developmental strengths in order to promote health and well-being" (p. 144). Finally, Small and Memmo (2004) identify a variant on positive youth development that places an important accent on mobilizing youth to shape their contexts and communities. Called Community Youth Development (Hughes & Curnan, 2000; Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001; Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoppe-Rooney, & Villarruel, 2003), this approach takes seriously the bidirectional arrow in Figure 16.1 connecting A with B and C. As we will see in the section on the theory of youth development, this bidirectionality is a central feature of developmental systems theory and in particular, Lerner's application of this theory to positive youth development (Lerner, 2003, 2004; Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002).

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Early uses of the term *youth development* can be found in the literature on juvenile delinquency. In 1947, the Texas State Development Council was formed following a report from a blue-ribbon commission charging that the state-run schools for delinquent children were failing. Embedded in the report was the suggestion that the causes of delinquency included environmental factors with the implication that well-entrenched models of changing behavior by "fixing the child" were insufficient. This new understanding of the contextual backdrop to individual development gained further momentum in a series of monographs from the University of Chicago's experimental Community Youth Development Program, an initiative designed to identify and organize community resources to better serve youth with "special problems" or "special abilities" (Havighurst, 1953).

Federal agencies dealing with juvenile delinquency expanded on their earlier efforts and took another important conceptual step. In 1970, the Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Administration (housed in what was then the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare) developed a delinquency prevention program based on what keeps "good kids on track" rather than the more prevalent question of the day ("why do kids get into trouble?"; West, 1974). The federal answer to the question of why some youth succeed had four components: a sense of competence, a sense of usefulness, a sense of belonging, and a sense of power (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 1996, p. 4).

In these state and federal approaches to addressing "troubled and troubling youth," we see the early signs of two cornerstones of contemporary youth development approaches: the primacy of context for shaping development and development understood in terms of strength rather than deficit. Though such ideas hardly seem like intellectual advances now, it is important to note how these ideas came to challenge historical and deeply entrenched therapeutic models.

Subsequently, a number of prominent foundations entered the picture. In addition to major youth development grant programs at the Kellogg Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and the Kauffman Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the William T. Grant Foundation sponsored and broadly disseminated pivotal reports on the developmental trajectories of American youth. Moving beyond the question of how society best deals with its so-called "at-risk youth," these influential reports began to document more persistent and pervasive issues about health and well-being of American youth. To some extent, the reports expanded the need for enhancing developmental supports and opportunities to include most young people.

In 1985, the Carnegie Corporation launched the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. The concluding report, *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century,* sought to focus the national spotlight on adolescence (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). The report, like many before it, lamented not only the high rates of high risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol use, illicit drug use, teen pregnancy)

and exposure to developmental threats (e.g., physical and sexual abuse) among adolescents, but the emergence of *alarming rates for these phenomena among 10- to 15-year-olds*. Unlike other reports on the health of youth, however, the Carnegie Council proposed solutions based less on services to and treatment of youth and more on altering the formative contexts of families, schools, community organizations, and the media. Among key recommendations were reengaging families with their adolescent children, designing developmentally attentive schools, and transforming the media into a socially constructive resource. And in a reaffirmation of the Carnegie Council's early report, *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Non School Hours* (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1992), this 1995 report called for community investment in and expansion of "safe, growth-promoting settings during the high-risk, after school time when parents are often not able to supervise their children and adolescents" (Hamburg & Takanishi, 1996, p. 387).

Several years earlier, the William T. Grant Foundation released *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families* (1988). Its focus was on ages 16 to 24 and the transition from adolescence to adulthood. In its words, "half of our youth are in danger of being caught in a massive bind that can deny them full participation in our society and the full benefit of their own talents" (p. 1). Like the Carnegie Council report, *The Forgotten Half* focused its recommendations on changing community and societal contexts. Among its specific recommendations: closer adult-youth relationships, opportunities to participate in the life of community in activities valued by adults (including community service), and quality work experiences that provide skill-building pathways to sustainable work.

In combination, these two highly visible reports challenged the common assumption that the "youth problem" was confined to a small percentage of youth needing special and targeted services to redeem them. Instead, portraits of youth emerge which suggested that the developmental journey was fragile for a much larger percentage of youth. And both reports made bold calls for systemic change in how communities and their socialization systems connect with young people.

By the 1990s, three ideas generally important in the youth development field were gaining momentum. These are: identifying positive, developmental "building blocks" which help youth stay on a successful developmental trajectory; attributing causality for "youth prob-

lems" more to environments and contexts than youth themselves, with a concomitant call for reforming and/or transforming contexts; and mainstreaming the need for change (i.e., the percentage of youth needing change goes far beyond the notion of "at-risk" youth). A corollary to these three strands is the oft-repeated idea that youth are resources to be utilized rather than problems to be fixed.

Several additional events have added direction and momentum to the positive youth development movement. The first was a symbolic and galvanizing historical moment—the gathering of five living U.S. presidents (Carter, G. H. W. Bush, Clinton, Ford, and Reagan, represented by Nancy Reagan) with hundreds of influential delegates—for the President's Summit on Youth in Philadelphia. This April, 1997 event offered an accessible language of positive development—and a passionate call to action—around five fundamental development resources (or promises). These were: caring adults, safe places and structured activities, community service, education for marketable skills, and a healthy start. This 1997 event became institutionalized with the formation of America's Promise, a not-for-profit community mobilization organization initially led by (Ret.) General Colin Powell.

While this and other mobilization efforts gave impetus to the principles of positive youth development, a series of publications gave greater intellectual and scientific attention to the youth development idea. In 1998, the Youth Development Directions Project (YDDP) was conceived by the Youth Development Funders Group at a meeting held at the Ewing Marian Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City. The purpose was to take stock of the youth development field and lay out suggested direction for strengthening science, practice and policy. A number of organizations, including the Academy for Educational Development (Center for Youth Development and Research), Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, The Forum for Youth Investment at the International Youth Foundation, Public/Private Ventures, and Search Institute participated in a 2-year learning and writing project, culminating in one of the first efforts to capture the breadth and status of the field (Benson & Pittman, 2001b; Public/Private Ventures, 2000).

Moreover, as already noted, influential federal reports had reviewed the field of positive youth development. Both focused on the slice of youth development having to do with the creation of developmentally attentive programs. One, initiated by the Board on Children,

Youth and Families of the National Research Council, created a Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth that evaluated and synthesized the science of adolescent development with research on the quality and efficiency of community programs designed to promote healthy development, and resulted in the influential report, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (NRCIM, 2002). The second was the comprehensive review of positive youth development programs evaluations commissioned by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (Catalano et al., 1999).

The rise of positive youth development as a field of science and practice has been fueled by two types of social analysis. The first documents a series of pervasive societal changes that inform and shape the processes of child and adolescent socialization. It is common in published treatises on positive youth development strategies to pinpoint the role of rapid social change in altering youth access to developmental resources. In this extensive literature, social changes hypothesized to undermine the capacity of family and community to generate developmental resources include: increasing parental absence as a result of changes in the nature of work and the dramatic increase in out-of home employment of mothers; the rise of civic disengagement; the loss of shared ideals about the goals of development; the growing privatization of recreation; increases in age segregation; the decrease in neighborhood cohesion; teenagers' disconnection from structured programming; the prevalence of negative stereotypes about youth; and the explosion in media access by youth (see, e.g., Benson, 1997; Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Damon, 1997; Dryfoos, 1990; Furstenberg, 2000; Garbarino, 1995; Lerner, 1995; Mortimer & Larson, 2002; Scales, 1991, 2001). In a particularly cogent analysis of these trends, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) offered this summary:

> The research findings presented here reveal growing chaos in the lives of families, in child care settings, schools, peer groups, youth programs, neighborhoods, workplaces, and other everyday environments in which human beings live their lives. Such chaos, in turn, interrupts and undermines the formation and stability of relationships and activities that are necessary for psychological growth. (p. 1022)

The second social analysis common in the youth development literature is a critique of deficit models prominent in the service professions, policy, and research. Indeed, it is a somewhat common refrain that models focused primarily on reducing risk behaviors, for example, are inadequate both theoretically and strategically. Furthermore, models driven by risk, deficit, and pathology may unintentionally become part of the problem (e.g., by negatively labeling youth and/or fueling unfavorable stereotypes of youth). These ideas have been discussed in a wide range of positive youth development publications (Catalano et al., 1999; Lerner, 2004; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003). In one particularly important analysis, Larson (2000) suggests that developmental psychology has spawned a much stronger tradition for understanding and treating psychopathology than for understanding and promoting pathways to developmental success. In this regard, positive youth development advocates are sympathetic to positive psychology's critique of the dominance of pathology-oriented research and practice within mainstream psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The premise that positive youth development represents a categorically different approach than so-called deficit, pathology, and risk models deserves deeper exploration. There is consensus that adolescent psychology, and applied youth areas have been dominated, in recent decades, by explorations of "youth problems." The social historian, Francis Fukuyama (1999), attributes this, in part, to a logical outgrowth of rapid social change. When social institutions become less stable—as in the United States beginning in the 1960s—governments, he noted, inevitably begin to create and measure indicators of social upheaval, and craft policy and programs to minimize social and personal problems assumed to emerge from social change (e.g., violence, alcohol, and other drug use).

Sociologist Frank Furstenberg (2000; Furstenberg, Modell, & Herschberg, 1976), argues that adolescence becomes culturally defined as a lifestage when schooling replaces work as the major activity during youth. This, he suggests, occurred in the United States near the middle of the twentieth century. The advent of full-time education "establishes a youth-based social world that is age segregated, partially buffered from adult control, and relatively turned in on itself" (2000, p. 897). Not surprisingly, societies interpret the consequences of this upheaval in terms of "youth problems." Consequently, and in line with Fukuyama's analysis, cultural authorities focus major attention on behaviors and styles that contradict established social norms. And not surpris-

ingly, social scientific studies of youth follow suit, with a disproportionate focus on problem behaviors (Dryfoos, 1998; Larson, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). This dominating theme in youth research likely reflects the dual consequence of the cultural zeitgeist and the longer term hospitality in mainline psychology to the study of pathology (Larson, 2000; Moore et al., 2004; Peterson, 2004). Furstenberg (2000) provided a cogent description of the implications of these social and scientific trends for the broader public perception of youth:

> Such an approach inevitably treats successful adolescents and young adults as escape artists who manage to dodge the hazards of growing up, rather than focusing on the ways that young people acquire and master skills, construct positive identities, and learn how to negotiate social roles simultaneously in the youth culture and adult world. (p. 900)

At first glance, it would appear that positive youth development represents a theoretical, research and practice "paradigm shift" from the prevention field—a multidisciplinary area of inquiry, programming, policy, and practice with a substantial American history (Wandersman & Florin, 2003; Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003). However, a considerable debate is underway about the conceptual overlap between prevention and positive youth development (Benson et al., 2004; Bumbarger & Greenberg, 2002; Catalano & Hawkins, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Sesma, Mannes, & Scales, in press; Small & Memmo, 2004).

Prevention and prevention science are deeply rooted in public health and epidemiological approaches to disease prevention (Bloom, 1996; Small & Memmo, 2004), with a particular focus on crafting interventions before the onset of significant problems, and with a focus on populations known to be at risk for such onset (Durlak, 1998; Munóz, Mrazek, & Haggerty, 1996). This form of prevention has been called primary prevention, in contrast to secondary and tertiary prevention (Caplan, 1964), or in more contemporary parlance, universal prevention in contrast to targeted prevention (Weissberg et al., 2003). At the center of current prevention research are the concepts of risk factors and protective factors (Jessor, 1993; Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998; Rutter, 1987). Risk factors are individual and/or environmental markers which increase the probability of a negative outcome. Protective factors are safeguards identified in epidemiological research that help individuals cope suc-cessfully with risk. As noted by Rutter (1987), protective factors operate only when risk is present.

There are important points of overlap and of difference when comparing positive youth development with this major risk and protective factor approach to prevention. The two approaches partially agree on developmental goals. That is, both are dedicated to reducing problem behaviors and negative outcomes. At the same time, however, positive youth development tends to place as much or more focus on promoting additional approaches to health, including thriving skill-building and competency (Bumbarger & Greenberg, 2002; Pittman & Fleming, 1991). There is also some overlap in understanding the processes and mechanisms involved in the production of successful development. Some of the so-called protective factors that buffer risk and reduce negative outcomes also play a role in the production of positive outcomes (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002). Alternatively, positive youth development research also identifies a series of additional supports, opportunities, and developmental assets whose identification emerges from investigations of environmental and individual factors that promote competence, achievement, growth, and thriving (Benson, 2003a; Lerner, 2004; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Hence, protective factors and the broader range of developmental resources central to positive youth development are not isomorphic.

At another level, however, prevention and positive youth development are grounded in quite different theoretical orientations and—though yoked by common interest in the health of youth—spring forth from quite different visions of youth potential and the developmental, ecological, and social processes at play (Damon & Gregory, 2003; Lerner, 2004).

THE THEORY OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

A grand theory of positive youth development requires the integration of multiple theoretical orientations. In part, this is because positive youth development is a "bridging" field that touches multiple academic disciplines and spheres of practice. Three theoretical strands central to positive youth development are discussed in this section, with primary emphasis on the first. These three are: human development, community organization and development, and social and community change.

Human Development

Central to positive youth development theory is a series of questions rooted squarely in the discipline of developmental psychology. The overarching goals of this theory are to explain: the capacity of youth to change and to change in a direction that fosters both individual well-being and the social good; how and under what conditions contextual and ecological factors contribute to this change (and how these factors are informed or influenced by the developing person); and, the principles and mechanisms that are at play in maximizing the dynamic and developmentally constructive interplay of context and individual.

The articulation of a *developmental* theory of positive youth development is itself an ongoing and dynamic process emerging several decades after the birthing of positive youth development as a field of practice (Benson & Saito, 2001; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004; Larson, 2000; Zeldin, 2000). Zeldin (2000) provides an important analysis of how the science of youth development emerged:

> [I]n hindsight, it is clear that positive youth development, as a philosophy of service and as a field of study was initiated and grounded in the expertise of practitioners, primarily those working in nonprofit, community-based, youth-serving organizations. Research was used primarily to offer "empirical justification" for exemplary practice that was already occurring in communities. (p. 3)

An important step in growing the science of positive youth development was a "call to action" made by a team of researchers and leaders of youth development organizations (Zeldin, 1995). Facilitated by the Academy for Educational Development, this 1995 document challenged academicians—particularly those engaged in the study of adolescence—to focus research on strength-based models of adolescent development, identify and study positive youth outcomes, and identify "the day-to-day developmental opportunities and supports that allow young people to become competent and compassionate individuals connected to their communities" (Zeldin, 2000, p. 3).

The "golden age" of positive youth development research began in the mid-1990s, with burgeoning literatures on topics such as civic engagement, service learning, connectedness, generosity, purpose, empowerment, and leadership. In the past few years, work positing the theoretical foundations of positive youth development has begun. This historical progression of practice, to research, to theory may not be the idealized scientific progression, but it is important here to identify how this evolutionary pattern critiques the heretofore irrelevance of developmental psychology to the massive number of people and organizations trying to innovate strength-based youth work in the United States. As Larson (2000) put it, youth development evolved separately from development psychology "partly because we psychologists have had little to offer" (p. 171). Alternatively, this progression may be an exemplar of the kind of citizen-scholar partnership needed to promote civil society (Lerner et al., 2000).

