



Youth Development Research Briefs

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Youth Development Research Briefs is a collaborative project among 4-H youth development faculty and educators at Oregon State University. The goal of the project is to provide concise summaries of current research relative to 4-H youth development program in:

- **Creating and Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships**
- **Youth Development Practice**
- **Youth Engagement**
- **Youth Development Profession**

Collaborators participate in the project by reviewing one current article, presenting a summary of the review at the 4-H professional development conference in the spring, and preparing a written review following a proscribed review outline. Each written review contains:

- **Topic area that is covered**
- **A verbatim article abstract**
- **A complete article citation**
- **A research brief that covers the article's contribution to theory and implication for promoting high quality youth development programs and practice**
- **Selected references for additional reading**

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Is Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) Linked to Positive Youth Development? Initial Answers

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Topic Areas(s)

- Youth Development Practice

Abstract

Human-animal relationships are ubiquitous and diverse across the life span and may be especially salient among children and adolescents. However, there is little information regarding whether human-animal interaction (HAI) is actually linked to young people's positive development in normative, nontherapeutic settings. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore if and how HAI may be linked to positive youth development (PYD) using data from the 4-H Study of PYD. Results suggested that emotions and cognitions about animals were related to indices of positive development. The implications of these findings, and suggestions for new areas of inquiry regarding the role of HAI as an important developmental context, are discussed.

Article Citation

Mueller, M. K. (2014). Is Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) Linked to Positive Youth Development? Initial Answers. *Applied Developmental Science, 18:1*, 5-16.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2014.864205>

Research Brief

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is an association between human-animal interaction and positive youth development, and, if so, how the processes involved in this linkage might operate. Unfortunately, the findings were less conclusive than expected and it was determined that the methodology requires refinement in order to achieve the desired outcomes. However, several conclusions can be made from the data to inform the youth development field of work.

The study drew on 567 participants of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development who ranged in age from 18 to 26. They were asked to participate in a 30 minute online questionnaire, which included various indices of individual and contextual bases of positive development and thriving.

Human-animal interaction was indexed in two ways, (1) the type of interaction, if any, with animals, and (2) emotions about animals (attitudes related to attachment, commitment, and

moral issues). Positive youth development was indexed using the Five Cs model (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring), in addition to measures of contribution, intentional self-regulation, and depression as indicators of thriving.

Contribution to Theory

While some parts of the study were inconclusive, there are several key outcomes that may contribute, theoretically, to the field of positive youth development.

- Both animal owners and individuals who participated in animal-related activities had higher Contribution scores than those who did not. This implies that pet ownership and animal-related activities lead to increased involvement in other parts of their lives and communities.
- A weak overall association between human-animal interaction and developmental outcomes lead the author to believe that the nature of these interactions may be driving any relationship between human-animal interactions and outcomes. The study did not differentiate between types of animals or levels of experience with those animals, which may have produced inconclusive results. It is likely, according to the author, that the nature of the interaction with an animal is a significant indicator of developmental outcomes.
- Intensity and frequency of participation in an animal-related activity significantly predicted Contribution for study participants. This suggests that those who are highly involved in caring for an animal or participating in an animal-focused activity, are also contributing more broadly to their families, communities, and schools, becoming an active and engaged member of the community.
- Attachment and commitment were positively related to thriving and negatively related to depressive symptomology. Attachment was positively associated with Connection, Competence, and Caring, while commitment was positively associated with Connection, Character, Caring, and Contribution, and negatively associated with Depression.
 - Emotional attachment to an animal appears to be related to more global connections to family, peers, and community. This demonstrates that emotional connectedness to an animal may be related to the support systems associated with youth feeling engaged in their family and community.
 - Emotional attachment to an animal may be part of the contextual features of an individual's ecology and may support feelings of positive self-regard and thriving.
 - The connection between Caring and attachment suggests a link between feelings of sympathy and empathy toward humans. Interactions with an animal may be a way to facilitate the emotions and social skills necessary for developing and maintaining adaptive social relationships with other humans.
- Commitment was positively associated with Connection, Character, Caring, and Contribution, and negatively associated with depression. These findings reflect the

importance of active investment in a relationship with an animal. Youth who are gaining the most from their experiences with animals are those who are engaged enough in animal relationships to be willing to commit their resources to the animal. The findings further imply that commitment to being responsible for an animal may also be associated with emotions that encourage individuals to take responsibility for contributing to the well-being of their families and communities.

- Seeing that the study's findings did not provide sufficient evidence that human-animal interactions directly influence thriving, the author believes it may be that youth who are successful in all aspects of their lives are more able to optimize and benefit from their interactions with animals.

Contribution to Practice

In evaluating the results from the study and applying theoretical outcomes to the practice of youth development professionals, the following practical implications are found.

- Youth development professionals should integrate interaction with animals into programming in order to promote involvement in other parts of their lives and communities.
- An awareness that the specific nature of the animal interaction may have more or less impact on development should be considered in program planning. More research is needed in this area, but it may be possible to begin to identify the most effective activities in one's own program through direct observation.
- Dosage is a key element in promoting positive youth development through human-animal interactions. Programs should be developed with the highest possible intensity and frequency of these interactions to achieve the best outcomes: highest contribution to family and community.
- Offering opportunities that allow for emotional attachment to animals may support feelings of positive self-regard and, sympathy and empathy toward humans.
- When integrating animal interactions into youth development programming, it is important for youth to have an active investment in the relationship. Programs that require a commitment of personal resources to an animal will have the highest impacts on participants.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

4-H youth development professionals can glean several practical applications from the results of this study. Most importantly, the results seem to confirm that 4-H programming is on the right track!

It is valuable to continue to support the requirement of youth's investment in their 4-H project animal. The more personal resources they commit to the project, the more they will see positive developmental impacts. This can come in the form of financial resources to purchase

the animal, feed, and supplies, or an investment of time, waking up early every morning to feed and prioritizing time spent working with their animal over other activities.

As 4-H promotes, youth who have human-animal interactions demonstrate increased involvement in other parts of their lives and communities. 4-H faculty and staff should capitalize on this relationship and provide more opportunities for youth to get involved in their communities as complimentary activities to their animal projects. Additionally, 4-H programming should support and encourage the highest possible intensity and frequency of human-animal interactions. Youth who spend the most time with their animals will contribute most broadly to their families, communities, and schools, becoming an active and engaged member of society.

Offering opportunities for emotional attachment to project animals will promote other healthy emotions surrounding self and family. This could be achieved through more responsibility and time with one's project and targeted volunteer training so leaders are aware of the importance of attachment.

Finally, in developing future 4-H programming, it is important to recognize that not all human-animal interactions have equal benefits. We should look for those that appear to have the highest impact on positive youth development and seek to strengthen and promote those activities. This would be an excellent area for additional research: differentiating the positive youth development impact among various types of animals and level of experience with those animals. This data could further inform priorities in 4-H programming.

