

**Families and Communities Together:
Strength and Resilience During Early Adolescence**

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Dedication

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Jack Partain, ThD,

my father,

whose belief in lifelong learning was contagious

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motivated me and kept me on my path to completion

Abstract

Grounded in a bioecological understanding of human development, this study examined the contributions of internal family strengths and family-community connections to youth well-being during early adolescence. Using a diverse dataset of about 1,498 families with 10- to 15-year-olds, the study explored whether and how strengths within families (Internal Family Assets) and family interactions with community were associated with six indicators of youth well-being: self-regulation, social competencies, school engagement, health behaviors, personal responsibility, and caring. In addition, it examined the extent to which these factors contributed to resilience, ameliorating the potentially deleterious effects of stressful life events on youth well-being. The study found that: (1) the level of Internal Family Assets was a much stronger predictor of family-community connections than youth, family, or community covariates; (2) the extent of Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families was modestly associated with youth well-being after accounting for covariates and Internal Family Assets; (3) the interactions between Internal Family Assets and family-community connections suggest that some family-community connections bolster the effect of Internal Family Assets on social competencies and caring; and (4) youth who have experienced high levels of Stressful Life Events have greater odds of experiencing high levels of well-being if they experience higher levels of Internal Family Assets and family-community connections. The findings invite increased attention to the ways in which families are engaged in communities, with particular focus on the importance of strengthening informal supports and engaging families as contributors to community life.

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Chapter One

Introduction

I often have opportunities to talk with practitioners in education, youth development, family services, and other fields about today's families. When you ask people about their own families, they will most often admit their quirks and challenges, but they generally express great appreciation for their families and how they add meaning, purpose, and joy to their lives.

In contrast, when you ask about the families they serve or the families of the young people they seek to teach or engage, you often hear quite a different story. There is general consternation with the perceived state of today's families and a defeatist attitude about the chances that they can effectively engage and work with families in ways that improve the well-being of the family, its children, and the broader community. Parents themselves struggle and often find themselves disparaging other parents who are absent from community life or just "aren't getting the job done" when it comes to being an effective parent and family.

Families are too important to young people and society to write off or try to work around. Despite the entrenched, sometimes generational, challenges and the lack of clear models and approaches, it is critical to the well-being of society—and to families themselves—to find ways not only to strengthen families, but also to recognize and celebrate the strengths that are present—the qualities that make us smile about our own families (and would make us smile if we knew other families better, too).

This study seeks to approach the connection between families and communities from a fresh perspective, focusing on intrinsic strengths in families (even in the midst of challenges) during the middle school years and emphasizing relationships both within and around families, rather than the more common approach of examining structures and programs. In doing so, this study seeks to open new avenues for exploration and innovation in strengthening family-community connections and, as a result, enhance the mutual and intersecting well-being of youth, families, and communities.

The Need for this Study

There has been voluptuous and high-quality research on each of the domains in this study: families, youth, and communities. And yet, in the midst of abundant research on each element, there remain important gaps in the field, particularly in examining the intersections and relationships among these domains. Grounded in a theoretical orientation built on Urie Bronfenbrenner's now-classic and pervasive bioecological approach to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005), this study seeks to examine some of these intersections between families, youth, and communities. In the process, it addresses several significant needs in the field.

The need to reconnect youth development and family development. Though there are notable exceptions, most research, policy, and practice focuses on either youth or families, but rarely are both addressed in an integrated manner. Family studies and youth studies are different academic disciplines and departments. Most institutions serve one or the other (particularly after early childhood); even when their program names include

“youth and families,” the efforts are rarely linked or integrated. Youth-serving practitioners express frustration about their inability to connect with young people’s families, and family-serving programs lament of the challenges of keeping young people involved past the early years. Some observers (generally off the record) contend that the division reflects a political split: Democrats focus on youth development; Republicans focus on families. Though one can certainly find exceptions to this split (such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community’s efforts to attain marriage equality), such polarization undermines our ability to explore the contributions of each to the other, or to examine the interactions across the ecology of development.

By surveying extant research on family development and youth development and then linking family dynamics with youth development outcomes and community contexts, this study seeks to stimulate conversation across these disciplines and domains.

The need to examine both strengths and challenges. Too often, when research examines families and family-community connections, they are framed within the context of risk, deficit, vulnerability, and prevention/intervention. Though there is a growing body of research on social capital and families (e.g., Furstenberg, 2005), rarely do theory and research explore the everyday nature of normative interactions and how they are manifestations of innate family and community strengths.

Without denying the challenges and entrenched dynamics families and communities face, a shift to understanding strengths has the potential to increase a sense of self-efficacy in families and communities. By recognizing both strengths and challenges across all families and communities, the study suggests the possibility of

resilience, with strengths being tapped to overcome adversity.

The need to examine and emphasize relationships more than structures. When many researchers investigate relationships between families and communities, it is often assumed that community institutions (especially schools or social service agencies) are the bridge between families and communities. Such an emphasis overlooks critical strategies for strengthening communities and families.

This gap is clearly manifested in the contrast between our experiences in families and our approach to families and communities in research and practice. On one hand, families are the crucible of our relationships, shaping who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we relate to others and the world. Our communities are a web of neighbors, resources, experiences, and memories that bond us to the places and networks where we live our lives.

Yet, judging from dominant research and public discourse, families are too often defined primarily, if not exclusively, by their structures: who is in the family, who isn't, where the family lives, and how much money it does or does not have. Attempts to strengthen, support, or educate families are formal, institutional, and, often, impersonal. Similarly, scholars and policy makers typically define communities by their geography, population, the presence (or absence) of institutions, and their economic vitality or challenges. In each case, the bonds within and between families, youth, and communities are overlooked or, worse, undermined.

An alternate narrative emphasizes the informal processes, relationships, and social capital that nurture thriving and resilience, often against the odds. One way to illustrate

the significance of this line of inquiry is through the experiences of families that have been part of housing mobility programs in which families are moved from high-poverty areas of cities to low-poverty areas, based on the research that shows the deleterious effects of living in high-poverty neighborhoods (Johnson, Ladd, & Ludwig, 2002; Rosenbaum & DeLuca, 2008; Sampson, 2012).

In Chicago, 7,000 families moved from high-rise housing projects to other neighborhoods, including suburbs, through the now-famous Gautreaux Project, a major housing desegregation project that began in 1976 after a Supreme Court decision that declared concentrated low-income housing in Chicago to be discriminatory. The results are promising, with more families getting jobs, and youth more likely to graduate from high school and go to college (Rosenbaum & DeLuca, 2008). Two-thirds of families stayed in their new neighborhoods. So the evidence is compelling that the families experienced positive changes. But which mechanisms facilitated their success? Interviews with families who participated shed light on that question.

To be sure, access to better schools, greater safety, and other resources made a difference. A key differentiator, however, for why some families made it and why others didn't was whether strong social relationships formed in the new communities. Families that felt welcomed, got to know their neighbors, learned to fit in with unspoken norms, and learned to rely on neighbors (and to be reliable in return) were most likely to thrive.

If, on the other hand, families experienced discrimination or isolation, they were much less likely to succeed and, in fact, they were more likely to return to their low-income, high-crime neighborhoods where at least they felt at home. Rosenbaum and

DeLuca (2008) concluded: “It is through some of these mechanisms—some social, some psychological—that we believe the Gautreaux families were able to permanently escape the contexts and consequences of segregated poverty and unsafe inner-city neighborhoods” (p. 396).

Moving families between communities is an extreme (non-replicable) case, but it illustrates that both structural and relational factors contribute to the health and well-being of both families and their communities across the socioeconomic spectrum. However, research and public discourse has been dominated by structural and economic factors at play. This study, then, emphasizes the relational or process dimensions both within families and in connections between families and communities, thus counterbalancing the disproportionate body of research on structural questions (such as family composition) and formal relationships (such as families as recipients of services).

The need to understand family dynamics beyond early childhood. Though the institution of family is relevant across the life course, a disproportionate body of research on family relationships focuses on early childhood. To be sure, those early years are formative and critical. However, the influence and role of families does not end when children go to kindergarten. As Bronfenbrenner and colleagues (1986) quipped, “It would seem, from our research literature, that parents have little significance for our lives and our development once we become adolescents, and surely after the age of 20” (p. 1220). And though this is not the intention of early childhood advocates, when we overemphasize the early “critical years” and ignore or downplay the dynamic and ongoing development that occurs throughout childhood and adolescence (and into

adulthood), we send not-so-subtle messages to parents about when and where their attention is and is not needed.

In fact, early adolescence may be another equally critical time in development—not only because of important processes in brain development that occur during this time (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008; Steinberg, 2008), but also because of the particular salience of family-community connections during this developmental period. Though proportionately less research has focused on family dynamics and family-community connections during this developmental period, it is one in which neighborhood or community influence and interaction tends to shift from being largely mediated by parents toward more direct influence and/or influence through other socializing systems. By focusing on the dynamics of families with young adolescents, this study seeks to call attention to the need for and value of engaging families during this important phase of a young person and family's development.

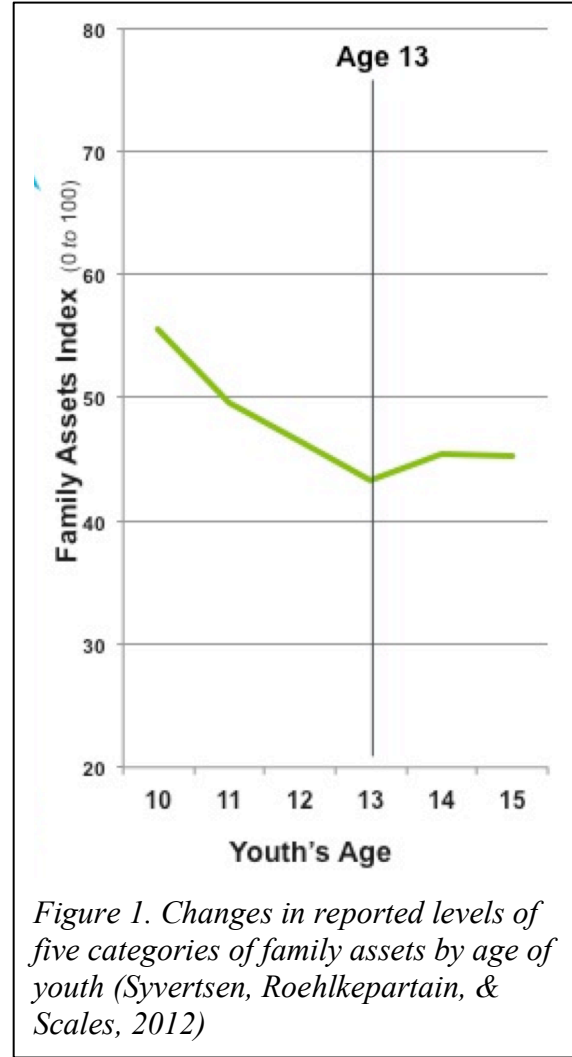
Early adolescence is also a developmental period when family relationships shift and many families experience greater challenges and strain (which is reflected in the sympathy parents receive from others if they say they have a 13 year old). This pattern can be illustrated with cross-sectional data from Search Institute's American Family Assets Study (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), which surveyed young adolescents, ages 10 to 15, and parents about their experiences related to strengths in their family, which were transformed into an index of family assets or strengths, with a potential range from 1 to 100. (The family assets framework is shown in Table 2.) As shown in Figure 1, family's reports of these strengths declined significantly between ages

10 and 13, leveling off (and even recovering a bit) by age 15. During this time of transition and change, parents are often at a loss for how to understand, reconnect, and repattern family life as their children move from childhood into adolescence.

The need to recognize the bidirectional influence between and contributions of families and communities.

Bidirectional influence is a core premise of bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and developmental systems theories (Lerner & Castellino, 2002) of human development. Yet current theory, research, and practice

disproportionately focus on either families or communities or on the impact of one on the other (most often, the community's impact on families). Rarely do researchers examine as their core focus the bidirectional interactions between families and communities (Burton & Jarrett, 2000). Most often, this inattentiveness leads to disequilibrium in power relationships, with families being assumed to be the client in need of services and the professional being viewed as the expert and source of resources (Doherty, 2000; Thomas & Lien, 2009). By examining both supports for families from communities and families'



contributions to communities, this study offers a counterbalancing narrative that challenges communities, schools, and organizations to see the power and potential of engaging families as leaders, activities, contributors, and change agents in ways that not only can strengthen community life, but also enhance family self-efficacy.

Study Thesis and Research Questions

The overall thesis of this study is that internal family strengths and bidirectional family-community connections work together to contribute to young people's well-being across demographic differences. Furthermore, these strengths also play roles in ameliorating the negative effects of family stresses on young people's development. Embedded in the thesis are four research questions that were investigated through analysis of an extant national dataset of 1,498 U.S. families in which dyads of a parenting adult and a 10- to 15-year-old youth were surveyed:

1. Are internal family strengths or assets more robust correlational predictors of Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community than structural or demographic characteristics of youth, families, and communities? This question seeks to confirm that assumption of a strong, positive relationship between internal family strengths (which we call Internal Family Assets) and family-community connections, with a particular interest in unpacking three potentially distinct strands of family-community connections: Formal Community Supports for Families, Informal Community Supports for Families, and Family Contributions to Community—with the combination reflecting both the structural–process dimensions of

community-family connections as well as the bidirectional influence (captured by the balance of supports for families and contributions by families).

Based on the literature review, families with higher levels of Internal Family Assets will also be more likely also to have strong community connections. Furthermore, these associations will be stronger for informal than formal supports. In addition, internal family processes and dynamics (approximated by the Internal Family Assets scale) are also hypothesized to be more robust and consistent predictors of community connections than a number of individual, family, and community covariates.

2. To what extent are Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community associated with selected indicators of youth well-being, over and above Internal Family Assets and individual, family, and community covariates? The hypothesis is that youth in families with stronger connections to their communities tend to have higher levels of well-being than those with weaker community connections. (Six indicators measured Well-being: school engagement, social competencies, self-regulation, caring, personal responsibility, and health behaviors.) However, because of proximal influence and extant research on community and neighborhood influence, Internal Family Assets were hypothesized to have stronger association with youth well-being than community connections, though family-community connections would contribute meaningfully.

In addition, associations would be expected to be stronger for *Informal* Community Supports for Families than *Formal* Community Supports for Families, partly because families that access services may already face more challenges. Less clear is the

extent to which Family Contributions to Community would play a role, though the hypothesis was that it would likely contribute significantly, since it infers a strong sense of self-efficacy by families who are civically engaged.

3. To what extent is the association between Internal Family Assets and youth well-being affected by Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community? This question suggests the potential for interactions among Internal Family Assets, Formal Community Supports for Families, Informal Community Supports for Families, and Family Contributions to Community in contributing to each outcome. For example, do different types of community connections boost the predictive power of Internal Family Assets and youth well-being? Though each of the variables likely contributes independently, they would also be expected to interact with each other. To illustrate, families with strong ties to communities might experience a strengthening of their internal family relationships and processes, inspired by friends and neighbors.

4. Finally, in families that have experienced multiple Stressful Life Events, what roles do Internal Family Assets and strong family-community connections play in predicting high levels of well-being? Families dealing with adversity would be expected to be better equipped to mitigate negative impact of those stressful events if they had both strong internal assets as well as robust, bidirectional connections with their communities.

The Study's Design and Approach

The study examined these questions and hypotheses through a series of regression analyses of an existing Search Institute dataset of 1,498 families that included

perspectives of a parenting adult and a young person (ages 10 to 15). The dataset included about 204 items for parenting adults and 178 items for youth that focus on the processes, strengths, and challenges their families face, including extensive data on their formal and informal connections to communities.

The data were collected through an online national survey with Harris Interactive. The sample is diverse in terms of socioeconomic, cultural, and structural descriptors of families. I served as project co-author in the original study (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), working with a team of research colleagues, including the principal investigator, Amy Syvertsen, who collaborated in the analyses for the present study. (The study's methodology is explicated in greater detail in Chapter 3.)

Through a series of analyses of this national dataset, the study sheds new light on the mutual influence of families with young adolescents and their community context, particularly through the informal bonds and relationships that are reflected in the social capital research but are often overlooked in other family studies. It points toward alternate strategies for family-community engagement that hold promise for strengthening bonds between families and communities and, in the process, increasing the well-being of young people and their families.

Each of these questions and hypotheses grows out of a broad review of the literature that is situated in the theoretical foundations of bioecological and developmental systems theories of human development, initially conceptualized in the 1970s, but remaining relevant, if challenging to operationalize in specific studies. They further build on existing literature on the strengths and challenges of youth, families, and

communities, including extant literature on the relationship between families and communities. Within the literature are three major themes, which will surface throughout the study: (1) the relative influence of structure and process; (2) the interactions between strengths and challenges; (3) the bidirectional influence of families and communities. We now turn to this literature review.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Like any study that seeks to examine relationships among the different aspects of the ecology, this study requires a fairly broad literature review in order to situate the specific questions being examined. It begins with the broad theoretical grounding of the study in ecological or systems understandings of human development, initially highlighting the seminal work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and Richard Lerner, followed by similar inquiries into the ecology of learning as manifested in the work of John Dewey and Lawrence Cremin as well as the vision of Marjorie Brown, whose pioneering work in home economics (now family and consumer science) applied an ecological frame to families beyond education or clinical practice.

Then we turn to examining the three domains that are at the heart of the study: youth, families, and communities, focusing on unpacking current understandings of the developmental, relational, or systems dynamics in each from a strengths perspective, dimensions that are particularly germane to the core thesis. Finally, this review surveys key studies that have examined the influence of communities on families and families on communities, identifying in each case some of the mechanisms that shape this bidirectional influence between families and communities.

Ecological Theories of Human Development and Education

Families, youth, and communities represent domains of life and inquiry that each has rich and somewhat independent traditions of theory, research, and practice. However,

in at least the past 30 years, there has been a growing consensus that one cannot fully understand one of these domains without attending to the others. As Barnes, Katz, Korbin, and O'Brien (2006) wrote: "Parents and children occupy systems beyond the family system, that they need to be understood in context, and that their environment makes a difference to their health, well-being, and progress. . . . Individual, family, and wider community factors need to be addressed together rather than being considered separately" (p. 1). Single, discrete changes in single settings rarely change a person's life trajectory in and of themselves.

The implication of this broad, ecological framing is that in order to understand the developmental path of any person, for example, one must consider that person's own capacity, agency, and influence interacting with her or his context or ecology (including family), and both the historical context and developmental stage (or time factors). Furthermore, if one wishes to change the trajectory for that person, each of these factors may be leverage points or obstacles or both, including a person's own agency and capacity to chart a course that may go against the odds of her or his surroundings.

Though there are clear roots for this approach in a variety of disciplines and a range of scholars, much contemporary theory and research is grounded in the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917 – 2005) of Cornell University. As a psychologist, Bronfenbrenner was distressed by what he saw as excessive fragmentation in his field. "Taking an overview of research in human development over the past 100 years," he wrote, "one could discern a process of progressive fragmentation of our field. . . . After infancy, developmental psychology becomes the study of variables, not the study of

systems, organisms, or live things living” (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1986, pp. 1219-1220). Much of his scholarship, then, sought to reconnect the pieces so that their complexity and interaction could be examined and understood. His approach provides a productive starting point for understanding the foundational literature in the field.

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model. Within this context, Bronfenbrenner’s seminal work, *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979) redefined the field of human development in fields ranging from psychology to education to anthropology. Bronfenbrenner (2005) argued that human development is the “joint function of the *person* and the *environment*” (p. 107). For Bronfenbrenner, human development could not be understood if persons are abstracted from their contexts. Similarly, those contexts cannot be understood apart from understanding the persons who shape them.

Though this 1979 treatise remains a primary reference point, Bronfenbrenner continued to refine his theories for 25 years. For example, a decade after publishing his best-known work (and the one that is still the most often cited), he wrote: “I have been pursuing a hidden agenda: that of re-assessing, revising, and extending—as well as regretting and even renouncing—some of the conceptions set forth in my 1979 monograph” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 187). A major refinement in Bronfenbrenner’s theory was a shift from the “ecology” of human development to the “bioecology” of human development. Bronfenbrenner came to believe that the original framing underrepresented the role of human agency and capacity. He wrote: “To a greater extent than for any other species, human beings create the environments that shape the course of

human development. . . . This agency makes humans—for better or for worse—active producers of their own development” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. xxvii). Thus, he argued, there is a constant need to attend to both the individual and the environment, recognizing that each shapes the other.

Bronfenbrenner described his bioecological approach as a “process-person-context-time model” that requires systematic information about four domains: (1) the context; (2) the person’s characteristics; (3) the processes; and (4) time, with the time dimension being added subsequent to the 1979 model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Contexts. The most widely recognized aspect of Bronfenbrenner’s theory (highlighted in his 1979 work) was his model of nested contexts of development. Bronfenbrenner (2005) used a metaphor to describe the model:

Like a set of Russian dolls, the contexts of human development work in a nested fashion, each one expanding beyond but containing the smaller one. Each one also simultaneously influences and is influenced by the others. Thus the context of the family fits into that of the neighborhood; the context of the neighborhood into the larger contexts of city, work, and government; and all contexts into the largest context of culture. Whatever factors affect any larger context will filter down to affect the innermost unit, the family. (p. 261)

The developing person (including her or his personal characteristics, biology, and heritability) is at the center of the model, surrounded first by a “microsystem,” or the immediate environment, such as family, peers, school, and other contexts of interpersonal engagement. The “mesosystem” involves the linkages and processes between two or

more of the settings that include the developing person. The “exosystem” includes the linkages and processes between two or more settings, at least one of which does not normally include the developing person (e.g., home and a parent’s workplace, which does not routinely include the developing child). Then there is the “macrosystem,” which is the “overarching pattern of ideology and organization of the social institution common to a particular culture or subculture” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 81). Finally, all of these must take into account the “chronosystem,” or the life events, historical time period, and life course development. Each of these aspects of the bioecology contributes to human development, and each influences the others in a dynamic interplay and processes.

Processes. These contexts shape development through processes between the individual and her or his contexts and between contexts. Regular, everyday actions shape who we are and how we understand ourselves. Particularly in his later work, Bronfenbrenner called regular, interactive processes (or proximal processes) the “primary mechanisms” of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). These processes explain connections between, for example, some aspects of context (e.g., social class or race/ethnicity) or outcomes of interest. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) argued that

human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of *time*. (p. 996, italics in the original)

Though these processes are “the engine of development,” they vary considerably by the person, the context, and time.

These interactions are evident when considering the role of young people in an ecological model. In both intentional and unintentional ways, young people co-create the world around them through their influence on their parents and other family members (Beatty & Talpade, 1994; Lerner, 2002), their peers (Brown, Bakken, et al., 2008), and the places where they spend time, such as schools, youth organizations, and congregations (e.g., Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Wortham, 2011)—not to mention the collective influence of the young on global society (Dimitriadis, 2008). These interactions move beyond a one-way influence of parent to child or teacher to child to highlight both personal agency and responsiveness through interaction with people and the world around us, with these interactions becoming more complex as young people mature. These interactions leave a more lasting effect when they are consistent and sustained over time.

Persons. Though the individual was certainly part of Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 theory, he later believed that it had not received adequate attention, which led to renaming the model a bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). He articulated various aspects of the person as being at work in a bioecological model, including biology and genetics as well as personal characteristics, such as temperament, personality, and resources or capacities. All of these aspects can influence the context through relatively passive means (simply being in a room) to more active efforts or, ultimately, very active efforts to bring about social change. The current attention to the

role of neurobiology or “brain science” in human development (e.g., Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008; Steinberg, 2008; Tough, 2012) clearly reflects an emphasis on individual characteristics in shaping human development.

Time. In addition to providing opportunity for development (we grow up across time), Bronfenbrenner saw the “time” dimension as including several elements. These included *micro-time*, which occurs during a particular activity or interaction; *meso-time*, which occur somewhat consistently in a person’s environment; and *macro-time*, which highlights that change happens in particular historical periods and at particular ages, all of which interact with the context, persons, and processes to effect a particular outcome (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner’s approach has had a profound impact on many disciplines related to human development. Several themes are particularly relevant for this study. Clearly, the emphasis on the context of development, including the interaction between them, lies at the heart of our examination of the family–community connection. Just as notable, however, is his emphasis on *relationships* as a primary mechanism of human development—what Bronfenbrenner called the mesosystem.

Similarly, a central premise of a bioecological model is *bidirectional influence* in which each aspect of the ecology influences others and, in a sense, the persons and groups within the ecology co-create their own development. Consistent with this theory, Reis and Collins (2004) argued that relationships are best understood by describing “the involved parties’ interdependence with each other” (p. 234). They continued:

Persons in relationships respond (or not) to each other's wishes, concerns, abilities, and emotional expressions; they modify their behavior to be together (or not); they allocate tasks between themselves; they react to each other's behaviors and circumstances, misfortune, and happiness; and they take the fact of their interdependence into account in organizing everyday life and longer-term plans. Central to most conceptualizations of relationship is the idea that these patterns of mutual influence are more informative about relationships than are nominal categories (e.g., spouses, co-workers, friends) or simple static descriptors (e.g., length of acquaintance, nature or degree of affect). (Reis & Collins, 2004, p. 234)

Bronfenbrenner's multi-dimensional, interactive framework moved beyond prior approaches to human development, which Bronfenbrenner challenged. Bronfenbrenner described the first of these limiting models as the *social address model*, which is "little more than the comparison of children or adults growing up in different geographical or social locations" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 70), with the assumption that this impact is the same for all persons, regardless of personal characteristics. The second set of models, *personal attributes models*, suggest that personal characteristics of an individual (age, gender, life stage, etc.) will have the same consequences on everyone later in life. Thus, for example, if something happens to you in early childhood (good or bad), it will impact you later in life the same way it impacts other people, regardless of other factors. Finally, *person-context models* propose that outcomes from combinations of environmental and personal characteristics cannot be predicted without accounting for the influence of the others. Though closer to his view, Bronfenbrenner believed these person-context approaches do not take into account the different effects the same environment might

have on different persons (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Thus, one must consider the influence of contexts as well as the agency of persons—and the interactions among them.

As widely used and transformative as Bronfenbrenner's approach has been, it is not without its limitations and critics. Some note that it is most useful in articulating the contexts and offering a broad vision of the interactions; it contributes much less to understanding the mechanisms by which the influence occurs across contexts (Gavazzi, 2011). In addition, cross-cultural scholars, who widely adopt an ecological perspective, critique Bronfenbrenner for placing culture in the outer-most or distal circle of influence; from their perspective, it must be infused into all levels of the ecology (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). More challenging has been that the approach has been quite difficult to fully implement in research, given the multiple interactions and the multiple layers that are theorized (Tudge et al., 2009).

Even with these limitations, Bronfenbrenner's approach has reframed many fields and stimulated a wide range of research that takes seriously the interaction of persons, contexts, processes, and time in human development. It is foundational to—and transformative for—most contemporary theories of child, youth, and family development. For example, Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter (2013) credited Bronfenbrenner as a key force in moving the field of resilience “away from the study of the invulnerable child to a focus on the social-ecological factors that facilitate the development of well-being under stress” (p. 348). Similar examples could be highlighted in anthropology, sociology, family studies, social work, medicine, public health, education, media studies, and dozens

of other fields. In short, no longer is it considered adequate to seek to understand or work with persons in isolation of their relationships and contexts.

Richard M. Lerner's developmental systems theory. A prominent interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's theory in human development is the developmental systems theory, of which Richard M. Lerner of Tufts University is the most prolific theorist. Developmental systems theory challenges dichotomies between nature and nurture, biology and culture, and individual and society (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, 1998; Lerner & Castellino, 2002; Lerner, Lerner, De Stefanis, & Apfel, 2001), instead emphasizing connections among biological, cognitive, psychological, and societal factors—none of which acts “either alone or as the ‘prime mover’ of change” (Lerner, Lerner, De Stefanis, & Apfel, 2001, p. 12).

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner, developmental systems theory positions the person as a “third source” of development (along with heredity and socialization). Through a process of self-organizing, the person become an active participant and agent in her or his own development. “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” (Thelen & Smith, 1998, p. 564). This dynamic is evident in twin studies in which genetically identical twins raised in the same home environment by the same parents have different characteristics and developmental pathways (Gottlieb, Wahlsten, & Lickliter, 1998).

Proponents of developmental systems theory insist that one cannot fully understand changes in any single part of the system in isolation. “These changes are

interdependent,” Lerner & Castellino (2002) wrote. “Changes within one level of organization (e.g., developmental changes in personality or cognition within the adolescent) are reciprocally related to developmental changes within other levels (e.g., involving changes in parenting practices or spousal relationships within the familial level of organization)” (p. 126). Whereas Bronfenbrenner is mostly recognized for his theoretical positioning of a bioecological approach, Lerner and his colleagues have undertaken dozens of large-scale empirical studies aimed at testing various components of developmental systems theory, particularly in youth development, and, by extension, validating and refining how we understand bioecological theories of development. Furthermore, developmental systems theory asserts mutually beneficial relations, or adaptive developmental regulations, lead young people to contribute to their families, communities and society, thus inferring that positive developmental growth synergistically benefits both the individual and society (Phelps et al., 2009).

A notable example of Lerner’s empirical exploration of a developmental systems theory approach is the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, which was a longitudinal sequential study involving more than 7,000 U.S. adolescents and some of their parents across seven years and 44 states. The primary focus of this study was to test “the idea that when the strengths of youth are aligned across adolescence with family, school, and community resources, positive youth development will occur” (Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2011, p. 2; see Lerner et al., 2009).

The dataset has provided grist for dozens of analyses examining the relationship between young people’s individual development and outcomes with their experiences in

a variety of activities, most notably out-of-school programs. In one study, for example, Urban and colleagues (2009) examined the differences in youth outcomes among a small subset of the larger sample, focusing on differences in outcomes among young people in low- and high-resource neighborhoods. They found that females living in low-resource neighborhoods had measureable differences in their youth development outcomes when they participated in structured activities. That association was not meaningful for females in high-resource neighborhoods. For males, the opposite patterns were evident. For males, higher youth development outcomes were evident for those with moderate to high levels of youth program participation in high-resource neighborhoods.

Though this particular study could only speculate on the reasons for the differences, it illustrates the complex interactions between individual characteristics (in this case, gender), program participation, neighborhood resources, and young people's outcomes. It also illustrates the complexity of establishing dynamic models that reflect they interaction within across a developmental system or, to go back to Bronfenbrenner, a bioecological context.

Bronfenbrenner and Lerner both had their scholarly home in the developmental sciences. It is noteworthy that two pivotal educational theorists, John Dewey and Lawrence Cremin, also approached their work with a focus on an ecological perspective on learning, complementing the developmental theorists. We turn now to their work.

John Dewey's views on democracy and education. Though progressive educational philosopher and pragmatic psychologist John Dewey (1859 – 1952) wrote decades before “ecology of education” or “ecology of development” came into use, he

articulated many compatible concepts, including persistent resistance to reductionism and segmentation, challenging what he saw as a false distinction between learning and living (Dewey, 1897). Unlike dominant strands of psychology at the time, Dewey emphasized the role of social environments in human development.

Thus, central purpose of education, he contended, was to model, experience, or practice community and democracy by “bringing people and their ideas and beliefs together, in such ways as will lessen friction and instability, and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding” (Dewey, 1902, p. 83). In Dewey’s vision, all aspects of community would embrace their role in learning. He wrote:

The ideal [of democracy] further demands that all the institutions, customs, and arrangements of social life shall contribute to these ends, that is, that they shall be educative. . . . When the educative function of all callings, occupations, and human relations is realized, the teacher will not have, or be thought to have, a monopoly on education. . . . In no case is the teacher or the classroom to serve as a substitute for educative activity by other persons and institutions. (Dewey, 1937, pp. 333, 336, 337)

Dewey recognized the importance of informal interactions for community building, democracy, and education, valuing both formal and informal (structural and psychological dimensions) of learning, growth, democracy, and community life:

I believe that this educational process has two sides—one psychological and one sociological—and neither can be subordinated to the other, or neglected, without evil results following. . . . The child’s own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting-point for all education. . . . Knowledge of social conditions, of the present state of civilization, is

necessary in order properly to interpret the child's powers. . . . I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with inert and lifeless mass. (Dewey, 1897, pp. 443-445)

Lawrence Cremin: Education in the public. Building on Dewey's legacy, Lawrence Cremin (who wrote at roughly the same time as Bronfenbrenner) argued that a fundamental problem with progressive education was that it created an unnecessary and counterproductive polarity between school and society, including Dewey's distinction between intentional (in schools) and incidental education (in community) (Cremin, 1976). Cremin challenged this bifurcated thinking, arguing that learning can be as intentional in other contexts as it is in schools. He wrote: "The important fact is that family life does educate, religious life does educate, and work does educate; and, what is more, the education of all three realms is as intentional as the education of the school, though in different ways and in different measures" (Cremin, 1975/2007, p. 1549).

