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## Exploring Developmental Assets And Strengths In Mississippi Youth

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EXPLORING DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS AND STRENGTHS IN MISSISSIPPI YOUTH

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Psychology  
The University of Mississippi

by

UMIECA NICOLLE HANKTON

August 2014

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess developmental assets in youth from rural Mississippi and expected to gain a better understanding of how school, family, and community contexts were related to optimal development. Strengths were assessed using the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP; Search Institute, 2005), along with individual measures that assessed children's hope, general self-efficacy, and perceived purpose in life. It was hypothesized that a several context factors, related to family, school, and community would be related to positive youth outcomes. Specifically, the researcher believed that family demographic factors (e.g. family income, median income, and parents' education level), school factors (e.g. graduation rates, dropout rates, ACT scores, school accountability rating, and availability of extra-curricular activities), and community factors (e.g. youth servicing agencies, recreational facilities, and crime rates) would influence how youth develop. Youth (N=232) from two rural counties in North Mississippi reported a fair range of development assets which suggested vulnerability to negative developmental outcomes. Overall, participants in both settings had similar asset profiles. The school and their community contexts were similar on most factors assessed. Study results indicated that family income was positively correlated with developmental assets including DAP

total, general self-efficacy, and hope. Supplemental analysis revealed gender differences in developmental assets with female participants reporting more developmental assets than males. Results highlighted a need for continued focus on youth development and the acquisition of developmental assets for youth living in rural areas.

## DEDICATION

07/16/1953—02/14/2013

In loving memory of my mother, Dianne Hankton, who taught me the value of being committed to myself and others, the power of perseverance, the freedom in forgiveness, and the strength gained from suffering. This would have been our year!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I offer my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Laura Renee Johnson, who has been a constant support through the years. I thank my committee members, Dr. Kelly Wilson, Dr. Debra Moore, and Dr. Mervin Matthews, for their exceptional support and contributions to the completion of this project. A special thank you is extended to my lab mate, Chris Drescher, and to my “Hexaflexme” family for the unbelievable amount of support provided. Thank you for creating an atmosphere that allowed me to be vulnerable but gain strength. Namaste! Last, all Praise and Glory is given to the Creator for the blessings that He continues to bestow upon me.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

To adequately understand how youth develop, researchers must adopt a wide lens that includes the examination of key contextual factors such as the family, school, community, and cultural background. Adolescents in Mississippi face numerous contextual challenges that impact their healthy development and psychological well-being. The struggles impacting Mississippi and its youth are widely known and it is all too common for Mississippi to rank first on the worst list and last on the best list. Indeed, a 2012 report from the Annie E. Casey foundation ranked Mississippi as the worst state in the nation on a number of dimensions. Mississippi has the highest obesity rates, percentage of children living in poverty, teen pregnancy rates, child and teen death rates, and lowest graduation rates (Kids Count Data, 2012). Given these difficulties and their psychological implications, research in Mississippi has highlighted the maladjustment of youth and adolescents exposed to contextual challenges (Gratz, Latzman, Young, Heiden, Damon, Hight, & Tull, 2012).

Mental illness impacts Mississippi youth to a devastating degree. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed 29 percent of high school students in Mississippi reported feeling sad or hopeless, 15 percent seriously considered suicide, 11 percent made a suicide plan, and 9 percent attempted suicide. These numbers

are frightening as suicide is the third leading cause of death in Mississippian youth (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2011). Youth incarcerated in several juvenile corrections facilities across the state of Mississippi experience a wide variety of psychological impairments that include separation anxiety and adjustment disorders (39 percent), substance abuse disorder (36 percent), posttraumatic stress disorder (26 percent), and major depression (19 percent), to name a few (Robertson, Dill, Husain, & Undesser, 2004). Fifteen percent of 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in four school districts across the state of Mississippi reported self-injurious behaviors and 21 percent reported thoughts of self-injurious behaviors with more self-injurious behavior reports from African American youth (Latzman, Gratz, Young, Heiden, Damon, & Hight, 2010).

While these findings provide some insight regarding youth development in Mississippi, there is a need to consider alternative perspectives that shift away from the sole focus on deficits to include youth strengths and assets. Research that focuses on youth deficits leaves many questions unanswered. For example, how do some youth survive the challenges of their environment and others do not? What individual, family, or community factors promote resiliency (Masten & Wright, 2009). What can researchers learn about youth development in Mississippi when strengths and assets are emphasized? How can research that focuses on strengths and assets support youth servicing agencies in building developmental assets in youth? The answers to these questions lay in a more comprehensive assessment of youth development that recognizes the problems that youth face but also highlight the strengths and assets of youth. Emphasis should be placed on youth strengths and how to foster greater autonomy and skills instead of viewing youth as deficient and in need of repair. The current study gives light to positive youth

development in northern Mississippi. By drawing attention to areas of optimal development (youth assets), we can have a more complete picture and a strengths base from which to cultivate even more assets. The study also explores how context is related to youth assets.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

### *State of Mississippi Youth*

Economic, social, educational, health and racial disparities exist in the state of Mississippi. With an estimated three million inhabitants, Mississippi ranks the lowest in the nation on multiple dimensions when compared to other states (Kids Count Data, 2012). Mississippi youth face a conglomeration of contextual challenges that range from extreme levels of poverty, high pregnancy rates, fewer educational accomplishments, and limited access to adequate health care. Specifically, Mississippi has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation with only 76 percent of the students graduating from high school. Twenty-two percent of Mississippians between the ages of 18-24 are unemployed, do not attend school, or do not have degrees beyond a high school diploma. Mississippi is highest in the nation with 35% of its residents below the age of 18 living in poverty. Fifty-eight percent of youth in Mississippi live with family members whose incomes are less than the federal poverty line with 39 percent of Mississippian youth living in environments in which unemployment and underemployment is prevalent (Kids Count Data, 2012). Additionally, data collected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation revealed more alarming statistics about the state of Mississippi. Based on a scale from 1 (highest/best) to 50 (lowest/worst), Mississippi consistently had low scores on all of the

human development indicators measured including economic rank (50), education rank (48), health rank (48), and family and community rank (50). Overall, with a ranking of 50, Mississippi was ranked as the worst state among the other states in the nation (Kids Count Data, 2012). Thus, it appears that the Hospitality State, is the least hospitable to youth. However, grim the portrait of Mississippi may be, a different side of the youth development story needs to be told. Mississippians are known for their strong family bonds and supports, neighborly care, faith, determination, and willingness to help others. It is certain that youth also have strengths that are too often overlooked, yet important for building grit and resilience and for promoting social and civic engagement. Fortunately, other youth scholars have taken an interest in viewing youth as possessing the skills and strengths needed to solve their own problems and also those of society. Dating back to the early 1990s, scholars interested in optimum youth development formulated theories and models of “positive youth development” (PYD) (Benson et al, 2006).

### *Positive Youth Development*

PYD is a strengths-based approach to understanding and nurturing youth. Youth are viewed as viable agents of change with developmental assets and skills that promote positive developmental outcomes. Proponents of PYD highlight the more favorable aspects of youth development such as self-efficacy (Benson et al., 2006; Catalano et al, 2004), hope, purpose (Johnson & Johnson-Pynn, 2007), social competence and caring (Lerner, 2006), commitment to learning, and positive identity (Scales & Leffert, 2004). These assets play a major role in youth developing an appreciation for pro-social behaviors and becoming engaged in their communities.

### *Model of Developmental Assets*

The Search Institute's developmental framework (Benson, 2007, Scales & Leffert, 2004; Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004) is a widely acknowledged PYD framework and applied research model that identified a compilation of 40 developmental assets essential to the healthy development of youth. The 40 assets are divided into two categories: external and internal assets. External assets are characterized as positive supports received from the youth's family, peers, school and religious leaders. External assets include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. Internal assets such as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity are the characteristics or assets that youth need to see within themselves to flourish. The assets can also be categorized by DAP context areas: personal, social, family, school, and community.