Selected References for Additional Reading

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Adolescent Purpose Development: Exploring Empathy, Discovering Roles, Shifting Priorities, and Creating Pathways.

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Topic Area(s)

- Positive youth development
- Adolescent thriving and Purpose

Abstract

The development of youth purpose was explored in a qualitative, cross-sequential study. Interviews about life goals and reasons for pursuing them were conducted with 146 adolescents from four age groups (6th grade, 9th grade, 12th grade, and college sophomores or juniors). Participants completed the interview twice in 2 years. Each cohort focused on different aspects of purpose: middle school youth desired to be empathic; high school youth focused on finding a role to engage their purpose; high school graduates focused on re-evaluating their priorities through transitions; and college students focused on developing pathways to support their purpose. These phases were impacted by several factors, including transitions, identity formation processes, and external supports and influences.

Article Citation

Malin, H., Reilly, T. S., Quinn, B., & Moran, S. (2013) Adolescent purpose development: Exploring empathy, discovering roles, shifting priorities, and creating pathways. *Journal of Research on Adolescents, 24/1, 186–199.*

Research Brief

Contribution to Theory and Practice

This study focuses on the developmental systems theory which examines human development by looking at the relationship between individuals and their contexts, and is the foundation of positive youth development theory (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002). One of the key elements of the system is the examination of purpose. This allows insight as to see whether purpose develops in the interaction between individuals and their contexts, and how it supports thriving and healthy adaption to the environment. Purpose helps to guide young people to ask “what gives my life meaning?” In addition to that young people establish how they can contribute to or connect with the world in ways that give their lives meaning. The question that drives this study is: How does purpose change over the course of adolescence?

Prosocial reasoning increases between childhood and adolescence (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006), and Hoffman's (2000) theory of empathy suggests that, in comparison with children, adolescents are more responsive to the needs of others due to increased cognitive abstraction skills. Furthermore, hedonistic reasoning decreases between childhood and adolescence, but then increases again during the emergent adult years (Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & VanCourt, 1995).

The authors of this study express the dimensions of intention and engagement that describe what the individual hopes to accomplish and what they are doing to accomplish it. Intention is what the individual hopes to accomplish, or the content of purpose. For example, youth set their goals based on social norms, then evaluate their success against those norms and set subsequent, higher-order goals depending on how successful they were at meeting those expectations (Nurmi, 1991). Therefore, interaction between individuals and their context is important to developing purposeful intentions, which are the highest order goals.

The results of the study reveal that adolescents transition through various stages of purpose. As early adolescents, they showed an emerging, empathic tendency which motivated them to engage in caring and helping behaviors. As they merged into middle adolescence, youth developed the beyond-the-self (BTS) dimension that helps distinguish goals that provide a purpose from those that only provide personal satisfaction (Malin, et al. 2013, p. 195). In late adolescence, youth re-evaluated their priorities as they left high school. Relationships helped youth to stabilize their purpose. As young adults, they found or developed a pathway to fulfill the role they had envisioned earlier in life.

Adolescents however, may lose focus on goals and develop more interest in peers. This article suggests that peers appeared to have a negative influence on purpose at this stage. A shift from family to peer influence over the course of middle school may alter the course of purpose development during this time. Among those who lost purpose in early adolescence, factors such as hedonic enjoyment and peer relations gained in importance and redirected their developing purpose. As extension leaders we can model prosocial behavior and engage youth in activities that develop empathy. Providing opportunities for youth to consider their unique contributions, personal interests and meaningful activities should help shape their plans for the role that they can take in society. When youth have an opportunity to make choices that will make a difference, they are more likely to develop goals and take the initiative to successfully complete those goals and commit to more challenges.

Knowing these principles, extension youth leaders should be more aware of goals that motivate participants to engage in meaningful activities. Youth leaders' interaction with adolescents in 4-H programs will enhance the development of those high order goals. Extension leaders should strive to empower adolescents to identify their interests through 4-H project selection, leadership activities, and experiential opportunities and further guide them through the

process of successful completion. Developing personal strengths in youth establishes how they can contribute to or connect with the world in ways that give their lives meaning. Understanding this concept in our youth should guide extension leaders to develop purposeful programs encompassing a wide range of interests.

One particular element of the study showed that family support influenced purpose development throughout adolescence. Eisenberg (2006) suggested that in early adolescence, family members who modeled empathy supported young people in developing prosocial intentions. In middle adolescence, young people looked to family members as models of possible roles that they could take in society and found opportunities to realize purposeful roles by working with family members. Overall, the findings suggest that during middle and high school years, parents can help their children develop purpose by modeling ways to contribute to society and inviting their children to participate in that activity (Malin, et al. 2013, p. 195). With this in mind, extension leaders should take full advantage of engaging parents in volunteer activities that support 4-H youth. Adolescents observing parents and other key adults embracing their role as volunteers will help youth to develop a pathway to realizing the role they envisioned for themselves.

The research team (Malin, et al. 2013, p. 196) found that youth actively engage their own development and are influenced by their families, friends, and opportunity arrangements. The results of the study has contributed to the body of knowledge that indicates young people are capable of developing and delivering a life purpose that has a positive impact on the world and honors what the individual finds most meaningful.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

The National 4-H Curriculum focuses on 4-H's three primary mission mandates: science, healthy living, and citizenship. From Wind Power to Workforce Readiness, youth activity guides are filled with engaging experiences that cultivate the skills that youth need for everyday living as they gain knowledge about subjects that interest them. Thanks to the research provided by the National 4-H Council, extension leaders have access to fully developed curricula to organize and deliver meaningful experiences for all youth.

Established by the National 4-H Council, essential elements are critical to effective youth development programs. These elements help youth become competent, contributing citizens. Created from traditional and applied research characteristics that contribute to positive youth development, they help professionals and volunteers who work with youth view the whole young person, rather than focus on a single aspect of life or development. These elements focus on social, physical, and emotional well-being, and are necessary for positive youth development. Each individual element is important. However, it is the combination of these elements that create an environment that promotes positive youth development. It is important to be aware of these elements when designing activities because they help

professionals and volunteers ensure that experiences, programs, and activities intentionally offer opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning in environments where youth feel safe, can master new skills and abilities, and develop the confidence they need to contribute to their local communities in a positive way.

4-H promotes positive youth development by giving youth opportunities to get involved and develop to their full potential. Positive youth development is a framework that highlights the things youth need to become successful. It focuses on strengths instead of limitations and is associated with the five Cs - competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring. Researchers have suggested that a sixth C, contribution (to oneself and others) comes about when the 5 Cs are present in a young person's life.

Studies suggest a link between PYD and the developmental assets associated with youth programs—especially programs that go beyond simple extracurricular activities to focus specifically on promoting youth development. The “Big Three” features of effective youth-serving programs (Blum, 2003; Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) are:

- Positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults.
- Activities that build important life skills.
- Opportunities for youth to use these life skills as both participants in and as leaders of valued community activities.