Essential to positive youth development theory is a generous view of human capacity and potential. Grounded initially in the views and values of professionals and practitioners working with youth, this vision of human nature identified the possibility of active and constructive contribution to the development of self, community, and society. As noted earlier in this chapter, such a view is often characterized in youth development circles by describing young people as resources to be nurtured versus problems to be managed. This view is an important starting point for a theory of positive youth development, for it brings to the fore the notion that the individual—and not just the environment—is a prime actor in the shaping of positive developmental trajectories.

Damon (2004), in an important essay titled "What Is Positive Youth Development" argues that this positive vision of youth potential has implications for research, education, and social policy. He also sees this human nature assumption supported by three relatively recent lines of inquiry: the research on resilience (Garmezy, 1983); the capacity of newborns to demonstrate empathy (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Hoffman, 2000); and the universal capacity for moral awareness and prosocial behavior (Feshbach, 1983; Madsen, 1971). Damon also asserts that this human capacity for competence and contribution is at play when seeking to explain how young people "learn and thrive in the diverse settings where they live."

The essence of positive youth development theory is explaining how such potentiality expresses itself. The theory requires an appreciation of the dynamic interplay of person and context. Accordingly, the theory is most at home in a family of theoretical approaches constituting the large metatheory known as developmental systems theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Gottlieb, 1997).

This metatheory includes several crucial assumptions and components that, in combination, positions human development in relational and contextual space, and that stand in contrast to earlier developmental theories that split development into such polarities as nature-nurture, biology-culture and individual—society (Lerner, 1998; Overton, 1998).

Although positive youth development theory is predicated on key concepts in developmental systems theory, it includes several other core ideas having to do with the orchestration of bidirectional context-person relationships in order to maximize growth and development. While positive youth development can happen naturally (as in the adage that "positive youth development is what happens when families have a good day"), such adaptive development regulations (Lerner, 1998, 2004) can be encouraged and engineered by the ways contexts are designed and the ways youth are engaged in that design.

Central to the theory of positive youth development are conceptions of the developing person, the contexts in which the person is embedded and the dynamic interaction between the two. Following Lerner's lead (1984, 1998, 2002, 2003), all of the multiple levels of organizations engaged in human development—from biology and personality disposition to relationships, social institutions, culture, and history—are fused into an integrated system. Development has to do with changes in the relations among and between these multiple levels of organizations. Consonant with systems thinking in biology, persons—through their dynamic interaction with developmental contexts—experience pattern and order via the process of self-organizing. This key dynamic of self-organization means that "pattern and order emerge from the interactions of the components of a complex system without explicit instructions, either in the organization itself or from the environment. Self-organization—processes that by their own activities change themselves—is a fundamental property of living things" (Thelen & Smith, 1998, p. 564). At one level, this proposed dynamic interaction of nature and nurture is a dramatic departure from earlier models of human development which created a split between the two (Lorenz, 1965; Skinner, 1938). At another level, however, the concept of self-organization introduces, as Lerner suggested (1976, 2003) a "third source" of development: the organism itself. Schneirla's (1957, 1959) concepts of circular functions and self-stimulation were important illustrations of the organism's centrality and active participation in development.

An articulation of this point suggests that individual development cannot be explained by heredity or environment alone (Gottlieb, Wahlsten, & Lickliter, 1998). Evidence for this comes from studies where "genetically identical individuals are reared in unusually uniform environments but nonetheless differ markedly in phenotypic types" (Gottlieb et al., p. 253). While individual differences—stemming presumably from neither genes nor contexts—can be a nuisance to theorists preferring reductionist understandings of development, such so-called "noise" or "randomness" points to the "third source" of development central in developmental system theories.

Positive youth development theory includes another dynamic feature of the organism that is consonant with the process of self-organization but not readily inferred from it. And this is the concept of how persons act on their contexts. Indeed, one of the core tenets in developmental systems theory is the bidirectional nature of influences on development. That is, the "individual is both the active producer and the product of his or her ontogeny . . ." (Brandtstädter, 1998, p. 800). Action theories of human development seek to explain these dual developmental regulation processes of the action of contexts on individuals and the action of individuals on their contexts. This process by which organisms engage, interact with, and alter their developmental contexts (e.g., peer group, family, school, and neighborhood) is not only a pivotal theoretical notion for positive youth development, but is also "the essential intellectual challenge for developmental science" (Lerner, 2003, p. 228).

What processes guide how youth engage and act on their contexts? There are a series of developmental processes particularly salient during adolescence. Among these are identify formation and allied issues around self-appraisal, meaning-making, and autonomy. Because of the centrality of these issues during adolescence, positive youth development theory argues that adolescents bring particular energy to their relational and social world. Their activity—as "co-producers" of their development—is guided by three intertwined processes, each of which is rooted in theoretical traditions from within the broader "family" of developmental systems theories. Indeed, we think of these three as prime features of the "engine" of development. And in combination, the three make possible a purposeful search for positive (i.e., developmentally rich) contexts.

Brandtstädter's action theory of development emphasizes the role of intentionality in guiding and regulating

one's engagement with social and symbolic environments (1998, 1999). His assumption is that persons reflect on, learn from, and use feedback from their social engagements creating behavioral intentions that guide subsequent behavior. While this proposed dynamic has currency across the life span, it is a hallmark of adolescence. There are a range of possible constraints on how the person self-regulates internal engagements with her or his social and symbolic worlds. As Brandtstädter suggests "these constraints lie partly or even completely outsides one's span of control, but they decisively structure the range of behavioral and developmental options" (1998, p. 808).

In addition to *intentionality,* there are *selection* and *optimization* processes that also inform how persons interact with their environments. Aligned with Baltes and his colleagues (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes, Dittmann-Kohli, & Dixon, 1984; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998), positive youth development theory posits that youth select from a range of developmental supports and opportunities a subset that has psychological and social advantage for prioritized personal goals. Selection, then, has to do with both one's preferences (e.g., to learn to play the flute, to find friends, to experiment with drama) and the ecologies one chooses to be the primary crucibles for development. Optimization is "the process of acquiring, refining, coordinating, and applying goal-relevant means or resources" toward the selected targets (Lerner, 2002, p. 224). Critical issues in the applied youth development world include: how well communities provide meaningful opportunities for optimization; and how well communities make it possible for youth to create optimization opportunities (e.g., to begin a new sports or arts program, or to attach oneself to an appropriate mentor).

The self-regulation of context engagement—even when buoyed with an internal press guided by intentionality, selection, and optimization—creates something of a conundrum for those on whom the constraints on action appear sizable. These constraints, which are well articulated in a number of life span and life course theories (e.g., Elder, 1974, 1980, 1998, 1999; Nesselroade, 1977; Schaie, 1965), can have strong salience during adolescence. Youth, after all, both seek control and are controlled, with many agents in their lives who, by virtue of position and power, can either suppress or encourage exploration, selection, and optimization. Among this army of socialization agents are parents, neighbors, teachers, youth workers, coaches, clergy, em-

ployees, and peers. Positive youth development theory posits that adolescents will strive to find and/or create optimizing settings even when their degrees of freedom are limited. These settings may be countercultural and/or deemed by society to be out-of-bounds. This axiom is supported by the work of Heckhausen and her colleagues (Heckhausen, 1999; Heckhausen & Krueger, 1993; Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). As in the model of selection, optimization, and compensation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), she is concerned with the dialectic between possibility (i.e., plasticity) and constraint. She argues that "primary control" (or the process of acting on the environment in order to make it more congruent with ones needs) is a dominating human striving, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood.

Lerner (1998, 2002, 2003, 2004; Lerner, Anderson, Balsano, Dowling, & Bobek, 2003; Lerner et al., 2002) has been particularly productive and influential in connecting core ideas in developmental systems theories to the emerging field of positive youth development. His overarching view is that "changes across the life span are seen as propelled by the dynamic relations between the individual and the multiple levels of the ecology of human development (family, peer group, school, community, culture), all changing interdependently across time (history)" (Lerner et al., 2002, pp. 13–14). His thinking about three core concepts—temporal embeddedness, plasticity, and developmental regulation—is central to the formation of positive youth development theory and deepens the assumptions of person-context interactions described earlier.

Temporal embeddedness refers to the potentiality, across the entire life span, for change in person-context relations. This potentiality—yoked with our earlier discussion of the principles of self-organization and the active participation by the individual in shaping one's contexts—liberates us from the idea that biology, environment, or the combination of the two, is destiny. Positive youth development—as theory and practice—works in the optimistic arena offered by temporal embeddedness and by the *relative plasticity* (i.e., the potential for systemic change) that derives from it. That is, temporality and relative plasticity mean that, "the potential to enhance human life" always exists (Lerner et al., 2002, p. 14).

Finally, Lerner links the concept of developmental regulation to the promise of positive youth development. By so doing, he gives the theory a way to understand how individuals manage or shape their relations with

multiple contexts. Developmental systems theories derive concepts of developmental regulation from the idea of relative plasticity. As persons actively regulate their development, developmental change occurs in the mutual exchange between person and context. *Adaptive* (healthy) *developmental regulation* occurs when there is a balance between individual capacity or strengths and the "growth-promoting influences of the social world" (Lerner, 2004, p. 44).

Positive youth development, then, occurs in the fusion of an active, engaged, and competent person with receptive, supportive, and nurturing ecologies. The consequences of these balanced interactions—particularly when they are frequent and sustained—can be seen at both the individual and social level. Among these hypotheses are the advancement of individual thriving and the reduction of health-compromising behaviors (Benson, 1997; Benson et al., 1998; Lerner, 2004; Lerner & Benson, 2003; Scales, Benson, et al., 2000). A common vocabulary in positive youth development for describing these effects is the five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (or compassion; NRCIM, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) has written extensively about a "6th C" fueled by adaptive developmental regulations: contribution. In his frame, the six Cs are essential not only for individual well-being but also for the creation of healthy and civil society.

Several recent lines of inquiry are congruent with this thinking. The goodness-of-fit model, for example, demonstrates the adaptive consequences of good matches between individual competencies and needs with the demands, features, and responsiveness of developmental settings, such as families and schools (Bogenschneider, Small, & Tsay, 1997; Chess & Thomas, 1999; Galambos & Turner, 1999; Thomas & Chess, 1977). Similarly, Eccles and her colleagues (Eccles, 1997; Eccles & Harold, 1996), employing a stage-environment fit model, demonstrate how embeddedness in developmentally appropriate environments such as schools influences motivation and academic achievement.

As we note later in this chapter, the issue of diversity is central to positive youth development. Spencer and her colleagues (Spencer, 1995, 1999; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997) provide a particularly important refinement and extension of the kinds of ecological and systems dynamics shaping the theory of youth development. Central to her phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), Spencer uses the concept of identity formation and of how self-appraisal processes regarding one's standing in multiple contexts (e.g., schools) inform the processing of bidirectional person-context transactions. Phenomenological variant of ecological systems th, then, integrates issues of historical and cultural context (e.g., race and gender stereotypes, minority status) into normative developmental processes. This theory has been extensively utilized to understand the development of African American youth. New work is underway to understand the historical and cultural contexts informing the development of Latino/Latina youth (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004).

Conceptual Models of Positive Development

A series of conceptual models have emerged to identify the positive developmental experiences that enhance the fusion of person and context. A rich vocabulary has developed to describe these development-enhancing ingredients. Among these are supports, opportunities, developmental nutrients, developmental strengths, and developmental assets.

One important research-based tradition informing these conceptualizations is that of resilience. Formal inquiry into resilience, or the development of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity (Masten, 2001), took root during the 1960s and 1970s. In an effort to better understand maladaptive behavior, psychologists and psychiatrists studied children believed to be at risk for pathology (e.g., children of a parent with schizophrenia), and observed that some children were developing normally (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). These early efforts at understanding "invulnerables" (Werner & Smith, 1989) focused on personal qualities of the child, such as self-esteem or high intelligence (Anthony, 1974). Eventually researchers came to understand that resilience was not a trait inherent in the child, but rather was a function of the child? environment interaction. This more ecological approach led to the identification of three broad sets of protective factors implicated in fostering resilience: (1) those within a child (cognitive abilities, easy temperament); (2) within the family (organized family environment, close parent-child relationships); and (3) within the broader social ecology (effective schools, relationship with a caring adult; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Garmezy, 1985).

The primary mechanism through which resilience approaches attempt to facilitate positive development is via intervention and prevention programs. One exemplar of

this approach is Hawkins' social development model (Hawkins & Catalano, 1996). This model asserts that children who experience developmentally appropriate opportunities for active involvement in their families, schools, and communities, *and* are recognized for their efforts are more likely to form positive bonds and attachments that inhibit deviant or problem behavior (Catalano et al., 2003). According to these authors, the following salient protective factors are necessary for prevention:

Community Protective Factors

- Opportunities for prosocial community involvement
- Rewards for prosocial community involvement

School Protective Factors

- Opportunities for prosocial school involvement
- Rewards for prosocial school involvement

Family Protective Factors

- Opportunities for prosocial family involvement
- Rewards for prosocial family involvement
- Family attachment

Peer and Individual Protective Factors

- Religiosity
- Belief in a moral order
- Social Skills
- Prosocial Peer Attachment
- Resilient Temperament
- Sociability

Within the community of scholars self-identifying as youth development researchers, considerable attention has been given to defining and conceptualizing development-enhancing processes, with a growing number of publications dedicated to synthesizing the many frameworks (Benson & Saito, 2001; NRCIM, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Small & Memmo, 2004). Several publications have been influential in guiding practice and policy. Pittman and her colleagues (Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2000; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2001) identified seven essential developmental resources: stable programs; basic care and services; healthy relationships with peers and adults; high expectations and standards; role models, resources and networks; challenging experiences and opportunities to participate and contribute; and high-quality instruction

and training. Connell, Gambone, and Smith (2001) posit three major developmental resources: the ability to be productive, the ability to connect, and the ability to navigate. Zeldin (1995; Zeldin, Kimball, & Price, 1995) identifies access to safe places, challenging experiences, and caring people.

The concept of developmental assets emerged in 1990 (Benson, 1990, 1997, 2002, 2003a) and has triggered considerable research and a community change process used in 700 cities in the United States and Canada. The framework of developmental assets (see Table 16.1) is a theory-based model linking features of ecologies (external assets) with personal skills and capacities (internal assets), guided by the hypothesis that external and internal assts are dynamically interconnected "building blocks" that, in combination, prevent high risk health behaviors and enhance many forms of developmental success (i.e., thriving).

As described in a series of publications (Benson, 1997, 2002; Benson et al., 1998), the framework establishes a set of developmental experiences and supports that are hypothesized to have import for all young people during the 2nd decade of life. However, it has also been hypothesized that developmental assets reflect developmental processes that have age-related parallels in infancy and childhood (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 1997; Mannes, Benson, Kretzmann, & Norris, 2003; Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004).