In Cremin's vision, the various educational systems are complementary and mutually reinforcing. He called for an "ecology of education" in which "educational institutions and configurations [are viewed] in relation to one another and to the larger society that sustains them and is in turn affected by them" (Cremin, 1976, p. 36). According to Cremin, an ecological model of education calls for thinking of education in three ways (all of which resonate with ecological theories of development):

- *Comprehensively*—Public education should be viewed as only one element of a child’s education in community, and schools do not function alone or in isolation. “The public school ought never to take the entire credit for the educational accomplishments of the public, and it ought never to be assigned the entire blame” (Cremin, 1975/2007, p. 1551).
- *Relationally*—Each educational effort and each educational institution (defined broadly) must engage in its mission in relationship with other educational efforts. Schools and teachers, Cremin (1975/2007) wrote, “will not be more effective until they become aware of and actually engage these other educators” beyond the schools in communities” (p. 1552).
- *Publicly*—Public control is untenable across all the educative institutions. So we are called to the “politics of persuasion and to the public dialogue about educational means and ends” (Cremin, 1975/2007, p. 1555). This requires a balance between individualism and community, which can only be accomplished through “a great public dialogue about education” (p. 1556), what knowledge we hold in common, and what values and sensibilities are “at the heart of the kind of society we want to live in and the kind of society we want our children to live in” (p. 1556).

Consistent with developmental theorists, Cremin emphasized that education is not just about the context; it is also about a student’s educational biography and agency, with “a discernable educative style [including temperament, life history] and a measure of educational autonomy . . . [that result in] a unique interaction, the outcome of which

cannot be predicted by looking at either the institution or the individual in isolation” (Cremin, 1976, pp. 40-41).

Marjorie M. Brown’s critical vision of home economics. A final theorist who merits attention in articulating bioecological themes is Marjorie M. Brown, who was widely considered one of the most articulate philosophers in the home economics profession (now family and consumer sciences). Brown challenged what she saw as simplistic causality in the positivistic sciences, describing them as offering an “incomplete and one-sided concept of reality” (Brown, 1993, p. 440; also see Brown, 1980) and promoting an undue focus on individuals, rather than families and cultures. This, in turn, undermined, she argued, the capacity to deal with families holistically, instead offering technical information for specific problems, such as nutrition, child discipline, and financial management, rather than engaging with families around the deeper, more meaningful (but more difficult to measure) self-reflection on values, well-being, and priorities.

By understanding the heart of home economics as “the problems of the family *as a family*” (Brown, 1980, p. 56), she urged moving beyond an almost exclusive focus on individual development toward recognition of families as a focal point, unit of analysis, and focal point for action. Throughout her work, she articulated a concern for the well being of individuals and families (e.g., Brown, 1980; 1993). For this concern to be operationalized and actionable, she pressed for an interdisciplinary understanding of families that went beyond a descriptive image to an articulation of a positive vision:

What is needed is a conceptualization of desired family life formulated by a rational process, open to rational and competent criticism in the cooperative spirit of seeking consensus, and agreed to as justifiable on intellectual and moral grounds. Such an undertaking is a different matter than merely looking sociologically at what the family is today or at any given time (Brown, 1980, p. 58)

Thus, operating in an applied field, Brown saw the importance of moving beyond technical information toward a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships, processes, and contexts of family as foundational for shaping her profession. Brown's applied, pragmatic vision complements Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization as well as many of the other bioecological approaches that have followed.

However, Brown went further in adopting a critical science approach that recognized the social and political implications of her vision, arguing (in contrast to many of her colleagues) that "because home economics is a field traditionally committed to the interests of the family as a unit in society, . . . the field is one that is political-moral in its orientation (Brown, 1985b, p. 62). Applying multiple themes of a bioecological approach to families, she continued:

The organization or structure of society changes historically by collective action of individuals or groups thereby changing the social realities affecting individuals and families. To change these social realities to be more congruent with a democratic society requires political-moral action by citizens acting as free, moral agents. . . . In this sense, the family develops people who are not only members of a family group, some of whom will socially reproduce other family groups, but who are or may become citizens." (Brown, 1985b, p. 63)

To this point, several key bioecological theories of human development have been introduced, providing the theoretical backdrop for the field. We now examine selected domains—youth, families, and neighborhoods—within a broad ecology that are the focus of the proposed study, particularly noting how these domains are understood from a bioecological perspective. Current theories and research in these three domains will be highlighted, and then the review will specifically examine the bidirectional influences and the mechanism of influence between communities and families with adolescents, which lies at the heart of this study.

Youth: Major Approaches to Positive Youth Development

For the purpose of this study, “youth” (typically between ages 12 and 18 in a U.S. context) represents the individual in a bioecological perspective on human development. Since at least the early 1990s, youth or adolescent research has widely embraced ecological or bioecological theories as foundational (though the current emphasis on biological mechanisms and noncognitive skills may erode this commitment). In addition, a growing body of research utilizes a positive youth development (PYD) approach, which typically has a contextual orientation at its core. This approach either replaces, complements, or competes with (depending on one’s orientation) approaches that highlight young people’s risks or deficits (e.g., Campos, 2004; Catalano et al., 2002; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Larson, 2000); their mental, emotional, or behavior disorders (e.g., Cicchetti, 2012; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; National Research Council, 2009); resilience in the face of challenges (Luthar, 2006; Riley & Masten, 2005; Rutter,

1987; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013; Werner, 2005; Werner & Smith, 2001); and strategies to prevent problem behaviors in individual youth or peer groups (Nation et al., 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

A widely recognized approach that grows out of the field of developmental psychopathology is the risk-and-protective factors model (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Luthar, 2006), which became the adopted framework for a wide range of federal youth prevention programs. Like PYD, risk-and-protective models also recognize the importance of context and the ecology of development, highlighting the maladaptive factors in either the person or the context that can compromise development:

[A]dolescents engage in destructive or abnormal behaviors . . . as a result of compromised developmental trajectories. In turn, compromised developmental trajectories are assumed to be caused, at least in part, by maladaptive intrapersonal processes and conditions in the youth's environment (e.g., family problems, neighborhood poverty and disorganization, or cultural incompatibilities between families and their environments). (Schwartz et al., 2007, pp. 119-120)

In the 1990s, however, a number of researchers began to question the primary focus on pathology, risks, and deficits in adolescent research. These challenges led to the emergence of positive youth development approaches. Though its roots can be traced back to the 1970s (with many youth programs having their roots at least a century earlier), PYD came to fruition in the 1990s (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Benson, Scales, et al., 2006; Catalano et al., 2002; Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 2001; Damon, 2004; Eccles

& Gootman, 2002; Lerner, Lerner, & Benson, 2011b; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001; Walker, Gambone, & Walker, 2011), fueled by considerable interest in private and corporate foundations and selected branches of the federal government.

Developmental Assets. A prominent approach to youth development is the developmental assets approach pioneered by Peter L. Benson (1946 – 2011) and his colleagues (including this author) at Minneapolis-based Search Institute (Benson, 1990; Benson, 2006; Benson, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Leffert, 2011; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011; Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Damon, 2004). First introduced in 1990 (Benson, 1990) and refined in 1995, the framework of developmental assets synthesized research and practitioner input from prevention science, youth development, resilience, adolescent development, and related fields to “provide greater attention to the positive developmental nutrients that young people need for successful development, not simply to avoid high-risk behaviors, and to accent the role that community plays in adolescent well-being” (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011, p. 198; for a review of the research behind the framework, see Scales & Leffert, 2004; Benson, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Leffert, 2011). It linked a bioecological ecological framework with practitioner wisdom, empirical research, widely used measures for local contextualization, and the capacity and tools to utilize the framework for social change (Benson, 2006).

Though originally developed for adolescents (ages 12 to 18) in the United States, the underlying theory and research have been expanded to articulate developmental strengths from early childhood through emerging adulthood (Benson, Scales, &

Syvertsen, 2011) and across cultures, languages, and national boundaries (Scales, 2011; Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Fraher, 2012).

An ecological understanding of human development is embedded in the asset framework (depicted in Appendix 1). Half of the 40 identified assets are “external assets,” addressing the supports, relationships, opportunities, and structures that families and communities offer to support young people’s successful development. The other 20 internal assets address the personal strengths of young people, highlighting their capacities, skills, and agency in their own development.

Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen (2011) articulate three hypotheses undergirding developmental assets that also reflect a bioecological understanding. The first is that the assets are additive or the *accumulation hypothesis*; that is, experiencing more assets is associated with positive outcomes, which Lewin-Bizan and colleagues (2010) describe as a *developmental cascade*. This hypothesis is the corollary to the well-established finding that as individual, family, and community risk factors compound, the well being of young people also declines (Campos, 2004; Friedman & Chase-Lansdale, 2002; Rutter, 1987; Sampson, 2012). Thus, one can interpret this hypothesis to suggest that the ecologies of development influence developmental outcomes either positively or negatively, depending on their quality. Furthermore, positive characteristics in one context or time may ameliorate the harmful effects of negative characteristics in another (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013).

The second hypothesis is the *diversity hypothesis*, which addresses the question of whether the core theory and framework is salient across different populations of youth.

Research has found that, although absolute levels of assets do vary somewhat by gender, age, race-ethnicity, and other demographic factors, the effect sizes for these differences are quite small. However, the relationship between levels of assets and a variety of developmental correlates (measures of both risks and thriving) remain consistently strong across each subgroup of young people studied in both longitudinal studies and large-scale cross-sectional studies (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011), with levels of developmental assets appearing to have a compensatory influence over some risk factors, such as low socioeconomic status (Scales, Benson, et al., 2006). In addition, emerging research from developing nations suggests that levels of assets are similarly associated with key developmental correlates in those contexts (Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Fraher, 2012).

The third hypothesis is the *differentiation hypothesis*, which proposes that particular clusters of assets are influential for particular outcomes, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. For example, several clusters of assets best predict student grade-point average (GPA) in longitudinal research. These include assets that emphasize structured community involvement (e.g., youth programs, religious participation, service to others, and creative activities) and norms of responsibility (such as positive peer influence, restraint, time at home, peaceful conflict resolution, and school engagement) (Scales, Benson, et al., 2006). A different but overlapping set of assets (e.g., positive peer influence, school engagement, and peaceful conflict resolution) best predicts lower levels of antisocial behavior and violence (Benson & Scales, 2009b).

A fourth hypothesis—which is assumed in virtually all writing by Benson and colleagues—might be added: The *relationship hypothesis*. That is, the primary mechanism for the development of assets is through relationships. Benson (2006) wrote:

Asset building has less to do with hiring more professionals and starting new programs than it does in activating and enhancing the capacity of community members to build sustained, informal positive relationships with children and teenagers. Through such relationships, care is given, expectations and boundaries are communicated, desirable social behavior is both modeled and affirmed, educational commitment and school success are nurtured, and values are “caught.” (p. 107)

Similarly, in their research summary, Li and Julian (2012) argue that developmental relationships are the “active ingredient” in effective programs and interventions, noting that “relationships not only are of central importance to children’s early cognitive, social, and personality development, but also have lasting influence on long-term outcomes, including social skills, emotion regulation, conscience development, trust in others, and general psychological well-being” (p. 158).

The asset-based approach has been criticized on several fronts, including a concern that it does not adequately recognize the risks and challenges that are part of development (Schwartz et al., 2007). Some observers contend that assets and risks are two sides of the same coins—just different emphases (e.g., Catalano et al., 2002). However, advocates of positive youth development argue that the strengths-based approach is a corrective to the deeply entrenched focus on deficits in this culture that

ultimately undermines efforts to improve the lives of young people, families, and communities by failing to recognize and tap their capacities, strengths, and inner resilience (Benson, 2006; Benson et al., 2006; Damon, 2004). In addition, Werner and Smith's (2001) groundbreaking longitudinal research on resilience from childhood into adulthood suggests that "a number of potent protective factors . . . have a more generalized effect on the life course of vulnerable children and youth than do specific risk factors or stressful life events" (p. 164). Thus, the focus on assets or strengths is both a strategic choice, borne out of research and experience suggesting its efficacy for transformation, as well as a moral commitment to focusing on recognizing and tapping the good in all humans and making efforts to nurture their thriving and encourage their contribution to society, even in the midst of daunting challenges, difficult odds, and, in some cases, negative choices (Taylor et al., 2003).

Noncognitive skills and socio-emotional learning. Whereas the asset-based approach to positive youth development grew primarily out of the field of prevention and psychology, a new wave of interest has emerged, largely out of education, that focuses on noncognitive skills, socio-emotional learning, and character strengths (e.g. Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman, 2008; Ito et al., 2013; National Research Council, 2012; Zins et al., 2004). This emphasis has gained momentum in reaction to the "cognitive hypothesis" (Tough, 2012, p. xiii), which postulated that cognitive knowledge, skills, and development should be the primary (if not exclusive) focus of education reform in order to close the achievement gap. (This philosophy is most evident in the No Child Left

Behind policy.) However, a growing number of theorists and researchers challenge this approach. Tough (2012) framed the shift this way:

[A] disparate congregation of economists, educators, psychologists, and neuroscientists has begun to produce evidence that calls into question many of the assumptions behind the cognitive hypothesis. What matters most in a child's development, they say, is not how much information we can stuff into her brain in the first few years. What matters, instead, is whether we are able to help her develop a very different set of qualities, a list that includes persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence. (p. xv)

Advocates of noncognitive and socio-emotional approaches (particularly when popularized) may be accused of retreating from a robust bioecological foundation toward an overemphasis on individual factors or traits (particularly neurobiological ones), thus neglecting contextual or ecological influences and interactions (Sercombe, 2009). However, their research also usefully sheds light on the influence of ecological factors, such as adverse childhood experiences (Blair & Raver, 2012; Shonkoff et al., 2012), on individual development, particularly brain development, offering additional insight into person-context interactions (Steinberg, 2008). For example, Tough (2012) summarized the role of families in mitigating the effects of trauma and stress in early childhood:

It turns out that there is a particularly effective antidote to the ill effects of early stress, and it comes not from pharmaceutical companies or early-childhood educators but from parents. Parents and other caregivers who are able to form close, nurturing relationships with their children can

foster resilience in them that protects them from many of the worst effects of a harsh early environment. (p. 28)

One might argue that advocates of social-emotional and noncognitive skills have focused attention on specific mechanisms of self-regulation and adaptability that overlap with factors named in positive youth development. Furthermore, as the Tough quote alludes, they also tap another important approach to youth development that focuses on how children and youth develop in healthy and productive ways even in the face of stress, trauma, or other challenges. We turn then to highlight the study of resilience.

Resilience. The concept of resilience in human development emerged in the developmental sciences in the 1970s with earlier roots in medicine (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Thus, its theory and research informed positive youth development. The approach grew out of a number of scholars (e.g., Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 1979, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982, 2001) who studied individuals and groups who were thought to be at great risk for current or future problems and yet showed few signs of pathology and often showed great competence (Sesma, Mannes, & Scales, 2006). Thus, this research challenges the assumption that particular “determinants” of health and well-being are immutable; rather, they are part of a larger mix of positive and negative factors in the environment and within the person that interact to shape development (Bonanno, 2004).

Increasingly resilience has aligned with a bioecological approach (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013), highlighting mechanisms in individuals, families, and environments that reinforce a child’s coping mechanisms (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 1987). Though we are addressing it within the context of understanding youth, the concept of

resilience has been broadly applied to families, communities, the environment, and many other contexts. Whereas positive youth development tended to propose universal application, resilience focused specifically on what can be learned from people who maintain a positive life course despite facing serious trauma or difficulties.

According to Ungar (2012):

Resilience is not . . . synonymous with population-wide phenomena like coping, adaptation, or developmental assets. Instead, it refers to the processes that individuals, families and communities use to cope, adapt and take advantage of assets when facing significant acute or chronic stress, or the compounding effect of both together. (p. 387)

Despite number of debates between proponents of resilience and positive youth development (e.g., Roosa, 2000), the two approaches complement each other in that “the study of resilience in development has overturned many negative assumptions and deficit-focused models about children growing up under the threat of disadvantage and adversity” (Masten, 2001, p. 227).

Resilience in child and youth development has focused on three phenomena (Masten & Best, 1990). The first is the phenomenon of having good outcomes despite being at high risk. Second is the capacity to maintain competence even under threat. The third involves recovery from trauma. Studies across these phenomena have yielded insights into broad capacities and protective factors (which often overlap with factors in positive development) as well as specific factors at work in particular circumstances.

Unlike early interpretations of the resilience research, which described “invincible” and “invulnerable” children who were “superkids,” Masten (2001) describes

resilience as “ordinary magic” (p. 227) that grows out of basic human adaptive systems. As Masten (2001) put it:

Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities. (p. 235)

That theme is also evident in Werner and Smith’s (2001) landmark, multi-decade study of resilience, the Kauai Longitudinal Study. Throughout the course of their study of people who they followed for more than 30 years, they found an ongoing shifting balance between stress or trauma that heighten vulnerability and protective factors (in themselves, their families, or the broader community) that strengthened their resilience. They also documented an innate self-righting tendency that extends well beyond childhood into adulthood. Though the traumas that some experienced in childhood (such as parental alcoholism) had lingering effects into midlife, a number of high-risk children had grown into confident, contributing adults. Often, they found, life transitions (such as graduation, entering the military, or finding an intimate partner) gave the opportunity for young people to turn their lives around.

Numerous studies have identified a range of factors that may be at work in resilience, including those within individuals as well as in the broader context. In a study of adolescents in 11 countries, Ungar et al. (2007; also see Ungar, 2011) identified seven aspects of the young person’s environment that dynamically interact and are associated with “doing well” under stress: access to material resources, relationships, identity, cohesion, power and control, social justice, and cultural adherence. Cross-referencing this

set of factors with factors highlighted in positive youth development suggests a high degree of alignment. The list also highlights aspects of many elements of a bioecological framework. However, a unique contribution of resilience research is its focus on understanding the individual, social, and cultural mechanisms of development for those who face stress and trauma.

Thriving and flourishing. A still-emergent strand of positive youth development borrows from the field of positive psychology and overlaps with the focus on noncognitive skills. It seeks to understand the factors and dynamics that tap the deep human capacities and passions of young people to set them on a path toward optimal development or flourishing. Whereas much of the early work in positive youth development focused on shifting the social context to emphasize nurturing positive skills, traits, values, and identity through positive opportunities and relationships (with the developmental assets exemplifying this “outside-in” development), theories of thriving (e.g., Benson & Scales, 2009a) emphasize “inside-out” development that moves beyond “competence” and begins with young people’s intrinsic capacities, including the capacity for self-regulation (Gestsdottir et al., 2009; Lerner et al., 2011); passions or sparks (Benson & Scales, 2009a, 2011; Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011); curiosity; and tenacity or grit (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Larson (2000) described the difference between adequate and optimal development (or thriving) this way: “Many youth do their schoolwork, comply with their parents, hang out with their friends, and get through the day, but are not invested in paths into the future that excite them or feel like they originate from within” (p. 170).

Though there is a clear difference in emphasis, both “outside-in” development (or socialization) and “inside-out” development (or self-actualization) recognize the interaction between persons and their contexts. For example, Lerner (2004) contended that healthy self-regulation balances individual capacities with the “growth-promoting influences of the social world” (p. 44). Similarly, Benson and colleagues (2006) described the optimal process as involving “the fusion of an active, engaged, and competent person with receptive, supportive, and nurturing ecologies” (p. 905). The central metaphor for Benson’s approach to thriving was “spark.” It was described in the youth survey as follows:

When people are really happy, energized, and passionate about their talents, interests, or hobbies, we say they have a “spark” in their life. This spark is more than just interesting or fun for them. They are passionate about it. It gives them joy and energy. It is a really important part of their life that gives them real purpose, direction, or focus. Do you have this kind of spark in your life? (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011, p. 266).

One national study found that 80 percent of 15-year-olds self-identified at least one spark in their life. Most often, they identified creative arts (28%), sports (26%), and technology (18%) as their sparks (Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2010). However, identifying a spark is not the same as embracing it and acting upon it. In the same study, only 51% of youth surveyed indicated that they knew their sparks, saw those sparks as important to them, and took initiative to develop their sparks. Through several studies, Search Institute documented the additive contribution of (1) positive opportunities in community programs (representing outside-in development); (2) sparks and youth voice

(inside-out development); and (3) positive relationships (representing the interaction between youth and others around them) to youth outcomes, including educational and civic engagement, and a sense of purpose and identity (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011; Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2009, 2010).

Thus, thriving emphasizes the importance of personal agency in the person-context interaction—in addition to the socializing influence of family and community and the neurobiological and genetic characteristics that also shape development. We now turn to examining two of the socializing influences, family and community, that interact dynamically with young people's capacities and agency to shape development.

Families: Changes, Challenges, and Strengths

There is little question of the importance—indeed the centrality—of the family for young people's healthy development, including parent-child relationships, other dynamics in the family, and structural characteristics of the family. (See Steinberg, 2000 and 2001, for reviews.) Though attempts have been made to dismiss the influence of family and parenting on children's development because of the influence of genetics or peers (e.g., Harris, 1998), the preponderance of evidence contradicts that assertion, offering a more nuanced understanding of multiple influences and interactions among them (Collins et al., 2000; Reeves & Howard, 2013; Steinberg, 2001).

For example, using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Children of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth ($n = 5,283$ children born in the late 1980s and early 1990s studied during infancy, early childhood, and early adolescence [age 10-15]), Reeves and Howard (2013) found that three out of four children whose parents who used

effective parenting practices (i.e., an authoritative mix of challenge and support as well as cognitive stimulation) graduated from high school with at least a 2.5 GPA, were not convicted of a crime, and did not become a teen parent. In contrast, only about 30 percent of those children with parents who did not employ effective parenting practices reached these benchmarks. Based on their statistical modeling, Reeves and Howard conclude that increasing the level of relational support by those parents with the weakest parenting practices, 12.5 percent fewer of their children would become teen parents and 8 percent fewer would be convicted of a crime by age 19.

It is important, though, that parenting influence not be considered in isolation (or as the only influence within the family system). Many other factors are also at work, including factors that influence parents and parenting. As Collins and colleagues (2000) summarize contemporary parenting research, “The difficulty today is not that the evidence is inadequate to show parenting effects but that the evidence has revealed a reality that is far more complex than critics expected or that writers can convey in most popular media outlets” (p. 228). Consistent with this conclusion, the vast majority of current family scholars embrace a bioecological understanding of families, particularly as it is manifested in family systems theories (Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Cox & Paley, 1997; Gavazzi, 2011; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Olson & DeFrain, 2000; Walsh, 2003a).

Though much of this research has been in “traditional” families, more and more studies examine normative processes, strengths, and resilience across a range of family structures (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Ford-Gilboe, 2000; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Richards & Schmiede, 1993) and cultures (Dalla, DeFrain, Johnson, & Abbott, 2009;

DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Peterson, 2007), emphasizing “unique coping styles and multiple adaptations . . . [and] the multiple, recursive influences in individual and family functioning” (Walsh, 2003b, p. 7).

Family systems theories. In general, family systems theories view family members as interconnected, with actions and experiences of one person directly or indirectly affecting all other family members (Alberts, 2005; Cox & Paley, 1997). From this perspective, the following are true of families: (a) the whole cannot be fully understood by just understanding each of the parts separately; (b) the family system has subsystems which are systems in themselves; (c) the system adjusts internally to compensate for changing conditions; and (d) the family system self-organizes to adapt to internal changes (Cox & Paley, 1997). Thus, “the family is viewed as a hierarchically organized system, comprised of smaller subsystems (e.g. parental, marital, and sibling) but also embedded within larger systems (e.g. the community), and interactions occur within and across these various levels” (Cox & Paley, 1997, p. 246).

However, this research has disproportionately focused on parent-child relationships and parenting practices (Kuczynski, 2003; Benson & Deal, 1995). As Bronfenbrenner and colleagues (1986) noted (and appears to be still true), the majority of studies of families grounded in ecological models have “concentrated on intrafamilial processes of parent-child interaction” (p. 723). This emphasis has begun to shift with a growing number of researchers introducing notions of “social capital” into family studies, highlighting the normative patterns and actions in families that contribute to positive outcomes (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Parcel et al., 2010).

Family definitions and change. More challenging—and politically charged—is defining what “family” means. “If there ever was a consensus on the definition of the family,” wrote Settles (1999), “it is not to be found in today’s research and policy analysis. Whether the operational definitions, which have served us well for specific projects, should be or could be integrated or abstracted to produce a clear conceptual definition for the field at a theoretical level is under debate. *The political and social consequences of conceptualizations of family are potent*” (p. 209, italics in original).

Underlying this debate have been dramatic shifts in demographics and understandings of families in the United States (and other industrialized nations) in the past century. These changes have included delayed marriage and child-bearing, cohabiting couples, marriage outside of marriage, women’s participation in the workforce, and shifting of roles in the home (Bianchi, 2011). In addition, religious norms about family roles and life have been supplanted by a focus on individual freedom and flexibility in roles, structures, and expectations (Scanzoni, 2004).

Historically, the relationships between family and community as well as roles within the family were typically governed by compliance with social and religious norms. However, the second half of the 20th century saw “the weakening of social prescriptions concerning the necessity of marrying and staying married, having children, and limiting sexual expression and childbearing to marriage” (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001, p. 1011) as well as shifts toward more egalitarian attitudes in workplaces and homes.

Whether these changes represent the decline (e.g., Glenn & Sylvester, 2008; Marquardt, 2006), progress (e.g., Coont, 1992; Scanzoni, 2004), or some combination (McLanahan et al., 2010) depends on one's ideology, worldview, situation, and context. At a minimum, the trends have caused considerable discussion about what matters in families and have raised fundamental questions about why we form and keep families. Hecko (1995) suggested that middle-class families in Western societies are asking: "Why should we care for each other? Why should I not just live as I like" (p. 686). Such a question begs for both a moral answer and an ecological understanding.

One reaction to the changes in society and in families has been to define—and advocate for—"The Family" as an ideal type (Bernardes, 1999). These efforts emphasize family structure and composition as fundamental. This approach seeks to set (or challenge) boundaries on what is or is not "The Family," how society and policy will (or will not) support "The Family," and what family structures are good (normal, healthy, productive, moral) or bad (harmful, deviant, dysfunctional, immoral).

From this perspective, families are in disarray. A national poll of 3,000 U.S. parents of school-aged children by the conservative-leaning Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia found that 64 percent of parents say family life has declined since they were growing up, though most are quite happy with their own families (Bowman et al., 2012).

In the midst of the changes, whether viewed positively or negatively, there is a need to understand and seek to support the well-being of all families. As Brown wrote

(1985a), “Presumably it is not just certain families whose interests we support but rather the interests of all families” (p. 62).

Despite the changes, debates, questions, and worries, people in the United States continue to place a high value on family, marriage, and parenting, suggesting that the family will remain a fundamental and vibrant (if changing) social institution. A 2010 survey of 2,691 U.S. adults by the Pew Research Center found that 76% said their family is the most important element of their lives, and 75% said they are very satisfied with their family. Furthermore, eight out of ten said their family now is as close or closer than the family in which they grew up (Taylor, 2010). Yet much of the research on families has focused on the risks, deficits, and challenges they face.

Challenges facing families. Several strands in theory and research highlight the challenges facing families, including the research on family resilience. They tend to address a variety of factors, including *environmental challenges*, such as neighborhood quality (Barnes et al., 2006; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000), socioeconomic status (Smith, 1995), multi-generational poverty (Elder et al., 1995; Redd et al., 2011), social exclusion (Barnes et al., 2006), or high-conflict or violent environments (Houltberg, Henry, & Morris, 2012; Sampson, 2012); *family structures* associated with greater risk, such single-parent families (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010), particular cultural groups (Hummer & Hamilton, 2010), or sexual orientation of the parents (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Tasker, 2010); *family transitions or losses*, such as divorce/separation (Amato, 2010; Brown, 2006; Krohn, Hall, & Lizotte, 2008; Somers et

al., 2011), moving/mobility (Scanlon & Devine, 2001), military deployment (Lester et al., 2010; Park, 2011), immigration (Mistry et al., 2008), chronic illness, or a death in the family (Coker et al., 2011; Oliva, Jiménez, & Parra, 2009); *internal family dysfunction or trauma*, such as families with an addictive, mentally ill, or disabled members (Backett-Milburn & Jackson, 2012) or families experiencing abuse, neglect, or other maltreatment (Cicchetti, 2012; Martin, Gardner, & Brooks-Gunn, 2012); and *routine, everyday family stresses* (Cichy, Stawski, & Almeida, 2012; Piazza et al., 2013), including work-school-family conflicts (Hostetler et al., 2012; Nomaguchi, 2012) and interpersonal conflicts (Eisenberg et al., 2008; La Valley & Guerrero, 2010).

Even this superficial litany of potential stresses may give the impression that families face so many internal and external challenges that they have little to offer. Indeed, that perception has historically been reinforced in much of the research and public messages about families. Commenting on prior research on families, Walsh (2003a) wrote that “most studies . . . tended to dismiss the family as hopelessly dysfunctional and to seek positive extrafamilial resources to counter the negative impact. Thus, families were seen to contribute to risk, but not to resilience” (p. 5).

In Search Institute’s survey of 1,498 families with children in early adolescence (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), parenting adults were asked about whether they had experienced several different transitions and stresses that mirror some of the categories evident in the literature. Table 1 suggests how many families in this life stage experience these stresses individually. Of course, many of these factors are often parts of larger, multi-dimensional patterns of risk or challenge (see Thoits, 2010).

*Table 1**Recent Stresses Experienced by U.S. Families with 10 to 15 Year Olds**The family has experienced the following transitions in the past year:*

- Moved to a different home 12%
- Moved to a different school district 8
- Had a new child through birth or adoption 6
- A child moved out 6
- An older family member moved in 5

The family has experienced the following in the past two years:

- A financial crisis 30
- A family member with a serious illness or disability 27
- A family member has struggled with abuse of alcohol or other drugs 14
- A family member has been arrested or imprisoned for a crime 11
- A family member has been a victim of a crime 9
- A natural disaster has damaged or destroyed home or other property 6

Parent has experienced the following in the past two years:

- Lost a job or been unemployed 27
- Dealing with a disability/handicap 18
- Had a serious accident or illness 17
- Experienced a separation or divorce 8
- Being away for an extended period of time due to a military deployment 7

Child, age 10 to 15, has experienced the following deaths in the past 2 years:

- A grandparent or other close relative 25
- A brother or sister 8
- A friend their own age 8
- A parent or other adult responsible for raising the child 6

SOURCE: Unpublished Search Institute data from the American Family Assets Study (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

Family strengths. In the midst of diminished community, societal, and religious norms that press for family conformity to social expectations and amid the many stresses they face, what binds families together and gives them strength and resilience? Rather than focusing primarily on family structure, stresses, and dysfunction, what processes and dynamics within families—regardless of their structure, composition, or background—contribute to the health and well-being of the individuals in the family, the family system as a whole, and the broader context of neighborhoods and communities?

These kinds of questions surfaced in the pioneering work of Herbert A. Otto in the 1960s (Otto, 1962, 1963) and came to the forefront in the 1970s and 1980s, popularized in books by researchers such as Jerry M. Lewis (1979), Marjorie M. Brown (1980), Dolores Curran (1983), Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain (1985), and others. With an interest in understanding why many families succeed rather than failing (Stinnett et al., 1981), these researchers identified and promoted traits or strengths of healthy families, such as affection, positive communication, time together, spiritual well-being, successful stress management, and service to others. For a decade in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars came together at the National Symposium on Building Family Strengths at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to expand the research and practice base (Stinnett et al., 1981).