#### Description of External DAP Asset Categories (Search Institute, 2005)

External Assets	Descriptions
Support	Support from parents, family, and other adults; parent-adolescent communication; advice and help from parent; helpful neighbors; and caring school environment
Empowerment	Feeling safe a home, at school and in the neighborhood; feeling valued; and having useful jobs and roles.
Boundaries and Expectations	Having good role models; clear rules at home and school; encouragement from parents and teachers; and monitoring by family and neighbors.
Constructive Use of Time	Participation in religious or spiritual activity; involvement in a sport, club, or group; creative activities; and quality time at home.

Description of Internal DAP Asset Categories (Search Institute, 2005)

Internal Assets	Description
Commitment to Learning	Enjoys reading and learning; caring about school; doing homework; and being encouraged to try new things.
Positive Values	Standing up for one’s beliefs; taking responsibility; avoiding alcohol and drugs; valuing honesty; healthy behaviors; being encouraged to help others; and helping, respecting, and serving others.
Social Competencies	Building friendships; properly expressing feelings; planning ahead; resisting negative peer pressure; being sensitive to and accepting others; and resolving conflicts peacefully.
Positive Identity	Optimism; locus of control; and self esteem

An increasing number of PYD scholars use the 58-item Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) as a tool to measure developmental assets in youth with promising results (Search Institute, 2005; Benson, 2007; Scales, 2011; Drescher, Chin, Johnson, Johnson-Pynn, 2012; Cabrera, 2013). Benson (2007) found a positive relationship between PYD assets and academic progression. Youth that accumulated 30 or more assets (out of 40) had higher grade point averages than youth with fewer assets. Also, having more positive assets served as a protective buffer against high risk behaviors (Benson, 2007; Search Institute, 2003; 2005a). Additionally, Sesma and Roehlkepartain (2003) found that youth with more developmental assets experience multiple life successes (e.g. success in school, advanced leadership skills, develop resilience when faced with hardship, avoid danger, and value diversity). Leffert and colleagues (1998) posit that developmental assets are useful and essential to the identification of specific benchmarks for positive



development. When developmental assets are present in youth, they serve as “building blocks” that improve developmental outcomes (Search Institute, 2005a)

Congruent with previous PYD studies, Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldrige-Houser & Cox’s (2010), found that possession of positive developmental assets reduced the probability of youth engaging in risk behaviors such as illicit drug use, alcohol and tobacco use, sexual activity, violence and antisocial behaviors. Consequently, youth who fail to acquire positive developmental assets are more susceptible to risk behaviors which may result in a failure to thrive. Examining the presence of PYD assets of youth in the Missouri juvenile justice system, Chew and colleagues (2010) found that youth who engaged in high-risk behaviors lacked community resources, positive peer or parental support, and a connectedness to their community. Youth who lacked these PYD assets were also more likely to endorse difficulties with substance abuse (Chew et al., 2010). These results provide support for the use of the developmental assets profile with a diverse sample of youth with a range of life experience. However, more research is needed among youth from rural and low SES environments, as well as among other minority youth. (Search Institute, 2003). Youth from Mississippi struggle with similar contextual challenges and life experiences. An exploration of youth assets in Mississippi will help to identify areas of development that need further growth or strengthening.

### *Role of Context*

Considerations should be given to the multiple contexts in which youth live. From an ecological perspective, youth development is a mixture of the interactions of the child and the context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While some youth thrive despite exposure to negative psychosocial events in their environment, not every youth is immune to the

consequences of these events (Shin, Morgan, Buhin, Truitt, & Vera, 2010).

Consequently, the environment or community in which a youth lives greatly influences whether the youth will accumulate the assets needed for positive development. For example, Resnick et al., (1997) found that youth who lacked family support and connections with their home, school, and church communities were more likely to engage in high risk behaviors that interfered with their abilities to thrive. Additionally, Shin et al., (2010), suggested that youth who reported greater contentment with their environment also reported greater life satisfaction.

*Family factors.* In most instances, the home environment is the first, and most influential, context that youth will experience (Ward & Zabriskie, 2011). It is within the family context that key relationships begin to develop where youth gain the skills and competencies needed to flourish. Ward & Zabriskie (2011) stated that family context must be “included in the youth development equation” when examining youth development (p. 38). Youth exposed to strong, positive, and healthy family relationships tend to avoid engagement in risky behaviors (Bahr & Hoffman, 2010). Family socio-economic status tends to influence the extent to which youth may thrive. Youth from low-income families do not have equal accessibility to healthcare and other much needed resources. As the number of positive contextual factors increase, so does the probability that youth will avoid high risk behaviors and engage in pro-social behaviors (Benson, 2007).

*Community Factors.* In addition to the family context, community involvement and connectedness have been shown to affect developmental outcomes. Most of the youth studies that have investigated the impact of community influence on youth

development have done so using a deficits approach (Anderson, Sabatelli, & Koustic, 2007). Lack of community support, exposure to poverty, and community violence are obstacles suggested to diminish a youth's ability to thrive (McDonald, 2010). Yet, fewer studies have taken a strengths-based approach to examining the positive contribution that community context plays on youth development (Anderson et. al, 2007). Communities that offer enrichment programs such as afterschool programs, recreational activities, and leadership and character building activities, afford their youth opportunities to develop life skills that contribute to positive development (Benson, 2002). However, it is still unclear how youth living in rural settings experience their communities as well as the range of developmental assets for these youth. The developmental assets of youth exposed to contextual challenges such as delinquent crime rates, substances abuse rates, and lack of resources is also unclear. Sadly, these gaps in the literature extend beyond the community context into school contexts.

*School Factors.* Youth spend more of their wakeful hours in the presence of teachers, administrators, and peers, than in any other context. Because youth spend most of their time in the school context, it is not surprising that school experiences, whether positive or negative, greatly influence development. Positive experiences with teachers, curricula that peak curiosity, and participation in extra-curricular and school sponsored activities has been linked to positive developmental outcomes (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Unfortunately, Carlisle (2011) found that middle school students had not acquired the skills needed to establish healthy relationships with teachers and peers. The lack of skills acquisition may be attributed to limited access to positive role models. Tackett (2005) highlighted the importance of developing meaningful interactions among students and

teachers and its positive contribution to development. It is through these positive connections between teacher and students that students experience positive school climates (Scales, 2005). Teacher to student ratio and school size, especially for youth living in rural communities, also serve as contributing factors to youth development. Geographical location (e.g. urban, suburban, rural) and school composition (e.g. ethnic make-up and proportion of students receiving free/reduced lunch) play a role in youth development as youth from high poverty and minority backgrounds experience fewer educational successes than youth from low poverty environments. Geographical isolation may contribute to decreases in the academic aspirations of youth living in rural areas as some adolescents may value their connections to family and community and understand pursuance of a post-secondary education often requires moving away from their family and community. Additionally, schools located in geographically isolated communities experience much difficulty in locating and retaining highly qualified teachers (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011).

#### *Rationale for Further Investigation*

Previous research has made it clear that context greatly influences youth development (Damon, 2003; Benson et al., 2006). However, gaps in the literature continue to exist regarding the accumulation of developmental assets based on different contextual variables and settings. The American Family Assets study (Search Institute, 2012) found that youth living in urban areas had more developmental assets than youth living in rural areas. Additionally, families living in environments in which their basic needs were not met reported fewer developmental assets. Low-income families struggle to access resources because of poverty, lower educational attainment, and language

barriers. These barriers, in turn, interfere with the developmental needs of youth living in these environments (Search Institute, 2012). The majority of PYD research has been conducted on youth living in urban areas (Search Institute, 2012; Anderson et al., 2007), with limited focus on youth living in rural areas. Developmental assets in Mississippi youth may be low because Mississippi youth face similar contextual challenges and rank low on most indicators of well-being (Kids Count Data, 2012). A need exists for more empirically supported PYD research to explain how rural youth, such as in MS, develop as well as to identify specific differences in development, if they exist. Additionally, specific research regarding the positive aspects of youth in the state of Mississippi is lacking.