The framework synthesizes research in a number of fields with the goal of selecting for inclusion those developmental resources that: (a) have been demonstrated to prevent high risk behavior (e.g., substance use, violence, dropping out of school), enhance thriving, or build resilience; (b) have evidence of generalizability across social locations; (c) contribute balance to the overall framework (i.e., of ecological and individual-level factors); and (d) for which it can be demonstrated that communities have the capacity to effect their acquisition.

Because the model, in addition to its theoretical and research purposes, "is also intended to have practical significance for mobilizing communities" (Benson, 2002, p. 127), the assets are placed in categories that have conceptual integrity and that can be described easily to the people of a community. They are grouped into 20 external assets (health-promoting features of the environment) and 20 that are internal (skills, values, competencies, and self-perceptions). The external assets are grouped into four categories: (1) support, (2) empowerment, (3) boundaries and expectations, and (4) constructive use of time. The

TABLE 16.1 The Framework of Developmental Assets

Category	External Assets	Definition
	1. Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.
	2. Positive family communication	Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
	3. Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
Support	4. Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.
	5. Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
	6. Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
	7. Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
Empowerment	8. Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.
	9. Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
	10. Safety	Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
	11. Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
	12. School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
Boundaries and expectations	14. Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
	15. Positive peer influence	Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
	16. High expectations	Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Category	Internal Assets	Definition
	21. Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.
	22. School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.
Commitment to learning	23. Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
	24. Bonding to school	Young person cares about her or his school.
	25. Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	26. Caring	Young person places high value on helping other people.
	27. Equality and social justice	Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
	28. Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
Positive values	29. Honesty	Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
	30. Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
	31. Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	32. Planning and decision making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
	33. Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
	34. Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Social competencies	35. Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
	36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

(continued)

TABLE 16.1   *Continued*

Category	External Assets	Definition
Positive identity	37. Personal power	Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
	38. Self-esteem	Young person reports having high self-esteem.
	39. Sense of purpose	Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
	40. Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

Source: From *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents,* by P. Benson, 1997, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

internal assets are placed in four categories: (1) commitment to learning, (2) positive values, (3) social competencies, and (4) positive identity. The scientific foundations for the eight categories and each of the 40 assets are described in a series of publications (Scales & Leffert, 1999, 2004; Scales et al., 2004).

The 2002 report from The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Community Programs to Promote Positive youth Development* (NRCIM, 2002), used the concept of assets to describe the experiences, supports, and opportunities "which facilitate both successful passage through" adolescence and "optimal transition into the next phase of life—adulthood" (p. 67). Parallel to Search Institute's distinction between external and internal assets, this national report used the language of "personal" and "social" assets. The authors used three types of empirical studies to identify assets: "studies linking the personal and social assets to indicators of positive current development, studies linking these characteristics to indicators of future positive adult development, and experimental studies designed to change the asset under study" (p. 82).

The committee of scholars charged with creating this report then identified 28 personal and social assets. Unlike Search Institute's developmental asset taxonomy, the 28 indicators are all personological in nature and do not include the same balance of contextual factors and individual-level factors. Nonetheless, there is considerable overlap between the two taxonomies. Table 16.2 displays the NRCIM taxonomy of personal and social assets. It should be noted, however, that the committee also created a conceptual model of the "features of positive developmental settings." These provide some parallel thinking to the concept of external assets. These "features" will be discussed in the next section.

Embedded in both the developmental asset model and the National Research Council report are three explicit hypotheses, each of which will be evaluated later in this chapter. The first has to do with the additive or cumulative nature of the elements called assets. The assumption is that "the more assets, the better." The National Research Council Report frames it this way: "adolescents with more personal and social assets . . . have a greater chance of both current well-being and future success" (NRCIM, 2002, p. 42). Benson and his colleagues (Benson, 2003a; Benson et al., 1998; Benson, Scales, & Mannes, 2003) refer to the longitudinal expression of this principle as the "vertical pile up" of assets. Both streams of thought also contend that this principle of accumulated assets generalizes to multiple forms of behavior—from prevention of high risk behavior to the enhancement of positive outcomes such as school success (Benson et al., 2003; NRCIM, 2002; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

Closely related is the idea of the "pile up" of supportive contexts. That is, positive development is also enhanced when many settings collaborate—whether intentional or not—in generating the kinds of supports and opportunities known to promote assets. In the words of the National Research Council (2002),

Research shows that the more settings that adolescents experience reflecting these features, the more likely they are to acquire the personal and social assets linked to both current and future well-being. (p. 43)

Scales and Roehlkepartain (2004) have recently called this the principle of "horizontal pile up." This concept is similar to the idea of developmental redundancy (Benson, 1997; Benson et al., 1998). Recent work in the sociology of adolescence also speaks to this dynamic (Furstenberg, 2000).

A second hypothesis addresses the nature of assets as relevant universally, although often experienced or expressed differently across diversities. Among youth development scholars, it is commonly assumed that the elements in the conceptual models of nutrients/

TABLE 16.2   Personal and Social Assets That Facilitate Positive Youth Development

Physical development:
   –Good health habits
   –Good health risk management skills

Intellectual development:
   –Knowledge of essential life skills
   –Knowledge of essential vocational skills
   –School success
   –Rational habits of mind—critical thinking and reasoning skills
   –In-depth knowledge of more than one culture
   –Good decision-making skills
   –Knowledge of skills needed to navigate through multiple cultural contexts

Psychological and emotional development:
   –Good mental health including positive self-regard
   –Good emotional self-regulation skills
   –Good coping skills
   –Good conflict resolution skills
   –Mastery motivation and positive achievement motivation
   –Confidence in one's personal efficacy
   –"Planfulness"—planning for the future and future life events
   –Sense of personal autonomy/responsibility for self
   –Optimism coupled with realism
   –Coherent and positive personal and social identity
   –Prosocial and culturally sensitive values
   –Spirituality or a sense of a "larger" purpose in life
   –Strong moral character
   –A commitment to good use of time

Social development:
   –Connectedness—perceived good relationships and trust with parents, peers, and some other adults
   –Sense of social plane/integration—being connected and valued by larger social networks
   –Attachment to prosocial/conventional institutions, such as school, church, nonschool youth programs
   –Ability to navigate in multiple cultural contexts
   –Commitment to civic engagement

Source: From *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development: Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth,* by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, J. Eccles and J. A. Gootman (Eds), Board on Children, Youth and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, 2002, Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

resources/assets have currency for youth in all social locations. This claim is particularly clear in both the National Research Council report and the research undergirding the developmental asset model. At the same time, however, both models testify to the diversity of methods and procedures for promoting assets, and to the importance of creating strategies of asset-building that are crafted with deep sensitivity to the experience, wisdom and capacity of people within particular racial, ethnic, religious, and economic groups (Hamilton et al., 2004).

The third assumption is one that arguably is the strongest point of theoretical consensus across scholars, research programs, and practitioners within the positive youth development field. This is the belief that assets are enhanced when contexts and settings are configured

and organized in specific ways. Context matters and contexts can be changed. This principle can be succinctly stated as:

> personal and social assets are enhanced by positive developmental settings. (NRCIM, 2002, p. 43)

Not surprisingly, then, there is a considerable research tradition on how, and under what conditions, contexts and ecologies promote positive development. This body of work shifts the unit of analysis from the person to contexts, environments, and communities. Accordingly, it draws us into a number of fields beyond developmental psychology in which such inquiry is more at home. We suggest that a theory of person, context, and their intersection such as suggested earlier in this chapter is a necessary but not sufficient set of ideas for delineating the territory, scope, and uniqueness of positive youth development. The major lacuna in our discussion to this point is the idea of intentional change. At the heart of positive youth development thinking and research is the question of how the healthy/balanced/adaptive fusion of person and context can be enhanced. It is this idea—this possibility of creating change—that has fueled practice for several decades and, more recently, is fueling research and policy.

A theory of positive youth development, then, is incomplete without incorporating the concept of intentional change. Without doing so, we have a theory of adolescent development—not positive youth development. Intentional change is the purposeful effort to enhance the fusion of person and context in a healthy direction. Because of the dynamic bidirectionality of this interaction, there are three major points of potential intervention. The three of these, in combination, increase the probability of adaptive developmental regulation. These are:

1. *Increasing the developmental-attentiveness of contexts* (to increase their capacity to nurture, support, and constructively challenge the developing person).
2. *Enhancing the skills and competencies of youth* (to further enable their "natural" capacity to engage with, connect, change, and learn from their social contexts).
3. *Creating processes and opportunities to invite youth to actively exercise and utilize their capacity* to engage with and change their social contexts. In practice and research, this form of intentional change travels under
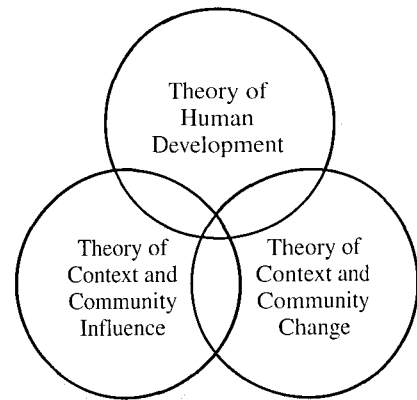

Figure 16.2   A comprehensive theory of positive youth development.

such concepts as youth leadership, service learning, youth empowerment, and youth engagement.

A comprehensive approach to positive youth-development requires the integration of three theories: of human development (which is the primary focus of this chapter), of context and community influence, and of how contexts and communities change. These three are displayed in Figure 16.2.

The Theory of Context and Community Influence

There is an extensive and growing literature on the features and dynamics of developmentally supportive contexts. It is here that we reference the major contributions of Bronfenbrenner (1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). His ecological theory of development has been instrumental in shaping the theory, research, and practice of positive youth development. If we were to posit the canon of youth development, the list would begin with *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979). In this work, he provides a highly influential definition that not only supports a critical notion in current developmental systems theory but also shaped a generation of scholarship. In his words:

> The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

Among Bronfenbrenner's many contributions is his conceptual formulation of the nature and dynamics of developmental contexts. He portrays the nested systems that influence development as interdependent; their influence is interactive; none stands or has its effects alone. What happens in a microsystem, such as a classroom, is influenced by tax policies and by the media, but those elements of the macrosystem are themselves interpreted through and influenced by microsystems. An important implication for youth development is that effective efforts to enhance assets must change more than one system and level of system. Changing schools or even families will be less effective than changing multiple systems (or settings).

Wynn (1997) and her colleagues conceive of the community institutions influencing youth development as "sectors" and focus on "primary supports" as a strong but under-appreciated influence. Primary supports are voluntary; youth choose to participate and make choices about what they will do and how. Primary supports afford young people opportunities to take initiative and to participate actively, in contrast to the passivity characterizing the role of student. Exemplars of primary supports include "arts and after school programs; organized sports; community service and youth entrepreneurship opportunities; and the offerings of parks, libraries, museums, and community centers" (p. 1).

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's idea of the importance of links among systems, Wynn (1997) claims that primary supports function best when they reinforce and link other sectors, especially families, schools, healthcare, and other services. Critical to effective primary supports are: high expectations; group problem solving; concrete products and performances; prospects for advancement and expanded opportunities; adults acting as caregivers, catalysts and coaches; membership; availability and continuity; respect and reciprocity; and adult investment (pp. 5–7).

There are a growing number of such conceptual models for identifying developmental contexts that are potential sources for positive youth development (see, e.g., Benson & Saito, 2001; Benson et al., 2003; Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004; Pittman et al., 2000). An important line of theory and research is also emerging to explain how, and under what conditions, such contexts inform positive development. Several themes are particularly central to positive youth development theory. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) identify two of these themes. Development occurs as a person in-

teracts with "people, objects and symbols" in what they call "proximal processes," which are "the primary engines of development" (p. 996). Caring relationships are critical, not only in the family, but in all the settings youth occupy. Likewise, youth need a range of challenging activities in multiple settings. Both the people and the activities foster development best when they provide an optimum balance of challenge and support. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris, the most powerful activities and relationships are predictable and enduring.

The classic account of how relationships promote development and learning is Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development." According to Vygotsky, development, in the sense of growing competence, occurs when the developing person is assisted by someone who is already competent in accomplishing tasks she or he cannot do unaided. With experience, this assistance becomes unnecessary and the person can perform independently. Several cognitive scientists have elaborated this notion, using the metaphor of "scaffolding" that is gradually withdrawn (e.g., Bruner, 1983; Rogoff, 1990). Although the metaphor is faulty (implying that scaffolding holds up a building until it is capable of standing on its own), the idea is sound: the assistance of someone who is more advanced enables youth to gain competence, especially if that person is skilled at knowing when to help and when not to. Bronfenbrenner (1979), acknowledging Vygotsky, hypothesized that:

> Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment and when the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person. (p. 60)

Benson et al. (2003) enumerated five aspects of relationships germane to positive youth development. First, supportive relationships with both immediate and extended family members have been shown, in multiple studies and multiple demographic settings, to enhance developmental strengths and provide a protective buffer against risk (Rhodes & Roffman, 2003). Second, supportive relationships with nonparental adults can be equally compelling in advancing positive development, particularly during adolescence (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2002; Scales & Leffert, 2004; Scales, Leffert, & Vraa, 2003). Third, the number of supportive adult relationships may provide an additive impact: As the

number of nurturing relationships increase, probabilities for the presence of developmental strengths such as caring values, self-esteem, and a positive view of one's future also may increase (Benson, 1997). An additional axiom about nonparental adults has to do with the sustainability of relationships. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the strength-building capacity of nonparental adult connections increases proportionately with the length of the relationship.

Fourth, exposure to positive peer influence—defined, for example, as peer modeling of prosocial and achievement values—can both advance developmental strengths and inhibit risk behaviors (Leffert et al., 1998; Scales, Benson, et al., 2000). Finally, the developmental advantage of relationships is enhanced by three factors: their quality, their quantity, and their sustainability.

The second theme identified by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) has to do with the importance and certainty of activity. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has compellingly made the case that certain kinds of activities instigate development in his work on "flow" or "the psychology of optimal performance." Csikszentmihalyi has documented the phenomenon of flow in people like rock climbers, dancers, and others who engage in highly challenging activities that reward them with a sense of successfully negotiating challenges that require intense concentration. This work helps to explain why some activities contribute more to building youths' assets than others. Activities such as playing chess, playing a musical instrument, or planning and carrying out a community service project build developmental assets more than watching television or gossiping with friends.

In another important statement of how activity contributes to positive development, Larson (2000) posits that the development of initiative is critical. Combining intrinsic motivation and deep attention, initiative can emerge from well-designed structured activities within sports, arts, and related youth development programs.

