
Positive Adaptation, Resilience and the Developmental Assets Framework

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Advances in our understanding of adaptation are rooted in the seminal work of Garmezy, Rutter, Werner, and others who “discovered” a not inconsiderable proportion of children who, thought to be at risk for current and future maladaptation, showed few or no signs of pathology and often exhibited high levels of competence (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982). Investigating what made a difference in this group of children’s lives led at first to descriptions of correlates of positive development among children living in high-risk contexts and has progressed to complex process models allowing for multiple causal effects across multiple ecologies (Masten, 1999a). Two of the great contributions from this line of work have focused on elucidating the mechanisms thought to underlie both adaptive and maladaptive developmental trajectories under conditions of adversity, as well as advancing the position that studies of positive adaptation and competence should be studied alongside the more dominant models of risk, pathology, and treatment (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 1979; Masten, 2001). These advancements in turn have been instrumental in current

intervention and prevention practices (Rolf & Johnson, 1999).

This attention to the broad array of factors that facilitate healthy youth development has fueled a relatively new set of models focusing on the strengths, resources, and positive experiences of youths and of their communities (Benson & Pittman, 2001). Under the broader rubric of positive youth development, and with the knowledge gained from decades of research on resilience and risk and protective factors, these models seek new ways of conceptualizing, measuring, and promoting optimal outcomes for youth (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 2001; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001).

One of these models is Search Institute’s developmental assets framework. Over the past 20 years, Search Institute has been a leading force in theoretical and empirical work examining the relations among developmental resources, optimal development, and community mobilization (Benson, 2003; Brown, 2008; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2003), with the primary goal of establishing an interdisciplinary and applied line of inquiry exploring the viability and developmental significance of the “informal, natural, and nonprogrammatic capacity of community” (Benson & Saito, 2001, p. 146).

In this chapter we describe the developmental assets framework and its relation to resilience models by addressing three dimensions salient to both approaches: (1) the taxonomy of factors thought to promote positive development and

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adaptation; (2) the criteria used to determine or define positive developmental outcomes; and (3) strategies and mechanisms for enhancing the development of youth. In the process, we highlight points of convergence and distinction from resilience models along these three dimensions. Given that resilience is not a homogeneous arena of research, with differences in models, terminology, and assumptions, we will draw on broad themes to provide the context for the description of the developmental assets model.

Facilitators of Positive Development: The Developmental Assets Framework

The developmental assets framework is part of the rapidly developing field of positive youth development (PYD). PYD is the umbrella term for a number of approaches that, by and large, share the following characteristics (see also Benson et al., 2006; Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2003):

- *A strength-based approach to development.* An emphasis on elements that facilitates optimal (thriving) development rather than factors associated with problematic behavior. The converse of strength-based models is the *risk or deficit-model*, where the emphasis is on problem behaviors and how to reduce or prevent them.
- *Multiple agents across multiple sectors.* Children develop in families, schools, neighborhoods, and in the context of multiple relationships. Any model that purports to describe development must reflect the various settings in which development proceeds.
- *Focus on relationships.* Positive development as a function of intentional and meaningful relationships with youth—getting to know them, asking their opinions, acknowledging that youth have a voice and something to contribute.
- *Facilitating positive development is an everyday, commonplace occurrence.* Promoting youth development is not solely the province of professionals or practitioners; everyone in a

community has a role and a responsibility in the lives of youth.

Search Institute's attempt at capturing these four elements lies in our work on how young people experience various "developmental assets." Developmental assets are defined as a set of interrelated experiences, relationships, skills, and values that are known to enhance a broad range of youth outcomes and are assumed to operate similarly for all youth (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Scales & Leffert, 2004). We have identified 40 of these assets, which reflect broad conceptualizations about strength-based, positive child and youth development that are rooted in explications of key developmental socialization processes of connection, support, regulation, autonomy, and competencies (Barber & Olsen, 1997; Benson, Scales, & Mannes, 2003; Scales & Leffert, 2004).