Mississippi is of specific interest. It has the highest poverty and lowest income rates in the nation (Census Bureau, 2011) coupled with a primary emphasis on youth mental health deficit. Research in this area is needed as youth living in rural settings may not have the same community, family, and school resources as youth living in urban settings (MacTavish & Salamon, 2006). Conducting research in rural settings would afford researchers and PYD scholars the opportunity to understand how youth in these areas develop as well as identify areas of development that need attention.

### **III. PRESENT STUDY**

The dual goals of the study were to 1) provide a fresh perspective on youths' development through assessment and description of youth strengths and assets and 2) examine how various context variables were related to assets. More specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: What are the strengths and developmental assets of youth in northern MS districts? How are developmental assets associated with various contextual factors (e.g. school, community, family)? What are the differences in development based on context? What do Mississippi youth describe as positive youth assets and how does this related to standard PYD measures (e.g. DAP)?

#### **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** Family socio-demographic variables (e.g. maternal & paternal educational attainment, income, median income per county, and percentage of free and reduced lunch) will be associated with PYD outcomes (e.g. DAP total score, perceived meaning in life, hope, and self-efficacy).

**Hypothesis 2:** School settings factors (e.g. graduation rates, drop-out rate, student/teacher ratio, arts and extra-curricular programs offered, and school accountability label) will be associated with PYD.

**Hypothesis 3:** Community settings factors (e.g. youth servicing agencies, youth recreational facilities, crime rates, and substance abuse rates) will be associated with positive youth development.

**Hypothesis 4:** Youth asset profiles will vary from school to school.

**Hypothesis 5:** Based on review of qualitative data, youth will identify positive youth characteristics that appear to reflect internal assets on the DAP (e.g. confident, loyal, personable), and possibly, some assets that are not included on the standard measure.

#### **IV. METHODS**

##### *Participants*

Participants were 232 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students that attended public school in Northern Mississippi. Seventy-three percent attended Strayhorn High School (169) and 27% attended North Panola Junior High School (63). Participants ranged in age from 11-16, with an average age of 13. One participant did not indicate the school of attendance. Forty-nine percent of the participants identified as female (115), 50% identified as male (116), and one percent did not specify gender (2). Study participants were Caucasian (46%), Black (33%), Biracial (7%), Native American or American Indian (4%), Hispanic or Latino (4%), Asian or Asian American (1%), and Other (6%). Participants were asked whether their immediate family had enough money for basic needs. Sixty-five percent



(156) of the respondents felt that their family ‘always’ had enough money to meet their basic needs (see table 1).

### *Procedures*

Schools were recruited through written requests for participation and through verbal invitations. Participants were recruited via verbal classroom announcements. Participants were informed that inclusion in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Each participant was asked to read the assent form and then date and endorse the box that indicated their preference for participation. Participants that did not want to participate in the study were encouraged to continue course work provided by the teacher. Survey packets were collected after all of the participants were finished. This approach was used to maintain the anonymity of non-participants and minimize any pressure to participate that may have surfaced as a result of being identified as a non-participant by others. At the completion of the study, participants were provided with information related to the nature of the study. This study was approved, with waiver of parental consent, by the institutional review board at the University of Mississippi.

Table 1: Individual and Family Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variables	Tate N=169	North Panola N=63	Total N=232
Ability to Meet Basic Needs	%	%	%
Never	1%	2%	1%
Rarely	3%	2%	2%
Sometimes	7%	3%	6%
Usually	28%	13%	24%
Always	63%	81%	68%
Father's Educational Level			
Graduate degree	7%	13%	8%
College graduate	11%	8%	11%
Some college or technical	13%	3%	10%
High School	29%	32%	30%
Primary School	7%	3%	6%
Do Not Know	33%	39%	35%
Mother's Educational Level			
Graduate degree	14%	21%	16%
College graduate	17%	13%	16%
Some college or technical	16%	11%	15%
High School	20%	32%	24%
Primary School	5%	2%	4%
Do Not Know	27%	21%	25%

*School/County Demographics*

Strayhorn High School resides in Sarah, Mississippi. Sarah, Mississippi, is a small town located in Tate County. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Kids Count Data, 2012) Tate County has an estimated population of 28,886 and a median

income of \$40,811. Data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2013) indicate that 27 percent of the children residing in Tate County live in poverty, 43 percent of the children live in single parent households, and 27 percent receive inadequate social support. Strayhorn High School comprises grades 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> with an estimated 416 students. According to the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) educational standards, Tate County School District has an overall successful accountability rating. Strayhorn High School contributes to the district's overall accountability by earning a high performance accountability label for two consecutive years. Strayhorn has a graduation success rate of 73.8 percent with students earning an average ACT score of 17.60. Students may participate in extracurricular activities such as joining various sports teams, Student Government Association, Chess Club, Green Club, and Beta Club.

North Panola Junior High School is located in Como, Mississippi. Como, Mississippi, is a small town located in Panola County. Panola County has an estimated population of 34,473 with a median income of \$33,489 (Kids Count Data, 2012). Thirty-six percent of youth living in Panola County live in poverty, 50 percent reside in single parent homes, and 30 percent receive inadequate social support (RWJF, 2013). Panola County has a graduation success rate of 62.1 percent. Graduates of the Panola County School District earned an average ACT score of 16.30. Based on school accountability reports, Panola County School district and North Panola Junior High School fell below the standards set by the MDE and were on Academic Watch. North Panola Junior High is comprised of grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> with an estimated 350 students. North Panola Junior High offers its students the option of joining several clubs and organizations (e.g. Art,

Cheerleading, chess and dance teams, Future Business Leaders of America, Jr. Beta Club, Math Olympiads, and Student Council).

### *Measures*

Demographic Questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire asks participants to indicate their gender, age, number of years in school, country of origin, city of residence, geographical makeup (e.g., rural, urban, small town, etc.), and parents' highest level of educational attainment, income, and median income per county. Additional community and school context information was collected for analysis. School context information included graduation and drop-out rates per school, student/teacher ratio, school programs, and each school's accountability label. Community context information included the number of youth servicing agencies, Boys and Girls clubs, crime rates, and substance abuse rates. Information for the school and community contexts was gathered post-survey administration.

Developmental Assets Profile. The Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) is a 58-item measure designed to assess how youth fare in multiple contexts such as family, school, and community. The DAP measures forty assets and was designed for use with youth ages 11 to 18 (Grades 6 to 12). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'Not at All or Rarely' to 'Extremely or Almost Always.' Respondents are instructed to describe themselves "now or within the past three months." For the current study, the DAP will be used to assess external and internal assets. External assets measure the positive experiences and support young people receive from their social environment including family, peers, and institutions such as school. Internal assets

measure the personal characteristics of youth that guide choices and create a sense of centeredness, purpose, and focus. The current internal consistency score for the DAP total was .96 (see table 2 for other subscales).

General Self Efficacy Scale. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was originally developed in German in 1979 and has since been published in 26 other languages. Its purpose is to assess a general sense of self-efficacy in order to predict coping with daily stressors and stressful life events. It is acceptable for the general population, but is not designed for those under 12 years of age. It contains 10 items, each with a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *hardly true*, 3 = *moderately true*, 4 = *exactly true*), and takes about 4 minutes to administer. Sample items include “It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals; I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort, and I can usually handle whatever comes my way. A previous study has demonstrated acceptable reliability of the GSE with cronbach alphas in the upper .80s (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Internal consistency for the current study was .82.