The themes of relationships and developmentally appropriate activity are "front and center" in most conceptual models seeking to describe the essential features of positive developmental contexts (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Quinn, 1999; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, 2003). In a synthesis of this research, NRCIM (2002) identified eight features of programs, hypothesized to "expand the opportunities for youth to acquire personal and social assets" (p. 8). These are listed in Table 16.3. As noted earlier, these

TABLE 16.3 Features of Positive Developmental Settings

Feature	Descriptors
Physical and psychological safety	Safe and health-promoting facilities, practice that increases safe peer group interaction and decreases unsafe or confrontational peer interactions
Appropriate structure	Limit setting, clear and consistent rules and expectations, firm-enough control, continuity and predictability, clear boundaries, and age-appropriate monitoring
Supportive relationships	Warmth, closeness, connectedness, good communication, caring, support, guidance, secure attachment, and responsiveness.
Opportunities to belong	Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement and integration; opportunities for sociocultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence
Positive social norms	Rules of behavior, expectations, injunctions, ways of doing things, values and morals, and obligations for service
Support for efficacy and mattering	Youth-based, empowerment practices that support autonomy, making a real difference in one's community, and being taken seriously; practices that include enabling, responsibility granting, and meaningful challenge; practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance levels
Opportunity for skill building	Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural literacies, media literacy, communication skills, and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital
Integration of family, school, and community efforts	Concordance; coordination and synergy among family, school and community.

Source: From *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development: Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth,* by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, J. Eccles and J. A. Gootman (Eds), Board on Children, Youth and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, 2002, Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

eight features of positive development settings have some conceptual overlap with the external assets in the developmental asset framework (Benson, 1997; Benson et al., 2003; Scales & Leffert, 1999, 2004).

The theory of positive youth development posits that development is enhanced when contexts are configured and organized in ways consonant with these developmental principles. As already suggested, closely aligned with the "contexts can be changed" axiom is the principle of "horizontal pile-up." This latter concept refers to the reinforcing, simultaneous experience of ecological assets across the different context of a young person's total ecology, such as family, neighborhood, school, peer group, after-school programs, and other co-curricular organizations. As suggested by Benson et al. (2003):

> Such multiple and redundant exposure to developmentally rich ecologies fortifies the social space within which young people can perceive themselves to be safe, supported and capable. Young people who experience such redundancy ought to be even more likely than young people without such a horizontal pile-up of assets to enjoy protection from risk and to thrive. (p. 387)

This idea of "developmental redundancy" helps to fuel an additional and important concept in positive youth development: the viability of community as a setting for generating both ecological and internal assets. This question of how communities inform development has become a vibrant area of inquiry (Benson et al., 1998; Blyth, 2001; Booth & Crouter, 2001; Comer, 1980; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996; Connell et al., 2001; Earls & Carlson, 2001; Hughes & Curnan, 2000; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mannes et al., 2003; Sampson, 2001; Spencer, 2001).

Using community as a unit of analysis, researchers have posited a number of community processes and dynamics inferred to be important for creating the kinds of relationships and developmentally rich contexts that promote positive development. Scales and his colleagues (Scales et al., 2001, 2002, 2003) identify pro-child social norms in which engagement with children and adolescents is expected and supported. Some theorists posit the viability of shared ideals and expectations that unite multiple socializing systems in common purpose (Benson, 1997; Damon, 1997). Zeldin (2002) points to the role of adults' sense of community as an important precursor to engagement with youth. And several identify the role of strategic alignment among community ser-

vices delivery systems (Dorgan & Ferguson, 2004; Dryfoos, 1990; Mannes et al., 2003).

The construct of social capital elucidates why community mobilization is important and points to some avenues for action. Coleman (1990, p. 304) describes social capital as contained in human relationships. Human capital includes a person's competencies. Just like human capital and financial capital, social capital makes it possible for people to be productive, to accomplish tasks. Coleman points out that social capital is greater in social networks with a high degree of "closure," meaning that many people know each other, communicate, and trust each other (pp. 319–320).

Sampson and his colleagues (Sampson, 2001; Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997) have identified community mechanisms that facilitate the generation of social capital. Chief among these is the idea of collective efficacy, which signifies "an emphasis on shared beliefs in a neighborhood's conjoint capability for action to achieve an intended effect, and hence an active sense of engagement on the part of residents" (Sampson, 2001, p. 10). Benson and his colleagues (Benson, 1997; Benson et al., 1998) have suggested that one important source of collective efficacy is a shared community vocabulary of developmental assets aligned with a publicly shared understanding of the capacity of social contexts to effect their acquisition.

The Theory of Context and Community Change

The third formulation in a comprehensive theory of positive youth-development focuses on the processes, strategies, and tactics that can directly or indirectly alter contexts and community. This is the least developed of the three theoretical foundations of the theory we envision. One recent review of the science on "how change occurs" has argued that a compelling question emerging from new discoveries about the dynamic and bidirectional sources of positive development has to do with:

> the processes and procedures of increasing access to developmental nutrients/assets on a rather massive scale. And truth be told, though all architects of developmental nutrient models are deeply interested in application, the science of how change occurs is in its infancy. We have invested much more intellectual and research energy in naming the positive building blocks of development and demonstrating their predictive utility for enhancing health and academic outcomes than in studying the complex

array of strategies and procedures for moving the developmental needle forward. (Benson, 2003b, p. 214)

Thinking about such change is a complex enterprise. Because positive youth-development has a pronounced interest in application, a comprehensive theory of change is needed to guide both research and the change-making efforts already underway in hundreds of communities, organizations, and systems. Tying this theory and research agenda to the previous section on context and community influences suggests some of the concepts hypothesized to be central to this inquiry. Among these are building shared vision; activating collective and personal efficacy; promoting social trust; reframing how citizens view youth; mobilizing adult-youth relationships; creating effective cross-sector collaborations; and enhancing relationships and developmentally appropriate activities within socializing systems and programs.

Many points of entry into this complex arena of change have been proposed. Among these are social policy (Blum & Ellen, 2002; Halfon, 2003); social norms (Scales et al., 2003); community building (Hyman, 2002; Mannes et al., 2003); schools (Gambone et al., 2002); neighborhoods (Sampson, 2001); families (Simpson & Roehlkepartain, 2003); the mobilization of adults as change activists (Rhodes & Roffman, 2003); and the mobilization of youth as change activists (Earls & Carlson, 2002).

Recently, two conceptual frames have been proposed to help guide theory and research on change. First, Granger (2002) suggested two overarching constructs: intervention strategies to enhance the *will* to change and intervention strategies to enhance the *capacity* to change. For the latter, he posits five key strategies: human capital creation, redistribution strategies, investment strategies, social capital creation, and efficiency strategies.

Second, Benson et al. (2003) proposed five interlocking spheres of intervention. Grounded in organizational systems theory, this model suggests that change in any one sphere impacts each of the others. This assertion bears theoretical affinity with core tenets in developmental systems theory. This five-fold model is in the service, theoretically, of creating a "developmentally attentive community" (p. 389). Such a community is envisioned as one that marshals and activates the asset-building capacity of its residents (both adults and youth), and sectors (family, neighborhoods, schools, youth organizations, laces of work, congregations). A developmentally attentive community is also characterized by indirect influences that support and sustain these more direct resident and sector influences. These influences include policy, financial resources, and social norms that promote adult engagement with the young (Scales et al., 2001, 2003).

In turn, Benson et al. (2003) propose that the strategic targets for such communities are *vertical pileup* (in which youth develop many developmental assets), *horizontal pileup* (in which youth experience asset-building in multiple contexts), and *developmental breadth* (extending, by purpose and design, the reach of asset-building energy to *all* children and adolescents, not only those judged to be at "risk" and served by traditional "prevention" programs).

Accordingly, the five synergistic strategies they posit for community change are:

1. *Engage adults:* Community adults build sustained, asset-building relationships with children and youth, both within and beyond family.

2. *Mobilize youth engagement:* Adolescents use their asset-building capacities with peers and with younger children and in activities that help enhance the quality of their community.

3. *Activate sectors:* Families, neighborhoods, schools, congregations, and youth organizations activate their asset-building potential.

4. *Invigorate programs:* A community infrastructure of quality early childhood, after-school, weekend, and summer programs is available and used by children and youth.

5. *Influence civic decisions:* Financial, leadership, media, and policy resources are mobilized to support and sustain the transformation needed for areas 1, 2, 3, and 4 to emerge.

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR KEY POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESES

The theory and practice of positive youth development suggests several of key hypotheses. Later in this section, we introduce and examine empirical support for seven hypotheses, and offer perspectives on the implications of these principles both for understanding and promoting positive youth development. Here, however, it is important to provide an overview of the nature and power of the research base pertinent to these hypotheses.

Overview of Positive Youth Development Research

The research base supporting these hypotheses is plentiful, although uneven. The literature measuring developmental resources is typified by variable-centered methods, a focus on isolated variables, use of cross-sectional samples, and linear-additive theory and analytic strategies. What is needed are person-centered methods, a focus on patterns or clusters of variables, use of longitudinal samples, and dynamic nonlinear theory and analytic strategies (Lerner, Lerner, De Stefanis, & Apfel, 2001).

Developmental outcomes for youth also encompass processes that are as important as if not more important than outcomes reflecting status points in time (e.g., current use of alcohol, how much community service one contributes). Processes include reorganization (Sroufe, 1979), being able to permanently make transitions (Baltes & Freund, 2003), and being on a path to a hopeful future (Lerner et al., 2002; Scales & Benson, 2004). Status outcomes may not adequately capture the nested interactions of person and contexts over time, for example, person-family and family community (Lerner, Freund, De Stefanis, & Habermas, 2001).

Further, the literature says relatively little about the interaction of the combination of nutrients or resources young people experience. Most studies focus on just a handful of assets (especially parental/family assets and school orientation assets, with some emphasis on peers, and more recently, on extracurricular and positive youth development program activities), and at best, how this handful may interact.

We illuminate the research support for the positive youth development hypotheses by focusing on a small number of outcomes for which positive youth development theory is best explicated, and that appear to have strong research bases and broad constituencies of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers dealing with them: Alcohol and other drug use; violence/anti-social behavior; school success; and civic engagement. Much but not all of the research cited herein pertains to those four exemplar outcomes.

How Much Explanatory Power Is Reasonable to Expect?

Hundreds of studies, cited in this chapter and in comprehensive reviews (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Scales et al., 2004), provide *persuasive* evidence (Miller & Thoresen, 2003) for the broad theoretical connection between developmental assets and developmental outcomes, both concurrently and longitudinally. This is especially true when considering as an independent variable the cumulative number of assets young people experience, or comparing those young people with relatively higher and lower levels of assets.

There is relative persuasiveness and consistency of positive findings in the literature on the explanatory power of positive youth development concepts. But what level of explanation is reasonable to expect developmental assets or nutrients to provide for complex outcomes? Luthar et al. (2000), for example, observe that studies whose findings rest on main effects often report effects of 10% to 20% for individual protective factors. When interaction effects are necessary to explain the workings of such assets, effect sizes are far smaller, in the 2% to 5% range. With both advocacy and empirical work in recent years reflecting a shift from merely documenting the impact of developmental nutrients to studying the processes and interactions that suggest *how* those nutrients contribute to outcomes (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Heatherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Davey, Eaker, & Walters, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000), it may be expected that the size of many reported effects will be disappointingly, but understandably, limited.

Ecological and developmental systems theory have become the predominant frames of theoretical reference for the study of child and adolescent development (Lerner et al., 2002). Moreover, individual development and broader community and social change processes increasingly are linked in positive youth development frameworks (Benson et al., 1998, 2003; Connell & Kubisch, 2001; Hawkins & Catalano, 1996). These theoretical formulations imply that effects derived from studies shaped by those theories and frameworks may be quite modest, a conclusion supported in a recent review by Wandersman and Florin (2003). All these factors make it quite challenging scientifically to capture broad community change in the service of positive youth development (Berkowitz, 2001).

With the preceding comments providing perspective on the state-of-the-art in positive youth development research, we turn now to illustrating the evidence for each of the major positive youth development hypotheses, we can derive from our prior discussion of the theoretical and practitioner bases of the concept of positive youth development.

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis is termed the contextual change hypothesis, and consists of two assumptions. First, contexts can be intentionally altered to enhance developmental success. And second, changes in these contexts change the person.

There is abundant evidence that ecological contexts can be changed to promote positive youth development, as well as a wealth of data about why such approaches have those positive effects. In most of this research, researchers have documented (usually, but not always) the efficacy of intervention or prevention programs in providing youth with experiences that facilitate developmental outcomes. For example, from their review of 60 evaluations of youth development programs, Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, and Foster (1998) concluded:

> [Y]outh development programs are best characterized by their approach to youth as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed, and their efforts to help youth become healthy, happy, and productive by increasing youths' exposure to the external assets, opportunities and supports. (p. 427)

The Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington conducted one of the most wide-ranging reviews of positive youth development programs (Catalano et al., 2004). They identified 161 programs and discussed in detail 25 that were well-evaluated and showed significant effects on behavioral outcomes. The programs had to have one or more of the following objectives about building developmental assets or nutrients: Promote bonding; foster resilience; promote social competence; promote emotional competence; promote cognitive competence; promote behavioral competence; promote moral competence; foster self-determination; foster spirituality; foster self-efficacy; foster clear and positive identity; foster belief in the future; provide recognition for positive behavior; provide opportunities for prosocial involvement; and foster prosocial norms. In addition, the programs had to address either multiple assets, or a single nutrient but across the multiple social domains of family, school, or community. Programs that addressed only a single asset in a single domain were excluded. Competence, self-efficacy, and prosocial norms were addressed in all 25 programs, and most programs dealt with at least 8 of the 15 nutrients. Most programs used positive outcome measures as well as reduction of problem behavior in their evaluations. Nineteen of the

25 programs demonstrated significant effects on positive youth development outcomes, including improvements in interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, self-control, problem solving, cognitive competence, self-efficacy, commitment to school, and academic achievement. In addition, 24 of the 25 showed significant reductions in problem behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use, school problems, aggressive behavior, violence, and risky sexual behavior.

In a review of more than 1,200 studies of outcomes in prevention programs for children and adolescents, Durlak (1998) identified eight common protective factors across programs successful in preventing behavior problems, school failure, poor physical health, and pregnancy among young people: Social support; personal and social skills; self-efficacy; good parent-child relationships; positive peer modeling; high quality schools; effective social policies; and positive social norms. The resilience literature also suggests from the finding of "synchronous evidence" from multiple studies using differing measurements, that there are three critical kinds of protective factors: Close relationships with caring, supportive adults, often in primary care-giving roles; effective schools; and positive relationships with prosocial adults in the wider community (Luthar et al., 2000).

In a meta-analysis of 177 primary prevention programs designed to prevent behavioral and mental health problems among children and adolescents, Durlak and Wells (1997) reported that most kinds of primary prevention programs (whether person- or environment-centered, and whether universal or targeted) contributed both to reducing problems and increasing competencies. However, only 15% of these programs attempted to change children's environments, despite the emphasis of context in the major developmental systems and ecological theories that are the foundation of the positive youth development field.

Developmental theories suggest that, because of the fusion of person and context, variations or alterations in developmental context should be associated with variations or alterations in developmental outcomes. For example, theories regarding the development of anti-social behavior and violence typically posit several differing trajectories. Children who are chronically high in anti-social behavior from childhood through adolescence, for example, are seen as having biological or genetic vulnerabilities that manifest themselves in attention and concentration problems, which are associated both with early school failure and peer rejection (Moffitt, 1993). Poor parenting may also contribute to this pathway.