One of the conclusions that the National 4-H Council has drawn from their findings to date is that youth programs cannot remain static; they must expand and change in order to address the diverse and changing characteristics, needs, and interests of adolescents and their families (e.g., Balsano, Phelps, Theokas, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009; Mueller, Lewin-Bizan, & Urban, 2011; Theokas, Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, 2006; Zarrett & Lerner, 2008). The council has also concluded that youth programs must address both prevention and promotion; contrary to popular belief, focusing on one does not necessarily affect the other (Lewin-Bizan, Lynch, Fey, Schmid, McPherran, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010; Phelps et al., 2007).

Within the Malin, Reilly, Quinn, & Moran (2013) study the developmental systems theory exemplified purpose and the content of purpose for youth. The concept of positive youth development (PYD) in 4-H provides useful scientific evidence about actions that may be taken to enhance the lives of the diverse young people of America. Extension leaders should continue to develop important relations between 4-H participation and the characteristics and correlations of positive youth development (PYD). Of course, the true value of 4-H programs may come not from short-term results or even the results over the few years spanned by our study. The value may instead come from the program's influence on life-long pathways of development. Continued study of the 4-H Study participants beyond the high school years is

needed to assess whether such longer term influences exist. Nevertheless, there is great value in ascertaining if, during middle and high school, youth with a history of 4-H participation appear to be on a healthy progression.

The National 4-H Council suggests that as our cultural and social values change and develop, it is imperative that 4-H programs continue to be mindful of the present and forge ahead in teaching our youth the advanced skills necessary for them to adapt and have continued success throughout life.

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ILLUMINATING TRAJECTORIES OF ADOLESCENT THRIVING AND CONTRIBUTION THROUGH THE WORDS OF YOUTH: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM THE 4-H STUDY OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Topic Area(s)

- Contribution
- Positive Youth Development
- Qualitative
- Descriptive Analysis
- Adolescence

Abstract

Theory and research in adolescent development have emphasized that contributing to self, others, and community is important to the success of society and predictive of positive youth and later adult development. Despite this emphasis, there is a lack of qualitative and youth-centered research exploring whether adolescents themselves value contribution as part of their daily lives or future goals. Understandings of contribution are, thus, limited in their generalizability. To lesson this gap, we implemented qualitative analyses of open-ended responses from youth in the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. We addressed questions about what is meaningful to youth and about their future goals through descriptive and thematic analyses of responses from 56 youth (66% female) who participated in the 4-H Study in each of three grades (6, 9, and 12). Findings indicated that most youth in this study valued acts and/or ideologies of contribution at some point in their adolescence, and several were committed to facets of contribution across grades. The analyses also identified other aspects of these youth experiences (e.g., athletics, family relationships, and academic competencies) that were described as meaningful across adolescence. Findings are discussed in relationship to youth programming aimed at encouraging well-being and contribution in adolescence.

Article Citation

Hershberg, R. M., DeSouza, L. M., Warren, A. E. A., Lerner, J. V. & Lerner, R. M. (2014). Illuminating trajectories of adolescent thriving and contribution through the words of youth: Qualitative findings from the 4-H study of positive youth development. *Journal Youth Adolescence*, 43, 950-970.

Research Brief

The research shared in this paper further explores qualitative data collected from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. Through deeper analysis of the 4-H Study, researchers sought to develop a clearer understanding of what youth find are the most meaningful aspects of their lives and how they envision their future selves. The 4-H Study collected data from study participants at three different stages in development (grades 6, 9 and 12). This allowed researchers to examine if there were differences and patterns in reporting across different waves. Researchers were particularly interested in understanding the meaningfulness of contribution to study participants, both in their current lives and their future.

Researchers systematically selected a sample of participant responses from the 4-H Study to review. First, only those participants who participated at all three waves (grades 6, 9 and 12) of the qualitative portion of the 4-H Study were selected. This ensured qualitative responses were provided at three stages of development by each participant to the following original 4-H Study questions:

“What do you think is the most important/meaningful thing that you do?”

“If you can imagine yourself doing really well in all areas of your life, what would you be like? What sort of things would you do?”

Second, researchers also wanted to examine the responses of participants who were identified as “thriving.” Therefore, participants who had a high to moderate PYD score (see J. Lerner et al. 2013) were selected. The screening criteria identified 56 participants.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

This research supports over the course of adolescent development the values of youth change and youth become increasingly articulate about envisioning their future. Researcher’s unveiled patterns and trends in the shift in values as youth develop from 6th, 9th and 12th grades. As an example, sample-level analyses show academic competence becomes of increasing higher value; whereas, the value of athletics significantly decreases over time. In addition, as youth envision their future through their development, they place higher value on connection, contribution, career aspiration and happiness and less value on activities such as athletics.

At every wave of the sample-level analyses, social relations (connection with family and peers/friends) are of high value to youth. Moreover, as youth envision their future selves, connection was articulated as being increasingly important to youth throughout the waves of the study. This reaffirms the importance of belonging to youth development programming and supports connection as the building block for other developmental assets.

The ultimate goal of this research was to explore how meaningful contribution is to youth throughout their development. In addition, how youth value contribution as they look to their

future. Through the sample-level analyses, study participants placed the highest value on contribution in 6th grade. Of the 56 study participants in 6th grade, nine youth indicated contribution as their highest valued activity. Yet, only four of the 56 participants indicated contribution as their highest valued activity in the 9th and 12th grades. Conversely, as youth envision their future, contribution is the second highest valued category, second only to connection.

The researchers of this paper suggest the decrease in value to contribution, from 6th to 9th grade, may be linked to the decline in social constructs (parents, school, and organized club activities) to participate in contribution-related activities. The researchers suggest as youth develop and become more independent they are less intrinsically motivated to engage in contribution-related activities.

The researchers express one of the limitations of utilizing the 4-H Study qualitative responses is youth's responses were limited to identifying one response, through question design, as study participants were asked to identify the "most" important/meaningful thing that they do. Yet, research shows youth on average are involved in three extracurricular activities a year (Mahoney et. al., 2008). Therefore, asking youth to identify the most important/meaningful activity may prove difficult or varying throughout the year.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

The research provides important implications for youth development professionals. The recommendations are as follows:

Understating Current vs. Future Values

The primary implication of this research is for youth development professionals to understand youth's current values may not align with their future goals. This in turn may negatively affect their day-to-day decision making. Youth development professionals can assist by providing opportunities for youth to develop decision-making skills that connect their current value to their future goals.

Importance of Social Relations

This research strongly supports that youth development professionals should continue to focus on establishing connections among youth and their peers, as well as youth and non-parental adults. In addition, youth development professionals should strive to assist youth to develop habits to build and maintain relationships through their development into adulthood.