These developmental processes, however, need to be understood in light of the multiple and interactive influences on child well-being. The asset framework borrows heavily from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion that successful development is a function of the individual in constant transaction with multiple supportive ecologies. Additionally, the work of Jessor (1993) and Sameroff, Seifer, and Bartko (1997) on the "shared causation" and cumulative nature of risk and protective factors have informed the development and interpretation of developmental assets. Thus, one of the main purposes of the asset framework is to identify correlates and predictors of short- and long-term positive outcomes in order to guide theory and research on developmental strengths. Central to these efforts is an examination of interactive and richly layered community effects on youth development. Like various lists of protective factors (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1993), the assets framework identifies both external and internal qualities (see Table 25.1). The external assets (i.e., health-promoting features of the environment) are grouped into four categories: (1) support; (2) empowerment; (3) boundaries and expectations; and (4) constructive use of time. The internal

Table 25.1 Search Institute's developmental assets framework

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 advice and counsel from parents
		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
		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 1 h or more per week
		10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood
Internal assets	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
		17. Creative activities—Young person spends 3 or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts
		18. Youth programs—Young person spends 3 or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community
		19. Religious community—Young person spends 1 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 3 or more hours per week
		26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people
		27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty
		28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs
		29. Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy"
		30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility
Internal assets	Positive values	31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs

(continued)

Table 25.1 (continued)

Internal assets	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

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assets (i.e., competencies and skills that young people use to guide their behavior) are placed in four categories as well: (1) commitment to learning; (2) positive values; (3) social competencies; and (4) positive identity. Search Institute's studies collectively involving more than three million 6th–12th graders (Benson, 2006; Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999; Leffert et al., 1998; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000), as well as our extensive synthesis of empirical studies on development in adolescence (Scales & Leffert, 2004), middle childhood (Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004), and early childhood (VanderVen, 2008) have yielded numerous positive conclusions about the contribution of developmental assets to students' avoidance of high-risk behaviors and measures of thriving, including helping others, overcoming adversity, and school success, as well as hopeful purpose and positive emotionality (Benson & Scales 2009a, 2009b).

Though important to our conceptual and empirical work on positive development, this framework was also designed with highly applied objectives as well. Thus, a second purpose of the asset model is to create an easily accessible language around positive development that can act as a catalyst for community mobilization and action on behalf of its youth. The significance of this facet cannot be overstated. Developmental assets were specifically chosen to reflect the kinds of relationships, environments, norms, and competencies over which people in a community have some degree of control (Benson, Scales, & Mannes, 2003). As Scales and Leffert (1999) put it: although not everyone can offer youth a well-designed experience that builds their planning and decision-making skills, everyone can talk with adolescents, keep an eye on them when their parents are not around, protect them, and give them help when they need it. Everyone can help make youth feel valued and supported (p. 13).

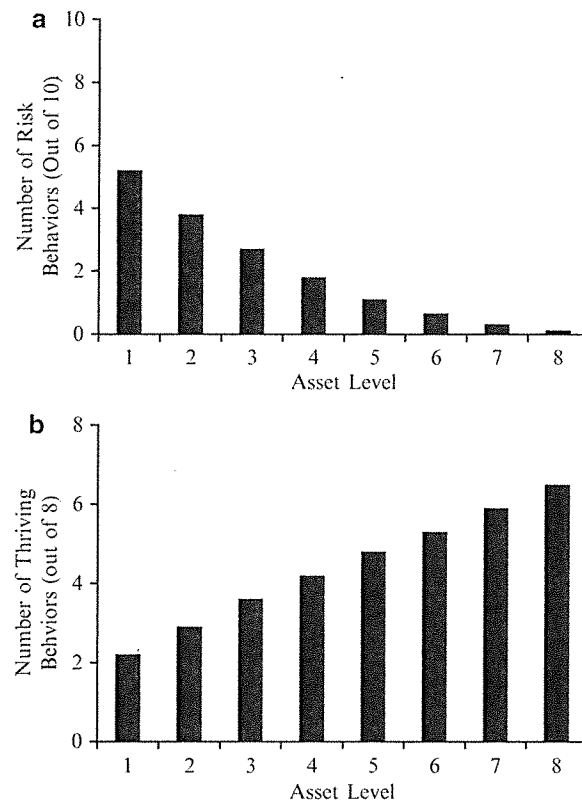
Much of the research and applied fieldwork conducted at Search Institute addresses the significance of these kinds of experiences for youth, including how to mobilize individuals within communities to begin engaging in these kinds of intentional relationships with youth.