Those developing higher levels of antisocial behavior later in childhood or adolescence are seen as being influenced more by association with deviant peers (Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). A study of several hundred urban, mostly African American males followed from first grade through seventh grade found evidence supporting such differing pathways (Schaeffer, Petras, Ialongo, Poduska, & Kellam, 2003). Theoretically then, it is plausible that early efforts to improve family related assets, social competencies, and school success all could have an ameliorative effect on the development of antisocial behavior trajectories. Indeed, Furlong, Paige, and Osher (2003) note such evidence findings linking violence prevention with children's connection to caring adults, social/emotional skills, and appropriate instruction and academic supports that promote a sense of competence and school success.

Similarly, in a study of school success, Gutman, Sameroff, and Eccles (2002) showed that developmental assets may have both a promotive (helpful for all youth) and a protective function (helpful for some youth under conditions of risk). In their study of more than 800 seventh-grade African American students, these researchers found that consistent discipline and parental school involvement were related to higher GPAs and better attendance for all youth, but not to math test scores. Peer support was a helpful resource, but only for math test scores, and then only for students who also were exposed to multiple risks such as low maternal education and family income. Parent promotion of democratic decision making was related to higher GPAs and math test scores for students who experienced multiple risks, but it was high-risk students whose parents did *not* promote democratic decision making who had the greater school success. The researchers reasoned that parents adapt their parenting practices to the risk level of the environment, with greater parental control more beneficial when children are living in high-risk environments.

In a study of high school students, McLellan and Youniss (2003) used the framework of identity development theory to describe the developmental role played by different kinds of community service, that is, differing service contexts. In their view, service provides access to different "transcendent systems of meaning" that enable young people to connect themselves with historical, religious, ethnic, or political traditions "of which they can legitimately feel a part" (p. 57). Young people were more likely to volunteer if they were in networks in which their parents and friends did service,

and if they were connected to youth organizations and religious institutions. That is, service was less an individual and spontaneous act and more the result of a web of asset-building relationships and norms that together elevated service to a shared social expectation.

One of the most impressive studies illustrating the power of changed contexts on personal change and developmental success is the evaluation of Big Brothers/Big Sisters conducted by Public/Private Ventures (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). The investigators fashioned a true experiment by randomly assigning half of those awaiting placement to a delayed-treatment control group while seeking placements for the other half. Those in the treatment group demonstrated several advantages over the control group, including lower likelihood of beginning to use drugs and alcohol or to have hit another person, along with better attitudes toward school, better grades, and attendance. In addition, they reported improved relations with family and peers. The causal pathway of mentoring's effects on school performance appears to have been through improved relations with parents (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000).

In summary, intentional efforts to change contexts to improve developmental success among young people largely have been shown to be effective. A cluster of intervention components including strengthened adult-youth relationships, social norms around desired behavior, development of social competencies, and provision of youth opportunities appears especially critical.

Hypothesis Two

The youth action hypothesis is the second hypothesis. The three components that comprise it are: (1) Youth action impacts contexts and the person. When youth take action to improve the contexts in which they live, the impact is enhanced because such action (properly guided and including reflection) is developmentally enhancing and, when successful, makes the target context(s) more beneficial to the actors and to other youth; (2) The impact is cumulative because youth who take action are more likely than those who do not to take action in the future, which again enhances their personal development and the contexts they have changed; their example also encourages other youth to take action; and (3) Processes for strengthening youth impact on context and self—youth participation and leadership—can be designed and implemented.

Systems and ecological models of development hold that individuals are both the products and producers of

their environments, and that it is the *relation* between the individual and environment that influences development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Hamilton et al., 2004; Lerner, 2002; Zeldin, 2004). As Hamilton et al. (2004, p. 15) note: "Human beings develop through active engagement with their environment; by making choices and shaping that environment, they also direct their own development." Two related processes may be at work. Young people's engagement may in fact alter how other people relate to them, and young people taking action to improve their contexts may subjectively appraise those contexts more favorably.

Youth engagement extends beyond merely providing opportunities for youth, but is rather a part of an intricate dialectic that itself characterizes positive outcomes, or thriving (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Lerner hypothesizes that when this bidirectional process occurs under conditions of "building a civil society"—that is, when the ideals of equity, democracy, social justice, and personal freedoms are supported—and when youth see themselves as part of an activity or issue that is larger than themselves, this in turn impels both healthy individual development as well as salutary effects for the community (Lerner, Dowling, et al., 2003; see also Nakamura, 2001; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002).

'Youth engagement' is a multidimensional term, and loosely refers to activities and constructs such as positive citizenship, volunteering, prosocial acts in the community, involvement, participation, community service, and youth voice (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Zaff & Michelsen, 2002). Central to all of these terms is meaningful participation in an activity that links the individual, through action and commitment, to the broader context (Nakamura, 2001; Pancer et al., 2002). It is this last component—where the individual "transcends self-interest" (Lerner, Dowling, et al., 2003; p. 176)—that separates youth engagement from other extracurricular activities in which the youth may partake.

The interplay of person and context means not only that change in context changes the person, but that young people's actions inevitably alter the developmental contexts they experience, with related consequences, positively or negatively, for their developmental well-being (and as well, the positive development of their *community*—see below). For example, exploring the theoretical importance of "engagement" in living, Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) studied a diverse national sample of 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th graders. They compared adolescents who were "chronically interested" as they went about their lives, versus adolescents who reported being habitually bored. The interested, engaged adolescents had significantly higher global self-esteem, internal locus of control, and optimism about their future, and significantly less pessimism than the bored adolescents.

Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) reasoned that, over time, engaged adolescents will develop more internal resources of confidence and enthusiasm—more "psychological capital"—than their disengaged peers, because they view themselves as more effective agents in constructing the flow of their lives. Moreover, their openness and interested connection to their experiences may both partly arise from their social capital in the form of adults' enhancing and guiding their interests, and also help create further social capital, as their very interested nature attracts others to them. Ryff and Singer (1998) also ascribe high importance to the effect that individuals' perceptions of events or circumstances have on psychological coping and how "physiological cascades unfold" (p. 13) based on perceptions.

These theoretical descriptions of social and psychological capital, and the processes that link them, are quite analogous to Benson et al.'s (1998) formulation of "external" and "internal" developmental assets being key "building blocks of success." Similar too is Lerner, Wertlieb, and Jacobs (2003) elaboration of the reciprocal individual-context relations that are the heart of developmental systems theory.

Dworkin, Larsen, and Hansen (2003) also provide a theoretical explanation of how youth participation in one kind of developmental context—extracurricular or community-based activities—might positively influence development through young people's actions. They postulated that such activities facilitate six different developmental processes: Identity exploration; the development of initiative ("the capacity to direct attention and effort over time toward a challenging goal," p. 18) and goal-directed behavior; growth in emotional competencies; formation of new and varied peer network connections; development of social skills; and the acquisition of social capital through developing relationships with nonfamily adults. Dworkin et al. concluded that a common thread connecting these processes is that the young people participating in youth programs were developing a sense of agency and seeing themselves as producers of their own development. This empirical conclusion provides support for

one of the basic tenets of both ecological and especially developmental systems theory, that children and youth help to construct their contexts and do not simply "interact" with them (Lerner, 2002).

Masten et al. (1999) used multiple methods to follow a group of 200 urban 8- to 12-year-olds for 10 years, investigating pathways to resilience. Individuals were resilient if they were adequately competent in academic achievement, conduct, and peer relations even when experiencing high adversity. They experienced positive adaptational systems much like those of low adversity and competent peers, namely, adequate IQ, high parenting quality, high self-worth, and a cheerful, energetic outlook. Consistent with positive youth development Hypothesis 2, competence in childhood longitudinally predicted positive changes in parenting quality during adolescence, and parenting quality in childhood longitudinally contributed to positive changes in peer social competence during adolescence. Children's own behaviors changed the kind of family context they experienced, as reflected in parenting, and through that path altered another developmental context, that of later peer relations.

When youth provide community service, they participate in an activity that explicitly is intended to alter both person and context. For example, Metz, McLellan, and Youniss (2003) studied 367 mostly European American, middle-class, public high school students in Boston, examining how different kinds of community service facilitated civic development (e.g., concern with poverty, intention to vote, demonstrating for a cause, future volunteering) over the course of a school year. Both social cause service (remedying a social problem) and standard service (from coaching to raking leaves) were associated with greater future intentions to serve than was not participating in service. However, social cause service during the school year was associated with greater concern for social issues and unconventional civic involvement than was standard service or no service.

Eccles and Barber (1999) examined the effects of 10th-grade prosocial activity involvement (church involvement and/or participating in volunteer and community service) on concurrent and future (2 years later) risk behaviors and academic outcomes. Students engaged in prosocial activities drank alcohol and used marijuana less at both time points than did students not engaged in these activities. In addition, involved students also had higher concurrent and future grade point averages than did their noninvolved peers, even after controlling for initial levels of outcome.

Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier (2000) compared, over the course of a school year, social responsibility and academic success among middle-school students engaged in service-learning projects and a control group of students. Youth action had significant effects on young people's social contexts: Youth in service-learning projects were more likely to maintain concern for others' welfare than were control students. Moreover, service-learning students, especially girls, also declined significantly less then did control students in their frequency of talking with parents about school, a contextual effect (parent involvement) related to positive academic achievement.

In a study by Allen, Philliber, Herrling, and Kuperminc (1997), almost 700 high school students were randomly assigned to a treatment group, which consisted of structured volunteer community service time as well as a related classroom-based curriculum, or to a control group. Students involved in volunteer activities had significantly lower rates of course failure, school suspensions, and rates of pregnancy (ever been for females, responsible for pregnancy for males) than did the control group.

In a study of 972 urban, predominantly non-European American seventh and eightg graders, O'Donnell and colleagues (1999) found that students who participated in community service reported significantly less violence than did control students, after controlling for initial levels of violence, gender, ethnicity, and socially desirable responses. Students who had only a violence-prevention curriculum did not differ from controls at the 6-month follow-up, suggesting that participation in community service was critical to the changes in behavior.

These studies illustrate the significance of different kinds of youth engagement on *changes* in developmental outcomes over time. In particular, given that in many cases these effects held after controlling for potential selection-effect confounds (Atkins & Hart, 2003), these results suggest that all youth, regardless of background, can benefit from these kinds of experiences.

Youniss and colleagues (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997) offer a more specific model for how youth participation actively facilitates not only a sense of identity, but specifically, civic identity. They argue that "participatory action" during adolescent identity formation infuses one's sense of self with a civic component; this civic component then

becomes an inextricable part of how an adolescent sees himself or herself (Youniss et al., 1997).

Youniss proposes three related consequences of youth engagement that work to influence identity formation. First, participating in community activities "allows youth to see society as a construction of human actors with political and moral goals rather than as a distant, preformed object" (Youniss et al., 1997). Second, by virtue of engaging in these kinds of activities, youth build a sense of agency regarding their own abilities to influence their surrounding contexts. Third, community involvement instills in youth a sense of responsibility for welfare of the community and its members (see also Lerner, Dowling, et al., 2003). These processes have lifelong effects on the attitudes individuals hold and the actions they take. Support for this hypothesis is provided in Youniss et al. (1997). Retrospective accounts indicated that participation in youth organizations during adolescence increased the likelihood of civic behaviors (e.g., membership in local civic, church, service, and professional groups) 15 years later in adulthood. This is interpreted as indicating that youth engagement acts as a gateway to future civic involvement (Tolman & Pittman, 2001).

The research thus shows the positive impact that youth action has on both person—young people themselves—and social context. However, most of this research concerns community service or service-learning programs, which represent only one kind of "youth action" or leadership. One review of more than 800 studies concluded that youth "empowerment," broadly construed, is a relatively less represented area of research in positive youth development (Scales & Leffert, 2004).

Hypothesis Three

The covariation hypothesis states that the Person factors (e.g., achievement motivation) and context factors (e.g., caring school climate or school boundaries) covary and are mutually reinforcing. That is, ecological factors and individual attributes tend to be directly related. Increasing assets of one kind tends to increase the other.

Developmental theory posits that person and context truly are mutually interactive. Thus, developmental assets "in" the person, such as social competencies or positive identity, should be found operating together with developmental assets "outside" the person in their various contexts (e.g., family, schools, peers, community) to promote developmental well-being and thriving. In sup-

port of this hypothesis, studies consistently find constellations of developmental nutrients, including both internal and external factors, to be associated with various outcomes. For example, Dukes and Stein (2001) measured several protective factors, including: self-esteem, positive school attitudes, prosocial activities (homework, clubs, service), purpose in life, and prosocial bonds (attitudes toward police officers). Outcomes included drug use, delinquency, and weapons possession. A second-order factor comprising the assets predicted significantly fewer of those problem behaviors among a sample of 13,000 6th to 12th grade students in Colorado. Similarly, in the Add Health study, lower levels of violence were significantly predicted by parent-family connectedness, parental expectations for education (weakly), and school connectedness. However, parent-adolescent activities or self-esteem did not predict lower levels of violence (Resnick et al., 1997).

Leffert et al. (1998) studied a sample of nearly 100,000 youth from more than 200 U.S. communities. They reported that a cluster of four assets—positive peer influence, peaceful conflict resolution, school engagement, and safety—added 30% to the explained variance of engagement in violence, compared to the 8% explained by demographics.

Crosnoe, Erickson, and Dornbusch (2002) studied a diverse sample of adolescents from nine California and Wisconsin high schools. They reported that "protection" against delinquency and substance use existed among adolescents who experienced warm relations with parents, came from relatively well-organized households, valued academic achievement, were engaged at school, felt close to teachers, and performed well in school.

Catterall (1998) analyzed subsamples from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to explore the concepts of commitment resilience and academic resilience among 8th graders followed through 10th grade. Commitment resilience was the recovery by 10th grade of confidence in graduating among those who in 8th grade had "any degree of doubt" about graduating. Academic resilience was the significantly better performance in English of 10th-grade students who in 8th grade had C or lower grades in that subject. Both kinds of resilience were fostered by a similar constellation of positive assets. These assets included family involvement in and supports for schooling (e.g., books in the home, a place for studying, rules about TV watching [for academic resilience only]), teacher responsiveness (listening and being interested in students), fairness of

school discipline policies, and student involvement in school and extracurricular activities.

These studies illustrate the commonly observed linkage of both person and context factors in positive youth development. Some assets, such as school bonding, also well exemplify the often tenuous distinction between "internal" and "external" resources. School bonding is a particularly important developmental asset, having been linked to positive outcomes such as reduced substance use, antisocial behavior, risky behaviors such as early sexual initiation, delinquency and, most substantially, academic performance. Four dimensions of school bonding have been identified: Attachment to school (youth care about their school), attachment to personnel (connection to school adults), school commitment (the priority of school for youth), and school involvement (participation in school activities). In the social development model, involvement is seen more as a contributor to school bonding than a result of it (Maddox & Prinz, 2003), but that the construct comprises *both* internal and external dimensions underscores the covariation of person and context influences on development.