Creating Meaningful Opportunities to Contribute

It is helpful for youth development professionals to have an understanding that youth envision contribution as an important part of their future, although youth development professionals should continue to seek ways to connect youth to meaningful contribution activities that would lead to intrinsic activities that would carry them into adulthood.

Selected References for Additional Reading

- Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Almerigi, J., Theokas, C., Phelps, E., Gestsdottir, S., et al. (2005). Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth grade adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 25(1), 17-71.*
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On the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development

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Topic Area(s)

- Positive youth development

Abstract

The research reported in this issue advances our understanding of the multiple interactive influences on young people's development. The study invokes Relational Developmental Systems Theory to show, among other findings, how the impact of out-of-school time depends on the number and range of different types of activities young people engage in. The study also demonstrates that developmental assets (the 5 Cs) can co-exist with problem behavior, an important contribution to the positive youth development perspective. Readers will also find in these articles diverse strategies of data analysis and exemplars of research that informs practice as well as theory.

Article Citation

Hamilton, S. F. (2014). On the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(6), 1008-1011.

Research Brief

This article appeared in a special issue of the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* titled *Thriving across the Adolescent Years: Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*. The issue included a series of 15 articles following the *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (PYD)*—a study resulting from a partnership between the National 4-H Council and the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, led by Richard M. Lerner at Tufts University. Hamilton's commentary examines five of the articles from this issue (Agans, et al.; Bowers, et al.; Callina, et al.; Hershberg, et al.; Arbeit, et al.).

Agans, et al.

Agans, et al. analyzed patterns in Lerner's PYD data to investigate the question of providing breadth of programming vs. depth of programming.

Contribution to Theory

- Participation in a range of out-of-school-time (OST) activities is associated with more indicators of PYD.

Contribution to Practice

- Consider breadth over depth; provide a variety of programming.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

- Points to the potential value of new research into differences among youth who participate in one or one type of activity and those who participate in a range of activities.
- In addition to demographic differences it would be helpful to know whether youth have differing motives for participation and how the conditions surrounding their participation differ, including parental support and after-school employment.

Bowers, et al.

Bowers, et al., investigated how parenting profiles interact with mentor relations and with youth development “outcomes,” defined in terms of Lerner’s 5Cs—competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring.

Contribution to Theory

- Parenting profiles interact with mentor relations and with youth development outcomes.

Contribution to Practice

- A key factor in promoting young people’s positive development may be to increase their connections to, and experiences with, important non-parental adults.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

- Out-of-school time and youth development programs should include training and support for youth-serving professionals so that they learn the best ways to develop positive relationships with young people that enable them to have these characteristics.

Callina, et al.

Callina, et al. examined the influence of parent trust on young people’s hopes for the future. Specifically, they looked for evidence that trust in parents predicts hopeful future expectations (HFE), which, in turn, produce more contributions to the community.

Contribution to Theory

- The profile reflecting the greatest discrepancy in HFE and trust across early to middle adolescence, was associated with the highest mean Contribution scores.
- The Both Decreasing profile was associated with the lowest mean Contribution scores.

Contribution to Practice

- 80% of the sample was classified as being “High Stable” in both Trust and HFE, yet did not have the highest Contribution scores. More research is warranted to understand why that seemingly optimal group did not have the highest Contribution scores.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

- Emphasizes the need for parents or other important non-parental adults to strive toward maintaining trusting relationships with youth in order to promote community engagement in later adolescence.

Hershberg, et al.

Hershberg et al. present *qualitative* findings on thriving and contribution.

Contribution to Theory

- While youth may value particular activities as part of their daily lives in adolescence, they do not necessarily consider these activities as an essential part of a thriving future.
- Youth whose open-ended responses Hershberg et al. analyzed were able to differentiate between what is important in the present and what will be important in the future, recognizing that in adulthood school and athletics will neither engage them nor give them an identity.

Contribution to Practice

- This finding does not mean that all youth do not value the other people and/or community contexts in their lives. However, the finding does suggest that positively developing youth articulate what they find to be important in their lives very differently, and in ways that do not always substantiate quantitative measures used to assess their positive development.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

- It's important to consider qualitative measures in addition to quantitative measures when assessing positive youth development.
- It's not always apparent how the skills a youth develops in adolescence will be utilized later in life. As people grow older, they may draw upon some of the same developmental assets that enabled them to thrive in youth to establish an equivalent adult social position under quite different circumstances.

Arbeit, et al.

Arbeit, et al. focuses on what Hamilton refers to as one of the most important refinements of the youth development perspective to emerge from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, namely that developmental assets can co-occur with risky behavior.

Contribution Theory

- Developmental assets can co-occur with risky behavior.

Contribution to Practice

- Many proponents of PYD have argued that prevention and treatment programs should recede in favor of creating more opportunities for positive development. However, Arbeit, et al. concluded that taking risks can be part of the identity development that is the principal developmental task of adolescence.

Implications for 4-H Development Professional Practice

- This observation of the coexistence of positive and negative suggests the possible utility of research seeking optimal boundaries and types of risky behavior.
- Further, accepting the method of treating both positive and negative behaviors as distinct constructs calls attention to a substantive difference between the 5Cs and the problem behaviors that may exist alongside them. The 5Cs are abstract, whereas problem behaviors they are contrasted with (such as delinquency, depressive symptoms, substance use, sexual activity, disordered eating behaviors, and bullying) are concrete.

Selected References for Additional Reading

Bowers, et al. (2014). Important Non-parental Adults and Positive Youth Development Across Mid- to Late-Adolescence: The Moderating Effect of Parenting Profiles. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(6), 859-868.

Callina, et al. (2014). Hope in Context: Developmental Profiles of Trust, Hopeful Future Expectations, and Civic Engagement Across Adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(6), 869-883.

Arbeit, et al. (2014). Profiles of Problematic Behaviors Across Adolescence: Covariations with Indicators of Positive Youth Development. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(6), 971-990.

The Role of Context in Evaluating Neighborhood Interventions Promoting Positive Youth Development: A Narrative Systematic Review

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Union County

Topic Area(s)

- Youth Development Practice
- Youth Engagement

Abstract

Objectives This narrative systematic review explored (1) how neighborhood interventions promote positive youth development (PYD) and (2) the role of context for these interventions. We asked: How do neighborhood interventions become effective in promoting PYD for adolescents aged 12-18 years?

Methods Articles (n=19) were analyzed using a framework integrating standards of health promotion evaluation and elements of the ecological systems perspective.

Results First, results highlight the key characteristics of interventions that promote PYD. An intervention's atmosphere encouraging supportive relationships and an intervention's activities aiming to build skills and that are real and challenging promoted PYD elements including cognitive competence, confidence, connection, leadership civic engagement, and feelings of empowerment. Secondly, this review identified facilitators (e.g. partnerships and understanding of the community) and constraints (e.g. funding and conflicts) to an intervention's integration with its context.