Building on this emphasis, President Jimmy Carter convened a White House Conference on Families in 1979 to “examine the strengths of American families, the difficulties they face, and the ways in which family life is affected by public policies” in order to “help strengthen and support this most vital and enduring social resource”

(Carter, 1978). However, the government's role in family life remains a contentious issue, as stated by Barbaro (1979): "The political order of the United States cannot deal with an issue so emotionally charged as family life in a comprehensive manner and could not attempt to do so without violating individual liberties or discriminating against nonconventional families" (p. 455).

Since that time, a focus on "normal" family processes (Walsh, 2003a), family strengths (DeFrain & Asay, 2007), and family resilience (Walsh, 2006) has gained depth and rigor, continuing a shift toward a more balanced understanding of families in both clinical and developmental research. Walsh (2004) described the focus on family resilience (which echoes the broader field of resilience, introduced earlier):

A family resilience approach [shifts] . . . perspective from seeing families as damaged to viewing them as challenged. It also corrects the tendency to think of family health in a mythologized problem-free family. Instead, it seeks to understand how families can survive and regenerate even in the midst of overwhelming stress. A family resilience perspective affirms the family's capacity for self-repair." (p. 5)

It is beyond the scope of this study to synthesize the vast and diverse literature on family strengths and family dynamics. However, the proposed study builds on a research endeavor at Search Institute to identify and measure critical strengths for families, particularly those with young adolescents (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012). The resulting Family Assets framework, derived from extant literature and then empirically tested, offers a window into family dynamics addressed in this study.

The framework of Family Assets grew out of a review of the literature in family systems theory, family resiliency, and adolescent development as well as qualitative interviews with youth and adults, a focus group with LGBT parents (who are underrepresented in other literature), and active feedback from a national advisory board of scholars and leaders in family and youth development. Included strengths have been associated in the literature with positive outcomes for youth and parenting adults, and there is evidence that it is relevant and meaningful across a wide diversity of U.S. families and contexts. Finally, the framework was refined after collecting and analyzing data from 1,498 families nationally that included dyads of a 10 to 15 year old and a parenting adult. (In general, the work on family strengths in the 1970s and 1980s was based on qualitative and clinical research and was generally not validated or normed through quantitative, population-level studies. This study was also among the first to include both parenting adult and youth report equally in assessing family strengths.)

The resulting framework seeks to embody key elements of a bioecological understanding of families. It intentionally emphasizes systems-level family functioning rather than parenting strategies, *per se*, seeking to capture the overall culture and patterns of family life. Consistent with an understanding of person-context interaction, it highlights the agency of both parenting adults and young people in contributing to family well-being. It also focuses on processes and relationships within families (the mesosystem within families, using Bronfenbrenner's term), not on family composition and structure. This emphasis also aligns with extensive research showing that positive outcomes for youth are more closely associated with internal family functioning than

family structure (see DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson 2010).

The specific elements echo other articulations of family strengths and resilience (e.g., Brown; 1980; Curran, 1983; DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Olson & Gorall, 2003; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985; Walsh, 2006).

In total, 21 strengths—dubbed “Family Assets”—were identified (Table 2). Of these, 17 focus on relationships, processes, and practices within the family (which are, collectively, Internal Family Assets), and four describe ways families connect to their communities. (The last four will be reviewed later, when family-community connections are discussed.) Each category was finalized through confirmatory factor analyses that offered empirical (as well as theoretical) evidence of associations among the assets that are included in each category.

When combined, these assets are correlated with positive behavioral, socio-emotional, relational, and health outcomes for both parents and young people, and they account for considerably more difference in these outcomes than family demographics (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012). In addition, overall levels of these strengths in families varies little, if any, by a variety of demographic differences, including family income and education, family composition (two-parent or single-parent), sexual orientation of the parenting adults, region, type of community (urban, rural, suburban), or race-ethnicity (though African American and Latino families tend to have slightly higher overall asset levels) (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

*Table 2**Search Institute's Family Assets Framework***Nurturing Relationships**

1. *Positive Communication*—Family members listen attentively and speak in respectful ways.
2. *Affection*—Family members regularly show warmth to each other.
3. *Emotional Openness*—Family members can be themselves and are comfortable sharing their feelings.
4. *Support for Sparks*—Family members encourage each other in pursuing their talents and interests.

Establishing Routines

5. *Family Meals*—Family members eat meals together most days in a typical week.
6. *Shared Activities*—Family members regularly spend time doing everyday activities together.
7. *Meaningful Traditions*—Holidays, rituals, and celebrations are part of family life.
8. *Dependability*—Family members know what to expect from one another.

Maintaining Expectations

9. *Openness about Tough Topics*—Family members openly discuss sensitive issues, such as sex and substance use.
10. *Fair Rules*—Family rules and consequences are reasonable.
11. *Defined Boundaries*—The family sets limits on what young people can do and how they spend their time.
12. *Clear Expectations*—The family openly articulates its expectations for young people.
13. *Contributions to Family*—Family members help meet each other's needs and share in getting things done.

Adapting to Challenges

14. *Management of Daily Commitments*—Family members effectively navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work.
15. *Adaptability*—The family adapts well when faced with changes.
16. *Problem Solving*—Family members work together to solve problems and deal with challenges.
17. *Democratic Decision Making*—Family members have a say in decisions that affect the family.

Connecting to Community

18. *Neighborhood Cohesion*—Neighbors look out for one another.
19. *Relationships with Others*—Family members feel close to teachers, coaches, and others in the community.
20. *Enriching Activities*—Family members participate in programs and activities that deepen their lives.
21. *Supportive Resources*—Family members have people and places in the community they can turn to for help.

Though the approaches are distinct, it is noteworthy that the four “internal” categories of Family Assets roughly parallel Olson’s Family Circumplex Model within the field of family studies (Olson & DeFrain, 2000; Olson & Gorall, 2003):

Family Circumplex Model	Categories of Family Assets
Cohesion	Establishing Routines Maintaining Expectations
Flexibility	Adapting to Challenges
Communication	Nurturing Relationships

Like the Family Circumplex Model, Family Assets stand in dynamic balance with each other. For example, routines and adaptation are both important, with each counterbalancing the other. In theory, families that develop strengths in some categories without the balance of the others risk, for example, rigidity on one hand or chaos on the other. We turn now to a brief summary of selected research supporting each of the 17 Internal Family Assets (IFA).

Nurture relationships. The first category of Family Assets focuses on positive, mutual relationships within the family, which are widely recognized as foundational for family functioning, including parent-child relationships (Oliva, Jiménez, & Parra, 2009; Paradis et al., 2011; Rothon, Goodwin, & Stansfeld, 2011; Steinberg, 2001; Trommsdorff & Korndat, 2003), sibling relationships (Cummings & Schermerhorn, 2003), and marriage/partner or interparental relations (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Graham, 2002; Roehlkepartain et al., 2002). Healthy relationships begin and grow as family members

show each other they care about what each person has to say, how they feel, and their unique and shared interests. These relationships are nurtured through the following assets named in the framework.

1. *Positive communication* among family members includes attentive listening, respectful communication, and setting aside distractions (Caughlin, 2003; Samek & Rueter, 2011) as well as the substance of conversations, such as open communication about issues, even amid disagreements, and a focus on communication to maintain harmonious family relationships (Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008). Schrodt, Witt, and Messersmith's meta-analysis (2008) of 56 studies found that healthy communication patterns are associated with a wide range of indicators of cognitive activities, relational dynamics, and individual well-being.

2. *Affection* is expressed regularly within the family so that all family members know they are valued and loved, recognizing that different families show affection in different ways based on their own culture and personalities (Barry & Kochanska, 2010; McNeely & Barber, 2010; Tendulkar et al., 2010). Across cultures, adolescents link instrumental support (help with tasks or resources) and emotional support (such as showing affection or offering praise) as evidence of parental love (McNeely & Barber, 2010).

3. *Emotional openness* highlights the degree to which family members feel like they can be themselves with each other, disclose personal information to each other, and openly share their feelings and experiences with an expectations of being respected and safe, in contrast to feeling that they need to keep secrets from each other (Afifi & Olson,

2005; Eisenberg, Gershoff, et al., 2001; Eisenberg, Valiente, et al., 2003; Finkenauer et al., 2004; Morris et al., 2007). Furthermore, Froyen and colleagues (2013) found higher levels of positive emotional expressiveness and lower levels of negative emotional expressiveness were associated with higher material satisfaction and better learning environments and higher literacy skills for young children.

4. Finally, *support for sparks* focuses on the ways in which each family member encourages the others to pursue their interests, passions, and other forms of self-expression, self-differentiation, and autonomy (Benson & Scales, 2011; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011; Seiffge-Krenke & Pakalniskiene, 2011). Young people who have articulated their own spark, have family members who support them in pursuing that spark, and have opportunities to express their spark to others experience a number of key concurrent outcomes, particularly those representing prosociality (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011).

Establish routines. The second category of Family Assets focuses on the shared routines, traditions, and activities that give a dependable rhythm and structure to family life (Fiese et al., 2002; Israel & Roderick, 2001; Roche & Ghazarian, 2012; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007), and may be particularly important for families whose lives have been disrupted by a crisis such as divorce, a death in the family, or other stresses (e.g., Coker et al., 2011; Oliva, Jiménez, & Parra, 2009). Absent routines, the family life becomes chaotic and unpredictable. On the other hand, routines without the balance of flexibility can become rigid and constraining, often pushing family members to detach (Olson, DeFrain, & Skogrand, 2008). Specifically, rituals and routines can enhance relationships

in families, cultivate skills, and contribute to healthy socialization (Denham, 2003; Fiese et al., 2002; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007). Four assets are included in “the establishing routines” category.

5. *Family meals*, shared on a regular basis, contribute to a range of positive outcomes for family members, including healthier diets (Eisenberg et al., 2004; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2008; Videon & Manning, 2003), greater family cohesion and problem-solving (Franko et al., 2008); academic performance and language development (Fiese & Schwartz, 2008); and reduced risk behaviors, even after controlling for an overall level of family connectedness (Fiese & Schwartz, 2008; White & Halliwell, 2010). Shared meals become a touchpoint in a family’s routine, with rituals and practices that form family life.

6. *Shared activities* enrich family cohesion as family members regularly spend time together doing chores, playing games, exercising, doing schoolwork, reading, or other shared activities. These activities are associated with higher levels of family satisfaction and well-being (Crouter et al., 2004), including in families that have dealt with major disruptions such as divorce (Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Similarly, Offer (2013) found that that shared leisure activity benefitted adolescent well-being, especially when fathers were present. Interestingly, this study found that productive family time (such as homework) and maintenance (such as chores) with both parents did not contribute to well-being, suggesting the unique value of spending leisure time together.

Not surprisingly, researchers (Crosnoe & Trinitapoli, 2008) have found that shared activities tend to decline through adolescence. Daly (2001) found that families place high value on shared time together, but they often feel guilty or disillusioned about living up to an idealized understanding of what this time is or could be (Milkie et al., 2004). In general, shared leisure time has been found to be associated with positive functioning, though there are questions about the extent to which this research is applicable across cultures and socioeconomics (Poff, Zabriskie, & Townsend, 2010; Tubbs, Roy, & Burton, 2005).

7. *Meaningful traditions* have been found to have positive associations with multiple areas of family well-being, including partner relationships (Crespo et al., 2008), family members' health and healing (Denham, 2003), and adolescents' life satisfaction and development (Eaker & Walters, 2002). Some researchers focus specifically on the role of religious or spiritual rituals and traditions, noting their critical role in family cohesion and meaning making (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Fiese & Tomcho, 2001).

8. *Dependability* focuses on family members knowing what to expect from one another day-to-day. The importance of dependability as a Family Asset grows out of the attachment literature, which emphasizes the critical need for caregivers to be predictably responsive, particularly in infancy, fostering a secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969/1982). If family members experience another's erratic behavior or unwillingness (or inability) to fulfill family responsibilities (particularly from a parent), it undermines family health and the strength of bonds to the family (Ross & Hill, 2000). On the other hand, dependability

cultivates interpersonal trust, a cornerstone of healthy relationships (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985), contributing to family members' self-efficacy and confidence.

Maintain expectations. The third category of Family Assets highlights the expectations that family members have for each other that clarify how each person participates in and contributes to family life. In this domain, parenting adults play a clear socializing role for their children, yet it is also important that expectations are mutual, fair, clear, and balanced. One can think of this category as addressing a number of key aspects of family management in which external expectations are used both to guide current choices and behaviors while also developing internal self-regulation and character (Habib et al., 2010; Hardy, Carlo, & Roesch, 2010; Wyatt & Carlo, 2002). Such expectations also become particularly important to have established in times of crisis or when stresses pile up. As Walsh (2006) wrote:

In times of upheaval, families commonly lose structure, daily routines fall by the wayside, and established patterns become disorganized. . . . Members need to know what is expected of them and what they can expect of each other. Reliability is crucial: family members need assurance that they can depend on one another to follow through with the commitments they've made. (p. 85)

The following assets were identified within the “maintaining expectations” category.

9. *Openness about tough topics* might conceptually fit well with positive communication, but analyses correlated it more with the other assets in the maintaining expectations category. The connection also has face validity in that the establishment and maintenance of clear expectations depends on a willingness and capacity to discuss

difficult topics—such as sexuality, substance abuse, religion, health, and other issues—openly. Family communication about sexuality, money, substance abuse, and other difficult topics is consistently found to be associated with more positive choices among young people (Blake et al., 2001; Meschke, Bartholomae, & Zentall, 2002; Miller-Day, 2002; Whitaker & Miller, 2000).

10. *Fair rules* is an asset that emphasizes the family's role in socialization, putting boundaries on behaviors based on values, goals, traditions, and beliefs. Such rules (and consequences for not following them) are most effective when they are viewed as fair and reasonable (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004). In general, families set rules differently for different domains, with, for example, rules being more lax regarding personal choices and clearer when related to issues of health, safety, or effect on others (Padilla-Walker, 2008).

The ways rules are set and enforced can make a significant difference in how young people internalize the underlying values and self-regulate (Baxter et al., 2009; Patrick & Gibbs, 2012). However, parents typically believe they have done a better job of communicating them clearly and with justification than their adolescents do (Baxter et al., 2009). One final note: Though the Search Institute study focused on rules governing young people's behaviors, the broader framework would support the value of rules for all family members that contribute to family functioning, individual and shared well-being, and a sense of mutual dependability.

11. Closely related to clear rules is *defined boundaries*, an asset that highlights the importance of setting limits on each other, particularly parenting adults setting limits on

young people, who have not yet developed the needed self-regulation processes. The measurement of this asset focuses on limits around media use (Barradas et al., 2007; Blinn-Pike, 2009; Carlson et al., 2010) and specific activities with friends, but the concept is broader and can also include defined boundaries for the adults in the family. Critical to setting defined boundaries is parental monitoring (which involves both communication and supervising) that is appropriate to the situation and the developmental maturity of the young person (DeVore & Ginsburg, 2005).

12. The fourth asset in the “maintaining expectations” category is *clear expectations*, which focuses on being explicit about expected behaviors and practices, such as dietary choices, educational commitment, and how to communicate within the family (such as being clear about where you and who you are with). Though the value of such expectations of parents for youth are well-established related to education (Bowen et al., 2012; Scales & Leffert, 2004) and high-risk behaviors (Habib et al., 2010; Nash et al., 2004), little existing research articulates the importance of clear expectations *for* parents.

13. The final asset in this category, *contributions to family*, shifts the focus of expectations to highlight the ways that family members are expected to share in getting things done, meet each others needs, and help each other out. This asset not only has a utilitarian purpose (getting things done or learning life skills), but it also underscores the psychological value of all family members investing their time and themselves into maintaining and strengthening family life (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Smetana et al., 2009), not to mention the effect on family cohesion to know that everyone is “chipping in.”

Of course, such contributions are more of an economic necessity, including many families where adolescents play important caregiving roles for younger siblings or elderly grandparents (Lee & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011), provide help when mothers work or are particularly tired (Tsai, Telzer, & Gonzales, 2013), as well as other essential roles in family maintenance and well-being, all of which tend to be unequally maintained by women and daughters in this society (Crouter et al., 2001), though there is some evidence of a shift toward greater shared responsibility in U.S. homes (Coltrane, 2000).

Adapt to challenges. As noted earlier, every family faces challenges, large and small, and the presence of these challenges has been well-documented. The ways families face and adapt to those changes together help them through the ups and downs of life. Like the dimension of “flexibility” in Olson’s Family Circumplex Model (Olson & DeFrain, 2000), this category of Family Assets is key for everyday family functioning, but becomes even more critical when families face major challenges, disruptions, or traumas, either within the family (such as a prolonged or acute illness or injury, a family death, or serious conflicts) or external to the family (such as losing a job, moving to a new home or city, dealing with a natural disaster, or navigating an economic downturn). However, it is important that it be valued alongside routines and expectations, lest unchecked flexibility deteriorates into chaos (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

This category of family assets includes strengths that are important for everyday functioning and can also be tapped (along with other assets) in times of crisis, disruption, or trauma in the family, drawing on the robust field of family resilience (Black & Lobo,

2008; Conger & Conger, 2002; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004; Simon, Murphy, & Smith, 2005; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013; Walsh, 2006).

14. For many families, *management of daily commitments* requires constant negotiation and adaptation. For some families, those commitments may be multiple jobs to make ends meet or to support a relative needing long-term, chronic care. For others, it may involve the juggling of demanding careers and school expectations along with family life and civic participation (Hill, 2005). Furthermore, activities for some family members affect other family members. This relationship may be self-evident when focused on parental working schedules (though empirical evidence is limited and nuanced; Johnson et al., 2013), but it goes beyond that. For example, Barnett and Gareis (2009) found that children's school and activities schedules, if misaligned with other responsibilities, contributed to psychological distress for working fathers.

These interactions among different demands suggest that families who work together to manage multiple commitments, make individual and collective choices in light of shared, sometimes-competing interests, provide mutual support, and take time to do things they enjoy can reduce the stress, increase personal and family satisfaction, develop the skills needed to negotiate competing demands throughout life, and clarify role expectations and role balance (Hill, 2005; Mauno & Rantanen, 2012; Nomaguchi, 2012; Voydanoff, 2002). Inability to effectively navigate competing demands can undermine family relationships, including the partner relationship (Hostetler et al., 2012).

15. The *adaptability* asset addresses the extent to which family members see themselves easily adjusting when things come up, versus being overly rigid in their

response (Walsh, 2006). This adaptability matters at the family systems level (allowing the family to adjust to new realities) and also at the interpersonal level in navigating relationships with other family members. As Walsh (2006) wrote, “Couples and families do best when they construct relationships with a flexible structure that they can mold and reshape to fit their needs and challenges over time” (p. 85). From a developmental perspective, this adaptability becomes an important resource during early adolescence when the parent-child relationship inevitably shifts as the young person differentiates and seeks increased autonomy.

16. *Problem solving* highlights the value of family members working together to work through issues and deal with challenges. In the analyses for creating the Family Assets framework, two distinct themes in the literature coalesce into this asset. The first focuses on the strategies families use to solve (or not solve) problems or deal with conflicts (Conger et al., 2009; Roskos, Handal, & Ubinger, 2010; Walsh, 2006), such as tackling issues when they arise (instead of putting them off), working together, and accepting responsibility (rather than blaming others). Aside from its intrinsic benefit, effective family problem-solving is associated with the development of mastery in adolescence (Conger et al., 2009). The other theme that is reflected in this asset is how the family makes meaning in the midst of solving a problem by, for example, tapping their religious or spiritual resources, maintaining a hopeful outlook, and other ways of finding meaning amid adversity (Walsh, 2006).

17. The final asset in this category, *democratic decision making*, speaks to how the family negotiates, compromises, and invites everyone to have a voice in decisions,

particularly when they affect the whole family. Consistent with the Family Circumplex Model (Olson & Gorall, 2003), this asset speaks to the value of shared leadership and role sharing within the family, including between partners (Lee & Beatty, 2002) and between parents and children, recognizing that some decisions are appropriately the responsibility of the parent, even when the child's opinion is sought.

To be sure, the ways that decisions are shared or not shared is informed or shaped by the family's worldview, culture, and religious beliefs. For example, children in more individualistic countries tend to have a greater say in family life than those in collectivist societies, reflecting the value placed in individualistic societies on developing autonomy and independence (Trommsdorff & Korndat, 2003).

The final category of Family Assets is "connecting to community." Since that area is the primary focus of the proposed research, this section of the Family Assets framework will be examined later when we examine the relationship between families with youth and their communities. Before turning our attention to those issues, however, we will delve into the third and final major context: the community.

Communities: Places and Belonging

The third and final domain within a bioecological approach that is particularly germane to this study is the domain of community, which may be loosely understood as the network of relationships, supports, and systems that include elements of the microsystem and the exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (2005) model. Community is a concept used in multiple, sometimes competing ways, and some relevant research focuses

on neighborhoods, which could be considered subcategory of “place” community. That complexity forces an articulation of underlying assumptions.

Community may refer to *communities of place* (specifically, geographic or physical places, including neighborhoods) or *communities of affiliation*, which may include communities of identity (such as religious, cultural, ethnic, national, political, or other subgroups) and *communities of affection* (in which one has a sense of belonging, trust, and mutual care), which has also been described as a “psychological sense of community” (Barnes, Katz, Korbin, & O’Brien, 2006, p. 33). Of course, subcategories may be aligned or at least overlapping, with one feeling a sense of belonging in a physical neighborhood in which he or she connects with others who share an ideological, cultural, or religious identity.

Defining communities and their traits. Researchers typically take one of two approaches in defining communities and neighborhoods, roughly mirroring the place-affiliation (or institutional-process) distinction. Empirical studies often use administrative data such as Census boundaries and other structural traits reflect the physical or jurisdictional features of communities or neighborhoods. These approaches emphasize socioeconomic status, racial-ethnic composition, crime, and level of stability. Others rely on individuals’ perceived neighborhood boundaries, thus emphasizing social organization, relationships, and cohesion (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

One of the early sociological framers of these distinctions in understanding communities was German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/1959), whose framing surfaces a key distinction in approaches to community. He introduced the concepts of

gemeinschaft und gesellschaft. *Gemeinschaft* (community or social relations) emphasized family and community ties, and *gesellschaft* (society) emphasized secondary relationships bound through rationality and formal contracts. In a *gesellschaft*-focused civilization, he believed, “the state protects this civilization through legislation and politics” (p. 296). In a *gemeinschaft*-focused civilization, however, folk life and culture persist. Tönnies did not see these two concepts as merely descriptive or morally neutral. He advocated for *gesellschaft* becoming normative, with social contracts replacing the sentiment of social relationships as the basis for society. He wrote (1887/1959):

Previously, all was centered around the belief in invisible things, spirits and gods; now it is focalized on the insight into visible nature. Religion, which is rooted in folk life or at least closely related to it, must cede supremacy to science, which derives from and corresponds to consciousness. . . . The attitude of the individual becomes gradually less and less influenced by religion and more and more influenced by science. (pp. 297-298)

Tönnies’ analysis, grounded in rationalism and the Enlightenment, shaped how sociologists understood and studied community for at least the next century, and set up an ongoing debate among scholars and policy makers about the relative value and contribution of formal institutions and systems and the value and contribution of individual and collective action.

Strikingly, one of the most prominent U.S. public philosophers of the 20th century, Reinhold Niebuhr, examined the two levels of society and reached the opposite conclusion as Tönnies, as captured in the title of his seminal book, titled *Moral Man and*

Immoral Society (1932/1960). He wrote: “As individuals, men [sic] believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power can command” (p. 9).

Confronted by Nazism and Communism (particularly in the build-up to World War II), Niebuhr tackled what he described as “a sharp distinction . . . between the moral and social behavior of individuals and of social groups” (p. xi). He argued that individual people have the capacity to be moral and just—that is, to consider the needs of others and even to act in the interest of an other over-and-above one’s own interests. However, such achievements are “more difficult, if not impossible for human societies and social groups” (p. xi).

In light of this perspective, Niebuhr critiqued scientific rationalism and enlightenment (the world of Tönnies) for “failing to recognize those elements in man’s collective behavior which belong to the order of nature and can never be brought completely under the dominion of reason or conscience” (p. xii). As groups gain power, Niebuhr argued, they become caught up in using that power for their self-interests. Unity within a social group (what would later be dubbed “bonding” social capital) is achieved by the ability of a dominant group to impose its perspective through its collective power.

The fact is that political opinions are inevitably rooted in economic interests of some kind or another, and only comparably few citizens can view a problem of social policy without regard to their interest. . . . As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national

groups, they take for themselves, whatever their power can command.”

(Niebuhr, 1932, pp. 5, 9)

Thus, Niebuhr suggested, to obtain ethical social goals, political approaches are needed that both tap the moral capacities of individuals while also confronting the inevitable limitations of human nature, particularly in the collective. So though he agreed with the social goals of many progressives, his moral pragmatism pressed for taking greater account of the complexity of human nature and its impulses, particularly the will to power. From his perspective, human beings are flawed by nature, and that has to be taken into account as we seek to design education, democracy, and community in ways that not only reflect our ideals but also recognize, and keep in check, human corruption and the potential of evil.

The dynamic tension between institutions and informal networks remains a salient debate and a practical issue in both research and practice. For example, the current wave of interest in “collective impact” (HanleyBrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011, 2013) as a framework for community engagement typically involves the leaders of major systems in a city (education, corporate, social sector, philanthropy) coming together to identify key targets for action, then working to align the energy of programs and institutions around these targets (typically for educational outcomes). As this work has progressed, proponents have noted a consistent, yet-to-be-solved challenge across many of the networks that have formed: how do you effectively engage the energy and families and community (the non-formal capacity, *gemeinschaft*, of community) in achieving the goals established by the formal systems of power, or *gesellschaft*?

In the end, I would propose, healthy communities and democracies need both the deep bonds of *gemeinschaft* as well as the structures and systems of *gesellschaft*. They require the structure and constraints of policies and institutions; they also require the energy, commitment, and moral critique of individual and collective action. They must each be both nurtured to their fullest benefits and constrained against their potential excesses in order to create vibrant communities and societies. The challenge remains in sorting out whether and how these might be aligned. We turn now to looking briefly at each dimension, which I will refer to as the “formal and structural dimensions” and the “relational and process dimensions.”

Formal and structural dimensions of community life. The physical characteristics and institutions of the community clearly matter in influencing the level of social order or disorder present in a community as well as the degree to which individuals and families attach to and contribute to community life. Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) ground-breaking “broken-windows theory” (also see Sampson, 2012) theorized a deep connection between the presence or absence of broken windows in a neighborhood and quality of life, social disorder, and self-efficacy, setting norms and expectations for individual behavior and shared responsibility. This theory, and subsequent research, established a clear link and interaction between the physical and social order in defining quality of life (Chappell, Monk-Turner, & Payne, 2011). In a very different context, we see the power of physical place in Elder and Conger’s (2000) study of farm families and their deep connections to the land in rural Iowa.

Place does matter. Sampson's (2012) Chicago study offered compelling evidence that "differentiation by neighborhood is not only everywhere to be seen, but that it is has durable properties—with cultural and social mechanisms of reproduction—and with effects that span a wide variety of social phenomena" (Sampson, 2012, p. 6). He demonstrated "effects of concentrated disadvantage on violence, disorder, altruism, incarceration, collective efficacy, verbal ability, and other aspects of well-being in a way that cannot be attributable to the disposition or composition of individuals" (Sampson, 2012, p. 363). These "structural and cultural dimensions of neighborhood effects," he concluded, are "determinants of the quantity and quality of human behavior in their own right" (Sampson, 2012, p. 358). "Despite globalization's march and plausible claims about the death of distance and place, neighborhood differentiation remains durable in American society" (Sampson, 2012, pp. 20-21).

Sampson (2012) documented the intractability of neighborhood structural characteristics by creating a measure of "concentrated disadvantage," which combined welfare receipt, poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, racial composition (percentage black), and density of children from the U.S. Census. In statistical analyses, all of these indicators loaded on a single principal component in both Chicago and across 65,000 Census tracts throughout the United States. This concentrated disadvantage is closely tied with social disorder, as evident by a high correlation with incarceration rates (0.82 and 0.80 in different cohort samples).

Similarly, researchers at Harvard University and the University of California Berkeley compiled anonymous earnings records of families by geographic area to predict

the potential of economic mobility (the child earning more than the parent) based on where the family lived (Chetty et al., 2013). They looked at children born in 1980 or 1981 who are U.S. citizens in 2013, measuring their household income when these children are 30 years old (2010-2011). They then measured their parents' household income between 1996 and 2000, and assigned children to a particular geographic area based on where they lived at age 16.

They found that where a family lived is a powerful predictor of whether low-children would be able to do better than their parents (intergenerational economic mobility), even after controlling for an area's economic growth and race. To illustrate using data from the 50 largest cities, a child from a low-income family (bottom fifth of income) has about an 11 percent chance of reaching the top fifth of income if he or she grows up in Salt Lake City or San Jose. However, if he or she grows up in Atlanta or Charlotte, he or she has only a 4 percent chance of reaching the highest income level (Chetty et al., 2013).

Factors that were associated with intergenerational mobility (without causal claims) included income inequality, residential segregation, K-12 school quality, social capital indices, and family structure (such as the proportion of single parents). It is noteworthy that these factors include both structural community issues (such as school quality and residential segregation), but also social relationships, as suggested by social capital theory, which is discussed later in this review.

A vexing challenge for those seeking to address inequities, discrimination, and injustice in community is that many of the structural factors that shape individual and

family well-being are very difficult to change. Sampson (2012) wrote:

Despite urban social transformation . . . most neighborhoods remained stable in their relative economic standing despite the inflow and outflow of individual residents. . . . There is an enduring vulnerability to certain neighborhoods that is not simply a result of the current income of residents. . . . Neighborhoods possess reputations that, when coupled with certain residential selection decisions, reproduce existing patterns of inequality. (p. 119)

Thus, the physical, economic, service, and political infrastructure of a community, city, or neighborhood—the *gesellschaft*, if you will—clearly shape, influence, support, or undermine the individuals and families who live there. Families behave and interact differently with each other and with their larger context when they are safe or unsafe, economically challenged or well off, and so forth. Their quality of life is enriched when families have access to parks and cultural activities, and it is undermined when they do not have access to healthy foods and health care services.

Relational and process dimensions of community life. A seminal sociological counterbalance to Tönnies' interpretation of the dangers of *gemeinschaft* or informal community was Jacob's (1961) exploration of American cities. She argued that formal services could not replace social norms of community (what Tönnies might call *gemeinschaft*). "Public space . . . is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves. . . ."

No amount of police can enforce civilization where the normal, casual enforcement of it has broken down” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 40).

The broadest conceptual framework that has propelled this conversation since the early 1990s is the concept of social capital, which emerged out of sociology and has been adopted across many disciplines and perspectives. For some observers, in fact, the concept has been so broadly defined, applied, and appropriated that it has lost definitional clarity and power (e.g., Portes, 1998). It gained attention, however, in placing the discussion of the importance of social relationships and networks in a broader discussion of capital and the economy, thus capturing the attention of policy makers, economists, and many others beyond the fields of social science.

Though the term has earlier roots, it entered contemporary scholarship and public consciousness in the 1980s, initially through the writing of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Using an instrumental approach, he defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (cited in Portes, 1998, p. 3). Through social capital, he argued, individuals gained access to economic resources and other forms of capital.

Because he wrote in French, Bourdieu’s contributions are often overlooked (Portes, 1998). Instead, James S. Coleman is widely attributed with bringing the discussion of social capital to U.S. academic, political, and educational discourse. Whereas Bourdieu focused on the link between social and economic capital, Coleman advanced theory linking social capital with human capital, beginning with an examination

of the potential of social capital for reducing high school dropouts (Coleman, 1988), challenging what he saw as “extreme individualism” (p. S95) in much contemporary analysis of social and economic problems. For Coleman, social capital had three forms: obligations and expectations; information channels; and social norms, with an important need for closure that links and aligns the various sources of social capital in community in order to create social norms.