Hypothesis Four

The fourth hypothesis, termed the "pile-up" hypothesis, states that the total number of positive experiences (i.e., a pile-up of assets) is concurrently related to both positive and negative outcomes. Moreover, assets are functionally equivalent; it is the number of assets that matters, not specific assets or combinations of assets, because context-person fusion creates an infinite diversity of combinations of assets that "matter most." Research provides considerable support for the first part of this hypothesis, the "pile-up" effect associated with greater numbers of assets. But there is also considerable evidence that specific assets or clusters of assets matter more or less for specific youth (see also below under the universality/diversity hypothesis), and depending on the developmental outcome the assets are hypothesized to predict.

The accumulation of developmental strengths repeatedly has been shown to add value over the positive effects of a lesser number of strengths. As discussed in Benson et al. (2003) there are two manifestations of this pile-up, horizontal and vertical. Horizontal pile-up is reflected in cross-sectional studies that document an increased association of assets and outcomes at a single point in time when the young person experiences greater numbers of those assets. Horizontal pile-up also implies contextual breadth, if not synergy, in the experience of assets, as when the accumulation of assets experienced in multiple ecological contexts (e.g., family, school, community, peer) is more strongly associated with positive outcomes than are assets experienced in only one context.

Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, and Turbin's (1995) longitudinal study of seventh to ninth graders was one of the first to demonstrate, not only that an accumulation of risk factors was associated with greater problem behavior, but that a greater accumulation of protective factors was associated with fewer problem behavior. Implicit in their Protective Factor Index was the representation of multiple contexts, including school, friends, family, and community elements. Gutman and Midgely (2000) documented the multiplicative effects of developmental assets on the academic achievement of African American students living in poverty and making the transition to middle school. Students with either family (high parental involvement) or school protective factors (perceived teacher support, or feelings of school belonging) had higher GPAs in sixth grade than classmates who did not experience those nutrients. But students who had both family and school assets had higher GPAs than students who had only family or school assets but not both.

In a sample of more than 100,000 youth, Benson, Scales, Leffert, and Roehlkepartain (1999) found that each successive increase in a young person's quartile asset level, from asset-depleted (0 to 10 assets) to asset-rich (31 to 40 assets) was associated with significantly more adolescent thriving (e.g., school success, overcoming adversity) and significantly less risk behavior (e.g., problem alcohol use, early sexual intercourse).

A subsequent analysis of a more diverse sample of 217,000 middle and high school students from more than 300 U.S. communities revealed the same evidence of horizontal pile-up (*Developmental assets*, 2001). Young people with 0 to 10 assets report an average of 4.1 high-risk behavior patterns; those with 11 to 20 assets report 2.3 risk patterns; those with 21 to 30 assets report an asset of just 1 high-risk behavior pattern; and asset-rich youth, and with 31 to 40 assets, report an average of just .3 high-risk patterns.

Hollister-Wagner, Foshee, and Jackson (2001) studied how developmental assets (protective factors in their terminology) might promote resilience to aggression among adolescents. In their study of rural eighth and

ninth graders, the protective factors investigated were importance of religion, self-esteem, closeness to one adult, relationship competence, constructive communication skills, and constructive anger response. For females, but not for males, the researchers found that with each increase in the simple number of protective factors, the relationship between risk factors (e.g., having been hit, witnessing parental violence) and reports of beating up one's peers weakened. Eighth and ninth-grade girls who had all six protective factors were about three times less likely as girls with only two, and four times less likely as girls with no protective factors, to report beating up someone.

Relationships with adults in school and community settings also provide valuable sources of protection from risk. For example, in the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, Resnick et al. (1997) reported that young people who experienced closer connections to their families and schools were significantly less likely than other adolescents to engage in a variety of risk-taking behaviors. Each of the contexts (family and school) by itself explained relatively modest portions (5% to 18%) of the variance across outcomes such as emotional distress, violence, and substance use. But when the effects of the other context (family or school) and assets in still other contexts (e.g., religious involvement) were included, the contribution of these assets to outcome variance increased by more than 50%.

In another report utilizing the Add Health data (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999), the extent of several positive behaviors among 7th to 12th graders was noted, such as getting B or higher averages, involvement in extracurricular activities, and religious involvement once a month or more. The more positive behaviors in which students engaged, the fewer the number of risk behaviors in which they engaged.

Cumulative environmental risk has been shown to be predictive of internalizing and externalizing problems, not only as the absolute number of risks increases, but as the number of social domains (e.g., family, peer, school, neighborhood) being high-risk increases (Gerard & Buehler, 2004). Sanders's (1998) study of more than 800 urban African American students in the eighth grade lends further support to the hypothesis that, analogous to the findings for risk, *strengths* piling up *across* ecological domains magnify the protective and thriving effects of positive experiences in single contexts.

He reported that when all three support contexts— family, school, and church—were combined, the effect on academic self-concept (which most strongly pre- dicted actual achievement) and achievement ideology were stronger than the unique effects of any of the individual contexts (the combined effect on school conduct was comparable to the individual effect from teacher support). This finding suggested that "when students receive support from the family, church, and school simultaneously, the effects on their attitudes about self and the importance of schooling are magnified" (Sanders, 1998, p. 402).

The effects of positive experience across multiple contexts can be seen as well in Scales, Benson, et al.'s (2000) study of the relations among developmental assets and thriving indicators. For example, among European American 6th to 12th graders, achievement motivation alone explained 19% of the variance in school success (self-reported grades). But school engagement, time in youth programs, time at home, planning and decision making, parent involvement in school, and self-esteem added another 12% of variance (Scales, Benson, et al., 2000). The Search Institute findings are consistent with those reported by Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky, and McCarthy (1997). In their study of middle school students, the explained variance of adolescent outcomes was "substantially increased" when all the contexts studied (family, school, and peers) were added into regressions, leading the researchers to conclude that positive experiences across contexts add "linearly and independently" to contribute to positive development.

Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, and Armistead (2002) studied the contribution of supportive parenting and classroom processes to the psychological adjustment of African American elementary and middle school students living in poverty in the South. For both grade cohorts, they found that students experiencing high parenting (high monitoring and a supportive, involved mother-child relationship) or classroom quality (high levels of organization, clarity of rules, and involvement of students) had better adjustment than students experiencing low quality in both contexts. However, students experiencing high quality in *both* contexts had the best adjustment, as reflected in the highest self-regulation scores, and lowest externalization and depression scores.

Similar findings, among fifth and sixth graders, are reported by Paulson, Marchant, and Rothlisberg (1998) in a study of the effect of children having assets across contexts. Children with the highest achievement perceived a consistency and congruence of parenting and teaching styles, accompanied by high parental involvement in school and a caring school climate. The assets provided by family and school enabled those children to

enjoy more positive outcomes than children who experienced assets in only one of those contexts.

A test of the social development model (Catalano & Kosterman, 1996) found an acceptable fit to predicting drug use among 590 17- and 18-year-olds on the basis of variables measuring prosocial and antisocial influences from fifth grade through middle school. In addition to prior drug use, the model includes such protective factors as: perceived opportunities and rewards for prosocial involvement (knowing where to go to join clubs, participating in family decisions, having lots of chances for extracurricular activities), reported involvement in prosocial activities (including church attendance and membership in community groups), social competencies, attachment and bonding to prosocial others, and belief in the moral order (e.g., importance of telling the truth, whether it is okay to cheat). All the path coefficients for protective factors to drug use were significant and in the expected direction.

In a study of 12,500 9th to 12th graders from the original Add Health study pool of 7th to 12th graders, Zweig, Phillips, and Lindberg (2002) reported that students with higher levels of protective factors (e.g., decision-making skills, participation in physical activities) consistently had significantly lower levels of behaviors such as sexual activity, alcohol use, binge drinking, other drug use, fighting, and suicidal behaviors.

Similarly, Jessor et al. (1998) examined risk and protection especially among disadvantaged students, with disadvantage defined by low parental occupational status, low parental education, and single-parent family structure. The outcome variables of interest were school engagement, low problem behavior, and a composite of the two, labeled "Making It." They reported that a protective factor index contributed about as much to variance in the successful outcomes as did a risk factor index. For example, risk contributed 32% to the composite measure of Making It, compared to 26% for protection.

Benson and Roehlkepartain (2004) studied the relation of assets to substance use among a cross-sectional sample of more than 217,000 6th to 12th graders. They reported that young people with low levels of developmental assets (0 to 10 of the 40 assets) were from 2.4 to 4.4 times more likely to engage in different kinds of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use than were students at average or higher levels of assets (21 or more assets). The effects of assets were stronger than that of SES or living in a single-parent family.

The pile-up effect is seen for other outcomes as well. For example, the overall level of evidence (Miller &

Thoresen, 2003) for the theoretical connection between assets and greater school success appears to be *persuasive*, supported by scores of peer-reviewed studies. However, this conclusion pertains only when a number of assets and other factors (e.g., teachers' collective efficacy) are operating together; rarely do single assets or other factors (excepting near tautologies such as previous grades predicting future grades) account for considerable variance in school success outcomes (Wang, Hartel, & Walberg, 1990). Benson et al. (1999), for example, reported that in a sample of nearly 100,000 6th to 12th graders, each quartile increase in students' levels of 40 developmental assets (i.e., from 0 to 10, 11 to 20) was associated with a significant improvement in self-reported grades.

Similarly, Scales and Benson (2004) created a prosocial orientation measure by combining several items tapping adolescents' attitudes toward helping others, and several items asking about intentions to help those in need, working to improve their school, or tutoring or coaching younger children over the next year. They then examined the concurrent relation to prosocial orientation and the number of developmental assets adolescents reported. In a racially/ethnically diverse sample of more than 5,000 6th to 12th graders, they found that each increase in the quartile level of the asset domains studied (0 to 2, 3 to 5, 6 to 8, or 9 to 12 assets) was associated with a significant increase in the mean score on prosocial orientation. They also found that, controlling for grade in school, race/ethnicity, and parental education, both boys and girls with above average levels of prosocial orientation were nearly four times more likely to report actual volunteer service of at least 1 hour per week in the past year.

Overall, the empirical evidence is consistent and strong for the theoretical relation between the number of assets that adolescents experience and the positive developmental outcomes of both greater thriving and lessened risk behaviors.

Hypothesis Five

The longitudinal hypothesis is defined as the fusion of context/person dynamics in the presence of high levels of developmental assets results *over time* in (a) lessened risk behaviors; (b) increased academic achievement; (c) increased contribution; and (d) higher levels of other thriving indicators.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the contribution that developmental assets make to positive youth

outcomes not only concurrently but also over time. For example, more than 30 longitudinal studies showing these relations are cited in comprehensive reviews of research on developmental assets in adolescence (Scales & Leffert, 2004) and middle childhood (Scales et al., 2004). Although in all cases, the studies focus on only one or a small number of assets, not the entire range of 40 assets identified by Search Institute, the results are nevertheless consistent: The experience of developmental assets contributes significantly to the likelihood of subsequent protection from high-risk behaviors and promotion of thriving.

For example, Moore and Glei (1995) found that young people who as children and adolescents participated significantly more than their peers in school clubs were especially likely to report positive outcomes *in young adulthood* (ages 18 to 22). Outcomes included closer relationships with their parents, and greater involvement in community affairs or volunteer work.

In a small ($N = 100$) sample of racially/ethnically diverse adolescents from low-income families, Way and Robinson (2003) found, as predicted, that the asset of positive school climate contributed to higher levels of self esteem at 2 years later, over and above the positive effects of family and friend support. Masten et al. (1999) followed a sample of urban 8- to 12-year-olds for 10 years. They showed that even after controlling for IQ and socioeconomic status (SES), the quality of parenting in mid-adolescence predicted academic, conduct, and social competence in late adolescence. Perhaps more striking, the quality of parenting in childhood predicted social competence 10 years later in late adolescence.

Pettit, Bates, and Dodge (1997) reported similar longitudinal results in their 7-year study of more than 500 Tennessee and Indiana families with kindergartners. The quality of supportive parenting children received as kindergartners (e.g., parental warmth and involvement, proactive teaching, calm discussion) contributed a small (1% to 3%) but unique amount of variance to the prediction of their functioning in both kindergarten and grade six, including whether they exhibited problem behaviors, were socially skillful, and performed well in school. This study was notable for showing that the presence of positive parenting, not merely the absence of harsh parenting, plays an important role in contributing to child well-being in both the short- and longer-term.

Moreover, as for studies reflecting horizontal pile-up, experiencing assets in multiple contexts also is developmentally advantageous over time. Cook, Herman,

Phillips, and Settersten (2002) reported in their study of changes in early adolescent development that the effects of *individual* contexts on development were generally quite modest. However, the *additive* effects of adolescents' multiple positive contexts were considerable, a result in alignment with other research showing the value of young people experiencing "redundancy" of developmental assets across their ecologies (Benson et al., 2003).

Ultimately, the most important "outcome" of positive development is more postive development. The findings of the Iowa Youth and Families Project are illustrative. The researchers (Conger & Conger, 2002) reported that the assets of nurturant and involved parenting experienced in seventh grade helped young people have fewer emotional and behavioral problems and function more competently during adolescence, even when dealing with family economic adversity. But young people who experienced those family assets during adolescence also were themselves more competent parents and more successful in their romantic relationships years later in *early adulthood* (5 years posthigh school).

Gambone et al. (2002) created indices to measure several optimal adolescent developmental outcomes (young people are productive, connected, and can navigate through their worlds effectively), and several optimal young adult outcomes (individuals are on a path to economic self-sufficiency, have healthy family and social relationships, and are involved in the community). About half of youth were doing well overall in young adulthood, but 69% of those with optimal developmental milestones in high school subsequently did very well, with a 41% greater chance of experiencing such optimal young adult outcomes. Moreover, young people who had optimal levels of the developmental nutrients *early* in high school were much more likely to have the positive developmental milestones later in high school. For example, youth who had supportive relationships with parents, teachers, and friends early in high school were 100% more likely to have optimal developmental outcomes later in high school.

Analysis by Search Institute (2004) of a longitudinal sample of 370 students in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, from when they were in 7th to 9th grades to when they were in 10th to 12th grades, showed that, in general, the more assets students reported in 1998, the less they reported risk-taking behavior patterns (e.g., driving and alcohol problems, school problems) and the more they reported indicators of thriving (e.g., delayed gratifica-

tion, physical health) in 2001 (unpublished analyses for this chapter; for study details see Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, & van Dulmen, in press; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003). These results were largely maintained even when controlling for earlier levels of the outcome variables. Additional perspective came from using a more person-centered analysis. Students who stayed stable or went up .5 SD in their assets over those 3 years had significantly fewer problem alcohol use or school problems, and more informal helping, leadership, overcoming adversity, and school success than students who declined .5 SD in their assets.

Moreover, both concurrently and longitudinally, each quartile increase in assets was associated with significantly higher GPA, and the longitudinal relations held even when controlling for the effects of earlier GPA (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003). The difference in mean GPA between asset-rich students (31 to 40 assets) and asset-depleted students (0 to 10 assets) was equivalent to the difference between a B+ and a C average. In addition, growth curve analysis showed a small but significant relationship between increase in assets and increase in GPA, such that mean GPA increased about ⅕th of a grade point over time for each increase of one asset.