The Relation of Developmental Assets to Outcomes

The fundamental assumption of the asset model is that the more positive experiences youth possess, the greater the likelihood they will succeed developmentally. Studies from Search Institute and others consistently show that youth who report relatively more assets are less likely to engage in problematic risk behavior patterns and more likely to endorse engaging in positive, socially constructive behaviors (Benson & Scales, 2009b; Scales et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002). For example, 50% of youth with 0–10 assets report engaging in a pattern of problematic alcohol use, compared to only 3% of youth with 31–40 assets, a 17-fold risk ratio. Conversely, 89% of youth with 31–40 assets report that they **value and affirm cultural diversity**, while only 34% of youth with 0–10 assets report this. Similarly, 32% of asset-depleted youth report engaging in early sexual intercourse, vs. only 3% for asset-rich youth, and only 8% of asset-depleted youth report getting mostly. As in school, compared with 49% of asset-rich youth (Search Institute, 2001). Multivariate analyses investigating the cumulative effect of assets indicate that the total number of assets explains 57% of the variance in a composite index of risk behaviors (Leffert et al., 1998), and between 47 and 54% of the variance in a composite index of positive behaviors (Scales et al., 2000), all over and above demographic variables such as maternal education, grade, and gender. Similar cumulative effects are found when the sample is broken down by race/ethnicity and SES levels (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

Another way of showing this effect is to create a cumulative asset gradient. Figure 25.1 depicts the mean number of high-risk behavior patterns (e.g., problematic alcohol use, antisocial behavior) and thriving outcomes (e.g., values diversity, succeeds in school, exhibits leadership; see next section below) plotted as a function of the number of assets experienced by youth. These linear functions mirror the more oft-cited cumulative risk graph, wherein *risk* factors are plotted along the *jc*-axis. The concept of cumulative risk grew

Fig 25.1 Cumulative asset gradient—number of risk behaviors (a) and thriving behaviors (b) reported by youth as a function of cumulative assets (each asset point is in increments of 5 assets; 1=0–5 assets, 2=6–10 assets, etc.). Unpublished Search Institute data



out of two consistent findings: risk factors often co-occur, and that it is the accumulation of many risk factors, not just one, that thwarts developmental progress (Belsky & Fearon, 2002; Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). Few factors moderate this linear function, as it has been documented across age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES) level, and cross-culturally (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). What these findings from cumulative risk effects suggest is that the power of assets lies in the cumulative pile-up of effects across multiple contexts. A corollary to this echoes the admonition from resilience researchers when discussing risk factors: there is unlikely to be one asset or set of assets that is the “most important” for enhancing development. Attempts at identifying the “magic bullet” of assets violates the assumption of the multifinality of positive development and are unlikely to yield fruitful results (Masten, 1999b; Scales & Leffert, 2004).

Although the majority of studies show point-in-time connections between assets and positive youth outcomes, some also demonstrate the link between

assets at one point in time and outcomes one or more years later. Both the amount of an asset (or the number of assets if multiple assets are studied) and specific clusters of assets are related to outcomes over time. For example, Scales and Roehlkepartain (2003; Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, & van Dulmen, 2006) found that each increase in the level of assets young people reported (from 0–10, to 11–20, 21–30, and 31–40 assets) in 1998, when the sample was in seventh through ninth grades, was associated with a significantly higher grade point average (GPA) 3 years later, when the sample was in the 10th–12th grades; this finding also held when Time 1 GPA was controlled. This is significant because GPA tends to be very stable over time, such that one’s previous grades are by far, in all studies, the single best predictor of one’s future grades. Moreover, assets in one year are strongly related to grades that same year. These results support the hypothesis that early asset levels provide significant independent contribution to later academic performance. Benson & Scales (2009b) also found

that higher asset levels in middle school predicted lower levels of violent and antisocial behavior 3 years later in high school. In a study of whether changes in assets are related to changes in outcome, Taylor and his colleagues (2002) measured assets and positive functioning a year apart for youth involved in gang activity and a control group of youth involved in a community-based organization (CBO). Among the results reported was that for both gang- and CBO-involved youth, changes in positive functioning covaried positively with increases in assets over the year interval.