Though Coleman’s work is widely acknowledged, the concept of social capital really came into national and international prominence in public when Harvard University political scientist Robert Putnam published his article and book titled *Bowling Alone* (1995, 2000). From Putnam’s perspective, social capital refers to the “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2001, p. 58). Similarly, Fukuyama (2002) usefully defined social capital as “shared norms or values that promote social cooperation, instantiated in actual social relationships” (p. 27).

In the past 20 years, considerable, divergent theoretical and empirical scholarship has examined various understandings of social capital, including both the potential benefits and drawbacks of social capital, variously construed. (For reviews, see Parcel et al., 2010; Portes, 1998). Portes (1998) usefully distinguishes between the definition, sources, and consequences of social capital, which he argued are sometimes conflated (including his critique of Putnam). For Portes (1998), social capital is defined as the “ability to secure benefits through membership in networks and other social structures” (p. 8), with consequences including, positively, social norms (or social control), family

support, and other network-mediated benefits. Negative consequences included restricted opportunities for those in the group, reduced individual freedoms (and increased expectations of conformity), downward leveling of norms, and excessive claims on group members while barring others from access. For example, he wrote:

In a small town or village, all neighbors know each other, one can get supplies on credit at the corner store, and children play freely in the streets under the watchful eyes of other adults. The level of social control in such settings is strong and also quite restrictive of personal freedoms, which is the reason why the young and the more independent-minded have always left. (Portes, 1998, p. 16)

One way to illustrate the potential and limitations of social capital is through research that focuses on how communities respond to disasters. In his research on disaster recovery, Purdue University political scientist Daniel Aldrich noticed that people who fared best after disasters (such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami) were not necessarily those with the most money or power. They were the most socially connected individuals. “Those individuals who had been more involved in local festivals, funerals and weddings, those were individuals who were tied into the community, they knew who to go to, they knew how to find someone who could help them get aid,” Aldrich told National Public Radio. “Really, at the end of the day, the people who will save you, and the people who will help you—they're usually neighbors” (Vedantam, 2011).

Furthermore, Aldrich (2010a, 2010b, 2012) found that some of the formal relief efforts have unintentionally undermined the recovery in communities by not attending to the relational fabric of community. As the National Public Radio (NPR) reporter summarized, “The problem isn’t that experts are dumb. It's that communities are not the

sum of their roads, schools and malls. They are the sum of their *relationships*”

(Vedantam, 2011).

Consistent with Portes, Aldrich also notes the downside of social capital when close bonds between like-minded or culturally similar groups can shut out, marginalize, or stigmatize other groups. In studying the after-effects of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 in villages in southeast India, Aldrich (2011) found, as expected, that the catastrophe simultaneously unleashed strong, positive collective action for members of the village councils. However, it also reinforced obstacles for already-marginalized populations, including women, Dalits (known as “untouchables”), migrants, and Muslims, who are isolated from the social support and mutual care and responsibility that create collective efficacy. Thus, the bonds we have with those close to us can also shut us off from—and discriminate against—those who are different, particularly when we see that difference as a point of our solidarity.

Thus, the underlying case of social capital is to recognize relationships among people and systems (aligned with the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s framework) as integral to the health and well-being of neighborhoods and communities as well as the individuals and families within them. With the field now maturing, a number of useful frameworks have emerged to understand the dimensions or components of social capital, including several directly related to youth and families (for a review, see Enfield & Nathaniel, 2013).

In each case, a foundation of social capital lies in a sense of individual and collective efficacy, mutual trust, and opportunities to be engaged with others. Beyond

personal efficacy, communities have the potential for shared responsibility and collective action, whether intentional or simply normative. Thus, a core construct in social capital theory is the concept of “collective efficacy,” which refers to “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (Sampson et al., 1997). Thus, more than “friends helping friends,” collective efficacy highlights the shared sense of identity and mutual responsibility among neighbors based on being part of the same community, not just because of individual, personal relationships. These factors have been found to be foundational for neighborhood and community well-being.

Levels of individual and collective efficacy are important resources in communities. O’Brien and Kauffman (2013) studied levels of adolescent prosociality across neighborhoods in a small city, combining measures of youth prosociality and assessments of the physical characteristics of the city. They found that collective efficacy was a better explanation of neighborhood variation than were physical traits, such as actual and perceived social disorder.

Perhaps the most ambitious examination of community social capital to date is Sampson’s (2012) ongoing study of Chicago called the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods. Among many other findings (some of which are viewed elsewhere in this review), this study identified malleable social factors that interact with other neighborhood-level dynamics to produce different individual, family, and community outcomes, even in structurally similar neighborhoods. Sampson found that otherwise-similar neighborhoods with higher levels of collective efficacy exhibit lower

crime rates, both concurrently and in the future, even after adjusting for friendship and kinship ties, and other social networks. “In most cases,” Sampson summarized, “whether rich or poor, white or black, . . . collective efficacy signals a community on a trajectory of well-being” (Sampson, 2012, p. 368).

The notion of collective efficacy goes beyond urban environments. In a very different context, Elder and Conger (2000) conducted an equally compelling study of farm and other rural youth in Iowa, highlighting the particular power of belonging, social engagement, social embeddedness, and a sense of shared responsibility that seems to emanate from being tied to the land and the community, often for generations. “The civic life of farming families has much to do with their long-term investment in local communities. Caring for community institutions is part of the responsibility and stewardship that come from farm ownership and from the commitment to intergenerational continuity in farming” (Elder & Conger, 2000, p. 239).

Another common theme in social capital theory is a mix of bonding, linking, and bridging networks (Enfield & Nathaniel, 2013; Scheffert, Horntvedt, & Chazdon, 2008). Linking networks connect people to resources they need for growth and change. Bridging networks connect them to new relationships, groups, and opportunities, extending their worldview and their sense of possibilities. (These networks will be revisited later in this review as we examine the interactions between families and communities.) These three types of networks acknowledge the value of both formal and informal systems as part of a community.

The potential negative expressions of social capital are, in part, addressed by differentiating the different types of networks or social capital. Bonding social capital focuses on commonalities and familial relationships, typically emphasizing a shared heritage, culture, belief system, or experience (Putnam, 2000). This social capital, which is easiest to nurture, may generally be good for the individuals involved (though it can also be stifling to independence). However, if bonded groups become closed and self-serving, it can undermine the common good and civil society and can lead to discrimination and ostracizing.

Bridging social capital crosses boundaries to other groups for shared purpose or mutual benefit. Strategic efforts to build bridging social capital between those with and without power have the potential, over time, to shift social norms that sustain injustice by facilitating mutual respect, understanding, and trust across differences. These efforts may help to mitigate social isolation of vulnerable populations, an underlying factor that perpetuates poverty, segregation, and other discrimination (Rank, 2004). As Barnes and colleagues (2006) conclude, “Communities benefit from diversity in addition to cohesion” (p. 12).

In addition, some researchers (Sampson, 2012; Wuthnow, 1998) have argued against an overemphasis on close ties and sustained attachment and investment (bonding social capital) as the primary focus for community or neighborhood life. They suggested that these ties are not, and will not, be as strong as they may have been (or we might have imagined them to be) in previous eras with lower mobility and flexibility in family and economic life. Thus, they highlight the importance of other, less intensive relationships as

important components of a vibrant neighborhood or community. Sampson (2012) emphasized the power of community norms as more critical than individual attachments in shaping neighborhood effects. Wuthnow (1998) highlighted more episodic and less intensive engagement as meaningful contributions to collective efficacy and community life. In the end, these and other scholars acknowledge the need to recognize and account for the contribution of both “loose ties and close alliances” (Mancini, Bowen, Martin, 2005, p. 572) in shaping vibrant communities.

The dynamics of communities are clearly multi-faceted. However, the nature and quality of relationships within communities surfaces as vital factors in community health across domains (education, health, etc.), fields (community psychology, social psychology, sociology, education, evolutionary biology), and populations (socioeconomic characteristics, cultures, ages, nations) Recognizing those relationships—part of what Tönnies might dismiss as the *gemeinschaft* of folk life and culture (1887/1959)—as being at least as important to the ecology of development as the formal systems and infrastructure is an important contribution of social capital and related theories to our understanding of the complex role of community in human development.

Strengths and challenges in communities. Embedded in much of the research cited above are examinations of both the strengths and strains in communities. Most major studies have focused on socioeconomically distressed or marginalized communities, whether they are urban centers (such as Sampson, 2012) or rural (such as Elder and Conger, 2000). In many cases, they have focused on the breakdown of community, crime levels, and entrenched poverty. In addition, observers have debated

divergent theories regarding social exclusion, the culture of poverty or the underclass, and other forms of social disorganization (Barnes et al., 2006). These competing approaches and analyses of root causes are unlikely to be resolved any time soon. However, it is clear that living in communities with high levels of distress or disorganization has deleterious effects on youth and families. For example, studies by Furstenburg and colleagues (1999), Sampson (2012), and many others demonstrate that youth who live in neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty or crime and more single-parent families and jobless males tend to have more problem behaviors, regardless of the structure of their own family. The reasons for this impact are varied, but may include the reality that these neighborhoods provide fewer positive role models, have lower levels of social trust, and offer fewer opportunities for conventional success. Other studies (e.g., Hoffman, 2006) have found that high levels of family mobility in a neighborhood (associated with poverty) are associated with levels of community delinquency.

Similar impact is evident on parental effectiveness, as parents seek to compensate for social disorganization through higher levels of control, including harsh, inconsistent, and more punitive strategies, which, in turn, affected youth outcomes. Barry and colleagues (2012; also see Furstenberg et al., 1999) found that children living in a problematic neighborhood and having a parent who used harsher parenting strategies exhibited significantly higher levels of aggression than children who experienced just one or the other.

Other researchers (Cleveland, Feinberg, & Greenberg, 2010) have found that, in the case of substance use, family-based protective factors or strengths (such as

monitoring, boundary setting, and general family functioning) offer less protection for students in higher-risk contexts, whereas they are reinforced, and thus more efficacious, in lower-risk environments. Thus, addressing just the family contexts (or just the school or neighborhood context) may be undermined by the influence of the other—or, in the case of positive influence, the strengths will be mutually reinforcing and compounding.

What is important is to avoid dichotomizing communities or neighborhoods as essentially strong or broken; rather, each (like families) has strengths to tap and strains to manage or overcome. One only needs to recall the number of school and other mass shootings in middle- and upper-class communities to recognize some of the sometimes-hidden challenges they face. Similarly, one needs only to see the resourcefulness of residents of distressed communities in the face of hardship to recognize some of their individual and collective strengths, many of which are immediately evident to those outside the community.

Families with Youth in Communities: Interactions and Effects

To this point, this review has largely focused separately on each of the domains for the present study: youth, families, and communities. It has been, of necessity, a broad scan that situates this study within a bioecological framework of development. However, the present study zeros in on the interactions between families and their communities, highlighting the interactions between these two key context in young people's lives. This focal point addresses two relative gaps in the field: (1) examining the community

connections of families with adolescents; and (2) an emphasis on the social organization of communities and neighborhoods.

This review begins by noting the relative gap in attention to family-community connections in much of the current family research, though there are important exceptions. For example, despite the theoretical consensus that families are embedded in a larger community and societal context, family systems theory has largely focused on interactions and dynamics *within families*. As a result, the field has under-emphasized how families interact with communities and larger societal forces (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002), thus reinforcing the privatization or isolation of family life.

Some cases in point: The McMaster Model of healthy family functioning notes six dimensions of family functioning, all of which are contained within the immediate family (Epstein et al., 2003). Similarly, the widely adopted Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems only addresses dynamics of flexibility and closeness within the family itself (Olson & Gorall, 2003), with the assumption that families will have to adapt to changes around them. Similarly, Olson and DeFrain's (2000) classic textbook, *Marriage and the Family: Intimacy, Diversity and Strengths*, devotes only two paragraphs to "social support" from outside the family (with no mention of family engagement in the community). The index does not include either the word "community" or "neighborhood." The table of contents of the more recent edition (Olson, DeFrain, & Skogrand, 2008) does not suggest major additions that would fill this gap.

Similarly, though Brown (1980) and others advocated a much broader vision in the 1970s and 1980s, much of the field of parenting and family life education as well as

family and consumer sciences pays minimal attention to ecological models or relationships *beyond* the family (see, for example, Mann, 2008), including examination of “the social-contextual factors which shape parenting behavior, both in its development as well as in its everyday expression” (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002, p. 256). Reinforcing this point, a survey of 522 family life educators found that “families and individuals in societal context” ranked 8 out of 10 in order of importance for family life education (with human sexuality and family law being ranked ninth and tenth, respectively) (Darling, Fleming, & Cassidy, 2009).

Yet, there have been clear calls for a more intentional and explicit focus on unpacking the interactions between families and communities. Building on his seminal bioecological theory, Bronfenbrenner (2005) argued:

It is the family that determines our capacity to function effectively and to profit from later experiences in the other contexts in which human beings live and grow. . . . To a far greater extent than we have previously imagined, the capacity of a family to function effectively, to create and sustain competent and compassionate human beings, depends on the support of other, larger contexts. (p. 263)

On the other side, research on “neighborhood effects” has focused disproportionately on children and youth instead of families (Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). When family studies have considered community variables, they have most sought to control community effects when studying the inner workings of families (Teachman & Crowder, 2002). In addition, most research

focuses on community effects on children and youth more than community effects on families.

Scholars cannot understand communities without investigating the place of families in both shaping the character of community and mediating the influence of community on individual family members. Mancini, Bowen, and Martin (2005) wrote:

Families are pivotal in fully understanding social organization because families are the most basic and essential social grouping in a community, with a unique role in socialization. In effect, families often provide the energy for community processes. In turn, aspects of a community influence family processes. (p. 573)

With this context, the interactions between families and communities will be examined, drawing on research on community interactions with children and youth to expand our understanding of the interactions. The review begins by focusing on community effects on families and then shifts to families' effects on communities. It concludes with an exploration of what is known about the size of the effect of neighborhood variables on youth and family outcomes, including the relative strength of these effects vis-à-vis the effect of internal family dynamics and other institutions on young people's development.

Communities' effects on families. David Sloan Wilson is an evolutionary biologist at the State University of New York at Binghamton who has become a world-renowned expert in thinking of evolution as a social, not individual phenomenon (Wilson, 2007). He became fascinated with understanding human behavior at a community level, and so he launched the Binghamton Neighborhood Project to look at the lives of young people in their community context. In addition to collecting standard community-level

data (poverty, age, etc.), he collected a wide range of novel data, such as the presence or absence of holiday decorations and presence of trick-or-treaters and a sense of shared responsibility (documented by whether people mail the letters they find on the ground). He also administered Search Institute's *Developmental Assets Profile*, tied to their home address, which allowed him to overlay many different forms of data on maps of the city (O'Brien, Gallup, & Wilson, 2011; O'Brien, & Kauffman, 2013; Wilson, 2011; Wilson, O'Brien, & Sesma, 2009).

What the research team found (and continues to examine) is fascinating. First, there was a strong relationship between young people's own asset profiles and other neighborhood characteristics. Wilson and colleagues found that neighborhoods where young people had higher scores on the *Developmental Assets Profile* (DAP) were also neighborhoods where neighbors were more likely to perform small acts of kindness, such as picking up and mailing a dropped letter. The research team wrote that student-reported neighborhood quality (based on the DAP) were consistent with "crime statistics, school delinquency notices, the evaluation of photographs of neighborhoods by nonresidents and even the degree to which the neighborhoods become decorated during Halloween and Christmas" (Wilson, O'Brien, & Sesma, 2009, p. 197).

Furthermore, because data were collected from young people across time, they also found that, when families moved, young people's asset profiles tended to shift to match the profiles of their new neighborhoods—for better or worse (O'Brien, Gallup, & Wilson, 2011). Wilson concluded: "When teens in the city of Binghamton change their environment by moving, they respond as individuals [as reflected by DAP results] within

a period of three years. If we can change their environment for the better without requiring them to move, we will have the satisfaction of seeing them improve quickly” (Wilson, 2011, p. 380).

Since at least the 1980s, a number of prominent scholars have advanced understanding of community and neighborhood effects on children and youth, and, by extension, families. (For an in-depth review of the foundational studies on children in poverty, see Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997.) Though a disproportionate amount of this research focused on negative community characteristics such as poverty, violence, and substance abuse, it laid the foundation for the field and began to identify the protective and resilience factors that have the potential to contribute to family and youth well-being.

The family assets framework identifies four of these factors, which will be used to organize this review of the research on neighborhood and community effects. These family-community connections parallel mechanisms identified by Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000; also see Jencks & Mayer, 1990) through which “neighborhood effects are transmitted to children and adolescents” (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, p. 322), which can be extended to community effects on families:

<i>Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000</i>	<i>Syvertsen et al., 2012</i>
• Relationships	• Relationships with others
• Norms/collective efficacy	• Neighborhood cohesion
• Institutional resources	• Enriching activities
	• Supportive resources

It should be noted that each of the mechanisms in Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn's (2000) framework is at work toward both positive and negative effects, with a disproportionate body of research focusing primarily on the deleterious effects of neighborhoods and communities on children, youth, and families. However, because the current purpose is to identify potential strengths and opportunities, this review emphasizes the ways in which these mechanisms may contribute to family well-being.

Relationships with others. Though measured more narrowly in the American Family Assets study (focusing on close relationships with teachers, coaches, and neighbors) this factor highlights the importance of the informal relationships of trust and mutuality for the family (Melton, 2010). These relationships may include extended family, friends, professionals who form trusting relationships, and "fictive kin," or "individuals who are unrelated by either blood or marriage but regard one another in kinship terms" (Taylor et al., 2013, p. 611). Fictive kin relationships, more common in the African American community than among white families, may include peers of parents or youth, godparents, congregational members, and others. Whereas family is the most common source of informal help to parents and youth, fictive kin often play these roles as well, with friendship networks being least likely to do so.

The value a broad web of healthy, supportive relationships for all family members is clear, providing families with both material and emotional resources in everyday life and in times of stress and trauma. A broad literature documents the contribution of nonparent, nonfamily adults to youth outcomes, including reduced substance use, better social skills, and higher academic achievement (Rhodes & Roffman, 2003; Scales, 2003;

Scales & Leffert, 2004), and connections to competent, caring adults being a key factor in youth resilience (Werner & Smith, 2001). Similarly, Cochran and Niego (1995) found that parents who were embedded in supportive networks beyond the family tended to be more responsive in their parenting and were more supportive and less punitive in their relationship with their child. (Also see Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013.) In another cross-cultural study of families in Spain and Colombia, Gracia and Musitu (2003) found that abusive parents were less integrated into their communities and made less use of community organizations than those parents that provided adequate care.

It is also clear that these relationships are typically the first place people turn in times of need. Since at least the 1950s, researchers have documented that people first seek help from family, friends, and neighbors, only turning to professionals and services as a last resort, even in highly dangerous situations such as sexual abuse or rape (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Attree, 2005; Gurash, 1978; Martin et al., 2012). In their four-decade study of resilience, Werner & Smith (2001) found that, when facing stress, the vast majority of men and women had, throughout their lives, turned first to informal sources of support (partner, friends, etc.) and spiritual or religious resources rather than mental health or other services. Similarly, Taylor and colleagues (2013) document the enduring strength of informal kin and fictive kin supports, particularly in the African American community, the focus of their study.

However, access to this kind of support is fragile for too many families. More than a decade ago, a national survey found that nearly two thirds of adults (63%) knew

only some of the names of the neighbors they live close to, or did not know any of their closest neighbors' names (John S. & James L. Knight Foundation, 1999). In the *American Family Assets Study* (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), only 22 percent of families with 10 to 15 year olds indicated that they had close relationships to others in their neighborhood—the least common asset in the framework. Bowman and colleagues (2012) concluded that most parents nationally have “very thin support networks” (p. 13), with 59 percent saying neighbors offer no active supports in their daily routines, and three-fourths saying neighbor support is negligible. Melton (2010) reached a similar conclusion based on his qualitative research in South Carolina communities:

Social poverty—social isolation and a lack of easy access to help—had become rampant, regardless of families' socioeconomic status. To a large extent, help had become a commodity that people buy, not what they do. . . . By their own admission, [parents] do not know from whom they could obtain emergency child care, they do not know the names of any children in the neighborhood other than those of their own children, they do not belong to any community organizations (except perhaps a church), and so forth. (p. 90)

Though these “naturally occurring” support systems are vital for many children, youth, and parents, there are important limitations to consider before relying on them alone in communities and policies. In a synthesis of qualitative studies of support for low-income parents in the United Kingdom, Attree (2005) found that strong supportive networks were not available for all families, with low-income single-parent mothers typically having smaller support networks while needing them more. Those who were

most socially isolated were often least likely to seek professional help.

Furthermore, these networks can carry negative associations, including loss of privacy, interference with family life, and a sense of obligation to reciprocate with time or money.

A working hypothesis might be that informal bonds with others in the community is a necessary but insufficient resource to support families, particularly in times of crisis or chronic challenges. This conclusion is reinforced by Attree's (2005) synthesis of studies of formal and informal community supports for families in the United Kingdom. For many families, particularly those facing chronic challenges, formal and informal community connections play different, sometimes mutually reinforcing, roles. Rather than being an either-or choice, low-income families with more informal supports were more likely to turn to formal services when they needed them (Attree, 2005).

Neighborhood cohesion. This construct is most simply defined as neighbors looking out for one another. It aligns with Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn's (2000) focus on norms and collective efficacy, or "the extent to which community-level formal and informal institutions exist to supervise and monitor the behavior of residents, particularly youths' activities . . . and the presence of physical risk . . . to residents, especially children and youth" (p. 322). This collective efficacy creates what Furstenberg (2005) described when he wrote: "Where high consensus and a strong sense of obligation to the collectivity exist, individuals feel a sense of integration, belonging, and commitment to the larger society" (p. 810).

Byrnes and Miller (2012) documented connections between parents' perceived neighborhood social cohesion and greater social support, which was, in turn, related to

more effective parenting. A much more extensive body of research shows that young people who are embedded in a cohesive neighborhood are more likely to be more actively engaged in school (Nash, 2002), with the hypothesis (echoing Cremin, 1976) that “learning may be influenced not only by what happens in school and at home, but also by social networks, norms, and trust in the wider community” (Putnam, 2001, p. 65). On the other hand, young people who live in socially disorganized, unsafe, or unpredictable neighborhoods are much less likely to engage effectively in school. Williams and colleagues found that higher levels of deterioration in neighborhoods, such as abandoned buildings, violent crime, and drug dealing, predicted lower graduation rates and lower grade point averages among African American youth (Williams et al., 2002).

Neighborhood cohesion is important not only for youth and families, but for the whole neighborhood, since crime, delinquency, and other types of social disarray tend to increase when there are fewer people looking out for each other (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Sampson, 2012), particularly children and youth (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

The challenge is that structural and social changes can undermine neighborhood cohesion. For example, one of the reasons for the reduced informal monitoring may be the reduced number of parents in the neighborhood, which may be a side effect of a large number of single-parent households in a neighborhood and the necessity to seek work in business or service districts away from the neighborhood. “If there is a high proportion of single-parent homes in a social setting (e.g., neighborhood), the youths within the setting are at higher risk for delinquency regardless of their particular family arrangement”

(Anderson, 2002, p. 577). Thus, what happens in families affects neighborhoods and what happens in neighborhoods affects families. As Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) put it: “Not only do contexts influence individuals but also individual characteristics influence or often form the contexts in which individuals interact” (p. 310).

Enriching activities. Ties to formal community institutions such as recreational clubs or team, civic organizations, arts, music, or drama activities, and religious participation are all opportunities to support families, providing additional contexts in which learning, growth, and mutual support can be nurtured. Participation in such activities has been widely documented as valuable for healthy development for adolescents (Barber, Stone, & Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002) and other populations, such as the elderly (Liu & Besser, 2003). For example, Scales, Benson, and Mannes (2006) found that young people who participated in volunteering, youth programs, and religious organizations developed connections with other prosocial adults, experienced greater support, and were less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. (There is scant literature on the role of these kinds of enriching activities on parents.)

Barber, Stone, and Eccles (2005) summarize a range of studies documenting links between youth participation in activities and their longterm educational and career attainment as well as more immediate associations with educational achievement, civic participation, health, and personal development. They point to three mechanisms that may be at work in facilitating health development. First, they can provide a context for taking initiative and developing their own talents, creativity, and passions. They also

provide opportunities for social relationships with both peers and adults. And, finally, they may build other developmental assets and competencies.

There are many different types of activities, and they do not all have the same effects in people's lives. Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) found that different types of programs and opportunities contributed to different developmental outcomes. For example, youth in faith-based activities showed higher levels of identity formation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal development. However, sports and arts programs contributed more to development of initiative, and service activities were associated with developing teamwork, relationships, and social capital. Importantly, youth were more likely to experience these developmental outcomes in community-based activities than in school, reinforcing the value of these activities as complementary to formal education.

An important social challenge is unequal access to these kinds of opportunities, with young people in low-income communities being less likely to access or participate in these kinds of enriching activities (Dearing et al., 2009). Availability of programs, lack of transportation, fees, and other logistical barriers explain some of this difference, with income being a strong predictor of participation rates. For example, children in families with annual incomes lower than \$10,000 were two and a half times less likely to participate in any out-of-school activity than those with \$20,000 in annual income (Dearing et al., 2009).

There was, however, one exception: Young people from poorer neighborhoods were *more likely* to participate in religious activities than those living in wealthier communities. Overall, then, the association between neighborhood poverty and activity

participation is reduced when religious activities are included in the analyses.

“In poorer neighborhoods, churches are apparently a central source of support to children and families beyond religious services and provide social and educational activities at little or no cost” (Dearing et al., 2009, p. 1557; also see Roehlkepartain, 2003a). In the *American Family Assets Study*, the most common source of enriching activities identified by the parents was religious participation (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

However, a more significant variable in levels of participation was the level of cognitive stimulation in the home, with the level of cognitive stimulation in the home explaining up to one-fifth of the association between neighborhood income and program participation levels. This finding is consistent with research showing the dynamics within the home operating as mediators of neighborhood effects (Dearing et al., 2009).

Another variable that should be taken into account is the culture or quality of the enriching activities. Maton (2008) reviewed community studies across domains of adult well-being, positive youth development, locality development, and social change, looking for organizational characteristics and processes that led to member empowerment. Out of the review, he develops a comprehensive model that identifies a range of pathways and structures that appear to contribute to more effective change toward empowerment (and, thus, being more developmentally rich environments). What is striking is his conclusion that the most effective programs and institutions are those that are relational.

One of the primary insights gained in reviewing the literature across various empowering domains and types of settings is that when all six sets of empowering organizational characteristics and associated psychological mediators enumerated above are in place, community-based settings in

effect function as viable and vital relational communities. The nature of the relational community varies by setting type. . . . What is apparent across domains and types of settings, however, is the potential of a vital and vibrant relational community, over time, to empower its members. (Maton, 2008, p. 14)

Finally, it is telling that levels of collective efficacy or neighborhood cohesion are associated with the presence of nonprofit organizations. In his major study of Chicago neighborhoods, Sampson (2012) found higher levels of collective efficacy in neighborhoods that also had the highest density of nonprofit organizations. He argued that, rather than undermining community action, these community-based organizations become hubs and catalysts for such action. Similarly, Wuthnow (1998) found that nonprofit organizations have become the cornerstone of a post-institution era in history, providing opportunities for volunteering and action on a more episodic basis than was expected in past eras when people became civically involved through institutions to which they identified as members (such as faith communities and fraternal societies).

Thus, the literature on enriching activities reinforces key principles of a bioecological approach. Each context influences the others, and social address, though important, is not destiny. Furthermore, the interactions and processes within and across contexts may be most determinative in how they shape development.

Supportive resources. This final factor focuses on the formal institutional resources that are available for families when they need help. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) emphasize the importance of “the availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of learning, social, and recreational activities, child care, schools, medical

facilities, and employment opportunities present in the community” (p. 322) to strengthening family life and contribute to outcomes for children and youth. These obviously overlap with the enriching activities just discussed, but focus more on the kinds of services available for specific needs.

In the *American Family Assets Study* (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), parents were asked the extent to which various community institutions helped to strengthen their families. Descriptive results are shown in Table 3. Across the board, faith communities were the single-most common source of support for families from all racial-ethnic groups, with schools and doctors being the other most common sources of help. In most cases, African American or black families were more likely to point to each of the resources than other racial-ethnic groups, particularly whites.

Many communities have an extensive array of governmental and nonprofit institutional resources aimed at providing a safety net for children, youth, families, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations. There has been an ongoing debate in community and economic development policy about the extent to which these services are effective or counterproductive. Aside from clearly partisan attacks, one of the prominent voices challenging an overdependence on formal institutional services has been John McKnight, formerly of Northwestern University. McKnight argued that formal policies, services, and systems inadvertently undermine the capacity of communities to be developmentally vibrant ecologies. An unintended consequence of building communities around services and programs has been to undermine collective efficacy and shared responsibility among residents. He wrote:

Service systems can never be reformed so they will “produce” care. Care is the consenting commitment of citizens to one another. Care cannot be produced, provided, managed, organized, administered, or commodified. Care is the only thing a system cannot produce. Every institutional effort to replace the real thing is a counterfeit. (McKnight, 1995, p. x)

Table 3

Percentage of Parents Reporting that Each Resource Helped to Strengthen Family

	Total Sample	White and Other	Black/African American	Hispanic	Asian or Pacific Islander
Church, synagogue, mosque, or other spiritual/religious places	52	47	73	52	46
Local schools	42	39	58	41	48
A doctor or other health care provider	32	27	56	31	31
Our places of employment	27	25	33	30	30
Other organizations in our local community (e.g., a YMCA)	25	21	42	26	26
A counselor or social worker	22	18	33	28	18
The police	16	14	31	13	16

Note: Percent of parenting adults (with children ages 10 to 15) who said each resource helped to strengthen their family somewhat or a lot.

Source: Unpublished data from the American Family Assets Study. See Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

Attree's (2005) synthesis of qualitative studies of parenting support programs for low-income families in the United Kingdom provides useful nuance to the place of formal systems in supporting families effectively. As noted earlier, Attree examined both formal and informal sources of support. In her focus on formal supports, she found that many families greatly value the services that are provided, particularly those that offered practical parenting help. They valued professionals who took them seriously, did not judge them, and treated them with respect. Parents were less likely to seek support from agencies when they were not aware of what was available, were afraid of being labeled as "inadequate" parents, were afraid of outside interference in family life, and had a sense that the services available did not meet the family's needs.

The four "connecting to communities" factors in the framework of family assets (relationships with others; neighborhood cohesion; enriching activities; and supportive resources) represent four potential influences or mechanisms through which communities contribute to families' well-being. When discussing community effects (particularly structural stresses and characteristics, such as crime and poverty) on child and family outcomes, it is important not to overstate the strength of that relationship.

Early in the research on neighborhood effects (and resulting intervention and policy efforts), there was, in retrospect, a disproportionate expectation regarding the level of effect of neighborhoods and communities on families. More recent research has tempered our understanding, confirming that community effects do not overshadow, but complement, other factors that shape well-being. For example, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000, 2003) indicate that neighborhood effects (neighborhood socio-economic

status, ethnicity, and mobility) tend to account for 5 to 10 percent of the variance in negative child outcomes (though they are stronger in randomized trials, particularly for males), with family effects remaining stronger. Similarly, Theokas and Lerner (2006) examined the contribution of family, neighborhood, and school resources on a variety of youth development outcomes. They consistently found that neighborhood resources had the weakest association with various outcomes among the three contexts. Similarly, Dufur, Parcel, and McKune (2012) examined the effect of social capital at home and at school on alcohol and marijuana use, finding that family capital contributes to preventing use, whereas capital in school did not.

Although these studies call for circumspection in discussion of the community effect on families, they do not suggest that neighborhood and community connections are not significant factors to examine. Communities do, indeed, influence families, albeit potentially less directly than many advocates may argue. Though structural issues and available resources certainly provide a critical context for shaping neighborhood and community influence on children, youth, and families, a compelling case can be made that, as much as anything, healthy, developmental relationships are a primary mechanism through which this influence is transmitted.