Conclusions Results regarding interventions' characteristics promoting PYD confirm findings from past reviews. Our findings indicate that context is an important element of effective interventions. This review encourages future evaluations to analyze the role of context to build a better understanding of its role.

Article Citation

Lapalme, J., Bisset, S., & Potvin, L. (2013). Role of context in evaluating neighbourhood interventions promoting positive youth development: a narrative systematic review. *International Journal of Public Health*, 31-42.

Research Brief

The neighborhood-based intervention has been shown to be a successful method for the promotion of positive youth development (PYD). Previous reviews of this type of intervention have highlighted the relationships between an intervention's internal characteristics (i.e., activities and atmosphere) and its PYD outcomes; but few systematic reviews have considered the role of its external characteristics, namely an intervention's context. This narrative systematic review addresses three important issues: the importance of an intervention's integration within its context and the facilitators and constraints that affect the process; the relationship between an intervention's internal characteristics (i.e., activities and atmosphere) and PYD outcomes; and the importance of youth voices in the development and implementation of neighborhood interventions. The authors address these issues through a framework of health promotion standards and an ecological systems theoretical perspective.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

An ecological systems perspective recognizes that people are situated within a broad social setting composed of multiple systems, including community, family, and school. It is important to note that the relationship between a person and these systems is recursive: the behaviors of an individual are affected by their surroundings and their surroundings are affected or influenced by their behaviors. As an example, the authors explain how someone's health-related behaviors are influenced by their environment and vice versa.

The role of context

This review looks at facilitators and constraints to context integration and how they directly impact an intervention's success. One of the most important facilitators they highlight is *prior understanding of the neighborhood*, which, in the 19 interventions reviewed, was obtained via community needs assessments and personal experience within the community. This prior understanding of the community allows intervention organizers to develop their intervention based on youth interests and needs; it also leads to another important facilitator – *partnerships* with other agencies in the community. Interventions that lack this prior understanding may struggle to develop programs that are applicable to the youth they target, thus adversely affecting recruitment, participation, and the overall efficacy of the intervention. *Partnerships* within the community had multiple positive impacts in the interventions reviewed, namely that these partnerships helped involve community members, provided support (either social or financial) to the project, and improved relations between youth and the community. Other facilitators of context integration are an *intervention's involvement in the community*, *community support*, *flexibility*, and *accessible location*.

The authors also identify constraints to context integration, most notably *obtaining and securing funding* and *lack of social capital and social cohesion*. The authors highlight an important nuance here, returning to the concept that people and their contexts are recursive in

nature: when elements like *community support* or an *intervention's involvement in the community* are nurtured, community partners are likely to be naturally inclined to sustain the positive community benefits that come from an integrated intervention, whether through social or financial support. An overall lack of understanding of the community contributes to attrition and undermines relationships between the intervention and community members and partners.

While this review does not identify explicit links between interventions' theoretical approaches and their context integration, the authors speculate that two approaches help facilitate integration within the community: youth development and community engagement approaches. These approaches help interventions solidify community partnerships and establish community engagement opportunities for youth, which then contributed to the development of community engagement competencies. The authors also point to an ecological systems approach and how its understanding of all the pieces of the puzzle helps make an intervention more effective. One approach that did not seem to facilitate context integration was a prevention-focused approach; the authors found this approach to be too centered on the problem itself and not on the factors that surround or contribute to it.

Internal characteristics that promote PYD

The authors explore how an intervention's internal and external characteristics relate to PYD outcomes, namely the "5 Cs:" competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. The external characteristics – those which integrate the intervention into its context – have already been discussed. The authors note that internal characteristics – such as activities and atmosphere – are equally important in interventions. The biggest take-away from this review, which is confirmed in other reviews, is that in order to promote PYD an intervention's atmosphere should be one built around supportive relationships; in addition, its activities should be real and challenging and help youth build skills. In their review, the authors found that this type of atmosphere most significantly increased confidence outcomes, including self-confidence and self-identity. Activities that helped develop skills and that were real and challenging were also closely tied to competency, including critical thinking and problem/conflict resolution. The authors note that the "5 Cs" should be revisited in order to include other PYD outcomes such as leadership, civic engagement, and feelings of empowerment. They also highlight how interventions that target specific youth, such as those belonging to a specific cultural community or those who are disadvantaged, were more effective in promoting PYD. Lastly, the authors find that interventions following either a youth development and/or community engagement approach were more effective than other approaches in the development of competences, confidence, and character.

Youth involvement

In the interventions examined, the authors found that few of them considered youth voices or youth engagement in planning and implementation. They emphasize that youth should be seen as residents and stakeholders in their community, and thus should be considered an important part of the decisions that help shape that community. Adult intervention organizers may hold misperceptions about youth, perhaps that youth lack the knowledge to effectively participate in decision-making or that adults know what is best for youth; these misperceptions, along with those that youth may have about adults, only lead to the undermining of youth involvement in PYD. When youth involvement and engagement are nurtured, youth gain critical competences in leadership and civic engagement, which will not only help their positive development as youths but also as future adult residents of their communities. Neighborhood-level interventions that seek to promote PYD should therefore involve youth voices in their development and implementation.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

4-H already deeply considers the importance of context and youth involvement in its programming – its very foundation is built on the belief that youth are capable of developing the skills and competences needed to lead and succeed. While neighborhood interventions may not be common in 4-H, this review’s conclusions about context integration, atmospheres that encourage supportive relationships, and youth involvement are still very applicable. As 4-H youth development professionals, we can emphasize these elements and also help 4-H volunteers develop their skills in these areas.

Context integration can make or break a community program of any kind. As this review highlights, a lack of understanding of a program’s surrounding community can hinder its goals and overall efficacy – even when the best intentions are employed. I have seen the importance of context integration in the specialized 4-H program that I co-coordinate with Patty Herron in Union County, Oregon. SNACZ, which stands for “students now advocating to create (healthy snacking) zones,” is a four-year research study being conducted in partnership with the OHSU School of Nursing. On the OHSU side, staff collect data related to the snacking behaviors of students and faculty as well as health measurements (such as body mass index) of students. The 4-H side of the program operates much like other 4-H programs and is centered on youth involvement and advocacy in community change. Through a series of project “phases,” SNACZ 4-H club members are advocating for healthier food environments in their schools and communities; they are conducting outreach projects to engage their peers, connecting with their school boards to initiate food policy change, and in the final phase will be collaborating with local food store owners to create healthy snacking zones in the stores near participating schools. The program’s students, volunteer leaders, and staff continually draw on the contexts in which they operate. For instance, in implementing the final phase, SNACZ 4-H club members will be designing community surveys that will determine residents’ interests and preferences in

creating healthy snacking zones in their community stores; this type of “needs assessment” will not only help club members in implementation, but also assures our store owner partners that the project addresses the needs and desires of the community members who shop at their establishments. This type of deep integration not only contributes to PYD but also helps solidify the project’s place inside the community.