In a small study of 95 inner-city sixth to eighth graders (about 60% non-European American), Dubow, Arnett, Smith, and Ippolito (2001) reported that the asset of positive expectations for the future, as assessed in September, significantly predicted lower levels of a problem behavior index in June, including using alcohol. In addition, higher initial levels of perceived problem-solving efficacy and family support predicted increases over the school year in positive expectations for the future. In another example, the social development model was applied to promote children's bonding to school in Seattle. Children who received a program in Grade 5 emphasizing the development of social competencies and bonding to school experienced, by age 21, significantly more responsible sexual behavior, including fewer partners and less sexually transmitted diseases, than peers not exposed to the program (Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano, 2002).

Benson and Roehlkepartain (2004) also conducted longitudinal analyses on a sample of middle school students who reported abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, or drug (ATOD) use in 1997. Those who continued to abstain in high school 4 years later, compared to those who began ATOD use, had significantly higher levels of assets in both 1997 and 2001, especially in the categories

of support, and boundaries and expectations. These results offer an additional provocative suggestion of the role of developmental assets in protecting young people from ATOD risks.

Participation in youth programs was found in both the Scales, Benson, et al. (2000) and Scales and Roehlkepartain (2003) Search Institute studies to be linked to school success. In a study focusing on the role of such extracurricular programs on posthigh school educational achievement, Mahoney, Cairns, and Farmer (2003) utilized the Carolina Longitudinal Study to follow nearly 700 students annually from 4th grade through 12th grade, interviewing them again when the young people were 20. They found that consistency of extracurricular participation was significantly associated with both interpersonal competence over time, as well as with educational aspirations in late adolescence, and both of those factors were linked to educational status (whether in postsecondary education or not) at age 20. The researchers explained the theoretical basis for such results by noting that the peer and adult relationships and skills associated with sustained extracurricular activity participation promote social acceptance, positive social identity development, less depressed mood and anti-social behavior, school engagement, and higher educational expectations.

In an analysis of several waves of data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Zaff, Moore, Papillo, and Williams (2003) reported that volunteering 2 years after high school was significantly more likely among students who enjoyed key developmental assets from grades 8 to 12, such as having high levels of parental support and monitoring, positive peer influences, and attendance at religious services. Moreover, if students consistently participated in extracurricular activities during grades 8 to 12—regardless of whether those activities were sports, schools clubs, or community clubs—they were twice as likely to volunteer and to have voted in local or national elections 2 years after high school as students with only occasional extracurricular participation.

The overall pattern of these results suggests that developmental strengths provide some unique proportion of influence over time in addition to their much more substantial impact on concurrent developmental outcomes. In both their strong concurrent relations and small to moderate longitudinal relations, they provide support for the theoretical proposition that developmental assets positively affect developmental trajectories.

Hypothesis Six

The Community Hypothesis is based on the notion that community is a viable focus for understanding and promoting dynamics crucial for maximizing context/person relationships. By analogy to public health, the largest improvements in positive youth development will occur in response to interventions/initiatives that are aimed at changing communities more so than those aimed at individuals. How the community is defined depends on the target(s) of the intervention/initiative.

The inadequacy of individual treatment is related to the principles of public health and prevention. Despite dramatic improvements in medical treatment, Kreipe, Ryan, and Seibold-Simpson (2004, p. 104) point out that "Improved sanitation, work environments, and immunization programs as well as safety measures . . . have done more to improve health than one-to-one medical treatment."

Similarly, community mobilization to promote positive youth development must address not only formal organizations and programs but also informal norms and relationships. Studies show that youth do better in communities where adults share some basic values, norms, and expectations, including understandings about what kind of behavior is acceptable and what to do when someone crosses the line (Damon, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997).

In this section, we refer to community as the interlocking systems of contexts, ecologies, and settings that moderate developmental growth. Accordingly, there are within this broad conception a wide range of influences on development, including family, neighborhood, school, playground, and congregation, the relationships inside and beyond these settings, and the policy, business and economic infrastructure of a community.

Tolan, Gorman-Smith, and Henry (2003) conducted a 6-year longitudinal study of several hundred African American and Latino adolescent males and their primary caretakers. As predicted by bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), they reported a complex relationship among community structural characteristics, neighborhood processes, parenting practices, and youths' violent behavior. Neighborhood concentrated poverty and high crime levels were found to predict the extent of perceived neighborhood problems and neighborliness, as well as directly to predict parenting practices, such that high poverty and crime were related to more restrictive parenting, which reduced violence by limiting youths' gang involvement.

Scales and Roehlkepartain (2003) found that for every point higher students scored in 1998 on a developmental assets factor reflecting connection to community, they were three times more likely than other students to be in the high GPA group (B+ or higher) in 2001. Assets in that factor included youth programs, religious community, service to others, creative activities, reading for pleasure, other adult relationships, and adult role models. The results of this study are provocative in suggesting how a multiplicity of assets reflecting the developmental attentiveness of "community" may favorably affect young people's school success.

Similarly, Greenberg et al. (2003) reviewed a wide range of evidence that suggests the most effective school-based prevention and youth development data are those that "enhance students' personal and social assets" and improve the school-community environment (p. 467). The focus of effective approaches is not on narrow programs addressing a single issue—programs that often may be disruptive more than beneficial—but comprehensive efforts that try simultaneously to build students' health, character, citizenship and community connection, school orientation, and academic performance. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Prevention, Promoting Strength Resilience, and Health in Young People, also endorses a broad approach that coordinates problem-prevention with efforts to build young people's competence, relationships with others, and contributions to the community (Weissberg et al., 2003).

Echoing the research presented earlier as relevant to the first positive youth development hypothesis (i.e., that contexts are modifiable, and that these changes in contexts have consequences for youths' developmental outcomes), a core of strategies repeatedly appears in reports of successful efforts. These include: building students' social-emotional learning repertoire, providing frequent opportunities for student participation, such as through community service, fostering caring, supportive relationships among students, teachers, and parents, and consistently rewarding positive social, health, and academic behaviors through school-parent-community collaborations.

Much of the source for the impact of community comes from adults outside young people's own families. Recent research has documented clearly the value of formal mentoring relationships for young people (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2000). The more global influence of "other adult assets" that occur quite naturally in young people's

lives, such as with neighbors, is potentially more far-reaching but has been less well studied. The limited evidence suggests that only 15% of young people report experiencing a "rich" level of relationships with adults other than parents (Scales, 2003; Scales et al., 2002).

But the climate of social expectations is crucial. Sixty-two percent of U.S. adults with *strong* social expectations for involvement are highly engaged with other people's children, versus 41% for those who feel only moderate expectations, 22% for those with mild expectations, and just 9% for those with weak social expectations for involvement (Scales, 2003). Consequently, although studies regularly demonstrate the effect of "community" as a source of developmental assets, potentiation of the full range of possible positive community impact on youth development requires attention to changing existing social norms about adult-youth engagement.

Some of the more ambitious efforts to intervene at the level of community have been initiated by national foundations. The Kellogg Youth Initiative Partnerships (KYIP) were launched in 1987 to assist three Michigan communities in expanding beyond investment in "fixing young people's problems" to community collaborations engaged in promoting youth potential. Combining service integration with youth development principles and a focus on school reform, the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1987 launched New Futures, a 5-year demonstration project in five cities with high percentages of high-risk youth. In 1995, with funding from a consortium of foundations, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) launched its Community Change for Youth Development Initiative (CCYD). The CCYD provided communities with a set of research-based core principles and with strategies for implementing them. Among the principles were adult support and guidance and structured activities during nonschool hours.

None of these initiatives reported large and consistent effects in terms of outcomes for youth. However, new programs, organizations, and leaders demonstrated enduring impact. For example, 5 years after New Futures funding was ended, investigators (Hahn & Lanspery, 2001) attributed "change that abides" to the "ripeness" of the communities for change, including leadership, a widespread recognition of problems, and utilization of other resources and initiatives with compatible goals.

In a similar vein, a report from the Kellogg Foundation (n.d.) after the 1st decade of KYIP stressed the critical importance of engaging the community. Such engagement critically includes youth themselves. And from the lessons of CCYD, Gambone et al. (2002) have articulated and demonstrated a convincing rationale for evaluating the *opportunities* such an initiative creates for youth rather than focusing solely on impact or outcomes for individual youth. The "community action framework for youth development" (Connell et al., 2001) embeds such opportunities in a theory of change that can be theoretically and empirically linked to desired outcomes, some intermediate-term and some long-term.

In a particularly useful analysis of community initiatives, Dorgan and Ferguson (2004) examined factors critical to the success (or lack of it) in the New Futures initiative and the New York City Beacons project (community centers operating in public school buildings). Though the two initiatives had similar aspirations, they were directed by quite different theories of change and implementation strategies. The authors credit the particular success of the Beacons project to a clear, understandable, and politically compelling emphasis on co-locating services, supports and opportunities in neighborhood schools to create "safe havens" for youth. In addition, the Beacons' focus on professionals working directly with youth and on the grassroots support of volunteers, parents, and neighborhood residents led to faster achievement of goals than the New Futures approach of creating collaboratives to plan and coordinate youth services and programs city-wide.

A somewhat different theory of change undergirds Search Institute's national Healthy Community • Healthy Youth movement. With 600 communities currently engaged (Benson, 2003a), this change strategy invites communities to create multiple innovative "experiments" to transform contexts and ecologies with a particular eye to mobilizing asset-building adult and peer relationships. A number of studies are completed or ongoing in capturing both how transformative change is made and the connection of these changes to adolescent health and well-being (Mannes, Lewis, Hintz, Foster, & Nakkula, 2002; Whitlock & Hamiltion, 2003). A longitudinal study in St. Louis Park, Minnesota provides suggestive evidence that sustained community-wide engagement with asset-building has population-level effects on several measures of well-being (Roehlkepartain, Benson, & Sesma, 2003).

These studies generally support the broad hypothesis that describes "community" as an important focus of positive youth development efforts. However, much research is needed to better understand how specific conceptualizations of "community" operate to positively influence

young people, and how those effects may vary as a function of varying realities of person-context fusion.

Hypothesis Seven

The Universality/Diversity Hypothesis proposed that there are developmental supports and opportunities that enhance developmental success for all youth; strategies and tactics for promoting them vary. Moreover, because all youth need developmental assets, many community-level interventions will benefit all or almost all youth. However, youth with few or no assets may require interventions targeted to them and their specific needs. One of the functions of those extraordinary interventions is to enable those youth to benefit from more universal interventions.

There are likely variations in the degree to which developmental assets can explain developmental outcomes, and in which assets may be most critical in promoting specific outcomes, depending on differences among young people's contexts and developmental histories. But studies (e.g., reviews in Montemayor, Adams, & Gullotta, 2000; Scales et al., 2004; Scales & Leffert, 2004) suggest significant theoretical and practical insights relevant for most if not all groups of young people in looking at their development through a strength-based lens.

However, compared to the literature on developmental strengths and young people of differing gender, age, racial/ethnic groups, and socioeconomic status, there is a dearth of empirical work on relating developmental strengths to other dimensions of diversity, such as sexual orientation, family background, or differing exposure to violence. Goldfried and Bell (2003), for example, describe literature on sexual minorities as essentially "ignored" in mainstream psychology and adolescent development. The available evidence suggests that at least some developmental strengths, such as self-esteem and, particularly, family support, seem to diminish or eliminate differences in mental or behavioral health problems among both sexual majority and minority youth (Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehart, 2000).

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

We next briefly describe illustrative research pertaining to positive youth development as reflected across gender, age, SES, and race/ethnicity.

Gender

Studies consistently find that females report higher levels of most developmental assets than do males, with the exception of self-esteem (see reviews by Scales & Leffert, 2004; Scales et al., 2004). The consistency of such findings across studies and measures provides evidence for the validity of this basic conclusion. However, these systematic differences may be produced by a lack of measures tapping potential assets that may be more common among young men (e.g., assertiveness, competitiveness). Reported gender differences in some assets also may be a result of systematic response biases from young people responding in gender-typed ways (e.g., girls' greater reporting of prosocial attitudes and behaviors—Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Apart from frequency differences, however, numerous studies suggest that assets may operate somewhat differently for males and females.

Huebner and Betts (2002) used social control theory to frame a study of 911 7th to 12th graders from a mining community in the southwest. They found that both attachment bonds (connections to parents, unrelated adults, and peers) and involvement bonds (time in school and nonschool activities, including time in religious activities, volunteering, and clubs or organizations) predicted less delinquency and greater academic achievement (self-reported grades). Involvement bonds predicted delinquency more for males than females, and attachment bonds predicted grades more for females than for males.

Hollister-Wagner et al. (2001) studied resiliency with regard to aggression (beating up a peer). In a large sample of rural eighth and ninth graders, they found support for the role of protective factors in reducing violence for females, but not males. The researchers reasoned that exposure to aggressive models, and social reinforcement for aggression, is sufficiently stronger for males that protective factors, although still positive, have a weaker influence on them.

Age

High school students consistently are found to report fewer developmental assets than do middle school students. For example, in a cross-sectional sample of more than 217,000 6th to 12th graders, whose average number of 40 assets was 19.3, 6th graders reported 23.1 assets, 8th graders reported 19.6, and 10th graders reported

17.8 (Benson, 2001). Asset levels were somewhat higher among 11th and 12th graders (to 18.1 and 18.3 assets, respectively), but still remained lower than asset levels among the younger students. Similarly, in a study of more than 5,000 6th to 12th graders in a mid-sized Western city, Scales, Leffert, et al. (2003) reported that 6th to 8th graders reported significantly more exposure than 9th to 12th grade students to most assets, including positive relationships with unrelated adults and consistency of expectations for behavior. In a longitudinal study of 370 students, Roehlkepartain et al. (2003) reported that asset levels declined sharply across 6th to 8th grade, bottomed out between 9th to 11th grades, and evidenced a slight rebound in the 12th grade. In another analysis of the same longitudinal sample, Scales and Roehlkepartain (2003) reported that 41% of these students decreased at least .5 standard deviations in their assets from middle school through high school. Another 34% stayed relatively stable, and only 24% increased at least .5 standard deviations in asset levels over the middle school to high school period.

Similarly, Scales et al. (2004) found that fourth and fifth graders reported more assets than did sixth graders (26.6. and 26, respectively, versus 24.7 for sixth graders). Only for safety did sixth graders report higher levels than fourth to fifth graders. Although longitudinal data are not yet available to confirm that those grade differences result from declining assets as cohorts age, the longitudinal results for older youth suggest that this interpretation is warranted.

Race/Ethnicity and SES

Drawing on seven national, state, and local studies with racially/ethnically diverse adolescent samples, Rowe, Vazsonyi, and Flannery (1994) argued that developmental processes appeared similar across racial/ethnic categories in effects on outcomes such as IQ, achievement, and social adjustment. The variables investigated included parental involvement and monitoring, self-efficacy, school self-esteem, parents' school encouragement, family communication, and attachment to teachers. The covariance matrices of the associations between these developmental influences and outcomes had significant and similar goodness-of-fit indexes across African American, Asian, Hispanic, and European American adolescents. The degree of similarity between racial/ethnic groups was no less than the degree of similarity found in comparing covariance matri-

ces of random halves of a single racial/ethnic group, which would be expected to be highly similar.