Developmental Assets and Resilience Constructs

Even though the fundamental distinction between developmental assets and protective factors would seem to be that protective factors are, by definition, operative only under the context of risk (Rutter, 2000), while assets are presumed to be operative regardless of any presumed moderator (e.g., risk/adversity, gender, SES, etc.), attempts at greater terminological clarity of resilience constructs have blurred this distinction (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Thus, terms like “protective-stabilizing” and “vulnerability” are added to the resilience lexicon in order to lend greater precision to the putative interactions among risk, moderating attributes, and competence outcomes (Luthar et al., 2000). Using these more differentiated constructs, developmental assets seem to be most closely related to *protective factors* (Luthar et al., 2000), *promotive factors* (Sameroff, 1999), or *assets* (Masten & Reed, 2002). The core element of all of these constructs is a direct positive influence on development regardless of risk status. Though it is likely that some of the developmental assets interact with or moderate risk effects (i.e., should really be characterized as protective-enhancement or protective-stabilizing factors), we do not posit the kinds of complex interactions across assets and risk as outlined by some resilience researchers, for at least two reasons.

First, the preponderance of research on each of these assets shows, in general, similar predictive utility across different groups of youth (Benson et al., 2003; Scales & Leffert, 2004).

Second, our work with communities indicates that individual adults are more likely to be engaged and active in intentional activities if the focus is shifted from vulnerable youth and adolescents to all children and adolescents. Focusing on at-risk and vulnerable youth seems to have the unfortunate effect of strengthening the belief that youth development is the responsibility of the professional sector (clinicians, program implementers, social workers), which has the concomitant effect of fostering civic disengagement (Benson et al., 1998). Of course, this does not preclude examinations of how assets interact with risk-only factors, such as ADHD or poverty (Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 1993). Studies investigating the moderating effects of developmental assets, both with other assets as well as with risk factors, are currently under way. Furthermore, it seems that most of the developmental assets fall into what Sameroff (1999) and Rutter (2000) call dimensional factors, and what Stouthamer-Loeber and her colleagues (1993) call protective plus risk effects. These are factors that, depending on the spectrum one chooses to emphasize, can either be a risk or a protective factor. For example, one of our assets is *family support*, which is defined in a way that emphasizes the positive end of the construct. However, other researchers can use the same global construct (a facet of family functioning) and focus on the negative pole (lack of family support; high degree of family conflict) and call this a risk factor. This does not appear to be all that problematic, given that one's theoretical model should dictate how one chooses to define relevant constructs (so long as the dimensionality of the construct is not forgotten), but also since the effect seems to be the same whether one is increasing protective factors or reducing risk factors (Sameroff, Bartko, Baldwin, Baldwin, & Seifer, 1999).

Beyond Competence to Thriving

The second dimension relevant to both assets and resilience models refers to how each model operationalizes competence or positive development. Masten and Curtis (2000), using the concept of stage-salient tasks, define competence as a track

record of “adaptive success in the developmental tasks expected of individuals of a given age in a particular cultural and historical context” (p. 533). Other resilience researchers define competence as the absence of psychopathology or problems, while still others incorporate both stage-salient tasks and absence of symptoms to determine their outcome criteria (Masten, 2001). Luthar et al. (2000) attempt to refine the criteria and standards used to determine competence by positing that the selection of outcomes should be dictated by the type and severity of stress, and by a conceptual link between the presenting risk factors and the outcome. They suggest that perhaps the outcome criterion be excellent or superior functioning in a theoretically related domain when risk levels are low or moderate. This criterion for determining an outcome—excellent or optimal functioning—comes closer to Search Institute’s work on defining what it means to *thrive* developmentally (Benson & Scales 2009a, 2009b; Scales & Benson, 2005), but Benson and Scales and other scholars (see Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002) go farther, suggesting that thriving must reflect not just on optimal development of the person but mutually enhancing growth of the person and their *contexts*.

Scholars and practitioners are beginning to focus more on what defines not just normal or adequate development, but optimally successful development, or thriving. A new science of “positive psychology” is emerging that focuses on human happiness, optimism, and fulfillment rather than on the pathology and deficits that have driven psychology for the past 50 years (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The integration of the positive aspects of Erikson’s life cycle framework and the core principles of positive psychology, resilience, positive youth development, and the developmental assets framework together may provide an even more comprehensive canvas on which the strength-based child and adolescent research and practice of the coming decades unfolds.