This review highlights how an intervention’s internal characteristics impact PYD outcomes and also points to the importance of youth voices in neighborhood interventions. An atmosphere that encourages supportive relationships is something 4-H strongly emphasizes – 4-H sees the importance of successful youth-adult partnerships and how these collaborative relationships help initiate change. It is important to consider the aspects of youth-adult partnerships whether we are program coordinators, 4-H Leaders, or 4-H Ambassadors. There are many resources and trainings available via state and national 4-H websites; it is very useful to share this information with 4-H volunteers to ensure they have the tools needed to create these positive partnerships. “Youth/Adult Partnerships: Tips for Success,” created by Deb Jones of Utah State University Cooperative Extension, is a great two-page resource that can easily be shared with volunteers and revisited time and again by 4-H professionals. The importance of youth voices is also emphasized by 4-H. The Free Child Project put together an online “Youth Voice Toolbox” with a plethora of resources related to building successful youth-adult partnerships; the link to this toolbox is available on the national 4-H website. In our work as SNACZ 4-H program coordinators, Patty and I have seen the benefits of empowering youth voices in the development of outreach projects; this not only produces successful campaigns, but also contributes to the retention and dedication of members. SNACZ 4-H club members who are in their third year of the program often refer to past campaigns with pride and enthusiasm; they see themselves as leaders and advocates amongst their peers and recognize their roles as agents of change.

Overall, 4-H already strives to consider context, develop successful youth-adult partnerships, and empower youth voices. By utilizing 4-H resources and revisiting them as professionals and volunteers, we can only strengthen these elements of 4-H and become more acquainted with how they affect PYD outcomes.

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The Interface between Positive Youth Development and Youth Career Development: New Avenues for Career Guidance Practice

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Topic Area(s)

- Positive Youth Development
- Theory
- Quality Programs
- Career Exploration

Abstract

Article Citation

Bakshi, A. J., & Joshi, J. (2014). The Interface between Positive Youth Development and Youth Career Development: New Avenues for Career Guidance Practice. In G. Arulmai, A. J. Bakshi, F. T. L. Leong, & A. G. Watts (Eds.), *Handbook of Career Development* (pp. 173-201). Springer, New York. Retrieved from: http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4614-9460-7_10

Research Brief

At a time when....Career trajectories are not smooth....The benefits of youth participants in high quality community-based youth development programs extends to youth career development

Contribution to Theory and Practice: Key Messages

Positive youth development (PYD) theory is being constructed using perspectives from multiple theories, including: developmental systems theory (e.g., Lerner, 2006), ecological systems theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), dynamic systems theory (e.g., Thelen & Smith, 2006), action theory (e.g., Brandtsadter, 2006), and life span theory (e.g., Baltes, et al., 2006)

“Intentional change” is central in PYD (Benson, et al, 2006) and distinguishes PYD from adolescent development theory.

In the U.S. PYD represents an exemplary confluence of theory and research with advocacy, policy, and practice (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). A youth is likely to thrive when he/she is asset rich (psychological, not financial, portfolio) and when the youth’s ecology (environmental settings) are asset rich (Benson, 2007).

Youth development is not just promoting individual learning and well-being, but also on promoting the common good. PYD is a vehicle for benefiting the community through youth who are energized, empowered and engaged. *“A young person on a positive development trajectory is one who is able to select positive life goals, optimize opportunities and actions to achieve these goals, and compensate for obstacles that could staff the achievement of goals”* (p. 177). *“...positive changes at individual and community levels are planned and executed with the support of relevant (and integrative) theory, research, available best practice models, and policy”* (p. 181).

Characteristics of High quality PYD Community Youth Development Programs (Catalano, et al., 2004):

- Promote at least five PYD constructs (e.g., competence, self-efficacy, bonding, belief in the future, and positive identity)
- In a caring and supportive program atmosphere
- Likely to have a structured curriculum and consistent program delivery
- At least 9-months of program activity provided with regularity
- With young people participating and engaged in authentic roles, and
- Measure outcomes

PYD programs can effectively facilitate youth exposure to the Work World through exposure to:

- ✓ A wide range of career options
- ✓ Career role models
- ✓ Male and female leaders
- ✓ Access to real working environments
- ✓ Opportunities for project-based, experiential learning
- ✓ Supervised work experiences
- ✓ Community volunteering
- ✓ Partnerships and apprenticeships in the community, and
- ✓ Youth entrepreneurship

Three processes can be included in PYD community programming. They are: (1) career exploration (scanning needs and options), (2) career commitment (supporting decision and connecting to and identifying with a career), and (3) career reconsideration (reflecting, comparing and evolving as necessary).

In particular, transferable (soft) skills that are needed by employers in every field. Those include skills such as: professionalism, dependability, teamwork, sociability, oral and written communication, selecting and using information to solve problems, reasoning, initiative and creative thinking, technology, project management, sustaining goal-oriented activity.

Implications for Youth Development Professional

Youth development professionals need to:

- 1) Invest effort in helping youth and the community forge stronger bridges with each other for holistic and career-related experiences.
- 2) Ground their work in the belief that 'the community' is a powerful place to support youth career development.
- 3) Focus time in rural communities to develop opportunities.
- 4) Target youth skill-building with community needs (esp. rural communities) in mind.
- 5) Develop intentional programming for vocational competence. (NOTE: National 4-H common measures for career readiness are being developed.)
- 6) Support youth participation/youth engagement in one's community as critically important for career development.
- 7) Focus on community capacity building as the bridge between youth and communities.
- 8) Perpetuate community capacity building through designing and providing training to youth and adult volunteers in community based, youth-serving organizations.
- 9) Collaborate with additional research.

Selected References for Additional Reading

The Interest-Driven Pursuits of 15 Year Olds: "Sparks" And Their Association with Caring Relationships and Developmental Outcomes

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Topic Area(s)

- Positive Youth Development
- Youth Engagement

Abstract

In this study, we examined the characteristics of adolescents' deep interests or "sparks," the role of relationships in supporting the development of sparks, and whether having a spark was associated with positive developmental outcomes. Participants included 1,860 15 years olds from across the United States who participated in the national Teen Voice survey (56% European American, N=1,860). Profile-centered analyses suggested that sparks are characterized by the intensity of positive feelings, immersion, and utility. The strongest sparks were associated with pursuits requiring more interpersonal engagement, such as sports, drama and dance, participating in politics, and serving others. Spark intensity was related to better social, academic, and affective outcomes. Additionally, youth with stronger sparks reported more encouragement, financial support, and transportation to spark activities from parents, mentors, extended-family, neighbors, school-based adults, and peers. Benefits of adolescents' engagement in interest-driven activities and the role of caring relationships in supporting such interests are highlighted.