Children’s Hope Scale. The Children’s Hope Scale (Synder et. al, 1997) is a six-item self-report instrument designed to measure dispositional hope in youth ages 8-19. This measure assesses two components: agency (the ability to initiate and sustain action toward goals) and pathways (the capacity to find a means to carry out a goal). Responses are based on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=*None of the time*), 2=*A little of the time*, 3=*Some of the time*, 4=*A lot of the time*, 5=*Most of the time*, 6=*All of the time*) and takes about two to four minutes to complete. Synder and colleagues reported an internal

reliability coefficient of .77. Gilman and Hueber (2006) reported an alpha of .88 for the total score. Internal consistency for the current study was .87.

Purpose in Life. The Purpose in Life scale (Schulenberg, Schnetzer, & Buchanan, 2010) is a 4-item measure that assesses perceived meaning in life and purpose. Responses are based on a 7-point Likert-type response format in which different anchors for each of the four items are presented. For example, item 1 reads “In life I have:”, with the response choice ranging from 1 (no goals or aims at all) to 7 (very clear goals and aims). However, item 2 reads “My personal existence is:”, and has a response options ranging from 1 (utterly meaningless/without purpose) to 7 (very purposeful and meaningful). Items are summed to produce a total score ranging from 4 to 28. Higher scores suggest more perceived meaning in life and purpose. Internal consistency ranges were in the mid to high 80’s (Schulenberg et al., 2010). Internal consistency for the current study was .86.

Positive Youth Characteristics. How youth conceptualize the positive qualities of youth who was doing well was assessed using a single open-ended item that asked respondents “What are the three most important positive characteristics/traits that a youth role model should have?”

#### *Data Analysis*

This study used a mixed method design (quantitative and qualitative) to examine the relationship between contextual factors and PYD assets in youth living in MS. A mixed method design was used to allow participants to answer a question untapped by the quantitative measures. Prior to analyzing results, preliminary tests (e.g. descriptive analyses) were conducted to examine the distribution of scores to ensure that the dataset

met the necessary assumptions to run the proposed analyses (Pallant, 2010). Means and standard deviations were calculated for all PYD measures with results presented based on overall sample, gender, and school. Crosstabulations were performed to measure the percentage of participants' developmental asset profile (DAP) scores that were in the excellent, good, fair, and poor ranges (see Table 3). These preliminary analyses provided an overall profile of youth strengths (e.g. DAP) and provided an indication of the levels of hope, self-efficacy, and purpose in Mississippi youth (see Table 2). School and community context data from the Mississippi Department of Education's website, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's website (Kids Count Data, 2012), and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's website (County Health Ratings, 2012) were compiled.

Differences in school and community contexts were first explored by comparing the rates for the hypothesized factors to the rates reported for the State of Mississippi on the same factors. Based on this comparison, each factor was given a label of below, above, or comparable to the State's data. This approach proved problematic as further inspection of the data on a group-level appeared to show limited variability between the two settings and essentially not enough groups to perform proposed analysis. In light of similar school and community profiles and because data for these contexts were collected post survey administration, school was used as a proxy to examine group differences.

Multivariate multiple regression analysis was then used to identify independent variables that significantly influenced dependent variables. The result of the multivariate regression was also supported by examining the outcome of bivariate testing. Once significant independent variables were identified, a series of regressions analyses were conducted to examine the extent of the influence on youth development (e.g. DAP total,

hope, self-efficacy, and purpose). Additionally, a series of MANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in development by school location (H4). Supplemental exploratory analyses were performed to investigate gender differences in DAP assets, context scores, hope, self-efficacy, and perceived purpose in life. Further exploration of the data examined differences in DAP asset and context scores by school.



Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Variables

PYD Measures	Tate N=169	North Panola N=63	Total N=232	$\alpha$
DAP Total	39.20 (10.32)	42.22 (9.71)	39.92 (10.33)	.96
DAP External Assets	20.44 (5.67)	21.14 (5.32)	20.57 (5.64)	.92
Support	21.48 (6.80)	22.83 (5.65)	21.79 (6.57)	.81
Empowerment	20.89 (6.03)	20.45 (6.17)	20.70 (6.13)	.72
Boundaries/Expectations	21.07 (6.08)	21.11 (6.01)	21.01 (6.13)	.84
Constructive Use of Time	18.89 (7.05)	20.82 (7.07)	19.35 (7.12)	.54
DAP Internal Assets	18.88 (4.98)	21.08 (5.08)	19.43 (5.13)	.94
Learning	17.91 (6.15)	20.84 (6.17)	18.68 (6.28)	.83
Values	19.36 (5.56)	20.20 (5.88)	19.53 (5.71)	.84
Competencies	19.14 (5.44)	20.81 (5.93)	19.56 (5.64)	.78
Identity	19.22 (5.82)	22.46 (5.36)	20.06 (5.91)	.79
Personal	19.07 (5.20)	22.00 (4.83)	19.82 (5.30)	.84
Social	19.31 (5.45)	21.17 (5.78)	19.76 (5.64)	.85
Family	22.22 (6.76)	23.73 (5.82)	22.56 (6.63)	.90
School	20.25 (6.08)	19.75 (6.78)	20.06 (6.29)	.86
Community	18.04 (6.10)	18.88 (6.31)	18.22 (6.18)	.82
Other PYD Measures				
General Self Efficacy	2.99 (.52)	3.08 (.54)	3.01 (.53)	.82
Hope	25.75 (6.79)	28.75 (6.35)	26.63 (6.80)	.87
Purpose in Life	21.83 (5.11)	23.52 (4.00)	22.03 (5.00)	.86

*Note.* The following provides information for interpreting the means for the DAP Total and Asset Categories. The range of scores for the DAP Total are Low (0-29), Fair (30-40), Good (41-50), & Excellent (51-60). The ranges for the DAP Asset and Context Areas are Poor (0-14), Fair (15-20), Good (21-25), & Excellent (26-30).

Table 3: Levels of Developmental Assets

Developmental Assets Profile	Excellent %	Good %	Fair %	Poor %
DAP Total	13	34	34	16
External Assets	19	32	32	17
Support	26	36	23	15
Empowerment	23	30	31	17
Boundaries/Expectations	23	35	24	18
Constructive Use of Time	20	25	34	21
Internal Assets	13	26	42	19
Learning	13	29	30	<b>28-</b>
Values	19	21	38	22
Competencies	17	29	34	21
Identity	18	30	35	17
Context Scales				
Personal	14	30	39	17
Social	17	37	26	20
Family	<b>41+</b>	27	19	13
School	24	27	29	21
Community	10	26	35	<b>29-</b>

*Note.* 5-15% of the scores were expected to fall in the thriving and challenging ranges with most of the other scores in the middle (2013 Sample Data Report). (+) indicates a strength/(-) indicates a weakness