A developmental systems focus on such constructs of human thriving echoes the notions of maximum personal fulfillment reflected in Maslow’s theory of self-actualization. However, conceptualizations of thriving must give greater

emphasis to this construct not only as an element of personal actualization, but also as inextricably bound with the moral ethos of the larger community in which persons live and to which, even as young people, they are essential contributors. In other words, when young people thrive, they are not simply doing well as individuals; they also are connected and contributing in meaningful ways to the common good that is realized through the groups, neighborhoods, communities, and societies to which they belong (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002).¹

Differences Between Developmental Assets and Thriving Indicators

The concept of thriving encompasses not only the relative absence of pathology, but also more explicit indicators of healthy and even optimal development. There is some conceptual similarity between the notion of developmental assets and that of thriving indicators, in that both concepts focus on the presence of strengths in young people’s lives. However, there are some important differences between these concepts.

Most important, thriving signifies an optimal developmental process (and outcomes), not just adequate, competent functioning. As such, thriving indicators are unipolar constructs. That is, the absence of thriving in the sense defined here is not necessarily negative. The individual may still be experiencing adequate development and achieving basic competency across various outcomes. In contrast, the relative absence or lower levels of developmental assets, as reflected in the research findings to date, seems associated with poorer developmental outcomes among the adolescents (Benson et al., 1999).

¹Specifically, thriving may be understood as a developmental process of recursive cause and effect engagement with one’s ecology *over* time that repeatedly results in optimal outcomes as viewed at any *one* point in time. Thriving in this sense reflects processes that are unique to or more pronounced in particular stages of development, such as the successful navigation of rapidly expanding peer relationships in middle childhood, or the significant cognitive maturation in early adolescence that can radically affect, for better or worse, young people’s construction of supportive social environments.

Second, assets are conceptualized as *building blocks* of success, whereas thriving indicators are seen as *signs or markers* of success. In explanatory terms, developmental assets experienced cumulatively over time are considered predictors of or contributors to developmentally optimal outcomes that are represented by thriving indicators. If the assets are conceptualized as the “building blocks” of success, the question can then be raised, building toward what? The thriving indicators represent the “what” that the assets are helping young people build toward. Experiencing the assets defines conditions under which the attainment of those thriving outcomes is made more likely. To some extent, “thriving” can only be judged subjectively, by the individual him- or herself. For example, who can say that people are not thriving who are happy, emotionally open, and socially generous, but not as rich or powerful as they could have been, because they exercised their autonomy to make a choice not to pursue such paths? Perhaps they did so precisely because the pursuit of riches and power would have conflicted with other “well-being outcomes” they valued even more, such as a wonderful marriage, lots of time with their own kids, and other people’s kids, or the in-depth pursuits of hobbies or volunteering.

Nevertheless, thriving suggests not only internal satisfaction, but also demonstrable excellence or substantive positive growth in a dimension of life. This may be measured either by comparison to others or by comparison to where one was before on that “outcome.” Without this criterion as a form of one’s “personal best,” the concept of thriving becomes elitist. Instead, with the dual notion of thriving signifying demonstrable excellence or substantive positive growth, everyone is capable of thriving. In addition, some people are more capable of thriving by being “better” than others in given areas.

Thriving Indicators for Adolescents

Compared to the voluminous literature on adolescent risk-taking and negative behaviors, or the substantial literature on adequate development or competence, there is a relative paucity of research

around what constitutes thriving in adolescence. The orientation of both the public and researchers toward young people is predominantly toward naming and reducing negative behavior, or, at best, how to promote adequate or competent functioning among young people (Benson, 2006; Scales, 2001; Scales et al., 2003). The territory of thriving is beginning to be discussed, but until recently, has been largely uncharted. Thus, public and scientific consensus has been more difficult to achieve on what constitutes adolescent “thriving” than it has been to agree about the constellation of risk behaviors that is desirable to reduce in adolescence.²

Undoubtedly, that relative difficulty also is partly due to notions of “thriving” being more rooted in moral worldviews and more culturally contextualized than are ideas about risk (Scales & Benson, 2005). For example, youth involvement in violence or cigarette smoking is plainly harmful to them and can kill them. These effects are appreciable regardless of one’s cultural background or moral orientation. But showing leadership ability or being individually successful in other ways may not be so highly valued within a culture or moral orientation that values self-effacement and group harmony more highly. Thus, any taxonomy of thriving indicators necessarily reflects a particular moral and cultural framework that is likely to have less universality than competing taxonomies of risk or basic competence.