Article Citation

Eliyahu, A., Rhodes, J., & Scales, P. (2014). The Interest-Driven Pursuits of 15 Year Olds: "Sparks" and Their Association with Caring Relationships and Developmental Outcomes. *Applied Developmental Science, 8*(2), 76-89.

Research Brief

This study looks into the "developmental benefits of youth's engagement in intense interests or "sparks" (Benson & Scales, 2009). Quite a lot of research and information from previous surveys and publications are utilized and cited as the foundation for this study that was to delve deeper into finding what type of pursuits and engagement the youth attributed to their "spark". To be most effective, Eliyahu, Rhodes & Sparks, (2014) begins by clearly establishes the definition of "spark" as "passion for a self-identified interest, skill or capacity that metaphorically lights a fire

in the adolescents' life, providing energy, joy, purpose and direction" (Scales, Benson & Roehlkepartain(2011)

Their methodology consisted of recruiting 15 year old residents of the United States, through the Harris Poll Online, to complete a self-administered online survey that took an average of 20 minutes to complete. Eliyahu et al. (2014) clearly state that this was a "somewhat exploratory" study where they "examined how the emerging construct of deep interests or *sparks* is related to a variety of social, emotional, and academic outcomes and demographic characteristics."(p. 78). The survey was created to "investigate how emotional and instrumental supports were related to sparks." (p. 78). This approach had a few limitations. "Data were collected via an online, cross-section self-report survey and consequently is it impossible to determine the directions of the effects." (p.87). Further, they appreciate that the participants "were already part of an ongoing panel that receives incentives to participate in research studies" which "might make this sample less vulnerable and more developmentally advantaged than a truly representative sample of American 15 year olds." (p.87) However, the data that was collected and the information it offers does contribute to understanding that youth who know and can identify a "spark" are "in a better position to pursue activities that bring them happiness, well-being, and more positive contributions to their schools, communities and society."(p.87)

Contribution to Theory

In the study, specific behaviors and outcomes were identified and used to determine the intensity of the "spark" that youth reported. Eliyahu et al. (2014) proposed "that adolescents with deeper interests would have more support of these interests and having deep, impassioned interests would be associated with important outcomes across the social, academic and affective domains." (p.78)

Four forms of *Social Behaviors* were identified and the participants reported the number of hours or times they participated in the following behaviors.

- Leadership and vandalism – number of times engaged per year
- Social good contribution/ volunteerism – number of times engaged per week
- Civic Engagement – value assessment related to race and economic status equality
- Online activity – number of times per week

Academic related outcomes

- Mastery goals – focus on learning
- Attendance
- Grade point average
- School effort – did the youth work up to his/her ability (potential)

Affective (well-being) outcomes

- Sense of purpose – conceptual aspects of hope, meaning, etc.

- Positive future outlook
- Worries or concerns – related to school, future, etc.

Relationships Supporting Sparks – the extent to which different people provided the following:

- Encouragement or emotional support
- Funding assistance
- Transportation provided

As the researchers expected, youth who had High Spark were more engaged, had better self-esteem, and a positive future outlook. These High Spark youth were, generally, more active in sports, drama and dance, or service to others, and had more investment of their families, peer groups and communities.

By measuring the specific behaviors and outcomes of their study, Eliyahu et al. (2014) discovered that their “findings were “consistent with a growing body of research that suggests that young people’s subjective well-being is derived from engagement in satisfying activities and the developmental relationships and sense of connectedness that such engagement provides.” (p.86)

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Programs & Practices

In many ways, 4-H Youth Development programs have already embraced the importance of youth “spark”. Oregon 4-H Mission, Core Values and Program Outcomes accurately describe components needed to provide youth an opportunity to find their spark. Perhaps we only need to be sure we are able to articulate a definition of “spark” that everyone can recognize. In the article, a very simplistic and direct definition of “spark” was given to the 15 year old participants: “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.” (Benson & Scales, 2009)

A very fundamental component that 4-H offers youth is the ability to interact with caring adults across a wide range of projects and interests. “Learning and mastering interest-related skills can require a considerable financial and time commitment, and youth’s access to people who are willing to make such investments can affect their progression from nascent interest to deep passions. Moreover, many creative interests are not well supported in schools, heightening the need for more private investment in skills development.” (Eliyahu et al., p.78) It is essential that the 4-H program and 4-H professional continues to recruit, encourage and support volunteer leaders and mentors to inspire youth sparks.

Finally, intentionally connecting programs and opportunities to help encourage youth “spark” is essential. A strong County 4-H Youth Development Program should be cognizant of the community and individuals’ needs and interests. 4-H Professionals can utilize their access to multiple resources from the University, National 4-H, Oregon State & County Faculty, partners and volunteers, to connect youth to adults and programs. 4-H can and should provide a variety of opportunity to assure the youth development program is able to encourage and support “sparks” in our youth.

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**Using relational development systems theory to link program goals, activities, and outcomes:
The sample case of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development**

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Topic Area(s)

- Youth Development Practice
- Youth Development Profession

Abstract *Note: This article did not contain an abstract, so I prepared a brief overview*

This paper presents research and research models that seek to identify the individual and ecological relations (described as community assets) that may promote thriving as well as preventive effect in regard to risky or of problem behaviors. Positive youth development can be promoted when strengths are aligned with contextual assets found in youth afterschool programs. When these programs provide high-quality mentoring, teach life skills, and afford youth leadership opportunities, the likelihood of youth thriving is enhanced. The results of these studies provide important insights into how youth development program participation is involved in promoting adolescent thriving.

Article Citation

Lerner, R. M., Wang, F., Chase, P. A., Gutierrez, A. S., Harris, E. M., Rubin, R. O., & Yalin, C. (2014). *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 144, Winter 2014 © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. Wiley on-line Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10:1002/yd.20110

Research Brief

This article presents a theory of change in a research model derived from multiple 4-H PYD studies that look at a relational and developmental model of PYD. The authors reiterate the importance of the Five “Cs” of positive youth development—competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring. They describe the Sixth “C” of youth contributions to self, family, community, and civil society as mutually beneficial relations between the adolescent and his or her ecology. Ecological assets are described as families, schools, community institutions, and culture. Thriving can be better achieved when youth are positively engaged with and act to enhance their world. Further, the adolescent is less likely to be engaged in risk/problem behaviors.

The results of these studies provide important insights into how youth development program participation is involved in promoting adolescent thriving. However optimism must be tempered by recognizing constraints that may exist in implementing a PYD model among diverse youth and communities. The research noticed impact of these ecological assets differed in boys and girls. Girls who lived in lower asset neighborhoods exhibited higher levels of PYD with decreased depressive symptoms and risk behaviors when engaged in youth development programs. At high levels of youth development programming, girls in high asset neighborhoods exhibited increased levels of risk behaviors. The opposite relations were seen in boys. Another outcome from these studies is the hardest to reach youth have not been adequately involved in the research. Most studies have focused on adolescents who are reasonably accessible, who often volunteer to participate in studies, and from whom consent is be provided by their parents.