Other dynamics also come into play in examining the relative contribution of family, neighborhood, school, and other factors to particular child or youth outcomes, including interactions among these different contexts as well as additive contributions across contexts. For example, Dufur, Parcel, and Troutman (2013) conducted structural equation modeling of data from the National Longitudinal Education Study to examine

the extent to which social capital generated at home and in school had different effects on young people's academic achievement (test scores). They found that family social capital (as measured by parent-child relationship and parent involvement in school activities) had a stronger effect (.371) on student achievement than school social capital (.106; measured by school environment, teacher responsiveness, and other measures), after controlling for demographic differences. Similar results were found in the British National Child Development Study (McCulloch & Joshi, 2001)

However, these overall findings do not tell the whole story, since there are often interactive effects and well as other variables that change the equation. For example, Dufur, Parcel, and Troutman (2013) found that children's participation in co-curricular activities was associated with both family- and school-generated social capital. In addition, strength in one context can be bolstered by strength in the other. When students have both caring teachers and caring parents, for example, they did better, and interactive combinations of home and school social capital explained more difference in outcomes than additive models. At the same time, strong student-teacher bonding at school can help to compensate for parent-child distance at home (Parcel, Dufur, & Cornell Zito, 2010).

In addition, Potter and Roksa (2013) argued that the family's contributions to educational achievement are cumulative over time (arguably since birth), and time-specific measures thus underestimate family contribution. Furthermore, they noted, "cumulative family experiences account for most of the growing inequality in academic achievement between children from different social class backgrounds over time" (p. 1018). They wrote:

Accumulation over time is the way in which families generate the social environment that defines the developmental context of children. Without defining family experiences in a cumulative fashion, prior quantitative studies have not fully articulated one of the central tenants of the social reproduction perspective. (p. 1021)

Each of these studies affirms that communities do, in fact, influence families and the outcomes for children in these families. Though significant, these associations should not be overstated. Nor should we assume that *only* changing a neighborhood (or school) environment is adequate, on its own, to change outcomes. Parcel, Dufur, and Cornell Zito (2010) summarized the state of the field with a call to cross-discipline learning and collaboration:

Researchers have clearly demonstrated that the contexts in which children and adolescents develop are relevant for their well-being. However, the specific contexts they deem important vary by intellectual tradition. By definition, family scholars believe families are important, but they often neglect school effects, thus potentially overattributing child outcomes to family characteristics. Although education researchers acknowledge the importance of families in their conceptual arguments, detailed attention to the measurement of family structure and capital is often lacking. . . .

If we take the goal of accumulation of findings seriously, in the years ahead, there may be diminished returns to studies that focus on the effects of one institution at the exclusion of another, assuming that both are theoretically relevant. (p. 840)

Families' influence on communities. A core premise of bioecological theories is the principle of bidirectional influence. Hence, in addition to predicting the influence of

communities on families, one would expect to be able to identify specific ways that families influence their communities. Unfortunately, that question is rarely addressed either in research or practice, particularly if the focus is on “families” rather than “parents.” However, several dimensions can be extrapolated from theory and practice, particularly dimensions of parent/family education, involvement, and citizenship. When combined, these begin to reframe the place of families in communities.

Incidental or informal influence. Though rarely explicit in the literature, families influence communities by their presence, absence, and actions. The extent to which they connect or fight with neighbors, maintain or damage property, obey or disobey laws, litter or pick up litter, participate in civic events, frequent local businesses, or decorate for holidays—all these and other family actions contribute or undermine the quality of community life, often setting or challenging community norms. In addition, families move in and out of neighborhoods, thus affecting those neighborhoods—a dynamic that becomes particularly noticeable when groups of families move in or out for economic, racial, or immigration reasons (Sampson, 2012).

Peer networking and influence. An overlapping approach to understanding the potential for family-to-community influence is through peer-to-peer learning, development and action. In positive deviance, the current capacities of families (or other groups) are intentionally acknowledged and reinforced—which likely happens informally in many cases. In the process, the balance of power shifts between service providers and families. Such an approach is widely used in public health (Marsh et al., 2004), and vividly illustrated in an experiment to improve child nutrition in Vietnam (Li & Julian,

2012). Here, the development workers began by asking mothers what their peers are already doing that worked, then scaling those practices up with villagers teaching each other, instead of bringing in an outside, expert-generated approach. Thus,

By engaging the villagers themselves to identify what worked right under their noses and scaling up the change, the foreign aid workers effectively managed to build a developmental relationship with the local community—earning trust, building sophisticated local capacity for change, and shifting the balance of power toward the people being helped rather than building reliance on aid-supported materials. (Li & Julian, 2012, p. 163)

At one level, this approach reclaims the power of social relationships as core to community building and positive change. This echoes the perspectives of Cooke and Muir (2012), who advocate for shifting government policy and services from what they described as a “delivery state” with individual, passive citizens who receive services to a “relational state” that is more concerned with relationships between citizens. With this emphasis, the focus shifts to “encouraging, supporting and rewarding citizens coming together to get things done” (p. 25).

Engagement in schools and other organizations. A more formal way that families influence their community is through parental involvement in schools and other organizations. Much traditional work on family involvement in education has emphasized ways that parents help schools accomplish their educative mission (e.g., Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013), with parent involvement being, in fact, an example of community

institutions seeking to influence and educate families, with individual families getting involved on behalf of their own children (as “consumers” of educational services).

However, a number of community-centered efforts shift the power from the school to the families and focus on collective ways that families build their community. Warren and colleagues (2009) describe such an approach as a “community-based relational approach” that emphasizes building relationships (among parents and between educators and parents), strengthening leadership capacities, and closing culture and power gaps. This model stands in sharp contrast to traditional, school-center approaches, as illustrated in Table 4. At the heart of this shift are a power shift and a rebuilding of social capital among families, particularly if low-income families are to be meaningfully and authentically engaged.

Similarly, Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2011) studied the educational involvement of working-class urban Latino parents and found common motivations among the parents in three different programs. Among them were a “common quest for a more effective and safe academic alternative for their children” that was evident in the concept of *tequio*, or “collective dedication,” as well as strong solidarity because of shared immigrant experiences. “Ultimately,” authors concluded, Latino parent involvement conceived within a context of increased equity, inclusion, and activism seem to hold the potential to maximize a positive impact on their children’s education and life prospects” (p. 66).

Table 4

School-Centered and Community-Based Models of Parent Involvement

Traditional School-Centered Models	Community-Based Models
Activity based	Relationship based
Parents as individuals	Parents as members of community/collective
Parents follow school agenda	Parents as leaders and collaborators in setting agenda
Workshops that provide information	Training for leadership development and personal growth
School to parent communication	Mutual exchange of relational power

SOURCE: Warren et al., 2009, p. 2245.

Though these models of community-based engagement exist, they are far from normative. Mapp (2012) examined implementation of the Title 1 parent involvement requirements for Title 1 funding and found a consistent decline in “the focus on and commitment to building the capacity of families and school personnel to create and sustain partnerships that support children’s learning and development” (p. 3) along with a decline in systemic initiatives and collective growth of parents as well as an increased focus on compliance rather than an improvement mindset. Thus, major federal investments in family involvement may be doing little to increase its contribution.

The need for family involvement in and contributions to organizations in the community extends beyond schools, though the research is much less robust, with exceptions focused on family involvement in health care and mental health services for

children needing those services (e.g., Ingoldsby, 2010; King, Currie, & Petersen, 2012; Olin et al., 2010)—which focus almost exclusively on how community institutions and professionals can “engage with” to help families. Little research documents the value, quality, or impact of family engagement in other settings, such as youth programs or faith-based organizations, though it is addressed as a programmatic need (Kress, 2011; Roehlkepartain & Roehlkepartain, 2005).

Family volunteering and action. Whereas most of the literature focuses on parent engagement and their potential influence in the neighborhood, institutions, and society, some research (and more programs) seek to engage families together in service, volunteering, or social action through schools, faith-based organizations (Roehlkepartain, 2003b), community groups, or on their own. These efforts are thought to strengthen families through shared, values-oriented experiences and providing powerful socialization experiences to children (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2006; Lewton & Nievar, 2012; Littlepage, 2003) while also bringing unique energy and capacity to issues and organizations in the community through the intergenerational, family-based engagement (Jalandoni & Hume, 2001; Roehlkepartain & Friedman, 2009). However, much of the research on family volunteering (as with much service-learning) focuses on its benefit to or impact on families, rather than on the extent to which family engagement in service does, in fact, influence or shape the community (Lewton & Nievar, 2012).

In addition, in a study of families in 128 low-income census tracts in 10 cities, Coulton and Irwin (2009) found that children whose parents were involved in community volunteering and action were more likely to participate in out-of-school activities. In

addition, unsafe conditions in a neighborhood were less deterring for children's participation if the parent was involved. Yet, a robust body of research has also identified structural and personal barriers that can limit participation by many families, particularly those who are already marginalized (Mendez et al., 2009).

Family engagement as citizenship. Whereas parent education has historically been primarily an expert-driven model (Thomas & Lien, 2009), recent years have seen a shift toward parent-center, empowerment-oriented strategies that emphasize "the role of parents as members of communities and the larger world" (Doherty, Jacob, & Cutting, 2009, p. 303; also see Doherty, 2000). The professional's role shifts from being the expert holder of knowledge to facilitating the skills of democracy and shared action. This approach points to the potential influence that families can have on their communities and the issues that matter to them and to society, reclaiming parenting and families as not just a private matter, but a concern and responsibility of the public good.

Four ideas animate this approach: First, parents have influence. Second, parents and professionals who work with them can collaborate on addressing public challenges. Third, parenting educators can cultivate the skills of democracy. And, finally, this process requires a deliberative, intentional educative process so that "parent education classes will provide a public space for parents to claim their voice as citizens to improve our communities and renew our democracy" (Doherty, Jacob, & Cutting, 2009, p. 314). This perspective echoes Brown's (1985a) call to action two decades earlier:

The family has historically influenced the development of individuals drawing upon the culture variably as it did so; this influence on individual

development has occurred even while the family has assumed other activities. In this sense, the family develops people who are not only members of a family group, some of whom will socially reproduce other family groups, but who are or may become citizens. (p. 63).

Though many of these approaches to family citizenship and engagement are programmatically oriented and assume a professional or organizational catalyst, several factors consistently emerge in these approaches as dynamics to consider in understanding the potential of families influencing their neighborhoods and communities, all of which are consistent with social capital and collective efficacy theories. These include:

1. The sense of belonging, attachment or ownership that families have to their neighborhoods and communities, which Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2011) described as “*collective dedication*” or a “sense of community” in that families identify with their neighbors and neighborhood (Ohmer, 2010).
2. The degree to which families are seen (and see themselves) as *resources* with expertise and capacities to tap (even when they face challenges), rather than as helpless problems requiring professional or institutional intervention;
3. The sense of *individual and collective efficacy and shared responsibility* among families in the community;
4. The *quality and nature of the relationships* that families have with each other and with the institutions and systems of the community, including the level of trust, shared values and vision, and mutual respect (aspects of social capital);
and

5. The ways in which *formal and informal power* is or is not shared in the community—and whether particular families are on the inside or the outside of that power.

Levels of participation. A final way to examine family influence on community would be to build on Arnstein's (1969) classic "ladder of citizen participation" as well as subsequent adaptations (see Cornwall, 2008; Thomas, Whybrow, & Scharber, 2011). For Arnstein, the hierarchy moves from non-participation (including manipulation and therapy) up to "tokenism" (which includes informing, consultation, and placation), and, finally, up to citizen power, which is manifested through partnerships, delegated power, and citizen control. Whereas Arnstein presented the ladder as social critique, it also points more descriptively to the continuum of possible levels of intensity for family influence in community life, including the power dynamics that shift from a therapeutic (or service) model through sharing their voice and perspective (a form of consultation) to being active in taking action and making change (Arnstein, 1969).

To be sure, Arnstein and others emphasize access to political or government power as an assumed focus for citizenship. A broader understanding of citizenship to include active concern for the common good and taking responsibility for one's own community opens up additional avenues to explore levels of participation as lenses for understanding family's influence. Such an approach begins to make explicit both the sharing of power and the level of investment of families to influence their communities.

Complexity and interactions. It is important to end this section of the review by reinforcing the complex, nondeterministic nature of the interactions between families and

communities. Consistent with bioecological and developmental systems theories, increasingly sophisticated, multi-methods research challenges simple causal assumptions, highlighting the dynamic interactions among persons and their contexts.

The nature of these complex interactions are usefully illustrated by Collins and colleagues (2000), who published a seminal article on the state of contemporary parenting research in response to a series of popular books (e.g., Harris, 1998) that questioned whether parenting mattered in the face biology/genetics and peer influence. Their conclusion was that “parental influences on child development are neither as unambiguous as earlier researchers suggested nor as insubstantial as current critics claim” (Collins et al., 2000, p. 218).

In their review, Collins and colleagues note that, though genetics/heritability and socialization (nature and nurture) each contribute significantly to children’s development, it is impossible to fully untangle the two, since each interacts with or moderates the other. Furthermore, “estimating the effects of heredity versus environment ignores the potential for malleability, even in characteristics heavily influenced by heredity” (p. 219). For example, parents parent differently based on the child’s temperament, each of which is malleable and thus influenced by those parenting strategies. Researchers have found that the quality of parenting can moderate the association between problematic temperament characteristics (e.g., impulsivity) and later externalizing behaviors.

In addition, genetic predispositions can become manifested or not, depending on the presence of triggers in the environment (such as parenting, other family traits, and other factors). Collins and colleagues (2000) report on adoption studies in which children

from biological parents with a history of criminality were placed in homes with higher and lower levels of functioning. Among those in well-functioning homes, 12% engaged in “petty criminality” in adulthood, compared to 40% of those in homes with greater environmental risks.

Beyond the family, these patterns of interactions and synergies are also present in ways that are “interactive and synergistic, rather than additive and competitive” (Collins et al., 2000, p. 227). The researchers illustrate these interactions by discussing the influence of parents and peers on a young person’s development, particularly in adolescence. Among other things, they note that the level of susceptibility to peer influence is consistently moderated by the quality of the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, parents influence their children’s values, interests, and motives, which, in turn, influence who young people associate with and how they interact with those peers.

When the picture is expanded to the broader context of neighborhood or community, the influence remains interactive and dynamic. For example, many of the negative effects of poverty on children are not necessarily direct, but are mediated through parents by disrupting parenting practices. Thus, “economic stress and disadvantage increase parental punitiveness, which in turn adversely affects the child” (Collins et al., 2000, p. 228). Similarly, families living in more dangerous neighborhoods become more restrictive in order to protect the child; however, an unintended consequence may be the undermining of the child’s sense of autonomy. Thus, social conditions matter, but the nature of that influence is not linear or direct; it interacts with the family’s influence and with the child’s own capacities, personality, and dispositions.

Examining specific elements of these interactions can yield insights into those specific dynamics, but they must not be considered or addressed in isolation, lest important dynamics within the bioecology of development are overlooked.

Themes from the Literature Review

This literature review casts a wide net across the ecology of development, beginning with a review of major theories of development in context (most notably, Bronfenbrenner), then examining the strengths and challenges in each of the key domains of interest: Youth, families, and communities. Finally, it examined some of the dynamics of the bidirectional influence between families and communities, examining each direction of the influence separately. Three themes were evident across much of the literature, which set the stage for the present study.

1. Structure and process. The contrast between the institutional, formal, or structural dimensions and the social, relational, and informal dimensions of each domain is an underlying theme for each domain. Though it is an overgeneralization, one can argue that the structural or formal dimensions have received disproportionate attention in the literature, with concerns about demographics, structure, and formal systems. This literature review has accented the informal, process-focused, and relationship dynamics among youth, in families, and in communities through the literature on positive youth development, family systems, and social capital in neighborhoods and communities.

2. Strengths and challenges. Though the dominant focus in much research on youth, families, and communities two decades ago may have emphasized deficits and problems, there is a growing, counter-balancing literature on strengths and resilience in

each context. Research on risks and trauma is complemented with research on resilience and strengths, with growing attention to the interactions between the strengths and challenges. Furthermore, the research points toward the presence of strengths across diverse contexts and populations, opening possibilities for tapping strengths in order to address challenges, rather than defining or labeling populations or settings by deficits.

3. Bidirectional influence and interactions. The important role that each domain (youth, families, and communities) plays in shaping each of the others through a bidirectional influence and interactions remains a fruitful opportunity for investigation. In many cases, a unidirectional influence is dominated, often with the larger circle in an ecological model influencing the smaller circle. Thus, the emphasis is on how community influences families, which influence children and youth. A bioecological theory posits the equal opportunity for influence in the opposite direction or, often, the interactive influences among the domains.

These themes lay the foundation for the current study, pointing toward key hypotheses that will be explored through a national sample of families with 10 to 15 year olds, highlighting the ways internal family strengths and family-community connections are associated with youth developmental outcomes and also potentially moderate the negative effects of stressful life events on young people's development.

Chapter Three

Study Design and Method

This study utilizes data from the *American Family Assets Study* (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), which included self-reported data from youth and parenting adults on the strengths and challenges of a national sample of 1,498 families. This chapter describes the sample, measures, and analytic procedures used for this study.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed by Search Institute to advance scholarly and applied understanding of family strengths within the broader context of community and other family dynamics, including challenges and stressful life experiences. The framework underlying the instrument was informed by scientific research on family systems theory (e.g., Alberts, 2005; Cox & Paley, 1997), resiliency (e.g., Walsh, 2006), and family strengths (e.g., DeFrain & Asay, 2007), and adolescent development (e.g., Benson, 2006); and, listening sessions hosted with youth, adults, family professionals, and leaders in the family research and policy arenas. The survey consisted of 204 items for parenting adults and 178 items for youth (excluding screening questions). The adult survey was longer due to the expected shorter attention span for 10 to 15 year olds. In most cases, youth and parenting adults were asked parallel questions, though some scales reflect only a youth or only an adult perspective.

Demographic measures. The survey included the following demographic questions for the parenting adult: gender, age, race/ethnicity, marital status, sexual

orientation, gender identity, relationship with the target youth, household size, country of birth, primary home language, education level, household income, employment status (self and partner, if applicable), home ownership status, and tenure in current home. Youth demographics include age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, grade in school, and country of birth.

Family assets. The bulk of the survey consisted of items that were used to create the Family Assets Framework. These items were designed to capture critical family strengths based on a review of the literature, input from youth and adults through interviews, workshops, and focus groups, and input from a National Research Advisory Board, using six criteria (adapted from Search Institute's prior work on Developmental Assets; Benson, 2006). To be included, a construct needed to be:

- Rooted in the scientific literature on child and adolescent development, family systems theory, and family strengths and resilience;
- Empirically related to positive outcomes for youth, parenting adults, and/or the whole family;
- Reflective of the wisdom shared by practitioners, youth, and parents;
- Balanced and holistic;
- Applicable across the diversity of U.S. families regardless of structure, background, and location; and,
- Malleable by families, communities, and youth- and family-serving organizations (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

Whenever possible, items were drawn from previous research. However, when no suitable items were available, original measures were developed.

Neighborhood and community factors and connections. Parenting adults and youth asked about their neighborhood and community context as well as the ways they are connected to their community. These items explore civic participation of parents and youth, sources of support in the community, perceived safety and quality in the neighborhood and school, as well as ratings of qualities of relationships with neighbors, extended family, coaches, teachers, and other community members.

Family stresses. Measured stresses on the family included job loss or unemployment, separation or divorce, a financial crisis, a natural disaster, crime or imprisonment, military deployment, or the death of a family member. Parenting adults responded to these questions by indicating how recently each event had occurred (from never to occurring in the past six months).

Well-being indicators. Finally, the survey included a set of items that measure hypothesized outcomes of family strengths (though causality cannot be established through a cross-sectional study). For youth, these well-being indicators included school engagement and achievement, self-regulation, responsibility, caring, social competencies, risk behaviors, and health behaviors.

Data Collection

Search Institute partnered with Harris Interactive to collect data via an online survey, which can achieve a broad and diverse sample, although it is not a probability sample of U.S. families. Between June 6 and June 23, 2011, a total of 1,511 paired online

surveys were completed by parenting adults and their 10- 15-year-old youth.

Interviews averaged 25 minutes in length for the parenting adults and 20 minutes for the youth. Only completed surveys with matched pairs are included in the sample. The parenting adult actively consented to her or his child's participation. The data were cleaned prior to analysis. Thirteen matched pairs were removed due to suspicious responses patterns, leaving 1,498 parenting adults-youth dyads in the final sample.

Protections of Human Participants

The following human participant protections were in place during data collection. First, adult participants volunteered to participate in the online study as a result of the recruitment outreach to the Harris Interactive online database. Adult participants who completed the study were asked to give active consent for their child to participate. Once parents agreed, they were given a secure web link to share with their child so that he or she could complete their own survey. No identifying information about participants was shared with the Search Institute research team.

Because the present study is “research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects” (Institutional Review Board, 2004, p. 10), this study was exempt from review by the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (e-mail correspondence with Christina Dobrovolny, Institutional Review Board Compliance Supervisor, University of Minnesota, April 2, 2013).

Participants

Table 5 summarizes several demographic characteristics of the 1,498 parenting adult-youth family dyads in the sample. Quotas were set for key participant demographics in order to ensure diversity and adequate sample sizes for subgroup analyses. Quotas were set for: parenting adult race/ethnicity, youth's age, and youth's gender. A minimum of 210 Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic parenting adult-youth dyads were recruited to participate. Quotas for age (10 to 15) and gender (male; female) were evenly divided across the full sample. Although sample weights were provided to reflect the population of parents of 10-15 year olds in the US according to race and ethnicity, these analyses were conducted on the unweighted data.

Measures

The current study builds on the completed and ongoing analyses and reporting of the Search Institute Family Assets research team. However, most scales and indices have been developed or modified to address the specific questions of this study. A summary of the descriptive statistics on the resulting scales and indexes is shown in Table 6.

Table 5. *Characteristics of Study Participants*

		Youth (%)	Parenting Adults (%)
Individual Characteristics	Gender		
	Female	50	67
	Male	50	33
	Age		
	10	17	
	11	16	
	12	17	
	13	17	
	14	17	
	15	16	
	Race/Ethnicity		
	White/Other	61	59
	Asian or Pacific Islander	11	14
	Black or African American	14	14
	Hispanic	15	14
Marital Status			
Married (married; civil union)		74	
Not Married (never; divorced; separated; widowed; live w/ partner)		26	
Family Characteristics	Annual household income		
	< \$34,999		19
	\$35 – 49,999		15
	\$50 – 74,999		24
	\$75 – 99,999		18
	≥ \$100,000		24
	Number of Parenting Adults in the Household		
	1		22
	2		73
	3+		5
	Home Ownership		
	Rent		24
	Own		76
	Years in Current Home		
	Less than 2 years		19
3-6 years		28	
7-10 years		21	
11 or more years		33	
Number of Households Lived in by Youth			
1	83		
2	10		
3+	7		
Community Characteristics	Community Size		
	In a small town or rural area (less than 2,500 people)		15%
	In a town (2,500 to 9,999 people)		16%
	In a small city (10,000 to 49,999 people)		25%
	In a medium-sized city (50,000 to 250,000 people)		23%
In a large city (more than 250,000 people)		21%	

*Table 6**Descriptive Statistics for Key Measures*

Scale	# of Items	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Internal Family Assets (standardized)	31	.90	---	---
Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF)	20	Sum	7.00	3.96
Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF)	18	.91	2.65	0.59
Family Contributions to Community (FCC)	23	.89	---	---
Indicators of Youth Well-Being				
School Engagement	3	.88	3.27	0.64
Health Behaviors	6	.69	4.03	0.66
Social Competencies	4	.79	3.82	0.67
Personal Responsibility	3	Sum	1.87	1.05
Caring	3	.85	3.93	0.73
Self-Regulation	4	Sum	2.50	1.19
Stressful Life Events (SLE)	13	Sum	9.03	9.34

Internal Family Assets (IFA). The IFA scale used selected items from the original *American Family Assets Study* (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012), providing a more concise measure of the Internal Family Assets in the overall framework (Table 2). Items from the original scales were selected with the following criteria: First, items were selected to represent each of the four categories of “internal” family assets – Nurturing Relationships, Establishing Routines, Maintaining Expectations, and Adapting to Challenges – in order to reflect the breadth of the framework. Second, if possible, items were selected that had parallel items for youth and parenting adults. Third, reversed scoring items were avoided due to results that become difficult to interpret (Chang, 1995). Finally, if several items met all the above criteria, a representative item was selected based on higher variability. Appendix 2 lists the items, subscales they represent, and properties of each item.

Items in the IFA scale were standardized as individual items utilized a mix of 4- and 5-point Likert-type response scales. Once created, the full IFA scale was re-standardized to achieve a $M = 0$ and $SD = 1$. The resulting IFA scale demonstrates high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$).

Family-Community Connections. The Connecting to Community category from the original family assets study was not included in the IFA, but was reconceptualized to approximate bidirectional connections between families and communities. These measures reflect formal and informal ways communities contribute to families (Informal Community Supports for Families, and Formal Community Supports for Families) as well as the ways families contribute to communities (Family Contributions to

Community) (Table 6).

Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF). The ICSF scale includes 18 items from two of the assets from the original Connecting to Community assets: Neighborhood Cohesion and Relationships with Others. These items explore the extent to which youth and parenting adults feel connected and supported in their neighborhood and whether they feel close to significant people in their lives, such as teachers, coaches, and neighbors. The scale has a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$).

Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF). FCSF is a sum scale of 14 items that includes the measures of Enriching Activities and Supportive Resources from the original Connecting to Community. However, only the parenting adult measures of supportive resources were included in these analyses because of a lack of parallelism with the youth items. Summative indexes were used on the premise that a variety of community connections would be additive in their contribution to family life. Enriching Activities indicates whether youth and parenting adults participate in recreational, artistic, or religious activities. The measure is the sum of dichotomous items, with 0 = 0 hours, 1 = 1+ hours/typical week. Supportive Resources identifies people or places the parenting adult report have helped strengthen their family.

Family Contributions to Community (FCC). This 23-item measure ($\alpha = .89$) includes indicators of family members' civic attitudes, commitments, and participation. For parenting adults, this includes political involvement and activism. For both parenting adults and youth, it includes measures of a sense of civic responsibility and volunteerism, including whether the family volunteers together.

Youth Well-Being. Six indicators of youth well-being were selected based on their relative psychometric strength and the desire to address a range of developmental domains (psychosocial, academic, physical health). These include a mix of mean and sum scales. The scales, described in Table 6 (items listed in Appendix 2), are: school engagement; health behaviors; social competencies; personal responsibility; caring; and self-regulation.

School Engagement. This three-item scale is a self-reported measure on working hard in school, working up to one's ability, and going to school with homework completed. These measures, which are from Search Institute's *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes & Behaviors Survey*, are associated with academic motivation and high student achievement, as defined by Search Institute's developmental assets framework (Scales & Leffert, 2004). The scale has a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$).

Health Behaviors. This scale, which was created for this study, has six items that ask about how many days in a typical week the young person gets adequate sleep, exercise, and relaxation, and eats a balanced diet. Its internal reliability ($\alpha = .88$) is adequate, but not considered strong.

Social Competencies. This four-item scale ($\alpha = .79$) is made up of selected items from Search Institute's *Developmental Assets Profile*. It focuses on friendship and conflict resolution skills as well as ability to get along with and empathize with other people, which are part of Search Institute's framework of developmental assets and are associated with a wide range of educational and developmental outcomes for youth (Scales & Leffert, 2004).

Personal Responsibility. This three-item index focuses following through on commitments, taking responsibility for actions, and taking responsible actions, even when no one is looking. Two of the three items are derived from Chi and colleagues (2006). The items were dichotomous (yes/no) and the responses were summed.

Caring. This three-item scale ($\alpha = .85$) addresses young people's sense of empathy, such as the frequency with which they want to help people who are being taken advantage of or feel sorry for a person who is hurt or upset. The scale is from Lerner, Lerner, and colleagues (2005).

Self-Regulation. This is a four-item index with a dichotomous response scale (yes/no) that focuses on whether youth see themselves being able to calm themselves when they get upset, have control over their actions, and persevere when tasks are boring.

Stressful Life Events. The Stressful Life Events (SLE) index, created for this study, utilizes parent reports of whether the family has experienced 13 different high-stress events, including deaths in the family, divorce, military deployment, a disability or handicap, crime victimization; imprisonment; substance abuse; and, a natural disaster. It integrates three dimensions of stressful life events in a family: (a) cumulative stress (by adding multiple stresses within a family); (b) recency, by giving more weight to events that have happened in the past 6 months compared to more than 2 years ago; and, (c) intensity, by giving more weight to traumatic events that would be assumed to create disproportionate stress on the family, such as the death of a parent. See Appendix 2, Table 5.) The SLE Index has a potential range of 0 to 75 points. However, descriptive

analysis revealed suspicious response patterns among a few respondents ($n = 10$) with unusually high scores (>50 points). After additional investigation for plausibility, these cases were removed from the dataset during the original data cleaning.

Demographic Covariates. Eight demographic measures were selected as covariates in the analysis because of previous analyses that showed they contributed meaningfully to the analyses and/or because they were deemed potentially salient to the study research questions based on the extant literature. These included youth, family, and community characteristics:

- Youth characteristics: Gender, age, race-ethnicity
- Family characteristics: Annual household income, number of households youth lives in, home ownership or rental, and years in current home
- Community characteristics: Community Size

Each of these covariates has been identified in the literature as being potentially salient in examining the relationship between families and communities. These single-item measures are described in Table 7. Descriptive data for each covariate is displayed in Appendix 2.

Table 7
Demographic Covariates

Scale/Index Name	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Youth gender (youth report)		
Male (0)	0.50	0.50
Female (1)		
Youth age (youth report)		
Continuous 10 to 15	12.48	1.70
Youth race-ethnicity (youth report)		
4 dummy variables	1.77	0.38
Households youth lives in (youth report)		
1 household (0)	0.17	1.07
2+ households (1)		
Annual household income (parent report)		
Continuous 1 to 11	5.25	2.08
Home ownership (parent report)		
Own (0); Rent (1)	0.24	0.43
Years in current home (parent report)		
Continuous 1 to 7	4.71	2.03
Community Size (parent report)		
Continuous 1 to 5	3.20	1.34

Analytic Approach

In order to shed light on the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, the following analyses were performed.

1. Are internal family strengths or assets more robust correlational predictors of Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community than structural or demographic characteristics of youth, families, and communities? To examine this question, 2-step multivariate stepwise regressions will test the differential associations between Internal Family Assets (IFA) and three dimensions of family-community connections: FCSF, ICSF, and FCC. Covariates will be entered in Step 1, then IFA entered in Step 2 in analyses for each dependent variable: FCSF, ICSF, and FCC.

2. To what extent are Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community associated with selected indicators of youth well-being, over and above Internal Family Assets and individual, family, and community covariates? Multiple stepwise regression will be used to test the associations between community connections (FCSF, ICSF, and FCC) and the six well-being indicators: school engagement; health behaviors; social competencies; personal responsibility; caring; and self-regulation, each of which will be the dependent variable in separate analyses. Covariates will be entered in Step 1, followed by IFA in Step 2, and FCSF, ICSF, and FCC in Step 3.

3. To what extent is the association between Internal Family Assets and youth well-being affected by Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and

Family Contributions to Community? Two sets of stepwise moderated multiple regression models will be performed (Dawson & Richter, 2006). Model 1 will examine interactions among IFA (IV), ICSF (Moderator 1), and FCC (Moderator 2). Model 2 will examine interactions between IFA (IV) and FCSF (Moderator 3). Model 1 will focus on the less formal, bidirectional, and Model 2 will focus on the formal interactions, thus testing the theoretical distinction between formal and informal community connections.

4. *In families that have experienced multiple Stressful Life Events (SLE), what role do Internal Family Assets (IFA) and family-community connections (ICSF, FCSF, FCC) play in predicting high levels of well-being?* The subset of families experiencing high levels of stress will be identified based on their scores on the Stressful Life Events (SLE) index (Table A5 in Appendix 2). Youth well-being variables will be dichotomized using a median split in order to assess probability using odds ratios. Logistic regression will then be used to predict each dependent variable (youth well-being indicators).