## V. RESULTS

### *DAP Assets and Other PYD Measures*

Descriptive statistics for the Developmental Assets Profile revealed scores that were fairly comparable to Scales' (2011) study that examined youth developmental assets from a global perspective with the exception of notable differences in overall total development and internal assets. The overall mean for total developmental assets ( $M=39.92$ ,  $SD=10.33$ ) and internal developmental assets ( $M=19.43$ ,  $SD=5.13$ ) seemed lower than the reported U.S. means in Scales' (2011) study, ( $M=41.31$ ,  $SD=9.99$ ) and ( $M=20.64$ ,  $SD=5.08$ ), respectively. The four internal subscale means scores were Learning ( $M=18.68$ ,  $SD=6.28$ ), Positive Values ( $M=19.53$ ,  $SD=5.71$ ), Competencies ( $M=19.56$ ,  $SD=5.64$ ), and Positive Identity ( $M=20.06$ ,  $SD=5.91$ ). All of the internal assets for the current study, excluding positive identity, appeared to be lower than the scores reported by Scales. External assets scores ( $M=20.57$ ,  $SD=5.64$ ) appeared consistent with the means gathered from Scales' 2011 study, with the exception of Empowerment scores being slightly lower ( $M=20.70$ ,  $SD=6.13$ ). The other three external subscales mean scores were Support ( $M=21.79$ ,  $SD=6.57$ ), Boundaries/Expectations ( $M=21.01$ ,  $SD=6.13$ ), and Constructive Use of Time ( $M=19.35$ ,  $SD=7.12$ ). Additionally, the five DAP context

scores were Personal (M=19.81, SD=5.30), Social (M=19.76, SD=5.64), Family (M=22.56, SD=6.63), School (M=20.06, SD=6.29), and Community (M=18.22, SD=6.18). Family context and school context scores were also similar to study results reported for U.S. youth in Scales' (2011) global study. Overall mean scores for this sample are indicative of total development in the fair range (30-40) and internal and external assets in the fair (15-20) range. Four out of five DAP contexts were also in the fair range with the exception of the family context which was in the good range (21-25). Of the 232 participants, only 16 percent endorsed total assets in the excellent range (N=37). Thirty-four percent endorsed total assets in the good range (N=80), 34 percent endorsed total assets in the fair range (N=78), and lastly, 16 percent endorsed total assets in the poor range (N=38). Similar to total developmental assets, participants' endorsements of internal and external assets ranged from good to fair. Only in the family context asset were there more endorsements in the excellent (41%) and good (27%) ranges than fair (19%) and low (13) (see Table 3).

The mean score for the general self-efficacy scale was 3.01 (.53). This score appeared comparable to the norm score derived in Schwarzer & Jerusalem's (1995) study (M=2.95, SD=.50). Regarding children's hope (M=26.63, SD=6.80) and purpose in life (M=22.03, SD=5.00) scores for the participants were also similar to previous studies that examined perceived purpose in life (M=22.54, SD=3.61) (Schulenberg, Schnetzer, & Buchanan, 2010).

#### *Relationship between income, DAP assets, and other indicators of PYD*

Family income was positively correlated with measures of DAP total assets ( $r=.20, p=.01$ ) and DAP external assets ( $r=.22, p=.01$ ). No statistically significant

correlation was found between income and DAP internal assets ( $r=.12, p=.08$ ), except for the positive identity asset ( $r=.26, p=.01$ ). When examining DAP external assets, family income was positively linked to support ( $r=.20, p=.01$ ), empowerment ( $r=.20, p=.01$ ), and constructive use of time ( $r=.20, p=.05$ ). Boundaries and expectations was the only external asset that was not statistically related to income ( $r=.07, p=.27$ ).

Positive associations were found between income and the following DAP context areas: personal ( $r=.22, p=.01$ ), social ( $r=.14, p=.05$ ), and family ( $r=.25, p=.01$ ). There were no statistically significant relationships between income and school assets ( $r=.07, p=.34$ ) or community assets ( $r=.12, p=.07$ ). In addition to several DAP assets, family income was also positively correlated with general self-efficacy ( $r=.20, p=.01$ ), hope ( $r=.19, p=.01$ ), and purpose in life ( $r=.16, p=.05$ ). Overall, these results suggested a positive relationship between income, DAP assets, self-efficacy, hope, and purpose in life (see table 4).

Table 4: Relationship between Income and PYD Measures

PYD Construct	Income
DAP Total	.20**
DAP External	.22**
Support	.20**
Empowerment	.20**
Boundaries/Expectations	.07
Constructive Use of Time	.14*
DAP Internal	.12
Commitment to Learning	.03
Positive Values	.04
Social Competencies	.07
Positive Identity	.26**
DAP Contexts	
Personal	.22**
Social	.14*
Family	.25**
School	.07
Community	.12
General Self Efficacy	.20**
Hope	.19**
Purpose in Life	.16*

Note: \*\*p.01, \*p.05

Table 5: Relationship between DAP and PYD Measures

PYD Constructs	General Self Efficacy	Hope	Purpose In Life
DAP Total	.60**	.59**	.51**
DAP External	.52**	.52**	.46**
Support	.40**	.48**	.36**
Empowerment	.46**	.44**	.45**
Boundaries/Expectations	.42**	.42**	.41**
Constructive Use of Time	.48**	.46**	.37**
DAP Internal	.62**	.59**	.51**
Commitment to Learning	.57**	.54**	.45**
Positive Values	.51**	.48**	.46**
Social Competencies	.50**	.42**	.37**
Positive Identity	.53**	.59**	.48**
DAP Contexts			
Personal	.55**	.55**	.46**
Social	.57**	.53**	.49**
Family	.43**	.49**	.43**
School	.50**	.47**	.44**
Community	.51**	.43**	.38**

Note: \*\*p.01, \*p.05

### *Quantitative Results*

To address the proposed hypotheses, a multivariate multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables and dependent variables would be statistically significant to enter in a regression model. Results of the multivariate multiple regression indicated that family income (proposed) and gender (exploratory) were the only two significant independent variables. Four multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the impact of family income and gender as indicators of overall development, hope, general self-efficacy, and perceived purpose in life. To guard against Type I errors, the researcher gauged statistical significance based on a Bonferroni adjusted alpha  $p < .01$ .

#### *Impact of Gender and Income on PYD*

Results revealed partial support for H1. Family income and gender were the only significant indicators of total development,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 7.50$ ,  $p < .001$ , and accounted for 6% of the variance (Table 6). However, family income was the only variable to make a statistically significant contribution to the model,  $B = .238$ ,  $t(226) = 3.59$ ,  $p = .001$ . Gender and family income were significant indicators of general self-efficacy,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 5.39$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounting for 5% of the variance, with family income making a statistically significant contribution,  $B = .217$ ,  $t(223) = 3.23$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Table 7). Additionally, gender and income were statistically significant indicators of hope,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 7.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , which accounted for 6% of the variance. Both family income,  $B = .233$ ,  $t(218) = 3.43$ ,  $p = .001$ , and gender,  $B = -.170$ ,  $t(218) = -2.50$ ,  $p = .001$ , statistically impacted hope. Lastly, family income and gender



were not found to be statistically significant indicators of purpose in life,  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(2, 177) = 3.69$ ,  $p. = < .03$ .

Table 6: Gender and Family Income as Indicators of Overall Developmental Assets

Variable	DAP Total			External			Internal		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Gender	-3.10	1.36	-.15	-1.47	.74	-.13	-1.67	.69	-.16**
Family Income	3.16	.88	.24**	1.82	.48	.25**	1.02	.45	.15
$R^2$			.06**			.07**			.04**

Note.  $p < .01$ \*\*

Table 7: Gender and Family Income as Indicators of Other PYD

Variable	Self-Efficacy			Hope			Purpose in Life		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Gender	-.09	.07	-.09	-2.28	.91	-.17**	-1.17	.75	-.12
Family Income	.15	.05	.22**	2.07	.60	.23**	1.29	.51	.19
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			.05**			.06**			.04

Note. *p.* < .01\*\*

*School and Community Context and PYD*

North Panola and Tate County School Districts are both located in Northern Mississippi with some parts of the counties bordering near the Mississippi delta. The median family income among households with children for the State of Mississippi is \$40,900 (Kids Count Data, 2012). The median income for North Panola County is lower than the estimated median income for the state of MS. However, the median income for Tate County is equivalent to the median income for the state of MS. North Panola and Tate Counties both have a higher percentage of youth living in poverty when compared to the 16% poverty rate for the state. Graduation rates for the state of Mississippi stand at 74%. Tate County’s graduation rates are analogous with the State’s graduation rates while North Panola County’s graduation rates are slightly lower. Despite differences in

graduation rates, both district’s average ACT score falls below the State’s average ACT score of 18.6. When North Panola County is only compared to Tate County, there appear to be differences in indicators (e.g. economic, education, and family) of well-being. But, comparing both counties indicator of well-being rates to the State of Mississippi reveals that North Panola and Tate fall below the State’s indicators of well-being.