Contribution to Theory

Data from these studies underscore the view that youth development programs are important resources that are able to enhance the likelihood of youth thriving. Promoting PYD and activities, for example, mentor-mentee relationships show positive results in youth development. The research models presented help to inform policies and programs for youth, however it is important to look at all portions of the social-ecological and economic distribution of youth in future studies. The need for additional research, particularly with youth from diverse and lower asset neighborhoods is needed to advance youth opportunities to thrive in a growing complex society.

Contribution to Practice

The continuing review of research still shows that an intentional application for the Six “Cs”, including community engagement is a key factor of youth thriving. In developing future out-of-school time PYD programming, increasing opportunities to engage youth in positive, impactful work that benefits the community is beneficial.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

The article describes a positive view of PYD programming and its potential to enable youth to thrive using good practices. These practices include:

- 1) the mentor-mentee relationship along with the intentionality of the Six “Cs”, thus the role and skill of mentors in Six “C” application.
- 2) aligning resources of youth development, i.e.: the “Big Three” of positive and sustained adult-youth relationships, skill-building activities, and youth leadership opportunities.
- 3) recognize and foster the strengths of youth (a young person’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement.).

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Hope in Context: Developmental Profiles of Trust, Hopeful Future Expectations, and Civic Engagement Across Adolescence

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Topic Area(s)

- Hope
- Hopeful Future Expectations
- Positive Youth Development
- Parent Connection
- Trust
- Civic Engagement
- Youth Contribution

Abstract

“Hopeful expectations for the future have been shown to play an important role in the positive development of youth, including youth contributions to society. Although theory and some research suggest that familial socialization may influence future-oriented cognitions, little work has focused on the possible interrelation of parent-child relationships and the development of hope, particularly during adolescence. Accordingly, the first goal of this study was to identify developmental profiles of youth with respect to hopeful future expectations (HFE) and parental trust across adolescence. Next, we explored whether these developmental trajectories were related to youth Contribution, indexed by community leadership, service, and helping attitudes and behaviors. We used growth mixture modeling to simultaneously examine trajectories of adolescents’ perceived connections with parents (indexed by parent trust) and HFE among 1,432 participants (59% female) from Waves 3 through 6 (grades 7 through 10) of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. A four-profile model provided the best fit to the data, with the following profiles: Moderate HFE/U-shaped Trust; Moderate HFE/Increasing Trust; Both Decreasing; and Both High Stable profiles. We then explored whether hope-trust profiles were related to youth Contribution in Wave 7. Contrary to hypotheses, results indicated that the profile reflecting the greatest discrepancy in HFE and trust across early to middle adolescence (i.e., Moderate Hope/U-shaped Trust) was associated with the highest mean Contribution scores. The implications of the finding for future theory and research are discussed.

Article Citation

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Research Brief

Contribution to Theory: Know & do – Youth Development Professionals

This article identified development profiles of youth with respect to **hopeful future expectations (HFE)** and **parental trust** across adolescence. It next explored whether these development profiles were related to youth Contribution, community leadership, service, and helping attitudes and behaviors. Previous research has shown that higher levels of hope predict academic success (Ciarrochi et al. 2007) and psychosocial well-being, academic achievement, and athletic achievement (Lopez et al. 2009). Hopeful future expectations (HFE) have been linked to the more global indicators of youth thriving, including positive youth development (PYD) as indexed by the “Five Cs” – Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection and Caring – as well as the “Sixth C” – Contribution (Lerner et al. 2005; Schmid et al. 2011). In the 2010 Gallup Student Poll, a survey of more than 240,000 youth in Grades 5 through 12, hope was very strongly correlated in indicators of PYD, such as self-efficacy, intentional self-regulations, and well-being (Lopez et al. 2010).

Despite the importance of hope for the positive development of youth, very little research has been done to explore the role of hope in adolescents’ development pathways. The concept of trust, which Erikson (1959) theorized as being foundational to the emergence of hope across childhood and adolescence, has been absent from hope research in recent decades. The present study explored the development course of hope and trust across the adolescent period. Hope theory (Schmid & Lopez 2011) identifies hope as a key individual strength that contributes to the agency of the individual in successfully regulation his or her relations. This research is based on a model wherein hope involved HFE and intentional self-regulatory skills such as goal setting and management (Schmid and Lopez 2011). HFE is influenced by ecological assets and in turn plays a role in the individual’s relations with the environment. Individuals who are hopeful are more likely to positively engage with their families, communities, and society.

A sense of hope is established by one’s history of actions that lead to the attainment of goals. Hope is influenced by various constraints or supports that either hinder or promote goal attainment. In this study, the adolescents HFE and their perceived trusting relationships with their parents were examined. Trust is conceptualized here as adolescents’ expectations for warm, supportive, and reliable interactions between themselves and their parents. This trust and HFE provide a foundation for expectations that other social interactions will be positive and

provide the model of positive behaviors that youth incorporate into their own self-concepts. Adolescents trust that their parents are supportive. This implied support plays a key role in giving adolescents the confidence that their future plans may be realized.

A secondary goal of this investigation was to examine the association between hope & trust and youth Contribution. Variations of HFE and parent trust may have implications for adolescents' social relationships outside of the family. Erikson (1959) theorized that hope plays an important role in an individual's identity development in adolescence and beyond. He proposed that hope is maintained by trusting that social interactions will be positive. These positive social interactions are the primary force shaping identity development in adolescence. Thus, hope may serve to reinforce positive engagement with others, as well the exploration of future adult roles. Trusting social relationships may build and support hope as youth develop. In turn, hopeful youth may be more likely to engage in positive ways. Hopeful youth may be more likely to identify meaningful goals that contribute to their families, schools, and communities.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice

With over 80% of the study's participants falling in the High trust and High Hopeful Future Expectations (HFE) group the results are consistent with previous findings from the 4-H Study of PYD, which suggest that a majority of youth in this sample are on optimal trajectories for thriving indicators. This research found that HFE and trust may be highly linked.

The Moderate HFE with low to increasing trust (identified as Moderate Hope/U-shaped Trust) was associated with the highest mean contribution score, a surprising finding given that the profiles of HFE and trust were so divergent and that trust dipped so dramatically. Future research might examine whether the concurrent hope-trust profiles of youth are most relevant for predicting their attitudes and behaviors toward current Contribution.

HFE and trust across the adolescent period correlate with high Contribution. Trusting relationships with youth promote community engagement in later adolescence. By positively acting with youth or providing a positive environment for youth to explore and visualize their future, Youth Development Professionals can play a key role in youth's development. This research provided evidence for the importance within adolescence of trust, hope and Contribution.

Selected References for Additional Reading

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