4. Results

Correlation Analysis

Table 8 shows the bivariate correlations between key study variables. Internal family assets (IFA) were positively and moderately correlated with all the family-community connection measures as well as all youth well-being measures. IFA also had a modest, negative correlation with the Stressful Life Events (SLE) index. All three measures of family-community connections correlated weakly or moderately with all measures of youth well-being. These levels of correlations generally suggest that the measures used are related to but independent from each other. There may be some concern about excessive collinearity between Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF) and: Internal Family Assets ($r = .503$), Formal Community Supports for Families ($r = .496$), and Family Contributions to Community ($r = .542$). Though ICSF theoretically distinguishes dimensions of informal social engagement in communities, these associations are, in a practical sense, integrated with program participation and in one's activism and service in the community. These strong associations may help to explain less robust results in the following analyses for Informal Community Supports for Families. The dependent youth well-being variables were moderately to strongly correlated with each other.

Table 8

Correlation Matrix for Key Measures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Internal Family Assets (IFA)	—	.503	.263	.486	.402	.346	.487	.366	.466	.345
Family-Community Connections										
2. Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF)		—	.496	.542	.241	.207	.356	.129	.283	.203
3. Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF)			—	.454	.134	.083	.169	.026	.126	.117
4. Family Contributions to Community (FCC)				—	.234	.248	.396	.212	.386	.190
Correlational Outcomes										
5. School Engagement					—	.213	.322	.299	.285	.342
6. Health Behaviors						—	.231	.181	.189	.162
7. Social Competencies							—	.350	.743	.312
8. Personal Responsibility								—	.303	.492
9. Caring									—	.197
10. Self-Regulation										—

Note. All correlations are $p < .001$.

Internal Family Assets and Community Connections

Research Question #1: Are Internal Family Assets stronger correlational predictors of Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community than structural or demographic characteristics of youth, families, and communities?

Multiple stepwise regressions were used to test the differential associations between Internal Family Assets (IFA) and the three family-community connections measures (each in a separate regression): (a) Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF); (b) Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF); and, (c) Family Contributions to Community (FCC). Select youth and family demographic and community characteristics were entered into the model in Step 1, with IFA entered in Step 2. The results are summarized in Table 9. A Cohen's f^2 effect sizes (Cohen, 1988) was calculated for each model (Soper, 2013).

Demographic covariates in Step 1 predicted between 4% and 7% of the variance in the family-community connection dependent variables. IFA was more strongly associated with all three of the family-community connection variables than any of the covariates. The associations between IFA and the family-community connection variables reveals that IFA was more strongly related to ICSF ($\beta = .495$; $f^2 = .416$) and FCC ($\beta = .484$; $f^2 = .371$) than to FCSF ($\beta = .258$; $f^2 = .152$). Whereas IFA uniquely predicted 7% of the variance in FCSF over and above demographic variables (Δ in adjusted $R^2 = .065$), it uniquely predicted 24% of the variance in ICSF (Δ in adjusted $R^2 = .238$), and 23% of the variance in FCC (Δ in adjusted $R^2 = .227$). The effect size for the

association between IFA and ICSF ($f^2 = .416$) and FCC ($f^2 = .484$) would typically be considered strong in the social sciences, whereas the effect size for IFA and FCSF ($f^2 = .152$) would be considered weak to moderate.

Several demographic covariates contribute meaningfully to each measure of community connection. The number of households a young person lives in and annual household income each predicted all three family-community connection variables. Being African American as compared to White-Other contributed significantly to both FCSF and ICSF, but not FCC. Young people who identified as Hispanic or Asian-Pacific Islander had lower FCC levels than those who identified as White-Other. Youth age correlated negatively with ICSF ($\beta = -.131$), suggesting that older youth are less likely to have these informal, relational community connections.

Table 9
Multiple Stepwise Regressions Modeling the Associations Between Internal Family Assets and Family-Community Connections

	Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF)		Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF)		Family Contributions to Community (FCC)	
	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)
Covariates						
Youth gender: Female [Reference: Male]	.015	.002	.019	-.005	.029	.006
Youth age	-.066	-.050*	-.161***	-.131***	-.009	.019
Youth race-ethnicity [Reference = White/Other]						
Black/African American	.187***	.163***	.118***	.073**	.089**	.045
Hispanic	.010	-.012	-.013	-.055	-.022	-.063**
Asian or Pacific Islander	.035	.035	-.017	-.015	-.077**	-.075**
Youth lives in 2+ households [Reference = Lives in 1 household]	.169***	.190***	.036	.076***	.042	.062***
Annual household income	.093***	.093***	.086**	.085***	.089**	.088***
Home ownership: Rent [Reference: Own]	.000	.007	-.012	.000	-.119***	-.107***
Years in current home	.052	.039	.132***	.107***	-.049	.024
Community size	.034	.024	.006	-.013	-.045	.027
Internal Family Assets	----	.258**	----	.495***	----	.484***
Adjusted R ²	.067	.132	.054	.294	.043	.271
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 1 to 2)	----	.065	----	.238	----	.227
Effect Size (f ²)	.072	.152	.057	.416	.045	.371

Notes. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. A separate multiple stepwise regression was tested for each dependent variable. The covariates were entered in Step 1, followed by Internal Family Assets in Step 2. All youth covariate variables come from youth self-report. Annual household income, home ownership, years in current home, and community size are from parenting adult self-report.

Family-Community Connections and Youth Well-Being

Research Question #2: To what extent are Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community associated with select indicators of youth well-being, over and above Internal Family Assets and select covariates?

Multiple stepwise regressions tested the associations between the three family-community connection measures and six indicators of youth well-being: school engagement, health behaviors, social competencies, personal responsibility, caring, and self-regulation. A separate multiple stepwise regression model was used for each well-being indicator. Employing a similar strategy to that used in the previous analysis, covariates were entered in Step 1 followed by the Internal Family Assets (IFA) in Step 2 and the three family-community connection measures (Informal Community Supports for Families – ICSF, Formal Community Support for Families – FCSF, and Family Contributions to Community – FCC) in Step 3. The results are summarized in Table 10.

IFA has the strongest association with all six well-being indicators (β between .285 and .334), after accounting for the covariates and including the family-community connection variables. In most cases, family-community connections contribute only modestly to measures of youth well-being. Indeed, the change in Adjusted R^2 from Step 2 to 3 ranged from only 3% (self-regulation) to 5% (social competencies). No significant associations were found between family-community connections and self-regulation, and only FCC was associated with school engagement. All three types of family-community connections were associated with social competencies. Noteworthy, though, is that FCSF

was negative associated with three of the six well-being indicators: social competencies, personal responsibility, and caring. In contrast, FCC was positively associated with five of the six well-being indicators (all but self-regulation). Cohen's effect size ranged from modest ($f^2 = .148$) for self-regulation to high ($f^2 = .418$) for social competencies, with most of the strength being contributed by the Internal Family Assets.

Among the covariates, age and gender were consistently associated with each of the well-being indicators. Gender and age negatively predicted health behaviors ($\beta = -.055$ and $-.092$, respectively), and age was negatively associated with school engagement ($\beta = -.113$). Gender predicted variance in all six well-being indicators, and age predicts all but caring. Few other covariates contributed consistently to well-being indicators.

Table 10
Multiple Stepwise Regressions Modeling the Associations between Community Connections and Youth Well-Being

	School	Health	Social	Personal	Caring	Self-
	Engagement	Behaviors	Competencies	Responsibility		Regulation
	β	β	β	β	β	β
Covariates						
Youth gender: Female [Reference: Male]	.190***	-.055*	.118***	.067*	.148***	.089***
Youth age	-.113***	-.092***	.057*	.097***	-.003	.101***
Youth race-ethnicity [Reference = White/Other]						
Black/African American	-.005	-.137***	.052*	-.050	.040	-.003
Hispanic	-.008	-.033	.047*	-.002	.034	.030
Asian or Pacific Islander	.073**	.013	.002	.006	-.001	.025
Youth lives in 2+ households	-.047	-.066**	.024	-.030	.039	-.002
[Reference = Lives in 1 household]						
Annual household income	.017	-.031	.016	-.019	-.005	-.009
Home ownership: Rent [Reference: Own]	-.045	-.023	.005	.047	-.011	-.030
Years in current home	.006	-.032	-.035	.065*	-.006	.031
Community size	.019	.088	.023	.026	.009	.037
IFA: Internal Family Assets	.334***	.285***	.316***	.334***	.326***	.298***
FCSF: Formal Community Supports for Families	.002	-.029	-.096***	-.084*	-.112***	.006
ICSF: Informal Community Supports for Families	.006	.010	.129***	-.045	.019	.060
FCC: Family Contributions to Community	.082**	.145***	.232***	.106***	.281***	.006
Adjusted R ²	.214	.159	.295	.152	.275	.129
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 1 to 2)	.211	.121	.212	.120	.190	.107
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 2 to 3)	.005	.014	.054	.010	.051	.003
Effect Size (f ²)	.272	.189	.418	.179	.379	.148

Notes. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. A separate multiple stepwise regression was tested for each dependent variable. The covariates were entered in Step 1, followed by Internal Family Assets in Step 2, and the three family-community connection variables in Step 3. The results of Steps 1 and 2 are available from the author. All youth covariate variables come from youth self-report. Annual household income, home ownership, years in current home, and community size are from parenting adult self-report.

Interaction of Internal Family Assets and Family-Community Connections

Research Question #3: Do strong community connections (FCSF, ICSF, and FCC) amplify the effect of Internal Family Assets in the prediction of youth well-being?

To test this question, two sets of stepwise moderated multiple regression models were performed (Dawson & Richter, 2006). Model 1 examined interactions among IFA (IV), ICSF (Moderator 1), and FCC (Moderator 2). Model 2 examined interactions between IFA (IV) and FCSF (Moderator 3). Model 1 focused on the less formal, bidirectional interactions that were found to be more significant in research question 2, and Model 2 focused on the formal interactions, thus testing the theoretical distinction between formal and informal community connections. For both sets of models, the variables were entered stepwise to parse out their unique contributions and to see how each affected the model: (a) Step 1 – covariates; (b) Step 2 – main effects; (c) Step 3 – 2-way interactions; and, (d) Step 4, for Model 1 only, the 3-way interaction. In order to interpret the interactions, the simple slopes of the binary dependent youth well-being variable on IFA at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) values of the moderator(s) were plotted. Significant slope differences were tested in accord with Dawson and Richter (2006). All graphs were created using worksheets made available online by Dawson (2013), which are designed to implement the analytical recommendations of Dawson and Richter (2006) for interpreting interaction effects.

Model 1. Model 1 analyses revealed significant three-way interactions (IFA x FCC x ICSF) in the prediction of social competencies ($\beta = .075, p = .021$) and caring ($\beta = .099, p = .003$). Moreover, there was a significant two-way interaction between ICSF and

FCC (but non-significant 3-way interactions) in the prediction of personal responsibility ($\beta = -.094, p = .007$) and self-regulation ($\beta = -.083, p = .019$). No significant interactions were present for school engagement or health behaviors (see Table 11).

As illustrated by the slopes in Figure 5A, the level of social competencies rises from *low* to *high* Internal Family Assets. In addition, as expected and illustrated in this same figure, youth's mean-levels of social competencies is lowest in families with both low ICSF and low FCC, irrespective of their level of IFA. Furthermore, a slope difference test (Dawson, 2013) revealed that the slope for high ICSF and high FCC differed significantly from the slope for low ICSF and high FCC, $t(1368) = 2.51, p = .012$. Thus, the effect of Internal Family Assets on social competencies was amplified in the presence of high informal supports for families and high Family Contributions to Community.

The same pattern generally held for the significant 3-way interaction between IFA x ICSF x FCC in the prediction of caring (see Figure 5B): the slope for high ICSF and high FCC differed significantly from the slope for low ICC and high FCC, $t(1368) = 2.32, p = .020$. In addition, and different from the previous analysis, the slope for low ICSF and high FCC differed significantly from the slope for low ICSF and low FCC, $t(1368) = -2.23, p = .026$. Thus, the effect of IFA on caring is amplified in the presence of high ICSF and high FCC.

The model predicting personal responsibility revealed a significant two-way interaction between ICSF and FCC (see Figure 5C). For families with high ICSF, youth's reports of personal responsibility are fairly consistent regardless of FCC. For families

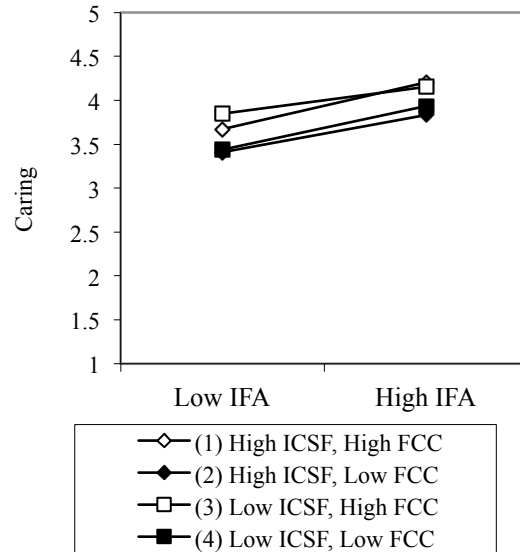
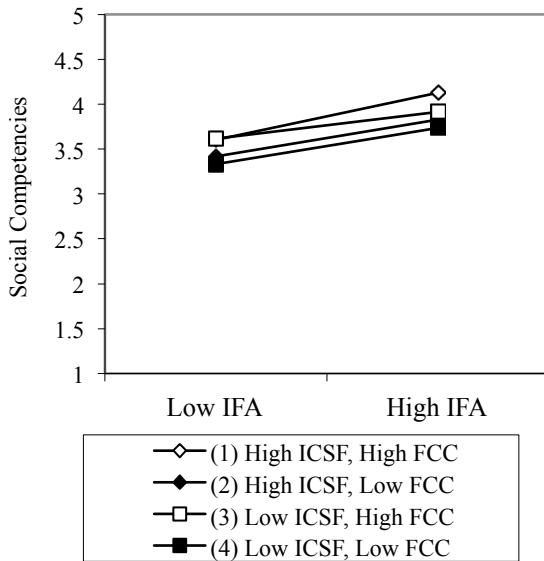
with low ICSF, however, personal responsibility increases with higher levels of FCC. At low levels of FCC, the personal responsibility means for low and high ICC do not differ.

Like in the model for personal responsibility, the ICSF x FCC interaction was significant in the self-regulation model (Figure 5D). In this model, it appears that for the low ICSF group self-regulation trends upwards with higher levels of FCC, with a somewhat opposite trend occurring for the high ICSF group where self-regulation trends downward with higher levels of FCC.

Table 11
Interaction of Internal Family Assets, Informal Community Supports, and Family Contributions in Predicting Well-Being (Model 1)

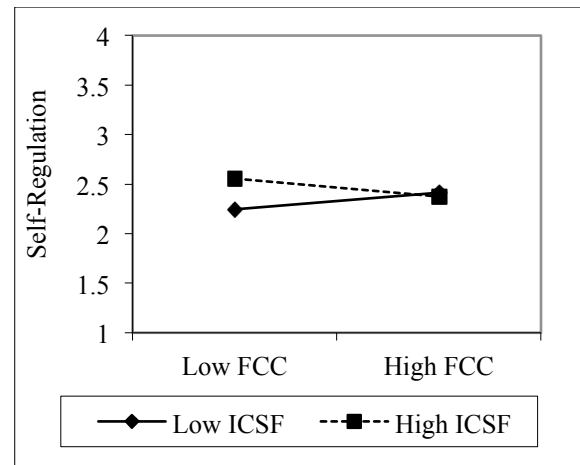
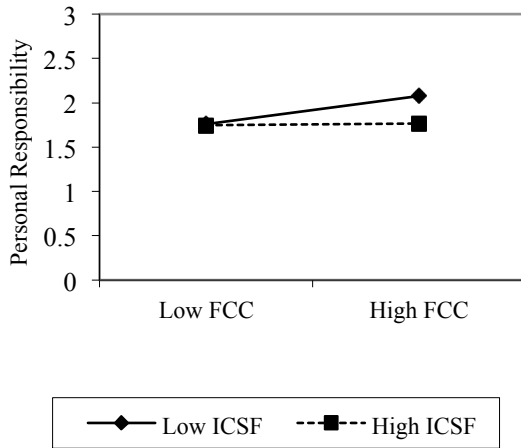
	School Engagement	Health Behaviors	Social Competencies	Personal Responsibility	Caring	Self-Regulation
	β	β	β	β	β	β
Covariates						
Youth gender: Female [Reference: Male]	.191***	-.056*	.117***	.067**	.148***	.087***
Youth age	-.115***	-.091***	.052*	.096***	-.004	.097***
Youth race-ethnicity [Reference = White/Other]						
Black/African American	-.006	-.140***	.038	-.062*	.025	-.002
Hispanic	-.007	-.034	.044	-.004	.031	.028
Asian or Pacific Islander	.073**	.011	-.004	.002	-.006	.025
Youth lives in 2+ households [Reference = 1 household]	-.047	-.070**	.013	-.040	.023	.001
Annual household income	.016	-.031	.013	-.023	-.012	-.006
Home ownership: Rent [Reference: Own]	.009	-.036	-.027	.065*	.001	.030
Years in current home	-.044	-.025	.007	.051	-.011	-.025
Community size	.014	.012	.015	.025	.000	.041
IFA: Internal Family Assets	.314***	.305***	.304***	.348***	.303***	.318***
ICSF: Informal Community Contributions to Families	-.003	.010	.073*	-.085*	-.044	.060
FCC: Family Contributions to Community	.071*	.151***	.179***	.068*	.220***	.002
IFA x FCC	-.046	.009	.004	-.031	-.019	.057
IFA x ICSF	.029	-.005	.048	.067	.030	.021
ICSF x FCC	.030	-.032	.003	-.094**	.001	-.083*
IFA x FCC x ICSF	.049	-.051	.075*	.037	.099**	-.015
Adjusted R ²	.216	.159	.293	.154	.271	.132
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 1 to 2)	.143	.124	.259	.126	.233	.110
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 2 to 3)	.002	.001	.003	.007	.001	.005
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 3 to 4)	.001	.001	.003	.001	.004	.000
Effect Size (f ²)	.276	.189	.414	.182	.372	.152

Notes. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. A separate stepwise multiple moderator regression was used to test each dependent variable. The covariates were entered in Step 1, followed by the main effects for IFA, ICC, and FCC in Step 2. Two-way interactions among IFA, FCC, and ICSF were entered in Step 3, and the three-way IFA x FCC x ICSF interaction was entered in Step 4. Only the Step 4 results are reported. The results of Steps 1-3 are available from the author. All youth covariate variables come from youth self-report. Annual household income, home ownership, years in current home, and community size are from parenting adult self-report.



A. Three-way interaction plot illustrating simple slopes of social competencies on Internal Family Assets (IFA) at high and low values of Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF) and Family Contributions to Community (FCC).

B. Three-way interaction plot illustrating simple slopes of caring on Internal Family Assets (IFA) at high and low values of Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF) and Family Contributions to Community (FCC).



C. Two-way interaction plot illustrating simple slopes of personal responsibility on Family Contributions to Community (FCC) at high and low values of Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF).

D. Two-way interaction plot illustrating simple slopes of self-regulation on Family Contributions to Community (FCC) high and low values of Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF).

Figure 2. Interaction plots that illustrate simple slopes of youth well-being on high and low values of selected moderating variables based on interaction analyses (Model 1, reported in Table 11).

Model 2. Model 2 examined whether the association between IFA and the youth well-being outcomes was moderated by Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF). To test this, a two-way IFA x FCSF interaction was included in the stepwise regression. The results are summarized in Table 12. Across the six youth well-being models in this set, there was only one significant interaction: IFA x FCSF in the prediction of social competencies (see Figure 6). At low levels of IFA, the social competencies means for low and high FCSF do not differ. When families have low levels of Internal Family Assets, there is no difference in social competencies based on either low or high formal community supports. However, there is a significant difference in social competencies among those with high IFA between those with low and high FCSF. Thus, the association between Internal Family Assets and social competencies is amplified when the family has formal community supports. However, as noted, this association is not significant for any of the other well-being indicators.

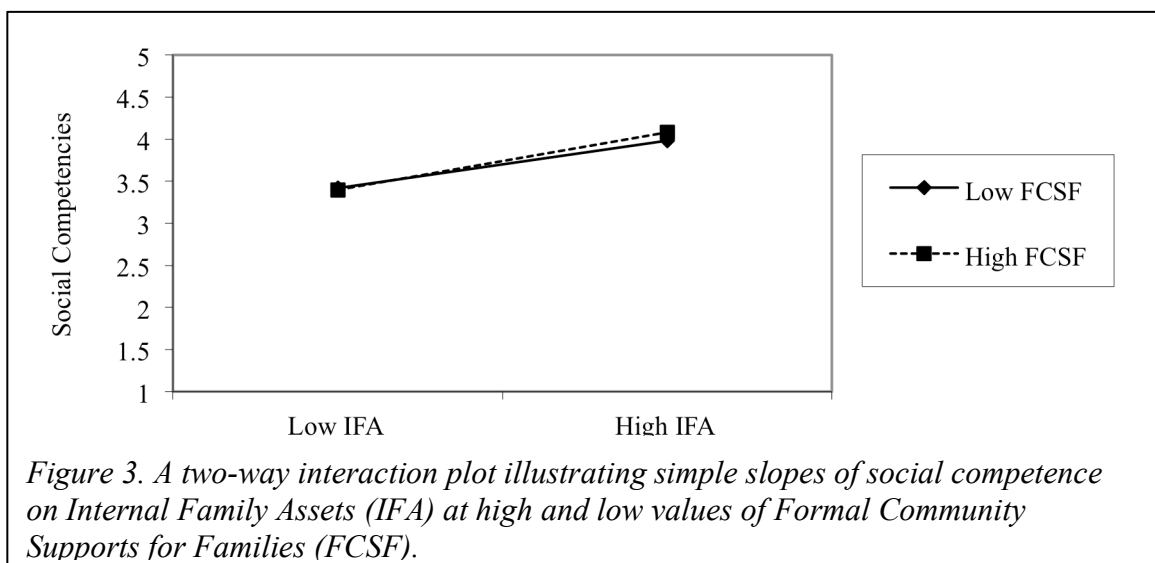


Table 12
Interaction of Internal Family Assets and Formal Community Supports for Families in Predicting Well-Being (Model 2)

	School Engagement	Health Behaviors	Social Competencies	Personal Responsibility	Caring	Self-Regulation
	β	β	β	β	β	β
Covariates						
Youth gender: Female [Reference: Male]	.191***	-.056*	.116***	.069**	.149***	.090***
Youth age	-.111***	-.090***	.048*	.107***	.004	.096***
Youth race-ethnicity [Reference = White/Other]						
Black/African American	-.006	-.140***	.046	-.050	.036	.000
Hispanic	-.013	-.043	.025	-.006	.016	.027
Asian or Pacific Islander	.066**	-.001	-.023	-.002	-.026	.023
Youth lives in 2+ households [Reference = 1 household]	-.046	-.063*	.030	-.029	.044	-.002
Annual household income	.022	-.021	.037	-.015	.012	-.007
Home ownership: Rent [Reference: Own]	.007	-.029	-.018	.061*	.000	.036
Years in current home	-.054	-.037	-.017	.035	-.040	-.033
Community size	.020	.010	.024	.029	.013	.036
IFA: Internal Family Assets	.369***	.348***	.462***	.368***	.446***	.322***
FCSF: Formal Community Supports for Families	.033	.023	.032	-.064*	-.008	.033
IFA x FCSF	.000	.024	.049*	-.012	.014	-.021
Adjusted R ²	.210	.146	.245	.147	.224	.128
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 1 to 2)	.139	.121	.213	.124	.190	.108
Δ Adjusted R ² (Step 2 to 3)	.000	.001	.002	.000	.000	.000
Effect Size	.266	.171	.325	.172	.289	.147

Notes. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. A separate stepwise multivariate regression was tested for each dependent variable. The covariates were entered in Step 1, followed by IFA and FCSF in Step 2. Two-way interactions between FCC and FCSF were entered in Step 3. Step 3 is reported. The results of Steps 1-2 are available from the author. All youth covariate variables are youth self-report. Annual household income, home ownership, years in current home, and community size are from parenting adult reports.

Resilience Factors for Youth in High-Stressed Families

Research Question 4: In families that have experienced multiple Stressful Life Events (SLE), what role do Internal Family Assets (IFA) and family-community connections (ICSF, FCSF, FCC) play in predicting high levels of well-being? This question sheds light on the resilience potential of Internal Family Assets and family-community connections for those young people in families that face greater challenges.

Because the concept of resilience focuses on factors at work in the lives of youth and families in the face of adversity or disadvantage (Masten, 2001), analyses were conducted on the subset of families in the sample ($n = 207$) who scored 17 or higher on the SLE Index, which seeks to capture families' experiences of 13 high-stress events. (See Table A5 in Appendix 2.) A score of 17 was selected as the point for the binary split based on the frequency of responses across the distribution, with a significant drop between 16 (with about 30 respondents having each score) and 17, after which point few scores have frequencies higher than 20. This proportion of the sample represents the 14% of families who report experiencing the highest level of Stressful Life Events (SLE). Within this subsample of 207 high-stressed families, 64% are White/Other, 18% African American, 13% Hispanic, and 5% Asian/Pacific Islander (roughly parallel to the total sample). Compared to the full sample, those in the high SLE subgroup were more likely to live in more than one household (35% in subgroup vs. 17% in full sample), and they are more likely to be males than females (58% vs. 42%).

For these models, the dependent youth well-being variables were dichotomized using a median split. This binary split allowed us to assess the probability (through odds

ratios) that a young person in a high-stress family achieves an adequate level of well-being across a diverse mix of indicators. Logistic regression allowed for testing models to predict categorical outcomes (Pallant, 2007)—in this case, whether or not a young person in a stressed family experienced levels of well-being above the median (high well-being) depending on internal family strengths and family-community connections. Put another way, which factors within the family and the family's connections to the community distinguish which young people in high-stressed families score high on each well-being outcome from those who do not?

Odds ratios (OR) greater than 1 indicate the increased odds of being in the high well-being group (scoring above the median) for the relevant well-being indicator with a one standard deviation increase in the independent variable (IFA, ICSF, FCSF, FCC). Odds ratios less than 1.0 indicate the decreased odds of being in the high well-being group. To ease interpretation, the inverse odds ratio (i.e., $1 / \text{OR}$) is provided for ORs < 1.0. Inverse odds ratios are interpreted as the increased odds of being in the high well-being group associated with a one standard deviation decrease in the independent variable.

The model contained 12 independent variables, eight of which are demographic covariates, as well as four key family and community variables: IFA, FCSF, ICSF, and FCC. The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant for all six dependent variables, suggesting that it distinguished meaningfully between youth who do and do not have high levels of well-being (see Tables 13, 14, 15). This suggests that, taken as whole, these factors do, in fact, predict high levels of well-being among young

people from families that score high on the SLE index, with demographic covariates contributing significantly in only four instances. In most models, IFA and FCC contribute the most to high levels of well-being, with FCC having higher odds ratios than IFA in several analyses.

School engagement—The model had an effect size ranging from .188 - .274 (moderate) in predicting a high level (above the median split) of school engagement. None of the demographic covariates contributed significantly; nor did any of the family-community connections (ICSF, FCSF, and FCC). The strongest predictor of high levels of school engagement among youth in high-stress families was Internal Family Assets (IFA), recording an odds ratio of 6.7. This indicates that youth from high-stressed families who had high levels of Internal Family Assets were more than 6 times more likely to report high school engagement than those who score 1 standard deviation lower on IFA.

Health behaviors—The model had an effect size ranging from .253 and .368 (moderate) in predicting an above-the-median score on health behaviors. Once again, none of the demographic covariates contributed significantly on its own to the model. Though Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families (FCSF, ICSF) did not contribute significantly, IFA and FCC both did. The strongest predictor of high levels of health behaviors was Family Contributions to Community (FCC), with an odds ratio of 5.2. Internal family assets (IFA) recorded an odds ratio of 3.0. Thus, for every one standard deviation increased in FCC, the odds of being above the median on health

behaviors was 5.2 times greater. Likewise, for every one standard deviation increase in IFA, the odds of being above the median on health behaviors was 3 times greater.

Social competencies—The effect size for the model ranged from .348 to .529, which would generally be considered moderate to strong. Only one demographic covariate (age) contributed significantly, with youth being 1.4 times as likely to report high social competencies with a standard deviation increase in age. Once again, FCC was the strongest predictor of high social competencies among youth in families that have experienced high levels of SLE, with an odds ratio of 6.9. Internal family assets had an odds ratio of 3.8. Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF) had an inverse odds ratio of 1.1, suggesting that a one standard deviation decrease in FCSF is association with an increased odds of 1.1 of being in the high social competencies group.

Personal responsibility—The effect size for this model ranged from .342 to .517, which is, once again, moderate to strong. Age is the sole demographic covariate that contributes significantly to the model. However, the odds ratio for IFA is 8.9, suggesting that youth in high-stressed families are almost nine times more likely to exhibit high levels of personal responsibility for every one standard deviation increase IFA. Like social competencies, FCSF *reduces* the likelihood that youth will exhibit high social competencies (inverse OR of 1.14).

Caring—The effect size was moderate to strong for the model predicting caring, ranging from .420 to .652 (Table 15). One demographic covariate contributes significantly to the prediction of caring among youth in high-stressed families: gender, with males being four times less likely to score above the median on caring (inverse odds

ratio of 4.03). IFA and all three types of family-community connections (FCSF, ICSF, and FCC) contribute significantly, though FCSF has an inverse OR (1.30). The strongest contributor was IFA (OR = 5.05), followed by FCC (OR = 4.47), and ICSF (OR = 3.43).

Self-regulation—As shown in Table 15, the model contributes meaningfully, if modestly, to high self-regulation among youth in high-stressed families (effect size of .176 to .253, which would be considered modest). Only two variables contribute significantly. Among the demographic covariates, household income contributed significantly (OR = 1.48). However, the strongest predictor of high self-regulation among youth in high-stressed families was IFA, with an odds ratio of 6.78. Thus, youth in high-stressed families were almost seven times as likely to score high on self-regulation for each one standard deviation increase in their levels of IFA.

Table 13
Logistic Regression Predicting High School Engagement and Health Behaviors for Youth in Families Experiencing High Levels of Stressful Life Events

Independent Variables	School Engagement						Health Behavior							
	β	SE	OR	Inverse OR	95% CI		p	β	SE	OR	Inverse OR	95% CI		p
					Lower	Upper						Lower	Upper	
Youth gender: Female (Male) ¹	-.079	.350	.92	1.1	.465	1.846	.822	.292	.355	1.34	—	.667	2.687	.412
Youth age	-.029	.169	.97	1.0	.697	1.354	.865	-.123	.171	.88	1.13	.632	1.236	.471
Youth race-ethnicity (White/Other) ¹														
Black/African American	.515	.451	1.67	—	.691	4.050	.254	-.260	.454	.33	3.05	.317	1.878	.567
Hispanic	-.079	.496	.92	1.1	.350	2.441	.873	-.075	.501	.93	1.08	.348	2.475	.881
Asian or Pacific Islander	.866	.719	2.38	—	.581	9.734	.229	1.188	.798	3.28	—	.667	15.664	.137
Youth lives in 2+ households (1 household) ¹	-.018	.378	.98	1.02	.468	2.062	.962	.721	.377	2.06	—	.983	4.305	.056
Annual household income	-.044	.193	.96	1.05	.655	1.397	.819	-.373	.200	.69	1.45	.466	1.019	.062
Home ownership: Rent (Own) ¹	-.467	.453	.63	1.60	.258	1.524	.303	-.118	.457	.89	1.13	.363	2.177	.797
Years in current home	.213	.186	1.24	—	.858	1.782	.254	-.094	.192	.91	1.10	.625	1.326	.624
Community size	.131	.176	1.14	—	.807	1.609	.457	-.124	.175	.88	1.13	.627	1.246	.481
Internal Family Assets	1.904	.520	6.71	—	2.424	18.598	.000	1.095	.492	2.99	—	1.139	7.842	.026
Formal Community Supports	-.065	.059	.94	1.07	.835	1.052	.269	-.860	.060	.92	1.09	.816	1.033	.156
Informal Community Supports	-.211	.401	.81	1.24	.369	1.778	.599	-.274	.421	.76	1.32	.333	1.734	.515
Family Contributions to Community	.689	.529	1.99	—	.707	5.617	.193	1.642	.566	5.16	—	1.704	15.647	.004
Pseudo R ² Range														.202 – .269
Effect Size (f ²)														.253 – .368

Notes. These models focus exclusively on the sample of 207 families who scored 17 or higher on the Stressful Life Events index (Table A5 in Appendix 2). To assess the odds of thriving across multiple indicators of adolescent well-being, each dependent variable was subject to a median split.