Table 8: School and Community Indicators of Well-Being

Social & Economic Factors	Tate	North Panola
High School Graduation Rate	73%	69%
Drop-out Rate	14%	22%
Free/Reduced Lunch	72%	96%
ACT Scores	17.6	16.3
Accountability Rating	Successful	Academic Watch
Accountability Label	High Performing	Academic Watch
District Accreditation	Probation	Probation
Unemployment Rates	11%	13%
Children Living in Poverty	27%	36%
Single Parent Household	43%	50%
Inadequate Social Support	27%	30%
# of Recreational Facilities	3	6
# of Violent Crimes Committed by Youth	76	297
#Youth Serving Agencies (excluding schools)	1	2

*Note:* The following information for social and economic factors was gathered from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2013). County Health Rankings and Roadmap: Building a Culture of Health, County by county. <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>

### *Differences in Developmental Assets by School*

A one-way between groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate differences in external and internal developmental assets by school (H4). The independent variable was school. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, with no violations noted. There was a statistically significant difference in external and internal developmental assets based on school,  $F(1, 229) = 7.62$ ,  $p = .001$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .94; partial eta squared = .06. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the only differences to reach statistical significance, using the Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01, were internal assets  $F(1, 229) = 8.83$ ,  $p = .003$ , partial eta squared = .04.

Further examination of mean scores indicated that students attending school in North Panola County reported higher levels of internal assets ( $M=21.08$ ,  $SD = 5.08$ ) than students attending school in Tate County ( $M=18.89$ ,  $SD= 4.98$ ). An additional MANOVA was conducted to examine differences in DAP contexts (e.g. personal, social, family, school, and community) by school. A statistically significant difference was found in DAP contexts,  $F(5, 226) = 7.50$ ,  $p = .001$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .89; partial eta squared = .14, with the only significance in the personal context,  $F(1, 230) = 15.13$ ,  $p = .001$ , partial eta squared = .06. Participants that attended school in North Panola county reported higher personal context assets ( $M=22.02$ ,  $SD=4.83$ ) than participants that attended school in Tate county ( $M=19.07$ ,  $SD=5.20$ ). Finally, a MANOVA was performed to investigate differences in self-efficacy, hope, and purpose in life by school.

Results failed to reveal statistically significant differences in levels of self-efficacy, hope, or purpose,  $F(3,174) = 2.41$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .96,  $p = .06$ , partial eta squared = .04.

### **Supplemental Analysis**

#### *Relationship between gender, DAP assets, and other indicators of PYD*

No statistically significant relationships were found between gender, DAP total, or DAP external assets. However, gender was negatively correlated with internal assets ( $r = -.13, p = .05$ ), including commitment to learning ( $r = -.19, p = .01$ ), positive values ( $r = -.15, p = .05$ ), and social competencies ( $r = -.19, p = .01$ ). Positive identity was the only internal asset to not be statistically related to gender. Further investigation of the link between gender and DAP contexts revealed negative statistically significant relationships between gender and social assets ( $r = -.13, p = .05$ ), school assets ( $r = -.17, p = .01$ ), and community assets ( $r = -.13, p = .01$ ). Examination of other indicators of PYD such as self-efficacy, hope, and purpose in life yielded no statistically significant relationships.

#### *Influence of Gender and Income on DAP Asset Categories*

Additional analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between gender and income on external and internal assets and DAP contexts (see tables 8 & 9). Gender and income were found to be significant indicators of external,  $R^2 = .07, F(2, 226) = 7.83, p < .001$ , and internal,  $R^2 = .04, F(2, 225) = 4.45, p < .01$ , developmental assets. Results suggested that family income was a statistically significant contributor to external assets,  $B = .252, t(226) = 3.80, p = .001$ , and gender contributed to internal assets,  $B = -.163, t(225) = -2.43, p = .01$ . These results suggest that participants with higher income and girls have more developmental assets than boys.

Income and gender also statistically impacted all 5 DAP context assets: personal,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 6.22$ ,  $p < .002$ , social,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 5.60$ ,  $p < .004$ , family,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 8.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , school,  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 4.74$ ,  $p < .01$ , and community,  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(2, 226) = 4.64$ ,  $p < .01$ . Family income positively contributed to personal assets,  $B = .24$ ,  $t(226) = 3.52$ ,  $p = .001$ , social assets,  $B = .18$ ,  $t(226) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .008$ , and family assets,  $B = .27$ ,  $t(226) = 4.05$ ,  $p = .001$ . These results indicate that as income increases so would participants' report of positive values and positive identity, strengthened social relationships with adults and peers, and good parent-child communications, parent engagement, and a clear set of boundaries and expectations. Gender also influenced social and school assets. Males reported lower levels of social assets,  $B = -.17$ ,  $t(226) = -2.59$ ,  $p = .01$ , and school assets,  $B = -.20$ ,  $t(226) = -2.91$ ,  $p = .004$  possibly indicating weak social relationships and a lower commitment to learning (see table 10).

Table 9. Gender and Family Income as Indicators of External Asset

Variable	Support			Empowerment			Boundaries & Expectations			Constructive Use of Time		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Gender	-1.15	.87	-.08	-1.82	.81	-.15	-1.45	.83	-.12	-1.20	.96	-.09
Family Income	1.85	.57	.22**	1.91	.53	.24**	.84	.54	.11	1.55	.65	.16
R <sup>2</sup>	.05**			.06**			.02			.03		

Note. p < .01\*\*\*

Table 10: Gender and Family Income as Indicators of Internal Assets

Variable	Commitment to Learning		Positive Values		Social Competencies		Positive Identity					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE(B)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE(B)</i>	$\beta$				
Gender	-2.54	.84	-.20**	-1.83	.77	-.16**	-2.34	.75	-.21**	-.11	.78	-.01
Family Income	.61	.56	.07	.57	.51	.08	.83	.50	.11	1.99	.51	.26
$R^2$	.04**		.03**		.05**		.07**					

Note.  $p < .01$ \*\*



Table 11 Gender and Family Income as Indicators of DAP Context Assets

Variable	Personal			Social			Family			School			Community		
	B	SE(B)	$\beta$	B	SE(B)	$\beta$	B	SE(B)	$\beta$	B	SE(B)	$\beta$	B	SE(B)	$\beta$
Gender	-.77	.70	-.07	-1.94	.75	-.17**	-1.04	.87	-.08	-2.45	.34	-.20**	-2.02	.83	-.16
Family income	1.00	.46	.24**	1.25	.48	.18**	2.27	.56	.27**	.92	.55	.11	1.26	.53	.16
R <sup>2</sup>	.05**			.05**			.07**			.04**			.04**		

Note. p < .01\*\*

### *Differences in Levels of Assets*

A series of chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) goodness of fit tests were performed to gain a better understanding of youth experiences by investigating potential differences in the levels of assets (e.g. excellent/thriving, good/adequate, fair/vulnerable, and poor/challenged) reported by study participants. According to a recent sample report from the Search Institute (2013), it was expected that 5 to 15 percent of youth asset scores would fall in the excellent range as well as 5 to 15 percent in the poor range. Majority of the asset levels were expected to fall in the good to fair ranges. Nonparametric results revealed a few statistically significant differences in the proportion of asset levels reported in the current study when compared to the Search Institute's (2013) expected proportion of asset levels. While there were no significant differences in the proportion of total development,  $\chi^2 (3, n=233) = .31, p. 96$ , external asset,  $\chi^2 (3, n=233) = 1.85, p. 61$ , or internal asset scores,  $\chi^2 (3, n=233) = 5.05, p. 17$ , statistical differences in the distribution of scores were noted in the commitment to learning asset,  $\chi^2 (3, n=233) = 13.28, p. 004$ , family context,  $\chi^2 (3, n=233) = 54.48, p. 001$ , and community context,  $\chi^2 (3, n=233) = 17.05, p. 001$ . There was a higher proportion of thriving (41%) in family context and higher proportion of challenges in the commitment to learning asset category (28%) and community context (29%) than expected.