Rowe et al. (1994) did not investigate precisely *how* assets and outcomes were related across racial/ethnic groups. Although developmental assets in general appear to have comparable positive relations with developmental outcomes for most groups of youth, how particular assets function to promote positive outcomes may well vary depending on which dimensions of diversity are examined. For example, Bean, Bush, McKenry, and Wilson (2003) studied the relation of components of authoritative parenting to academic achievement (self-reported grades) among 155 African American and European American high school students. They found that parental support, behavioral control, and psychological control had significantly different relations with grades, depending on parents' race and gender. For African American students, maternal support was significantly related to academic achievement, but the other components were not, and none of the parenting components was significant for African American fathers. But for neither European American mothers nor fathers was support a significant contributor to achievement. For European American students, fathers use of greater behavioral control, and mothers use of greater behavioral control and less psychological control, were significant predictors of academic success.

Sesma and Roehlkepartain (2003) examined developmental assets and outcomes among 217,277 6th- through 12th-grade students (including 69,731 youth of color) surveyed in 318 U.S. communities during the 1999/2000 school year. Across all racial/ethnic groups, greater numbers of developmental assets were associated with fewer risk behavior patterns and more thriving indicators. These relations held even after controlling for socioeconomic status. For example, across all racial/ethnic groups, young people who engaged in none of 10 high-risk behavior patterns averaged experiencing about 23 assets, whereas those who reported engaging in 5 or more of the 10 risk patterns said they experienced 15 or fewer of the developmental assets.

At the same time, there were racial/ethnic differences. For example, boundaries and expectations assets (e.g., family rules, neighborhood social controls, and adult role models) were important for all youth in helping them avoid anti-social behavior, but were found to have especially strong preventive associations for American Indian, Multiracial, and European American youth (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

Scales, Benson, et al. (2000) also reported that specific clusters of assets could explain from 19% to 32% of the variance in self-reported grades, over and above demographics, among six different racial/ethnic groups of students. The assets of achievement motivation, school engagement, time in youth programs, time at home, and personal power meaningfully contributed to variance in grades for three or more of the six racial/ethnic groups.

In an interview study with 45 male African American gang members and 50 similar youth connected to community organizations, Taylor et al. (2003) found that the nongang youth reported significantly more positive developmental experiences. However, across nine categories of positive attributes that reflect developmental assets, an average of 28% of the gang members scored above the mean for the nongang youth, suggesting that a reservoir of developmental strengths may exist among even "deviant" youth assets that supports their positive growth. For example, more than one-third of the gang youth had more positive relations with family and with school or education than the nongang youth, and a fifth had more positive role models than did nongang youth. In a 1-year longitudinal analyses of this sample, Taylor et al. (2002) also reported a sizeable correlation (.67, $p \leq .01$) between change in developmental assets from Time 1 to Time 2, and changes in individual growth in positive personal and social functioning. These findings point to two tentative conclusions: (1) that the developmental assets that support positive outcomes are not entirely absent even for young people who currently are "embedded in a behavioral and social milieu marked by risks (e.g., gang violence, drugs, and poor familial support) [and] . . . ambient problems of poverty and racism" (p. 513), and (2) that enhancing developmental assets may facilitate positive trajectories for a subset of such challenged youth.

In another study of several hundred gang and nongang adolescents, Li et al. (2002) also found, as expected, that gang members on average reported fewer resilience factors in their lives. But like Taylor et al. (2003), Li et al. also reported that gang and nongang youth were not significantly different on a number of those contributors to resilience, including social problem-solving skills, self-esteem, physical activity, and academic performance. That is, both these studies suggest that individual and ecological characteristics that promote health and thriving exist among a substantial proportion of seemingly "lost" young people, representing a potentially valuable target of community actions to build better developmental paths for all young people.

There is little research on developmental assets among mixed-race or multiracial adolescents. A recent report drawing on the national Add Health dataset focused solely on risk behaviors, and concluded that mixed-race adolescents, regardless of which racial/ethnic groups were combined, tended to have higher incidences of health and behavioral risks than single race youth. Although impossible to confirm with those data, the researchers speculated that the results were consistent with a theoretical explanation pointing to mixed-race status increasing the stress those young people faced (Udry, Li, & Hendrickson-Smith, 2003).

In one study of positive development that included self-described Multiracial youth, Scales, Benson, et al. (2000) reported that clusters of developmental assets had significant explanatory power for concurrent indicators of thriving among 6,000 middle and high school youth across racial/ethnic groups (American Indian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, Multiracial, and European American). For example, aggregating the indicators into an index of thriving, clusters of the assets explained from 47% of variance among American Indian youth to 54% among Multiracial youth, over and above gender, grade, and level of maternal education. There were some differences across groups. For example, experiencing supportive relationships with adults other than parents was an important contributor to the thriving index for Multiracial, American Indian, and European American youth, but reading for pleasure was more important among African American and Hispanic youth. However, a core of assets was important across groups. Time spent in youth programs, cultural competence, self esteem, personal power (a construct akin to self-efficacy), achievement motivation, and planning and decision-making skills each meaningfully contributed to variance for at least two of seven thriving indicators across at least three out of six racial/ethnic groups.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the past 10 years have seen a proliferation of conceptual models seeking to articulate the necessary ingredients for positive development and subsequent empirical tests of these models, on balance the state of our knowledge is disproportionately low compared with the state of our unknowns. Our knowledge-base is relatively strong in the following areas:

- Taxonomies of factors that are correlated with positive outcomes.
- Cross-sectional research results affirming associations among relationships, opportunities, social norms, and positive developmental outcomes.
- Knowledge that effective programs have the capacity to promote short-term changes in youth behaviors.

Lacunae in our knowledge base regarding developmental assets include the following:

- Theories of change that articulate *how* youths, adults, and community systems move toward greater developmental attentiveness.
- Explorations of the transactional nature of community-youth change; that is, examinations of both how community efforts (both informal and programmatic) affect youth, as well as how youth in turn affect and help shape their ecology.
- Empirical understanding of the significance of "informal, natural, and nonprogrammatic capacity of community" (Benson & Saito, 2001, p. 146).
- Understanding of the variability in the delivery of developmental assets across diverse communities and groups of people. While we can specify the necessary ingredients, we still do not well understand how those ingredients "work" in culturally diverse settings.
- Understanding of how broad, expansive models of community involvement and engagement interact with more focused programmatic approaches (i.e., does the presence of the former moderate the efficacy of the latter?).

In addition, the empirical literature offers to date only limited answers to the following more specific theoretical questions:

- How is the theory connecting assets to thriving outcomes the same as that linking assets to risk reduction outcomes, and how is it different? Relatedly, are "internal" asset categories such as positive values or positive identity more properly thought of as indicators of well-being, that is, as outcomes?
- Is the role of developmental assets global, or dependent on the outcome of interest?
- Is the effect of assets invariant across contexts, or does social domain make a difference in how assets affect outcomes? For example, do the same assets that

explain delay of gratification in the school domain also explain delay of gratification in the peer domain?

- Is there such a thing as too much of particular developmental assets, such that they no longer are assets and even become deficits or risk factors (e.g., family support becoming enmeshment, or high expectations becoming a factor that lessens perceived feelings of competence)?
- Are there ceiling effects not yet revealed in the research? For example, a close relationship with at least one caring adult is clearly important, and probably having that with several adults is better, but what does a dozen such relationships add that five or six does not? Whitlock (2003) reported, for instance, that youth reporting 9 or 10 of 10 possible developmental supports did not have greater school connectedness than youth reporting 7 or 8 of those supports. But developmental supports showed a continued linear relationship with *community* connectedness, that is, a ceiling effect was not observed for community connectedness.
- If all assets are not equal in their promotive and protective valence, then what are the bases on which some assets are considered more important than others, if not for all young people, then for some youth in some situations for some outcomes?
- Do some assets function as "gateways" more than others, making it more likely that young people will experience additional assets that collectively promote positive developmental outcomes? Scales and Roehlkepartain (2004), for example, found that students who provided community service in middle school were significantly more likely to be "asset-rich" in high school than were students who did not contribute service.
- Are some assets more critical for healthy development at differing developmental points or stages? For example, are high expectations from teachers and parents more critical in middle school and early adolescence, when increases in challenges to competency beliefs are common, than in later adolescence? Similarly, does the asset of cultural competence become *more* important as children age and encounter increasingly more diverse peers and adults?
- In a related sense, do some assets have more impact during key developmental transitions than at other times? For example, are young people feeling valued and that they have useful roles more important assets during the transition from elementary to middle

school and the transition from middle school to high school than they are at other times during early and later adolescence?

- How many of developmental assets does one need, over what period of time, to contribute meaningfully toward particular desired outcomes?

In addition to these questions, there exist issues regarding the design of research within which the questions may be addressed. Approaches such as the theory of change strategy for evaluating comprehensive positive youth development initiatives have been discussed for some time (see Connell & Kubisch, 2001; Connell, Kubisch, Schorr, & Weiss, 1995). But only a limited number of examples show such technology actually being applied, and a broad consensus does not exist about what reasonable outcomes for community initiatives may be (Berkowitz, 2001; Spilka, 2004).

Moreover, although the research to date shows promising results, the existing literature focuses almost exclusively on assessing the effects of community interventions on adolescent problem behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use, adolescent pregnancy, and antisocial behavior. Few positive outcomes other than academic success tend to be measured in *community,* as contrasted with program, initiatives (Greenberg et al., 2003; Wandersman & Florin, 2003).

MacDonald and Valdivieso (2001) also observed that deficit-oriented measures prevail in national tracking systems. They described numerous possible positive constructs and measures that are being or could be applied in gathering data across four critical domains: young people themselves, parent and nonparent adults, organizations that serve young people, and community-level data on policies, resources, and services.

Weissberg et al. (2003) also note that despite an impressive literature now suggesting the effectiveness of strength-based approaches to prevention and youth development, there is a continuing need for evaluations of multiyear, comprehensive youth development initiatives that target multiple outcomes. Especially needed are investigations of the mediating and moderating influences on program or initiative effects, and how strength-based approaches work similarly or differently across diversities of geography and circumstance. Finally, they noted the need for more standardized measures of core youth development outcomes, so that results across different studies can more readily be compared.

The lack of common positive measures of development decried by Weissberg et al. (2003) is not unique to

youth development. Ryff and Singer (1998) struck a similar chord in talking about research on "health" among older adults. Such research, they argued, routinely defines health by emphasizing the absence of negatives, such as being unable to dress and feed oneself, at the expense of inquiring about the positive indicators of purpose and engagement in life that actually may better predict health outcomes. To more accurately understand health, they argued, questions should be asked about what persons did today "that was meaningful or fulfilling," or whether they "love and care for others" (p. 21).

Several recent efforts have emerged in response to both the relative lack of emphasis on measuring positive outcomes, and the lack of a common core of measures to be used across positive youth development studies. For example, Search Institute, the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, and the Fuller Theological Seminary, with strategic consultation from Stanford University and the Thrive Foundation for Youth, recently embarked on a multiyear "Thriving Indicator Project" with the goal of producing effective measurement tools and resources on thriving that would be widely used and developed from a foundation of deep science.

Initial activities have included a comprehensive review of the literature on thriving and related concepts, and interviews with scholars, positive youth development practitioners, youth, and their parents that elicited their views on what describes a thriving youth (King et al., in press). A group of core dimensions of thriving is emerging (e.g., Theokas et al., in press) that will then serve as a lens to help focus development of thriving measurement tools to be used in clinical, programmatic, community change, and national tracking applications.

A similar effort, with the goal of developing and embedding common measures of positive youth development outcomes in state and federal data tracking systems, is being led by Child Trends. Scholars and policymakers are recommending reliable, valid, and relatively brief measures in areas such as prosocial orientation, religiosity, and social competencies (Moore & Lippman, 2004) that could help track developmental strengths and contribute to a long-term re-shaping of child and youth policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite differences in terminology and comprehensiveness, the similarities across models of positive youth development are apparent, and a substantial body of research supports the hypotheses emerging from the

melding of positive youth development practice and a variety of developmental and other theories. Positive youth development is both caused and indicated by whether a young person experiences adequate supports and opportunities. Doing so consistently and in multiple settings is particularly important. These experiences help them develop key competencies, skills, values, and self-perceptions that adaptively self-regulating persons need in order to successfully shape and navigate life over time.

There are multiple sources of those developmental nutrients or assets, including the proactive influence of young people on their own environments. Not just genetic heritage, not just family, not just schools, congregations, peers, or any other influence create a young person's developmental path, but all do so operating together, interactively, to form a system larger than the sum of those parts. In practical terms, the research findings that support this conclusion lead to two inevitable implications.

First, isolated programs working to change individual youth without changing the environments in which they live may have some limited, short-term success, but cannot be expected to support significant long-term positive development, or especially, to radically alter the developmental path of particularly vulnerable young people. Multiple contexts of young people's lives need to be strengthened simultaneously to promote the systemic supports needed for sustained and widespread positive development among all youth.

Second, the nesting of young people in families and schools within neighborhoods and communities and wider society means that a long-term commitment to significant community mobilization around common norms, values, and goals related to positive youth development is essential. No less an effort will attain the breadth, depth, and permeation of culture with both formal and informal daily life to profoundly change the developmental odds for a critical mass of America's young people.

Though research supports the efficacy of positive youth development as an approach for changing these developmental odds, it is also clear that other approaches are necessary. Poverty, family violence, and abuse are among a litany of risks that jeopardize development. It is likely that reducing risks and promoting assets can be complimentary strategies for enhancing positive developmental outcomes. Theory and research is needed to better understand the interplay of risks and assets. In addition, it is important to identify how combinations of

risk reduction and asset-building intervention strategies work for youth in various social locations.

One of the major contributions of positive youth development theory and research is the identification of the multiple contexts and settings that inform developmental trajectories. As an applied field, positive youth development and its advocates face crucial decision points about how and where to create intentional change. Though the development of and/or enrichment of programs is the primary locus of intervention, theory and research also identify a much wider range of possibilities. Access to developmental assets could also be advanced by, for example, transforming socializing systems (e.g., schools and neighborhoods) or mobilizing adults to create sustained relationships with community youth.

It is here in this complex space of community and societal change where new thinking is particularly needed. As noted at several points in this chapter, the least developed part of positive youth development theory is that having to do with how intentional change can best be understood (and practiced). The complexity of this issue (as well as the societal importance of promoting positive development) requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating multiple fields in common pursuit of how to enhance the dynamic fusion of ecological- and individual-level strengths.

This interdisciplinary research agenda should initially focus on developmental contexts as the unit of analysis with inquiry into the strategies that enhance the capacity and will of schools, neighborhoods, families, and congregations to nurture developmental strengths. And such inquiry will necessarily lead to important research issues regarding the orchestration of change at multiple levels, including the strategies for creating developmentally attentive communities. Consonant with the theory of positive development, we hypothesize that the most successful transformation in contexts and community will occur when youth are at the forefront in planning and implementing the change initiative.

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