¹These covariates are binary categorical variables; reference groups are in parentheses.

Table 14
Logistic Regression Predicting High Social Competencies and Personal Responsibility for Youth in Families Experiencing High Levels of Stressful Life Events

Independent Variables	Social Competencies						Personal Responsibility							
	β	SE	OR	Inverse OR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p	β	SE	OR	Inverse OR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p
Youth gender: Female (Male) ¹	-.575	.380	.56	1.78	.267	1.184	.130	-.225	.368	.80	1.25	.388	1.644	.542
Youth age	.388	.181	1.47	—	1.033	2.104	.032	.398	.182	1.49	—	1.043	2.124	.028
Youth race-ethnicity (White/Other) ¹														
Black/African American	.141	.490	1.15	—	.440	3.009	.774	.718	.508	2.05	—	.758	5.545	.157
Hispanic	.501	.534	1.65	—	.579	4.704	.348	.170	.449	1.19	—	.446	3.154	.733
Asian or Pacific Islander	-.335	.766	.72	1.40	.159	3.208	.662	-.166	.773	.85	1.18	.186	3.854	.830
Youth lives in 2+ households (1 household) ¹	-.233	.405	.79	1.26	.358	1.753	.565	.154	.389	1.17	—	.545	2.499	.692
Annual household income	-.237	.211	.79	1.27	.522	1.192	.260	-.006	.204	.99	1.01	.866	1.483	.975
Home ownership: Rent (Own) ¹	-.176	.487	.84	1.19	.323	2.177	.717	-.308	.463	.74	1.36	.297	1.817	.505
Years in current home	.133	.206	1.14	—	.763	1.710	.517	.187	.194	1.21	—	.824	1.765	.335
Community size	-.153	.188	.86	1.17	.594	1.240	.416	-.176	.181	.84	1.19	.588	1.197	.332
Internal Family Assets	1.344	.531	3.84	—	1.355	10.861	.011	2.183	.524	8.87	—	3.176	24.795	.000
Formal Community Supports	-.125	.064	.88	1.13	.778	.999	.049	-.134	.063	.88	1.14	.773	.989	.033
Informal Community Supports	.460	.433	1.59	—	.378	3.703	.358	-.784	.437	.46	2.19	.194	1.075	.073
Family Contributions to Community	1.939	.601	6.95	—	2.141	22.551	.001	.396	.572	1.81	—	.591	5.564	.298
Pseudo R ² Range	.258 – .346													
Effect Size (f ²)	.348 – .529													

Notes. These models focus exclusively on the sample of 207 families who scored 17 or higher on the Stressful Life Events index (Table A5 in Appendix 2). To assess the odds of thriving across multiple indicators of adolescent well-being, each dependent variable was subject to a median split.

¹These covariates are binary categorical variables; reference groups are in parentheses.

Table 15

Logistic Regression Predicting High Caring and Self-Regulation for Youth in Families Experiencing High Levels of Stressful Life Events

Independent Variables	Caring					Self-Regulation						
	β	SE	OR	Inverse OR	95% CI Lower Upper	p	β	SE	OR	Inverse OR	95% CI Lower Upper	p
Youth gender: Female (Male) ¹	-1.396	.406	.25	4.03	.112 .548	.001	.298	.351	1.35	—	.677 2.680	.396
Youth age	.122	.187	1.13	—	.884 1.629	.512	.133	.172	1.14	—	.816 1.598	.440
Youth race-ethnicity (White/Other) ¹												
Black/African American	.610	.504	1.84	—	.686 4.943	.226	.850	.459	2.34	—	.951 5.754	.064
Hispanic	-.208	.535	.81	1.23	.284 2.319	.698	-.289	.500	.75	1.36	.281 1.996	.563
Asian or Pacific Islander	-.307	.801	.74	1.36	.153 3.537	.702	-.246	.765	.78	1.28	.175 3.502	.748
Youth lives in 2+ households (1 household) ¹	-.243	.420	.78	1.28	.344 1.787	.562	.272	.384	1.31	—	.619 2.786	.478
Annual household income	.059	.217	1.06	—	.694 1.622	.785	.389	.199	1.48	—	1.000 2.180	.050
Home ownership: Rent (Own) ¹	.249	.496	1.28	—	.485 3.394	.615	-.486	.462	.62	1.63	.249 1.523	.294
Years in current home	-.227	.210	.80	1.26	.528 1.203	.281	.107	.187	.57	1.77	.772 1.606	.566
Community size	-.229	.191	.80	1.26	.547 1.156	.231	.028	.176	1.03	—	.729 1.452	.872
Internal Family Assets	1.620	.534	5.06	—	1.773 14.410	.002	1.913	.521	6.78	—	2.441 18.802	.000
Formal Community Supports	-.265	.070	.77	1.30	.669 .880	.000	-.079	.059	.92	1.08	.823 1.037	.179
Informal Community Supports	1.232	.460	3.43	—	1.392 8.445	.007	.315	.397	1.37	—	.629 2.986	.427
Family Contributions to Community	1.498	.596	4.47	—	1.391 14.370	.012	-.440	.524	.64	1.55	.230 1.800	.402
Pseudo R ² Range	.296 - .395											
Effect Size (f ²)	.420 - .653											

Notes. These models focus exclusively on the sample of 207 families who scored 17 or higher on the Stressful Life Events index (Table A5 in Appendix 2). To assess the odds of thriving across multiple indicators of adolescent well-being, each dependent variable was subject to a median split.

¹These covariates are binary categorical variables; reference groups are in parentheses.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This study sought to operationalize several dimensions of a bioecological model of human development, addressing underlying themes and gaps that emerged in the literature on the connections between communities and families with young adolescents. Its measures emphasized relational processes and dynamics within families and communities, rather than focusing on structures and formal institutions. It sought to recognize the presence and interplay of both strengths and challenges within families. And, finally, it captured, at least proximally, the bidirectional influence between families and communities by examining both Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community.

To do this, data from a national survey of 1,498 families with young adolescents were used to examine the extent to which family strengths and family-community connections contribute to young people's well-being, including whether they help to ameliorate the negative effects of Stressful Life Events on young people's well-being. The focus on families with young adolescents seeks to fill a gap in family research, which typically has focused more on early childhood. Moreover, this developmental age is typically a time when young people in the United States begin expanding their engagement in community more independently of their families.

Because of the multi-dimensional nature of this study, the discussion of the findings will proceed from two complementary perspectives. First will be a discussion of

each of the four research questions. That discussion will be followed by an expansion of the discussion to explore each of the key constructs in the study. It will conclude with discussions of the limitations and contributions and implications for future research and practice.

Review of Findings for Each Research Question

The overall thesis of the study was that strong, bidirectional connections between families and communities build on the strengths within families (Internal Family Assets) to contribute to young people's well-being during early adolescence. These community connections and internal family strengths contribute to resilience for young people in families that have faced multiple Stressful Life Events that might otherwise undermine well-being and healthy development. Four research questions grew out of this thesis and guided these analyses. The results for each research question will now be discussed separately.

1. Are Internal Family Assets more robust correlational predictors of Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community than structural or demographic characteristics of youth, families, and communities? Using multiple stepwise regression, we found that the level of Internal Family Assets was consistently a stronger predictor of each measure of community connections than any of the demographic covariates, with demographic factors contributing between 4% and 6% of the variance compared to 13% to 29% of the variance in community connections that was attributed to Internal Family Assets. This association was particularly strong for Informal Community Supports for Families ($\beta = .495$; $f^2 = .416$) and Family

Contributions to Community ($\beta = .484$; $f^2 = .484$) compared to Formal Community Supports for Families ($\beta = .258$; $f^2 = .152$). Thus, the first hypothesis is confirmed: Families with higher levels of Internal Family Assets do have, on average, stronger connections with their communities, and these internal family strengths are better predictors of community connections than the demographic covariates.

Though causation cannot be established, one can theorize a bidirectional influence and synergistic interaction between internal family strengths and community connections. Families with stronger and more consistent internal family processes (including relationships, routines, expectations, and adaptability) have a more stable foundation from which to reach out and engage, both to build formal and informal supports and to contribute to community life. They are less likely to be consumed with managing internal strain or dysfunction within the family. At the same time, the connections in the community may reinforce or strengthen internal family dynamics. For example, families that participate in community programs and have trusted resources in the neighborhood and community can tap these resources to help them with challenges they may experience in the home. Furthermore, being engaged in contributing to others in the community may increase a family's sense of self-efficacy, which can strengthen family life. These dynamics appear to matter more than social location or other demographic factors that are often the focus of research on families in communities (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

That said, several youth, family, and community characteristics also contributed significantly, if modestly, to each type of community-family connection. Most consistently, a child living in two or more households, annual family income, and race-

ethnicity affected all three community-family connections. For race-ethnicity, African American families reported higher levels of both formal and informal community supports than other groups. Hispanic and Asian American families reported lower levels of Family Contributions to Community than others. It is not clear why young people living in more than one household report higher levels of family-community connections, particularly Formal Community Supports for Families ($\beta = .19$). It may be that these young people are accessing more diverse resources in the community as a way of compensating for potential instability in the home. The association between higher income and greater community connections, though modest ($\beta < .10$), is expected, since those with higher incomes tend to have greater access to community resources and face fewer economic stresses that may reduce capacity to engage with the broader community and increase social isolation (Rank, 2004).

2. To what extent are Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community associated with selected indicators of youth well-being, over and above Internal Family Assets and select covariates? The overall answer to this question is “a little,” depending on the well-being indicator and the type of community-family connection under consideration.

Before examining the three family-community connection variables, a brief comment on the demographic variables is warranted. Because the study focused on measures of youth well-being, it is not surprising that gender and age contribute meaningfully to each of the dependent variables, with some variation in whether the variables contribute positively or negatively to each indicator of well-being. (For

example, the association between age and school engagement and health behaviors is negative, though it is positive on three other indicators.) In most cases, being female is more strongly associated with these measures of well-being, except for health behaviors. These findings are a reminder that individual characteristics—very few of which are measured in this study—also play a role in these relationships and interactions.

Turning now to the central question: The most robust association with youth well-being after factoring in demographic covariates and IFA was FCC, which measures how family members are engaged in the civic life of the community through activism, service, and a sense of collective responsibility. Not surprisingly, this measure of civic engagement correlated most strongly with young people's sense of caring ($\beta = .281$; $f^2 = .379$) and social competencies ($\beta = .232$; $f^2 = .418$). However, it is also associated moderately with school engagement ($\beta = .214$; $f^2 = .272$), health behaviors ($\beta = .159$; $f^2 = .189$), and personal responsibility ($\beta = .152$; $f^2 = .179$), but not self-regulation. Without presuming causality, these associations are consistent with social capital research, which contends that collective efficacy interacts with personal well-being for youth and families (e.g., Furstenburg, 2005). However, it is noteworthy that a focus on engaging families as resources in their communities is a much less common intervention strategy by community organizations than is providing them with programs and services designed to educate them or to compensate for problems they face.

Though it makes sense that ICSF is associated with social competencies ($\beta = .129$), it was not expected that none of the other well-being indicators are meaningfully associated with this measure of informal ties between families and communities. This

may be an artifact of inadequate measures of informal connections, though the scale is meaningful in other analyses. Just as likely, the internal assets explain most of the variance in these informal community connections. Indeed, the correlation between IFA and ICSF is quite high ($p = .503$). As predicted, the zero-order correlations between ICSF and each well-being indicator were meaningful (between $p = .345$ and $.487$; see Table 8), though these associations are greatly diminished when demographics covariates and, most significantly, IFA are factored in.

Analyses of the relationship Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF) and youth well-being indicators were quite different. In all three cases where the relationship was significant, it was *negative*: social competencies ($\beta = -.096$), personal responsibility ($\beta = -.084$), and caring ($\beta = -.112$). Though each of these cross-sectional associations would be considered weak to modest, it is important to examine, particularly given the emphasis placed on providing services to families as a primary family-strengthening emphasis. It may be simply that families with youth experiencing greater challenges are most likely to seek community supports and participation. Thus, rather than being an “outcome” of community supports, lower levels of youth well-being (and associated factors) precipitated or encouraged this engagement.

However, the content within the FCSF scale are broader, highlighting parent and youth participation in formal programs and activities in a variety of settings (including religious activities, arts, sports, and recreation) as well as places that the parent indicates have helped to strengthen the family. Furthermore, the zero-order correlations between FCSF and each of the youth well-being indicators were positive and significant (Table 8).

At a minimum, these analyses challenge interventions and models that presume simple and direct associations between accessing formal family services and youth well-being, without accounting for complex interactions and contextual variations.

Finally, these findings should stimulate new conversations that have previously been raised by critics of an overemphasis on formalized service systems as dominant strategy for supporting and strengthening families (e.g., Cooke & Muir, 2012; McKnight, 1995) because, they argue, it undermines the informal ties of community life. At a minimum, if we extrapolate that the three types of community connection measured in this study could contribute to positive outcomes for youth and families, a compelling case can be made for rebalancing the emphasis to strengthen efforts to engage families in working together to solve the challenges they are experiencing, which aligns well with a focus on strengthening the family's own capacities and well-being (family assets) to work together and navigate the challenges they face.

3. To what extent is the association between Internal Family Assets and youth well-being affected by Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families and Family Contributions to Community? This question suggests an interaction among the independent variables that are the focus of this study: Internal Family Assets (IFA), Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF), Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF), and Family Contributions to Community (FCC). Moderated multiple regressions shed light on these interactions, focusing on two models. The first model examined three-way interactions among IFA, ICSF, and FCC, which could be considered the non-programmatic or non-institutional factors, in predicting indicators of youth well-

being. The second model examined two-way interactions between IFA and FCSF, which emphasize institutional supports and involvement, in predicting youth well-being.

The first model offered mixed evidence regarding the research question. In the cases of the dependent variables of social competencies and caring, a three-way interaction was evident, suggesting that both ICSF and FCC amplify the association between IFA and these two well-being indicators after controlling for demographics and the independent contributions of each of the three independent variables. In other words, these two forms of community connections seem to strengthen the association between Internal Family Assets and social competencies and caring. Thus, the effect of Internal Family Assets on social competencies was amplified in the presence of high informal supports for families and high Family Contributions to Community. This might suggest that these experiences in the community compound the contribution of IFA to social competencies. Similar patterns were evident for caring; however, the slope difference between low ICSF/high FCC and low ICSF/low FCC would also suggest that high IFA may mitigate the negative ICSF might otherwise have on caring.

For personal responsibility, there is a significant two-way interaction between ICSF and FCC. If youth have high levels of informal community supports (ICSF), family contributions have little effect on personal responsibility. However, if families do not have those informal supports, personal responsibility increases as levels of FCC increases. Similar interactions are evident for self-regulation, though self-regulation is lower when FCC is high.

The second model focused on the interactions between Internal Family Assets and Formal Community Supports for Families. These analyses found only one significant interaction across all six measures of youth well-being: social competencies. If Internal Family Assets are low, then social competencies do not differ based on whether formal supports are high or low. However, if Internal Family Assets are high, there is a significant difference in social competencies depending on the level of formal community supports for the family.

Though complex to interpret, these interactions may offer two overall insights in light of the research question. First, in the case of informal community supports and Family Contributions to Community, the three sources of strength appear to work together, each magnifying the other, at least for several areas of youth well-being (particularly social competencies and caring). This could be likened to a “spillover effect” in which the benefits of these relationships and engagement enhance other areas of well-being. The second insight lies in the relatively few interactions in Model 2, which focused on Formal Community Supports for Families. In this case, the variables (IFA and FCSF) work relatively independently, with each adding little value to the other. Though deeper analyses would be needed to confirm the overall patterns, this finding appears to be aligned with the overall theme that documents greater associations with outcomes for the informal community supports and family contributions when compared to Formal Community Supports for Families.

4. In families that have experienced multiple Stressful Life Events (SLE), what role do Internal Family Assets (IFA) and community connections (ICSF, FCSF, and

FCC) play in predicting high levels of well-being? This question begins to explore the extent to which the factors at the center of this study might be considered resilience factors; that is, might they play a role in moderating the potential negative effects of Stressful Life Events in the family on, in this case, young people's well-being? These analyses focused on the 15% of the families that had the highest scores on the Stressful Life Events (SLE) index, which asks about whether and how recently the young person and family have experienced 13 different negative life events, ranging from the death of a parent or other family member, a separation or divorce in the family, having an accident, being unemployed, being the victim of crime or a natural disaster, or dealing with substance abuse in the family, or imprisonment of a family member. In zero-order correlations (Table 8), the SLE index correlated negatively, if modestly, with five of the six well-being indicators (the exception being caring) for the total sample (β between $-.06$ and $-.17$).

In order to assess probability of high well-being among youth in high-stressed families demonstrating high levels of well-being indicators, these dependent variables were dichotomized (median split) and logistic regression analyses were performed to generate odds ratios (OR) for the association between the four independent variables of interest (IFA, FCSF, ICSF, FCC) and the six youth well-being indicators, after controlling for demographic covariates within the sample of 219 families that have experienced relatively high levels of Stressful Life Events.

The odds of youth from high-stressed families achieving the high level of all six dichotomous measures of well-being are three to nine times greater for each standard deviation increase they experience in Internal Family Assets, as shown here:

<i>Well-Being (dichotomous measures)</i>	<i>Odds Ratio for IFA</i>
Personal responsibility (high)	8.9
Self-regulation (high)	6.8
School engagement (high)	6.7
Caring (high)	5.1
Health behavior (high)	3.0
Social competencies (high)	3.8

The next most consistent association is between Family Contributions to Community (FCC) and well-being indicators, with FCC having a higher OR than IFA (6.9 vs. 3.8) for high social competencies and high health behaviors (5.2 vs. 3.0). FCC also has meaningful, if less robust, associations with high caring (OR = 4.5), high school engagement (OR = 2.0), and personal responsibility (OR = 1.8). This association between well-being and family contributions through civic participation for youth in high-stressed families may point toward an underlying sense of self-efficacy that is present in these families, which would likely help to ameliorate the negative impact of Stressful Life Events on youth well-being.

However, the OR between FCC and self-regulation was <1, suggesting that youth from high-stressed families are 1.5 time less likely to achieve high levels of self-regulation for every standard deviation increase in family contributions to the community. This negative association does not have a clear theoretical explanation,

though in may reflect the contrast between the outwardly focused community engagement measures and the internal, personal focus of the self-regulation measure, which emphasizes internal emotional control.

Only one odds ratio is significant for ICSF: Caring (OR = 3.4). This relationship makes sense, given that ICSF emphasizes interpersonal relationships with peers, neighbors, and other significant community members. However, research on social capital might suggest a more consistent and meaningful role that informal community supports would play for families facing high stress. It may be that the results of informal supports in the midst of stress are substantively different from the well-being indicators used in this study. For example, they may involve reduction of stress or a sense of personal support. Further exploration would be needed to unpack this dynamic. It may also be that relatively few high-stressed families have access to the depth of informal relationships beyond the family that would be salient at a level that would independently shape youth well-being, particularly given the already-noted covariance between Internal Family Assets and Informal Community Supports for Families.

The relationship between Formal Community Supports for Families and well-being indicators is also modest at best for youth in high-stressed families. Of the six well-being indicators used as dependent variables, three are modestly statistically significant for OR less than 1, suggesting a negative relationship. These are social competencies (inverse OR = 1.13), personal responsibility (inverse OR = 1.14), and caring (inverse OR = 1.30). Thus, for each standard deviation increase in FCSF, the odds of scoring high on

these dichotomous measures of well-being *declines* among youth in high-stressed families.

It would be difficult to make a theoretical case that having stronger bonds to neighbors, teachers, coaches, peers, and others has a negative influence on outcomes for youth from high-stressed families. A more plausible explanation would lie in the ways families turn to these resources when they are facing stress and/or when their children are struggling with issues that are assumed in the well-being measures. In this theoretical scenario, youth in high-stressed families who struggle with, for example, personal responsibility or social competencies turn to community programs and resources to help them through.

These findings provide important evidence of the role of family strengths in young people's resilience in the face of challenges. Though causality cannot be established through these cross-sectional analyses, the odds ratios offer provocative evidence of the power of family relationships, processes, and practices for maintaining and strengthening well-being for young people whose families face a variety of challenges. These findings are consistent with prior research on family resilience (e.g., Walsh, 2006), but they are unique in specifically linking youth well-being and family strengths in the face of adversity. One does not have to have a perfect, challenge-free life in order to flourish, and many families facing adversity have the internal capacities needed to survive, regenerate, and do well. Furthermore, the strong associations between Family Contributions to Community and youth well-being in high-stressed families offers additional evidence of the benefits that may come when families are recognized as

contributors and leaders, and when they develop a sense of efficacy that they matter, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

This underlying attitude stands in sharp contrast with much of the current rhetoric about families under stress and how they are approached based solely on their problems and the services they need, rather than on ways they might contribute. Such contributions, engagement, and activism appear not to take away from the strengths within the family, but may actually reinforce and bolster those internal strengths.

Emerging Themes Regarding Key Constructs

The research questions for this study focused primarily on the relationships among key constructs: Internal Family Assets, Formal Community Supports for Families, Informal Community Supports for Families, Family Contributions to Community, Stressful Life Events, and demographic covariates. It is also helpful to examine findings related to each construct across research questions, which accents the themes in a different way.

Internal family assets. The Internal Family Assets approximate a broad body of research on family strengths and relationships, emphasizing positive relationships, routines, expectations, and adaptability within families. Much of the research in this field has been clinical in its primary orientation (e.g., Walsh, 2003c; Olson & Gorall, 2003), or it has been more qualitative and descriptive (e.g., DeFrain & Asay, 2007). In addition, much of the extant empirical work on families with adolescents has emphasized parenting strategies (e.g., Steinberg, 2000). Each of these approaches has informed this study, which sought to quantify specific processes, dynamics, and relationships in family life

that are associated with youth well-being (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

Furthermore, it included both youth and adult perspectives in assessing family dynamics.

In each of the analyses, internal families assets were consistently strong variables, explaining, for example, much more of the variance in a range of dependent variables than a wide range of demographic covariates. In addition, Internal Family Assets were strongly associated with all three types of community connections, all of the youth well-being indicators, and resilience in the face of Stressful Life Events. Though a few analyses found other variables to have stronger associations in specific instances (particularly Family Contributions to Community), the clear, underlying story is the consistent and robust associations that Internal Family Assets have with other constructs in the study.

The consistent strength of the Internal Family Assets across all of the analyses in this study is striking, though not necessarily surprising. As noted in the literature review, there is a strong consensus about the critical role of family dynamics in individual development (Collins et al., 2000; Reeves & Howard, 2013; Steinberg, 2001). Such an understanding is consistent with a bioecological model that emphasizes the unique influence of family as a primary “microsystem” of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Furthermore, it is aligned with Bronfenbrenner’s emphasis on the proximal processes that are primary mechanisms of development due to their salience, frequency, and sustainability across time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

What is important is that the relationships, practices, and processes embedded in the Internal Family Assets (IFA) scale and the larger family assets framework emphasize

malleable factors in family life that are known from previous analyses to be attainable across a wide spectrum of families, with very little variability in total asset levels across family income, parent education, race-ethnicity, immigrant status, number of adults in the home (single- vs. two-parent families), sexual orientation of the parenting adult(s), the child's relationship with the parenting adult (biological, adopted, or being raised by grandparent), or the type and size of community lived in (Syvertsen, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, 2012).

Thus, the Internal Family Assets are not only strongly associated with youth well-being, but they have the potential to be strengthened across a wide range of family life. Though additional research would be needed to show causality, a strong theoretical case could be made that strengthening family assets would contribute to increased well-being and educational engagement for young people across the socioeconomic and cultural spectrum. Furthermore, the analyses in this study suggest that such a focus for intervention could play a particularly powerful role in the lives of youth and family who may have experienced higher levels of adversity and stress. Discovering innovative ways to strengthen these family capacities remains a creative challenge for the field, particularly in light of the findings regarding family-community connections.

Informal Community Supports for Families. The ICSF scale was developed and used to approximate the informal bonds, connections, relationships, and neighborhood cohesion that are suggested in social capital research as being particularly salient and underrepresented in extant research. In Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn's (2000) influential

conceptualization, these informal supports relate to two of the three mechanisms they identified: relationships and norms/collective efficacy.

However, the mostly modest contribution of these constructs to many of the analyses in this study suggests that, though potentially malleable, seeking to change these dynamics alone would likely have only limited effect on youth and family outcomes. In only a few cases (such as social competencies) do informal supports contribute independently and robustly to the model.

The clear relationship between Internal Family Assets and informal community supports after controlling for demographic covariates (Δ in adjusted $R^2 = .238$; $f^2 = .416$) suggests the potential of overlap and bidirectional influence between relationships and processes within the family and relationships and processes in the community. This conclusion is reinforced by the interaction analyses in research question 3, which suggested that high levels informal community supports boosted the effect Internal Family Assets on youth well-being. One can speculate, therefore, that increasing strength, connection, or efficacy in either sphere could readily influence the other.

Formal Community Supports for Families. In many cases, the analyses for this study found that formal community supports operated differently from other independent variables, including Internal Family Assets, Informal Community Supports for Families, and Family Contributions to Community. Zero-order correlations with other constructs were typically weaker (with the exception of the correlation with informal supports; $\beta = .496$), and the correlation with the Stressful Life Events index ($\beta = .266$) was stronger than for any other variable in the study. Internal family assets only predict 6% of the

variance in formal community supports, and formal supports correlated significantly with only one of the six youth well-being indicators (social competencies; $\beta = .129$). In the examination of resilience for youth in high-stressed families (research question 4), odds ratios for formal community supports were < 1 for all six indicators of youth well-being (the dependent variable in these analyses), suggesting that youth are less likely to be in the high well-being group. (In each case, the inverse odds ratio is 1.3 or less.)

How are these relationships interpreted, underscoring that causality cannot be established within these cross-sectional data? It is unlikely that the formal involvement, as defined in these measures (which include participation in enriching activities in recreation, arts, and religious settings for both parents and youth, and recognizing ways organizations have helped to strengthen families), is *causing* negative results. Two other interpretations may be plausible.

First, the measures used are simply inadequate to capture the ways in which program involvement and institutional supports contribute to family strengths and youth well-being. In addition, these measures do not address issues of program quality or dosage, which are important variables to understand if one is to unpack the ways in which institutions and programs contribute to well-being.

Second, the causality may be the opposite direction than the analyses presume. If youth and families are struggling with, for example, dimensions of youth well-being (e.g., school engagement), internal challenges in the family (e.g., dysfunctional family communication), or high stress or chronic adversity, these challenges may encourage them to turn to formal community resources. If this were the case, one would expect that

formal community supports would, in fact, have stronger associations with negative factors and, by default, weaker associations with positive factors. On their face, the items in the formal community supports measure do not strongly reinforce this theory, but it is not one that can be set aside without further examination.

That said, one cannot see any evidence in these data that simply increasing opportunities for and access to formal programs and institutions would be adequate, in itself, to achieve social goals related to families with youth. Barring future research with more robust measures that tell a different story, other family-community connections (informal community supports and Family Contributions to Community) appear to have stronger associations with strengths in both youth and families and, thus, may be more actionable as strategies for improving the well-being of youth and families.

One final note is in order, however: Though the distinction between formal and informal community supports is important and though they appear to operate differently, it is important not to overstate the distinction or, more important, to place them in opposition to each other (as is too often done in political debates). These constructs are clearly related to each other ($\beta = .50$), and they certainly play different roles in the lives of families and communities. We know from Werner & Smith's (2001) four-decade study of resilience (and other research) that people first turn to informal sources of support (partner, friends, etc.) and spiritual resources when facing stress or challenges before they tap formal services. But that's not the end of the story. Informal bonds are a necessary but insufficient resource to support families, particularly in times of crisis or chronic challenges. Attree's (2005) synthesis of studies of formal and informal community

supports for families in the United Kingdom found that formal and informal community connections play different, sometimes mutually reinforcing, roles. In particular, those families facing chronic challenges depended on formal supports. Furthermore, they were more likely to seek formal help when they had more informal supports in their lives. The greatest risk is for those who become increasingly isolated and distrustful of both formal and informal supports, making it particularly challenging to intervene.

Family contributions to communities. Given the relative lack of research and theory regarding the role of family leadership and civic action as part of family strength and youth well-being (with notable exceptions, including Doherty, Jacob, & Cutting, 2009; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2011; Thomas & Lien, 2009), the consistent strength of this variable across this study is noteworthy. It is moderately associated with Internal Family Assets ($\beta = .271$ after controlling for demographics; see Table 9), suggesting both the potential of interaction as well as independence.

Unlike both Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families, Family Contributions to Community are meaningfully associated with five of the six measures of youth well-being after accounting for both demographic covariates and Internal Family Assets (Table 10). (The only exception was that the correlation between Family Contributions to Community and self-regulation was not significant.) Finally, youth in high-stressed families who experience Family Contributions to Community have greater odds of achieving high levels of five of the six measures of youth well-being (with self-regulation being the expected exception). In some cases (health behaviors and social competencies), these odds are stronger than those predicted based on levels of family

assets. Thus, for example, youth from high-stressed families who report Family Contributions to Community are 6.9 times more likely to have high levels of social competencies than those with one standard deviation lower in reported Family Contributions to Community.

Though causality cannot be established, it is clear from the analyses in this study that family engagement in community and civic life is a robust factor in family and youth well-being. This conclusion invites a new conversation among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers about how families are engaged in community life and through programs and services that are available. How might our efforts be different if an emphasis on family agency, leadership, and activism were at the heart of programs and services for families? Though family leadership is part of some efforts, many fields and institutions clearly operate from a needs- and service-based approach that views families as recipients of educational and social services, not as active agents in the development of their families, children, and communities.

Stressful life events. The Stressful Life Events index was a novel and rudimentary measure for this study that sought to emulate using existing data more robust theories and measures of stressful events (e.g., Jobe-Shields et al., 2013; Oliva et al., 2009; Piazza et al., 2013; Rahe et al., 2000). By focusing on adverse events that families may have experienced in the near or recent past, it approximates some of the many challenges families face that may interfere with family functioning and youth well-being. It does not capture several of the key chronic challenges that some families face, such as poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, or lack of access to resources, and, as such, it only captures some

of the potential challenges that many families face. And since many families experience few if any of these Stressful Life Events, the measure's value comes from helping to identify those families that many have experienced multiple recent adverse experiences.

In this study, the Stressful Life Events index provided an important analytic tool for examining family resilience in the face of adversity, helping to identify those families that may have faced compounding challenges that could affect family dynamics and youth well-being. Additional studies would be needed to confirm the predictive validity and reliability of the index prior to broader use.

Youth well-being indicators. The six well-being indicators address three dimensions of youth well-being: basic physical health (health behaviors index), education (school engagement), and social-emotional well-being (social competencies, self-regulation, personal responsibility, and caring). As expected, family and community dynamics are relevant for each of these areas of well-being, though they operate somewhat differently.

As examined in research question 2, Internal Family Assets are associated meaningfully with all six of these well-being indicators after controlling for demographic factors. This association between Internal Family Assets and measures of well-being is stronger than the association of any of the community-connection variables with these measures of youth well-being. Though causality cannot be asserted, these consistent patterns would suggest that attending to the internal strengths of families would hold promise as part of any intervention aimed at improving these areas of youth well-being. In addition, as discussed in detail for research question 4, experiencing high levels of

family assets significantly increased the odds that youth in high-stressed families would experience high levels of each of these areas of well-being.

Though the overall patterns are relatively consistent, there is meaningful variability in the associations between each of these well-being measures and other constructs in this study. For example, none of the community-family connections meaningfully predict self-regulation, whereas all three predict social competencies. One cannot hypothesize, therefore, that any effort to strengthen family-community connections will equally influence youth well-being.