### *Qualitative Results*

Responses to the open question were content analyzed and coded into categories that corresponded to youth developmental assets (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two independent coders sorted and coded each response according to the two asset categories of the DAP, internal or external. Kappa statistics were computed to assess inter-rater

agreement. Results of the Kappa Measure of Agreement suggested good agreement (.73) between coders with a  $p. <.001$ . Based on the 2 initial codes of external or internal, responses were then coded into specific external assets (e.g. support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, or constructive use of time) or internal assets (e.g. commitment to learning, positive value, social competencies, or positive identity). Kappa statistics were performed to measure inter-rater agreement between the coding of these specific asset categories with results suggesting moderate agreement (.62) between coders with a  $p. <.001$ . Twenty-eight discrepancies were found between the two coders. The discrepancies were found to be exclusively related to the coding of specific internal asset category. Both coders agreed that the responses were internal. However, the coders consistently disagreed on whether the responses should be coded as positive value or social competencies. A few examples of the discrepancy in coding included the following characteristics: big heart, care/caring, compassion, kind/kindness, love/loving, nice, outgoing, patience, peaceful, sweet, and understanding. The discrepancies were resolved by coding characteristics that reflected internal compasses as a positive value and characteristics that reflected personal skills as a social competency.

Frequencies and percentages were calculated to examine how the coded assets matched up with the DAP internal assets (H5). Consistent with the proposed H5, more than half of the responses provided by participants that described positive youth role models were related to DAP internal qualities. Frequency analysis of each response indicated that the majority (63%) of the responses were classified as internal assets (see Table 11). Sixty-three percent of the responses were coded as internal assets, 10% were coded as external assets, and 27% of the responses could not be coded into either

category. However, the majority of the non-coded responses were related to physical attributes (e.g. pretty eyes, pretty teeth, good body, nice clothes, and good hair). This suggests that while these attributes were not related to inner traits or context, participants considered physical traits to be as important as inner traits and contextual support.

Responses offered insight into the characteristics that youth deem important for youth role models to possess such as loyalty, determination, outgoing, and reliable. Most of the responses (38%) fell within one specific DAP internal asset categories: positive values. This suggests that youth felt that youth role models should demonstrate respect (N=49), responsibility (N=36), good attitude (N=33), niceness (N=24), honesty (N=22), kindness (N=19), and care (N=18). Although participants provided fewer external assets, responses suggested that support from family (N=17), religious/spiritual connection (N=14), having future plans/goals (N=6), and a career/job (N=6) were also admirable characteristics of a youth role model. Interestingly, participants qualitatively reported an association between internal developmental assets and positive role models, while quantitatively endorsing possession of more external assets ( $M=20.57$ ,  $SD=5.64$ ) than internal assets ( $M=19.43$ ,  $SD=5.13$ ). Several implications can be drawn from these findings. Both internal and external assets are essential components needed for youth to experience more positive outcomes. Efforts should be made to strengthen the experiences of youth in both asset categories. Also, with fewer contextual-related assets derived from qualitative results, emphasis should be placed on improving the experiences of youth in their families, schools, and neighborhoods.

Table 12: Qualitative Responses of Positive Characteristics of a Youth Role Model

Themes	Examples	(Percentage)
Internal	Smart, Responsible, Confidence, Encouragement, Big Heart, Motivated, Passionate, Positive Thinker, No Foul Language, Drug-free	(63%)
Commitment to Learning	In school, Intelligent, Good grades, Smart, Teaching, Education	(6%)
Positive Values	Loyal, Discipline, Hardworking, Determination, Fearless, No drinking, Good server, Modesty, Healthy, Reliable, Respect	(38%)
Social Competencies	Loving, Kindness, Encouragement, Social Skills, Humorous, Understanding, Enjoys others, Outgoing, Compassion, Socialize	(9%)
Positive Identity	Good personality, Self-esteem, Self, Positive Influence, Hope, Confident, Cheerful	(10%)
External	Goals, Cautious, Volunteering, Religion, Career, Family	(10%)
Support	Support, Family, Church, School Personnel	(4%)
Boundaries & Expectations	Future Plans, Goals, Cautious	(1%)
Empowerment	Career, Job, Protection	(1%)
Constructive Use of Time	Faith, Religion, Athletic, Involvement in sports, Volunteering, Hobby	(4%)
N/A	Pretty—teeth and eyes; Good—look out, body and hair; Nice clothes, Swag, Mean-spirited, Money, Ugly, Style, Gotta have facebook,	(27%)

## VI. DISCUSSION

Literature regarding the importance of development assets is clear. Youth possessing more developmental assets are in a better position to experience better developmental outcomes. Accrual of developmental assets have been linked to higher academic performances, stronger connections to family, school, and community, exposure to positive role models and leadership opportunities, and increases in psychological resilience (Search Institute, 2005). The current study investigated the influence of family context, namely family income, and gender on youth development. The study also explored levels of developmental assets by school and examined group differences. The following sections will discuss levels of developmental assets in MS youth as well as the impact of family context and gender on development.

### *Developmental Assets of MS Youth*

Information gleaned from the DAP revealed that youth living in rural parts of Mississippi had total developmental assets in the fair range ( $M=39.92$ ,  $SD=10.33$ ). Total developmental assets scores for the current study were similar to earlier studies that examined developmental assets in U.S. youth (Search Institute, 2004). However, when scores were compared to a more recent study that examined developmental assets from a

global perspective, including the U.S., total developmental assets for the current study were lower (Scales, 2011). This is useful information as it 1) offers a snapshot of development for MS youth as compared to other U.S. youth; 2) shifts the focus of attention away from deficits by examining internal strengths and external supports; and 3) highlights specific asset areas where additional attention may be needed. Youth with more developmental assets are suggested to experience higher rates of thriving (Benson & Scales, 2009) and fewer rates of high risk behaviors (Leffert et al, 1998). However, results from the current study suggest that youth in MS potentially possess only half of the developmental assets suggested as essential for thriving (Search Institute (2005). Examination of the DAP asset categories (e.g. internal and external) found that participants' reported developmental asset levels in the fair range. Of the eight developmental asset categories, support (M=21.76, SD=6.55) and boundaries and expectation (M=21.01, SD=6.13), were the only developmental assets in the good range of development. On the other hand, the Commitment to Learning internal asset (M=18.87, SD=6.44) produced the lowest scores indicating that participants reported fewer beliefs in the importance of learning and in their own efficacy. This finding illuminates a specific area for schools and youth servicing agencies in MS to focus their attention. Strengthening assets in these areas consist of schools developing innovative interventions that engage students in reading, reinforce learning, support student initiatives, and make clear the benefits of an education. It is through these efforts and supportive educational environments with compassionate and invested teachers that assets in the commitment to learning area may increase.

#### *Family Context and Positive Youth Development*

Research has shown that family context greatly contributes to an individual's developmental outcome (Bahr & Hoffman, 2010; Ward & Zabriskie, 2011). The current study attempted to examine the connection between family income, mother's educational attainment, and father's educational attainment levels and its influence on total developmental assets, hope, self-efficacy, and purpose. Results from the multivariate multiple regression identified family income as the sole statistically significant family context variable that influenced youth development. Family income was found to positively impact total developmental assets suggesting that as income increases so does the number of developmental assets. Similarly, family income was positively linked to other indicators of positive development, including hope and self-efficacy, indicating that increases in family income may result in higher levels of self-efficacy and hope. Results implied that family income did not influence participants' perceived purpose in life.