²Two early exceptions were two special issues of the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, one that was devoted to “positive aspects of adolescence” (Adams, 2001) and the other that called for youth social policy to focus on positive outcomes as much as it does on negative ones (Pittman, Diversi, & Ferber, 2002). Toward that end, for example, Child Trends, Inc., and the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, in collaboration with the US Department of Health and Human Services, also played an early leadership role by hosting a conference of state leaders in 2002 to suggest positive indicators of youth development (later released as a book (Moore & Lippman, 2005)). If added to state-level data collection, such indicators would better inform policymakers’ decisions about child, youth, and family policies and programs. But there are relatively few examples of studies or policy initiatives that go beyond measuring only negative or just adequate behavior among youth.

In addition, definitions of thriving clearly need to vary by age. Although the main focus of our work has been on adolescence, a useful framework of thriving also must include constructs that are continuous from earlier stages, as well as constructs that are unique to particular developmental stages. For example, there likely are some potential thriving indicators that are developmentally relevant to adolescence but not to middle childhood, such as having a significant girlfriend or boyfriend relationship. At the same time, valid thriving indicators for adolescence likely include some that are essentially the same as developmentally valid indicators for middle childhood. Young people's active helping of others might be an example. The items used to measure the "helping others" indicator might differ between those two developmental stages, but the essence of the prosocial behavior as an indicator of thriving would not. For example, perhaps we would expect adolescents to formally volunteer more as an indicator of thriving, whereas we would expect younger children's helping to be demonstrated more by informal helping of their friends and neighbors.

Originally, Search Institute studied seven indicators of thriving among adolescents: school success, helping others, valuing diversity, exhibiting leadership, overcoming adversity, maintaining physical health, and delaying gratification (Scales et al., 2000). These original seven indicators of well-being status were selected for study for two main reasons. First, a wealth of research suggests that these indicators are related to numerous positive physical, socioemotional, psychological, and cognitive outcomes, both proximally and distally, and that these positive associations occur among diverse young people by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic background (see review in Scales & Leffert, 2004). Second, these thriving indicators collectively reflect that adolescents have accomplished at least adequately and perhaps excellently a number of developmental tasks conceived as important for all young people, regardless of cultural background. These would include developing their intellectual capacities and a sense of belonging, being able to explore and enlarge their worlds while minimizing risks, and being able to persist and succeed despite challenge

(detailed in Scales et al., 2000). Such thriving indicators seem to satisfy what Takanishi, Mortimer, and McGourthy (1997) defined as their "primary" criterion for indicators of positive adolescent development: the attainment of social competency for adult roles and responsibilities. That broad criterion includes being an educated and productive worker, a person who can maintain a healthy lifestyle, a caring family member, and an involved citizen in a diverse society.

Our more recent definition of 'thriving' encompasses similar "status" descriptions of optimal functioning, but goes beyond them to reflect a more dynamic, process-oriented approach, characterized by three key, interconnected parts³. As we describe in Benson and Scales (2009a, 2009b, p. 90), thriving:

1. Represents a dynamic and bi-directional interplay over time of a young person intrinsically animated and energized by discovering his/her specialness, and the developmental contexts (people, places) that know, affirm, celebrate, encourage, and guide its expression.
2. Involves 'stability of movement' or the 'balance' of movement toward something (Bill Damon, personal conversation, May 11, 2006), that is, thriving is a process of experiencing a balance between continuity and discontinuity of development over time that is optimal for a given individual's fused relations with her or his contexts (per discussion of developmental continuity and discontinuity in Lerner, 2003).
3. Reflects both where a young person is currently in their journey to idealized personhood, and whether they are on the kind of path to get there that could rightly be called one of exemplary adaptive development regulations.

Given the complex balance and plasticity that these parts of the thriving definition reflect between person and context, continuity and discontinuity, and status and process, we also prefer to describe a young person at any point in time as more or less thriving oriented, rather than as thriving or not.

³A thorough description of the evolution of the theory of thriving is found in Benson and Scales (2010).