Demographic covariates. Finally, a core hypothesis of this study was that relational dynamics and processes within families and between families and communities would contribute more to understanding family and youth well-being than would individual, family, and community demographic covariates. Eight covariates that theoretically could influence family-community connections were included as control variables throughout this study:

- *Youth characteristics:* youth gender, age, and race-ethnicity
- *Family characteristics:* number of households the youth lives in, annual household income, whether the family owns or rents the home, and years lived in present home (a proxy for mobility)
- *Community:* community size.

Consistent with the original hypothesis, none of these factors turned out to be more significant in predicting the dependent variables of interest in this study. Few of these demographic covariates consistently reached a level of significance ($p < .05$) in any

of the study's regression analyses. The youth's age and gender were most likely to contribute variance in regression models. Both were significant, for example, in predicting all six measures of youth well-being. Furthermore, with few exceptions, the contributions to the models were weak ($\beta < .10$).

Not surprisingly, different subgroups of demographic covariates contribute more to models. When predicting family-community connections, family-level covariates were most likely to be significant (Table 9). In contrast, when predicting youth well-being, youth characteristics (particularly gender and age) contributed the most variance of any of the demographic in most instances. With the exception of health behaviors, being female contributed positively to all six indicators of well-being. This general finding is consistent with other research that highlights particular strength among females for a variety of measures of well-being. (See Benson, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Leffert, 2011.)

For age, there is a positive association with several areas of well-being (suggesting that older youth do better), but negative associations with school engagement and health behaviors. There are also meaningful, if modest, declines in both Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families as young people grow up. These patterns may reflect a broader cultural pattern in which families become less connected to and supported by their communities as their children move into adolescence, precisely when the children are spending more time away from family and engaged with others in the community. An important question is whether and how community connections could be maintained through this transition and, if so, whether and how those connections might

add value to both the young person's well-being and the family's development. Previous commentators (e.g., Benson, 2006; Steinberg, 2008) have noted, with concern, that too many adolescents become detached from both their families and the socializing institutions of community during early adolescence, leaving them with too little guidance, support, and responsibility as they seek to navigate their way to adulthood. By identifying several malleable factors within families and in family-community connections, this study may offer some starting points for identifying ways that families and communities can work together to reduce these patterns to keep more young people on a path for a productive, healthy, and hopeful future.

Limitations and Contributions

This study has several limitations to consider when interpreting its findings. First, the dataset used in these analyses was not developed specifically for these analyses. Measures that might be developed in response to these specific questions (particularly in exploring family-community connections) would more fully address multiple dimensions of community relationships, participation, and services. In addition, because the survey is based on respondent reports, its measures of community-level influences are through the perceptions of the respondents. Though considerable literature takes this approach (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005), it does not deepen understanding of family-community influence independent of family perceptions. Links to independent measures of community factors (e.g., neighborhood SES, crime levels, community-level social capital) would likely yield additional insights into contextual variations that meaningfully interact with family-reported dynamics.

Second, though the study included measures of youth well-being and several individual characteristics (age, gender, race-ethnicity), it did not focus on individual-level measures of young people's and parents' own attitudes, behaviors, personality (much less biological traits), and priorities. In order to more fully operationalize the interactions of youth, families, and communities, we would need a much richer understanding of the individual characteristics of participating young people and their parents.

Third, the study relied on self-reported, cross-sectional data, which introduces a number of limitations, particularly in conclusions that can be drawn (Collins, 2000). Because it is cross-sectional, causality cannot be established among factors. Nor can it offer the kind of developmental perspective that would come from a longitudinal study or cohort perspectives that would be potential through a series benchmark surveys across time. Integrating other data sources (e.g., observational data, laboratory experiments, behavior-genetic designs, and intervention studies) would add considerable richness to the analysis and interpretation, though it would also extend the study's complexity.

Because the study is based on a self-report measure, the results are subject to both the limitations and strengths of these kinds of data, including questions about whether people's perceptions are accurate or if they are responding honestly. However, given the subjective content of many of the salient questions, one can argue that self-report data are appropriate and potentially most salient. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) put it: It is "folly to try and understand a child's action solely from the objective qualities of an environment without learning what those qualities mean for the child in that setting" (pp. 24–25). It is

vital to know the perceptions of youth and parenting adults as central to a relational, process-focused understanding of family and community life.

Finally, the study is limited to a particular subgroup of families: those with youth between the ages of 10 and 15, with limited ability to tease out unique dynamics within subpopulations in particular contexts and cultures. Thus the dataset offers very limited opportunity to examine the time dimension in the bioecological model. (The age variable gives some sense of time across the vital developmental period of early adolescence—though it, too, is cross-sectional.) This study may be suggestive, but it cannot be generalized to families that do not have children in this age group or to families outside of the United States. One must also assume, of course, that overall patterns and associations mask important differences and nuances within subgroups or contexts within the population studied. Finally, though the sample is from a large database and is very diverse, it is not truly a nationally representative or a probability sample in that participating families were not randomly drawn from a list of all U.S. households.

Despite these limitations, the study also contributes in significant ways to understanding the intersections between families and communities during early adolescence. It links family strengths theories with ecological theories, particularly balancing the theoretical work that has emphasized managing risk and social control as primary ways of thinking about the interactions between families and communities (such as Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). It also builds another bridge between theory and research in family development and adolescent development, two disciplines that have been distinct and, at times, at odds. It suggests, for example, that

robust studies of adolescent development, health, and education could enrich their theories and frameworks by taking much more seriously the relational dimensions of family life, not just as a variable to control, but as a salient contributor to youth well-being and development.

Any attempt to operationalize the complex dynamics of a bioecological theory—particularly one within the scope of this study design—will be limited. However, by seeking to approximate some of the interactions and bidirectional influences among youth, families, and communities, this study points the way to more robust and complex studies as well as opportunities to reflect on and experiment with practices that have the potential to tap and strengthen the dynamics that emerged through these analyses.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

One could identify numerous specific potential implications from this study for both research and practice. Several of these have been alluded to throughout the presentation and discussion of findings. This concluding section, however, returns to the broad themes that grew out of the literature review that undergirded the study. First was the distinction between institutional, formal, or structural dimensions and the social, relational, and informal dimensions of both families and communities. Second was the recognition that families simultaneously experience both strengths and challenges, and the strengths are resources for coping with or overcoming the challenges. Third was an assumption that the relationship between families and communities is bidirectional, with each potentially contributing to or influencing the other. Each has important implications for research and practice that were augmented by these findings.

Structure and processes. Research, rhetoric, policy, and practice have paid a disproportionate amount of attention to the structure and form of families and communities, often deemphasizing the relational, affective dimensions of family and community life, which may be more malleable, though difficult to measure and change through policy or top-down mechanisms. This study reaffirmed the importance of these process dimensions. The internal processes of family life (as approximated by the Internal Family Assets) demonstrated consistent power, and the relational dimensions of family-community connections also showed promise, though the associations were not as robust. Without marginalizing the important role that structures, programs, and systems play in family and community life, this study joins the evidence base that emphasizes *relational mechanisms* as foundational, often underdeveloped, pathways for positive influence and growth at both the family and community level (as reflected in social capital research).

In contrast to the dominant evidence-based programs and systems-building approaches, Li and Julian (2012) propose designing interventions in which building and strengthening developmental relationships—“the active ingredient upon which the effectiveness of other program elements depend” (p. 163)—is a primary focus. They contended that “when developmental relationships are prevalent, development is promoted, and when this type of relationship is not available or is diluted, interventions show limited effects” (Li & Julian, 2012, p. 159). Thus, “in program design, the focal question ought to be ‘How does a (practice, program, system, or policy) help to strengthen relationships in the developmental setting?’ ” (p. 163).

This approach resonates with the orientation and findings of the present study. The opportunity and challenge for both research and practice is to further operationalize the dimensions of developmental relationships within and around families, building on the formative work of Li and Julian, and others. What do developmental relationships look like within families, particularly families with young adolescents, when relationships, power, and agency are in significant transition?

Such definitional, measurement and practice efforts will usefully build on Li and Julian's (2012) conceptualization, which proposed four criteria to distinguish *developmental* relationships: attachment, reciprocity (echoing Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on bidirectional relationships), progressive complexity (emphasizing growing agency in development), and balance of power (emphasizing mutual authority and accountability). Li and Julian (2012) described these traits as "interwoven and interdependent aspects of one coherent mechanism of developmental interaction" (p. 158). One can also point to the literature on authoritative parenting to highlight the critical need for both support and challenge (or responsiveness and demandingness) within family relationships (e.g., Steinberg et al., 1991). These and other dimensions are reflected in the Internal Family Assets, and they could be productively examined to conceptualize the nature of developmental relationships within Formal and Informal Community Supports for Families.

Though Li and Julian's framework emphasizes one-to-one developmental relationships, Stears (2011) helpfully articulates four factors that contribute to a relational environment. These include (1) *physical places* where people develop mutual

attachments and loyalties (e.g., public spaces such as parks, landmarks, gathering spots); (2) *time* together to explore commonalities, work through differences, explore interests, and develop bonds; (3) formal and informal *organizations* that mediate relationships and help them endure across time; and (4) *power*, in which people believe what they do together will matter. This final dimension reinforces the salience of family civic engagement as captured in the Family Contributions to Community variable.

A focus on relationships, then, does not replace the need for formal programs and services. Rather, mounting evidence suggests that integrating and emphasizing building developmental relationships as an intentional priority and strategy within and around families has potential not only to have a direct and positive impact on multiple key areas of well-being, but it may also be catalytic to increasing the reach, effectiveness, and impact of the programs and institutions that serve and engage youth and families.

From a research perspective, this shift in emphasis calls for new investment in theory, measurement development, and diverse approaches to documenting the quality, prevalence, trajectories, and impact of developmental relationships in the lives of youth and families. This research must include relationships within families, but a great deal more needs to be learned about other significant relationships in communities for both parents and youth, including peers, teachers, mentors, coaches, and others. Furthermore, important questions remain about whether and how developmental relationships can be built “at scale,” or if seeking to do so inevitably undermines the relational nature of the intervention. In addition, important questions remain unanswered about how relationships work within communities, particularly across socioeconomic, cultural, and religious

differences, recognizing the insights from social capital research that highlight the complexity of “bridging” social capital that creates shared purpose or mutual benefit (Putnam, 2000). Without developing relationships across boundaries of class, power, and privilege, society risks only further marginalizing vulnerable populations (Rank, 2004) and losing the benefits that come from both diversity and cohesion.

Strengths and challenges. There is growing recognition across many disciplines within education and human development of the importance of strength-based approaches with families and youth, including those facing major challenges, risks, and even dysfunction. Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that all families (and youth and parents) experience a dynamic blend of strengths and challenges. This study reinforces the utility of understanding and nurturing strengths in families, both for their general well-being as well as protective factors in the face of adversity and stress. Though some families clearly have and experience more or fewer strengths than others, all families have some strengths that can be identified, tapped, and nurtured in order to strengthen other areas of family and community life.

The analyses of the resilience potential of Internal Family Assets and family-community connections (research question 4) further reinforces the value of addressing both strengths and challenges. Higher levels of Internal Family Assets consistently increased the odds that youth in high-stressed families would experience high levels of well-being. Perhaps more surprising was the power of Family Contributions to Community in increasing the odds of high youth well-being across multiple domains. Though causality cannot be established, the theoretical case is compelling: If families

develop the attitudes and practices of being engaged in contributing to their communities and participating in civic life, they also develop a sense of self-efficacy (not to mention access to other resources) that can help through challenging circumstances.

There is, however, a potentially deeper implication of this finding. Our tendency in society is to view those who face adversity and challenge through a framework of sympathy, need, and charity. And, to be sure, these impulses can be vital to providing families and youth in crisis with instrumental support and resources. However, these findings invite a renewed examination of ways in which efforts to help families facing adversity may productively shift to actively engaging them as leaders and resources, not only to benefit their communities, but also to reinforce their own sense of capacity to take control, make a difference, and advocate to address the injustices they and others face. As Brown (1993) wrote, families themselves must be empowered and equipped to work for “the kind of society that will contribute to the needs of all families and the development of all individuals” (p. 487).

A great deal of progress has been made in research in identifying and measuring strengths in families, youth, and communities, including groundbreaking studies such as Sampson’s (2012) landmark and multi-layered study of Chicago neighborhoods. However, many of the largest population-level studies conducted by federal and state governments continue to focus primarily on demographic trends and the health, educational, and poverty-related variables that have been the focus of public policy. (The annual Kids Count report based on federal and state data exemplifies both the opportunity and challenge in this regard.) Until omnibus measures of child, youth, and family well-

being begin to include and track a broader range of family and youth strengths, it will be difficult for these approaches to become fully integrated into policies, funding streams, and public dialogue that emerge in response to data from these sources. In the meantime, persistent research efforts to document the critical role of strengths through diverse methods and with diverse populations can lay the groundwork for such a shift.

Bidirectional influence and interactions. The final theme in the literature emphasizes the bidirectional influence between families and communities, just as it highlights the mutual influence of family members on each other, including parents and children. Each of the above themes have addressed this dimension. In order to develop a relationship-based approach to family life and to engaging families, it must, by definition, be bidirectional, with each actor influencing the other.

In many cases, this bidirectional orientation will require rethinking assumptions regarding the balance of power and the roles that each person plays, whether it is a shift in parent-child relationships or a rebalancing of the relationship between a program provider and a family. Such explorations will shed light on opportunities, expectations, and challenges for both families and those who seek to engage them. It also has the potential to open the door to innovative practices, models, and learning that will transform whether and how families of young adolescents are engaged in ways that strengthen families and communities, and the young people who are part of each.

The implications of a bidirectional emphasis for research are pronounced, calling for studies that more fully document the persons or contexts that are interacting as well as the nature of those interactions. Furthermore, statistically unpacking the bidirectionality

of these interactions requires specialized methodological approaches beyond the capacities of many researchers. However, even in cases where such rigor is not possible, researchers can and must do more to explore reciprocity in relationships within families and between families and the people and institutions of communities. As long as research models presume a one-way influence (e.g., from parent to child, from teacher to student, from teacher to parent), studies are unlikely to stimulate new approaches and practices that contribute to rebalancing the power and creating mutual relationships that most productively contribute to well-being for youth, families, and communities.

Concluding Comments

The dynamic interaction between families and communities presents a rich terrain for examining human development from a bioecological perspective. Though the field has widely adopted these person-context theories of human development, too often they have been operationalized in ways that are either too complex to be understood or used by practitioners, or they have become reductionistic, assuming a broader context but only examining a few factors or a single context or relationship without attending to the broader context of development. Though practical, such an approach may leave the impression that a single variable or influence or intervention will single-handedly change trajectories our outcomes.

This reductionistic approach also risks being reduced to technical rather than adaptive or transformative solutions. In some senses, this tension was at the core of Brown's critique of home economics in the 1970s and 1980s. She challenged the profession not to be defined by the specific content or tasks (such as cooking), but to be

guided by the broader set of questions focused on enabling families not only to be strong crucibles for individual development, but also to contribute to the health of society (Brown, 1993). Furthermore, she noted that the profession claimed to prevent family problems rather than treat them, which led to “technical information to prevent such problems as malnutrition, poor housing, poor management of resources, or child-rearing problems” (p. 486). However, the technical solutions were inadequate because the challenges facing families extended beyond the family to the community.

Though modest, this study has sought to offer a counterbalance by emphasizing the relationships among multiple factors in the ecology of families with young adolescents. In doing so, it has offered new perspectives on the dynamics of family-community connections during this important phase of adolescent development. It is hoped that the results will contribute to new dialogue and action aimed at strengthening families, youth, and communities by recognizing and enhancing their interdependence, strengths, and capacities as resources not only for their own well-being, but for building a more just, equitable, and thriving society for all children, youth, and families.

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Appendix 1

Search Institute's Framework of 40 Developmental Assets

Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. This framework focuses on adolescents in grades 6 to 12. Developmentally responsive frameworks have also been developed for younger children and for emerging adults. (See Benson, 2006; Benson, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Leffert, 2011; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011; Scales & Leffert, 2004).

EXTERNAL ASSETS

Support

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 parent(s) advice and counsel.
3. **Other adult relationships**—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
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.

Empowerment

7. **Community values youth**—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
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.

Boundaries and Expectations

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.
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.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative activities**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth programs**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.
19. **Religious community**—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at home**—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do,” two or fewer nights per week.

INTERNAL ASSETS

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement motivation**—Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. **School engagement**—Young person is actively engaged in 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.

Positive Values

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.
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.

Social Competencies

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.
35. **Resistance skills**—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
36. **Peaceful conflict resolution**—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

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 a 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.

Appendix 2

Scales and Indexes: Items and Descriptive Data

Table A1

Internal Family Assets (IFA) Scale

Constructs	Survey Items	Range	M	SD
Nurturing Relationships	1. <i>When you talk with your [son/daughter], how often do you do each of the following? Show respect.</i>	1-5	4.37	.69
	2. <i>When you spend time with your [child], how often does [she/he] do each of the following? Express physical affection (e.g., giving a hug, a kiss, or putting an arm around you).</i>	1-5	4.02	1.05
	3. <i>When you spend time with your spouse or partner, how often does he or she do each of the following? Show or tell you that he or she loves you.</i>	1-5	4.02	1.02
	4. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your family? I can be myself in my family.</i>	1-4	3.51	.63
	5. <i>How often does your [child] do the following to support your talents, interests or hobbies? Talk with me about my talents, interests or hobbies.</i>	1-5	3.67	1.10
Youth Report	6. <i>When you talk with your parent(s), how often do you do each of the following? Show respect.</i>	1-5	3.97	.84
	7. <i>When you spend time with your parent(s), how often do they do each of the following? Express physical affection (e.g., giving a hug, a kiss, or putting an arm around you).</i>	1-5	4.08	.97
	8. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your family? I can be myself in my family.</i>	1-4	3.33	.66
	9. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your family? Members of our family feel comfortable telling each other how we feel.</i>	1-4	3.13	.69
	10. <i>How often do your parent(s) do the following to support your talents, interests or hobbies? Talk with me about my talents, interests or hobbies.</i>	1-5	4.27	.93

Constructs		Survey Items	Range	M	SD
Establishing Routines	<i>Parent Report</i>	11. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following about your own family's traditions? Traditions are important in my family.</i>	1-4	3.39	.69
		12. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following about your own family's traditions? Family traditions make me feel closer to my family.</i>	1-4	2.80	.92
		13. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your [son/daughter]? I never know how [my son/daughter] will act from one day to the next. [Reverse]</i>	1-4	2.80	.92
	<i>Youth Report</i>	14. <i>In a typical week, about how many days do you do the following with at least one of your parent(s)? Eat meals together.</i>	0-4	3.32	.97
		15. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following about your own family's traditions? Traditions are important in my family.</i>	1-4	3.22	.74
		16. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following about your own family's traditions? Family traditions make me feel closer to my family.</i>	1-4	3.27	.70
		17. <i>Overall, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parent(s)? I never know how my parent(s) will act from one day to the next. [Reverse]</i>	1-4	2.89	.91
Maintaining Expectations	<i>Parent Report</i>	18. <i>How comfortable do you feel talking about the following topics with your [child]? Sex.</i>	1-4	3.19	.84
		19. <i>I enforce limits for my [son/daughter] on: How much time s/he can talk or text on the phone.</i>	1-4	2.99	.79
		20. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your family? In my family, we all do our part to help get things done.</i>	1-4	3.24	.71
		21. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your [child]? I can count on her/him to keep promises s/he makes.</i>	1-4	3.14	.68

Constructs	Survey Items	Range	M	SD
<i>Youth Report</i>	22. <i>How comfortable do you feel talking about the following topics with at least one of your parents? Sex.</i>	1-4	2.60	.99
	23. <i>My parent(s) set limits for me on: How much time I can talk or text on the phone.</i>	1-4	2.76	.87
	24. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your family? In my family, we all do our part to help get things done.</i>	1-4	3.10	.67
	25. <i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parent(s)? I can count on my parent(s) to keep promises they make.</i>	1-4	3.28	.65
Adapting to Challenges	<i>Parent Report</i> 26. <i>How true is each of the following for you? I do a good job managing my family, work, and social life.</i>	1-4	3.16	.75
	27. <i>When your family faces a problem or challenge, how often do you as a family do each of the following? Work together with other family members to solve the problem.</i>	1-4	2.93	.90
	28. <i>When your family faces a problem or challenge, how often do you as a family do each of the following? Have confidence that we would get through it together.</i>	1-4	3.43	.73
<i>Youth Report</i>	29. <i>How true is each of the following for you? I do a good job managing my family, school, and social life.</i>	1-4	3.05	.76
	30. <i>When your family faces a problem or challenge, how often do you as a family do each of the following? Work together with other family members to solve the problem.</i>	1-4	2.72	.88
	31. <i>When your family faces a problem or challenge, how often do you as a family do each of the following? Have confidence that we would get through it together.</i>	1-4	3.21	.77

Table A2

Formal Community Supports for Families (FCSF) Scale

Constructs		Survey Items	M	SD	
Enriching Activities	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>In a typical week, about how many hours do you spend doing the following? (Recoded: 1 ≥ 1 hours; 0 = 0 hours)</i>			
		1. Participating in recreational clubs, teams, or organizations.	.365	.481	
		2. Performing or practicing art, music, or drama.	.270	.444	
			3. Participating in programs, groups, or services at a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious/spiritual place.	.542	.498
	<i>Youth Report</i>	<i>In a typical week, about how many hours do you spend doing the following?</i>			
		4. Participating in recreational clubs, teams, or organizations.	.622	.485	
5. Performing or practicing art, music, or drama.		.533	.499		
		6. Participating in programs, groups, or services at a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious/spiritual place.	.824	.836	
Supportive Resources	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>To what extent has each of the following helped to strengthen your family? (Recoded: 1 = helped somewhat or a lot; 0 = helped a little or not at all)</i>			
		7. Local schools.	.419	.493	
		8. Church, synagogue, mosque, or other spiritual/religious places.	.523	.450	
		9. Websites or social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter).	.220	.414	
		10. Our places of employment.	.272	.445	
		11. A doctor or other health care provider.	.316	.465	
		12. A counselor or social worker.	.205	.404	
		13. The police.	.146	.353	
		14. Other organizations in our local community (e.g., a YMCA).	.260	.439	

Table A3

Informal Community Supports for Families (ICSF) Scale

Constructs		Survey Items	M	SD
Neighborhood Cohesion	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>How true is each of the following for you? (Continuous: not at all true; somewhat true; mostly true; completely true)</i>		
		1. I have some good friends in the neighborhood I live in.	2.5	1.09
		2. I have good friends who support me as a parent.	3.11	.93
		3. When my [son/daughter] is out in my neighborhood, I know our neighbors are looking after him/her.	2.55	1.02
		4. When I see children out in my neighborhood, I keep an eye on them to make sure they are safe.	3.11	.89
	<i>Youth Report</i>	<i>How true is each of the following for you?</i>		
		5. I have some good friends in the neighborhood I live in.	2.62	1.08
		6. My parent(s) know my friends' parent(s).	2.98	.90
7. When I am out in my neighborhood, I know the neighbors are looking after me.		2.42	1.00	
	8. There are adults (other than my family) in my neighborhood who know me well and care about me.	2.58	1.05	
Relationships with Others	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>How close or connected do you feel to each of the following? (Continuous: not close at all; somewhat close; close; very close)</i>		
		9. Your [son/daughter]'s friends.	2.58	.927
		10. Your [son/daughter]'s teachers.	2.37	1.01
		11. Your [son/daughter]'s coaches or group leaders.	2.44	.98
		12. Your [son/daughter]'s mentors.	2.59	.95
		13. Your neighbors.	2.28	.99
	<i>Youth Report</i>	<i>How close or connected do you feel to each of the following? (Continuous: not close at all; somewhat close; close; very close)</i>		
		14. Your friends.	3.39	.70
		15. Your teachers.	2.64	.89
		16. Your coaches or group leaders.	2.59	.86
	17. Your mentor(s).	2.74	.88	
	18. Your neighbors.	2.16	.96	

Table A4

Family Contributions to Community (FCC) Scale

Constructs		Survey Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Civic Activities	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Continuous: SD, D, A, SD)</i>		
		1. I spend time on projects with other people to help the community.	2.53	.83
		2. I think it is important to change things that are unfair in society.	3.15	.59
		3. I have done things to help people in my neighborhood.	2.95	.70
		4. I believe that I can make a difference in my community.	2.97	.65
		5. My [son/daughter] suggests things we can do to help others in our neighborhood or community.	2.55	.80
		6. My family makes an effort to help the environment (e. g., recycling, picking up trash in public places, etc.).	3.16	.69
	<i>Youth Report</i>	<i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Continuous: SD, D, A, SD)</i>		
		7. I spend time on projects with other people to help the community.	2.55	.81
		8. I think it is important to change things that are unfair in society.	3.11	.63
		9. I have done things to help people in my neighborhood.	2.78	.75
		10. I believe that I can make a difference in my community.	2.91	.69
		11. I suggest to my parent(s) things we can do to help others in our neighborhood or community.	2.57	.79
		12. My family makes an effort to help the environment (e. g., recycling, picking up trash in public places, etc.).	3.12	.71

Constructs		Survey Items	M	SD
Social Responsibility	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Continuous: SD, D, A, SD)</i>		
		13. It is very important that neighbors look out for each other.	3.30	.60
		14. I am responsible for making my community a better place.	2.90	.69
		15. It is my responsibility to do something when I see others being treated unfairly.	3.10	.60
	<i>Youth Report</i>	<i>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Continuous: SD, D, A, SD)</i>		
		16. It is very important that students look out for each other at school.	3.21	.58
17. I am responsible for making my community a better place.		2.75	.73	
	18. It is my responsibility to do something when I see others being treated unfairly.	3.04	.64	
Family Volunteering	<i>Parent Report</i>	19. In a typical month, about how many times do two or more members of your immediate family spend together helping other people in your community through a school, church or synagogue, or some other place? (Continuous: 0; 1-2; 3-4; 5+)	2.02	.97
Political Activity	<i>Parent Report</i>	<i>How often do you do each of the following? (Continuous: never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often)</i>		
		20. Vote in public elections.	3.94	1.32
		21. Let others know you support a candidate for elected office.	2.69	1.33
		22. Give money to a political candidate or cause.	1.85	1.04
		23. Refuse to buy products/services that use unethical business practices.	2.95	1.24

Table A5

The Stressful Life Events (SLE) Index

	<i>Intensity (I)¹</i>	<i>Recency (R)²</i>	<i>Total Possible Points³</i>
<i>Have any of the following happened to you or another adult with responsibility for raising your [son/daughter]?</i>			
1. Experienced a separation or divorce.	3	0-3	9
2. Lost a job or been unemployed.	2	0-3	6
3. Had a serious accident or illness.	2	0-3	6
4. Dealing with a disability/handicap.	2	0-3	6
5. Being away for an extended period of time due to a military deployment.	2	0-3	6
<i>Has your family experienced any of the following situations?</i>			
6. A family member has been the victim of a crime.	1	0-3	3
7. A family member has been arrested or imprisoned for a crime.	1	0-3	3
8. A family member has struggled with abuse or alcohol or drugs.	2	0-3	6
9. A natural disaster has damaged or destroyed our home or other property.	1	0-3	3
<i>Has your [son/daughter] experienced the death of any of the following?</i>			
10. A parent or other adult responsibility for raising [son/daughter].	5	0-3	15
11. A brother or sister.	2	0-3	6
12. A grandparent or other close relative.	1	0-3	3
13. A friend their own age.	1	0-3	3
Total Possible Range			0 – 75⁴

Notes: Only parent-reported items were used in these measures.

¹Intensity is theoretical weighting (from 1, low, to 5, high) of the stress likely associated with each event.

²Recency captures how recently the event occurred, with the assumption that the most recent events are the most salient. 0 = never; 1 = more than 2 years ago; 2 = Between two years and six months ago; and 3 = in the past six months.

³The total possible points for each item is calculated by multiplying intensity by recency (I x R).

⁴The total score for the SLE index is the sum of points across the 13 items.

Table A6

*Indicators of Youth Well-Being**(Youth report items only)*

Constructs	Survey Items	M	SD	α
School Engagement	<i>Scale</i>	3.27	.64	.88
	<i>Items</i>	<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following? (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree)</i>		
	1.	At school I try as hard as I can to do my best work.	3.31	.69
	2.	I almost always come to classes with my homework finished.	3.31	.74
	3.	I almost always work up to my ability in school.	3.20	.72
Health Behaviors	<i>Scale</i>	3.27	.64	.69
	<i>Items</i>	<i>In a typical week, about how many days do you do each of the following? (0; 1; 2-3; 4-5; 6-7)</i>		
	1.	Sleep at least 8 hours during the night.	4.47	.85
	2.	Engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity.	3.55	1.20
	3.	Eat fruits and vegetables.	4.03	1.03
	4.	Eat whole grains (such as cereal, whole wheat bread).	3.83	1.23
	5.	Drink milk, soy milk, or eat a dairy product such as cheese (not including ice cream).	4.18	1.09
6.	Take time to relax.	4.13	1.02	
Social competencies	<i>Scale</i>	3.82	.68	.79
	<i>Items</i>	<i>How often do the following describe you? (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often)</i>		
	1.	I build friendships with other people.	3.89	.85
	2.	I resolve conflicts without anyone getting hurt.	3.61	.90
	3.	I accept people who are different from me.	4.07	.80
	4.	I am able to understand the needs and feelings of others.	3.71	.87
Personal Responsibility	<i>Index</i>	Sum score		
	<i>Items</i>	<i>Which of the following are true for you? Please select all that apply. (yes, no)</i>		
	1.	I usually do what I am supposed to do.	.77	.42

Constructs	Survey Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
	2. I almost always take responsibility for my actions, even if it gets me in trouble.	.48	.50	
	3. I almost always follow the rules, even if no one is watching.	.61	.49	
Caring	<i>Scale</i>	3.93	.73	.85
	<i>Items</i> <i>How often do the following describe you? (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often)</i>			
	1. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I want to help them.	3.83	.85	
	2. It bothers me when bad things happen to any person.	3.95	.83	
	3. When I see another person who is hurt or upset, I feel sorry for them.	4.02	.81	
Self-Regulation	<i>Index</i> Sum score			
	<i>Items</i> <i>Which of the following are true for you? Please select all that apply. (yes, no)</i>			
	1. When I get upset, I am usually able to calm myself down.	.53	.50	
	2. I almost always have control over my actions.	.52	.50	
	3. If I am working on a task that is really boring, I usually quit. [Reverse]	.66	.47	
	4. My feelings often feel like they are outside of my control. [Reverse]	.79	.41	

Table A7
Demographic Covariates

Covariate	Survey Items	M	SD	Freq. (%)
Youth Gender ¹	Are you a50	.50	
	Boy			50
	Girl			50
Youth Age ¹	How old are you?	12.5	1.7	
	10			17
	11			16
	12			17
	13			17
	14			17
	15			16
Youth Race-Ethnicity ¹	White/Other			60
	Black/African American			14
	Hispanic			15
	Asian/Pacific Islander			11
Youth lives in 2+ households ¹	How many households do you live in during the year? A household is a place you consider to be "your home." (1, 2 or more)	.17	.38	
	1 household			83
	2 or more households			17
Annual Household Income ²	Which of the following income categories best describes your total 2010 household income after taxes? (Range 1-11)	5.25	2.08	
	< \$25,000			10
	\$25,000 — \$49,999			24
	\$50,000 — \$99,999			42
	\$100,000 — \$149,999			17
	> \$150,000			7
Home Ownership ²	Thinking about your current home, do you rent or own?	.24	.43	
	Rent			24
	Own			76
Years in Current Home ²	About how long have you lived in your current residence? (Range 1-7)	4.7	2.03	
	Less than 2 years			19
	3-6 years			28
	7-10 years			21
	11 or more years			33

Covariate	Survey Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Freq. (%)
Community Size ²	Which of the following best describes where you live?	3.2	1.3	
	In a small town or rural area (less than 2,500 people)			15
	In a town (2,500 to 9,999 people)			16
	In a small city (10,000 to 49,999 people)			25
	In a medium-sized city (50,000 to 250,000 people)			23
	In a large city (more than 250,000 people)			21

¹ Youth report ² Parent report