Fostering Positive Development: Developmentally Attentive Communities

The final dimension relates to the way in which positive development or adaptation is achieved. From a resilience perspective, the dominant delivery system for fostering resilience is via science-based intervention and prevention programs that, ideally, reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors (Rolf & Johnson, 1999). Masten and Reed's (2002) tripartite typology for promoting resilience highlights this goal by suggesting strategies that prevent or reduce risks and stressors, strategies that improve the number and/or quality of resources or assets, and strategies that bolster and strengthen basic human adaptive systems (e.g., cognitive functioning, attachment relationships). Prevention and intervention programs are increasingly targeting multiple risk and protective factors across multiple contexts in fostering resilience and positive development, at times with impressive results (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

From a developmental asset perspective, programs are important, but cannot be the sole strategy in facilitating healthy outcomes for youth. Programs alone cannot offer the kinds of supports, opportunities, and relationships young people need. This work requires a broader strategy in which multiple contexts in young people's lives are strengthened to promote the kinds of factors that sustain and support positive development for all youth (Benson & Saito, 2001; Connell et al., 2001; Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2009; Villaruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003).

One way to conceive of this broader approach is through the notion of a "developmentally attentive community." This conception of community is rooted in strategies that identify mutually reinforcing lines of action, all intended to make communities places that promote youth development. Through our study of community change models and observations of hundreds of community

initiatives that are using the framework, we have identified five components (as depicted in Table 25.2) that can transform communities into more developmentally attentive places; that is, places that are more intentional in their efforts to foster the healthy development of their children and adolescents. Central to this multifaceted approach is to mobilize young people, such that youth themselves are engaged in a community's activities. This echoes others' assertions that from a positive youth perspective, young people are seen as resources and contributors to their environments (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner et al., 2002; Whitlock & Hamilton, 2003). Importantly, our studies also have shown that when young people experience higher levels of such "voice" and empowerment, they enjoy far better outcomes, across academic, psychological, social, and behavioral domains (Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2009). Another strategy is to activate the various sectors of a community; that is, the organizations, institutions, and settings that are able to promote youth development, including schools, families, faith-based organizations, neighborhoods, and youth organizations. Rallying the multiple settings of a community around positive youth development provides an important redundancy of messages and experiences to youth regarding their value in the community. A third strategy, engaging adults, refers to adults both in their formal roles as citizens, leaders, members, and decision makers who can influence the sectors, but also to adults as individuals who by their actions and statements in their ongoing daily relationships with young people can build youths' assets (Scales et al., 2003).

Becoming a mentor is a formal illustration of such engagement, but informal interactions can also be important (Lopez & McKnight, 2002). When many adults demonstrate their respect and appreciation of youth and when they actively seek to get to know them, the community becomes more welcoming and more growth-enhancing. Fourth, influencing civic decisions is necessary to both promote and sustain a community's activities.

Finally, the last component of a developmentally attentive community is the presence of

Table 25.2 Search Institute's five action strategies for a developmentally attentive community

<i>Engage adults.</i> Engage adults from all walks of life to develop sustained, strength-building relationships with children and adolescents, both within families and in neighborhoods
Young people need the adults in their lives to acknowledge them, affirm them, and connect with them. They need these things from the adults who are not paid to work with them, as well as the professionals who are
Engaging parents as asset builders—and affirming the many ways they already build assets—is particularly important, given their central role in children's lives
<i>Mobilize young people.</i> Mobilize young people to use their power as asset builders and change agents
Many youth feel devalued by adults. And most report their community does not provide useful roles for young people. It should become normative in all settings where children and youth are involved to seek their input and advice, to make decisions with them, and to treat them as responsible, competent allies in all asset-building efforts
It is also important to help young people tap their own power to build assets for themselves, their peers, and younger children
<i>Activate sectors.</i> Activate all sectors of the community—such as schools, congregations, children and youth, businesses, human services, and health care organizations—to create an asset-building culture and contribute fully to young people's healthy development
Young people are customers, employees, patients, participants—members of their community in many of the same ways adults are. All sectors have opportunities to examine the ways they come in contact with young people and identify ways they can support their healthy development
<i>Invigorate programs.</i> Invigorate, expand, and enhance programs to become more asset rich and to be available to and accessed by all children and youth
Though much asset-building occurs in daily, informal interactions, programs young people take part in throughout their community must also become more intentional about asset building. Opportunities for training, technical assistance, and networking should be made available in these settings
<i>Influence civic decisions.</i> Influence decision makers and opinion leaders to leverage financial, media, and policy resources in support of this positive transformation of communities and society
Community-wide policies, messages, and priorities not only shape people's perceptions of youth, but they also can motivate and support individuals, organizations, and sectors to make asset building an ongoing priority

effective programs. As noted above, programs have the potential to significantly alter maladaptive developmental trajectories, indeed, evidence suggests that, however, without significantly changing the environments in which youth live may lead to the kinds of modest short- and long-term effects often reported in reviews of prevention programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Indeed, this raises an interesting moderating hypothesis: Are the effects of a proven program enhanced when implemented in a community characterized by these other four components? Questions such as this one are possible when we begin to think beyond program models as the only planned or intentional efforts at influencing development and start to acknowledge the powerful role that a community can play when united around its youth.

What should be clear from this model is our assumption that not only are programs not sufficient to promote positive development across many groups of youth, but also that youth cannot

be the only target of change—adults are implicated as much if not more so in this work. Unless adults believe that they have the potential to play a significant role in the lives of youth, much of the work described in this chapter cannot take place. Thus, the strategies and assumptions that stem from our work do not focus on fixing or changing young people's behavior as much as they focus on influencing the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of adults toward youths (Benson, 2006).

There is no single model for how a community-wide, asset-building initiative is launched and sustained. We believe that each community brings a unique mix of strengths, history, and existing efforts into the planning and implementation of its initiative. However, certain dynamics appear essential.

- *Cultivate a shared vision.* Invite community members to articulate and keep alive a shared vision for an asset-rich community. Develop a shared community-wide vision centered on

increasing the asset base for all children and adolescents. Know that reaching this target cannot be rushed or done with a single new idea or program.

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Rather, it will take long-term commitment, multiple and coordinated changes, and a passion for the vision that will sustain your efforts.

- *Recruit and network champions.* Nurture relationships with people who have the passion to spread the word and help make the vision a reality. Create opportunities for these champions to learn from, support, and inspire each other.
- *Communicate.* Distribute information, make presentations, and tap the media to raise awareness about asset building and local efforts. Share with your community what young people experience. Emphasize the ability of *all* community members—including young people—to build assets.
- *Strengthen capacity.* Provide or facilitate training, technical assistance, coaching, tools, or other resources that help individuals and organizations in their asset-building efforts.
- *Reflect, learn, and celebrate.* Reflect on and learn from current progress and challenges. Many people, places, and programs already build assets. Highlight and honor existing and new asset-building efforts in the community.
- *Manage and coordinate.* Manage and coordinate schedules, budgets, and other administrative tasks, as needed.

Asset-building communities mobilize people, organizations, institutions, and systems to take action around a shared understanding of positive development. Ultimately, rebuilding and strengthening the developmental infrastructure in a community is not a program run by professionals. It is a movement that creates a community-wide sense of common purpose. It places residents and their leaders on the same team moving in the same direction, and creates a culture in which all residents are expected, by virtue of their membership

in the community, to promote the positive development of children and youth.

Conclusion

As this review suggests, there is a great deal of consonance between the developmental assets framework and models of resilience. Both approaches identify multiple sources of developmental nutrients across numerous ecologies likely to foster adaptive functioning and optimal development. Likewise, both approaches provide complementary notions regarding the configurations of positive developmental outcomes for youth. And both affirm the significance of programs as a mechanism for promoting healthy behaviors and attitudes.

Because the developmental assets framework is different from a programmatic approach, the scope and implications of our work are broader. This work represents a shift away from relying solely on prevention and intervention efforts to the intentional mobilization and engagement of individuals and systems within communities in the service of healthy youth development. This is no simple task, not the least of which because “community” as the unit of analysis is far less wieldy than a controlled program design, but also because of the paucity of research examining the role of deliberate community-wide effects on the health and well-being of youth. Note though that this discussion of community mobilization in no way is meant to replace or supplant targeted programmatic efforts; one of the implications of the asset model is that strong and effective programs are a necessary component of a developmentally attentive community and that programs are eminently complementary to positive youth development approaches (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Resnick, 2000; Whitlock & Hamilton, 2003).

Nevertheless, if, as Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) note, the “growing chaos in ... everyday environments in which human beings live their lives...interrupts and undermines the formation and stability of relationships and activities that are necessary for psychological growth” (p. 1022),

then working toward bringing structure and intentionality to these environments under the banner of positive youth development provides a promising approach to increasing the developmental outcomes for young people.

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