#### *Influence of Family Income on Developmental Assets*

Supplemental exploration of developmental assets and the impact of family income demonstrated positive relationships between external assets, namely support and empowerment. Moreover, results of the current study suggest that family income significantly influenced youths' experience of feeling safe and secure in multiple contexts and potentially impacted the family, school, and community persons' ability to offer support, care, and encouragement to developing youth. Family income was not statistically associated with the other two external assets, boundaries and expectation or constructive use of time. Also, family income was not a statistically significant indicator of internal assets. Because internal assets are inner traits, beliefs, and behaviors that



guide how youth interact with the world, it was not surprising that family income, an external asset, was unrelated to internal assets.

### *School and Community Context and Developmental Assets*

Inspection of community context appeared to show minimal differences between North Panola and Tate Counties. Youth residing in both counties seemed to experience similar rates of living in poverty, inadequate social support, and living in one-parent households. A higher percentage of students in North Panola (96%) received free and reduced lunch when compared to students in Tate (72%). The number of youth servicing agencies, excluding schools, was almost non-existent with Tate County only having one known organization for youth (community-wide 4-H Club) and North Panola having two known organizations (Panolian Boys and Girls Club and Youth Opportunities Unlimited—YOU). Based on crime reports for each county, there appeared to be more delinquent crimes being committed by youth in North Panola (N=297) than youth in Tate (N=76). Examination of school context also revealed similarities between the two counties as well as some notable differences. Graduation rates and average ACT scores appeared comparable for both districts. However, there were differences in standards of education ratings with the school in Tate County earning a High Performance rating and the school in North Panola County earning an Academic Watch rating. Yet, both districts had a Probationary accreditation status.

Differences in developmental assets between the schools were also noted with youth in North Panola reporting more internal developmental assets (M=21.08, SD=5.08) than youth in Tate (M=18.88, SD=4.98). Differences in developmental assets were also noted in the DAP context assets with North Panola reporting more personal context assets

( $M=22.00$ ,  $SD=4.83$ ) than youth in Tate ( $M=19.07$ ,  $SD=5.20$ ). These results are surprising as it would be expected that youth with more resources would have more developmental assets. But, the differences in developmental assets may be better explained by age/grades of the participants and not context resources as younger youth may report more developmental assets than older youth. Also, because of contextual challenges, it may be that the focus of attention for family, school, and community persons is directed at increasing internal assets such as values, positive identity, an appreciation for learning as it may not as feasible to improve contextual challenges.

#### *Relationship between Family Income and DAP Contexts*

Further exploration of the 5 DAP contexts also resulted in the discovery that family income also significantly impacted personal, social, and family context. However, finding that family income significantly impacted personal context and not internal assets is puzzling as the personal contexts scale reflects assets from 3 of the 4 internal asset categories (Search Institute, 2005). DAP family context scale was the only DAP context that produced mean scores in the good range with 41% of the sample reporting an abundant range of family assets. This offers additional support for earlier findings that indicated a statistically significant link between family income and support. Results clearly point to the importance of family support in the lives of MS youth. Youth reported more pleasant experiences in their family environment than in their school and community environments indicating a strong sense of support and connectedness to their families. Forty-five percent of the sample reported that they often spent quality time at home with their parents. Sixty-seven percent mentioned that their family gave them love and support and 70% endorsed that their parents tried to help them succeed (see

Appendix B). According to Ward and Zabriskie (2011), the family context acts as a “laboratory where skills, learning, and competencies develop” (p.38). It is clear that the family context is one of the most influential environments where youth experience positive outcomes. Although means scores for the Support asset category was in the fair range, a larger percent of the sample endorsed a good range of support and validation. Understanding the role of family is important for individuals working with youth because it offers information regarding how other contexts and developmental assets can be strengthened. Hillaker, Brophy-Herb, Villarruel, and Haas’s (2008) research illustrated that positive family interactions and communication were key contributors to the development of positive values and social competency.

School and community DAP contexts were not impacted by family income. Lack of supporting evidence for these contexts may reflect fewer beliefs in the importance of learning, fewer experiences with environments that provided participants with warmth or security, and fewer community resources for youth. However, if affirmative family relationships produce positive outcomes, then building comparable positive relationships in the school and community should produce similar effects by increasing developmental assets. Therefore, a stronger link between family and school should be cultivated as an avenue to strengthen assets especially since 70 percent of the participants mentioned that their family tried often to help them success and encouraged them to do well in school. The Search Institute (2009) issued a challenge to all communities to bolster opportunities for leadership and community engagement, to get youth engrossed in youth-servicing programs, and to foster strong intergenerational relationships.

*Gender and Positive Youth Development*

Additional supplemental analyses were conducted to explore possible relationships between gender and development. Past studies found that females reported higher levels of developmental assets than males (Leffert et al, 1998; Search Institute, 2005). In the current study, girls reported higher DAP total scores, asset category scores, and context scale scores than boys. While correlation and regressions testing did not identify a statistically significant relationship between gender, DAP total and external assets, results revealed a negative relationship between gender and internal assets that were statistically significant. These results suggested that males reported fewer internal scores than females. Additionally, results indicated that females had higher commitment to learning, positive values, and social competencies. This is also consistent with results that examined gender and context assets. These results showed that females reported higher social, school, and community context scores than the male counterparts. It is plausible to suggest that gender differences in assets exist because of socialization practices and expectations (Search Institute, 2005), greater attention should be devoted to understanding how to strengthen these developmental assets in males. According to the Search Institute (2009), increasing developmental assets in boys starts with a healthy self-concept that includes the expression of empathy and caring. Boys need a platform for engagement and skills building as they may be prone to becoming disconnected from school. This could be accomplished through the development of structured activities, youth-led service projects, adult mentorship, and involvement in assessing and conceptualizing youth needs and implementation of school and community projects. Increasing developmental assets in girls also starts with a healthy self-concept that includes assertiveness, discipline, and skill mastery.

## **Implications**

PYD scholars have been successful in demonstrating the importance and benefits of investing in today's youth (Benson, 2003; 2006; Lerner 2004; 2005). However, in Mississippi, a focus on youth strengths and assets is rare. From an applied perspective, PYD research in the state of Mississippi would help youth servicing organizations such as school, community, and state officials to develop programs to meet the developmental needs of youth in the region. Research has shown that youth with an abundance of developmental assets are least likely to experience negative developmental outcomes such as academic difficulties, drug and alcohol usage, violence, or engage in other high-risk behaviors (Search Institute, 2005a). Results of the current study revealed that youth in MS have total developmental assets in the fair range. These results suggest that youth in MS may be susceptible to negative outcomes when compared to youth with more developmental assets. These results also suggest diminution of assets and should grab the attention of youth servicing agencies. Efforts should be made to strengthen youth assets. Results showed that girls reported more developmental assets compared to boys. Special attention should be directed towards adolescent boys that include warm and supportive environments, programs, skill-building workshops, and opportunities for community and civic action. These additional opportunities include fostering more positive mentoring relationships, creating safe environments for youth to live and learn, having clear rules and expectations of youth, and developing extra-curricular or community activities that will allow youth to make constructive use of their time. These programming efforts are needed to increase the emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral, and moral competencies of youth as well as promote resilience, and self-efficacy (Catalano et al, 2004).

Despite reports of fewer developmental assets, family contexts emerged as an exceptionally strong context in which youth experienced positive outcomes. Factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the family context could be used as leverage in building up the other context areas. Family involvement is essential to building developmental assets in youth. Family support continues to surface as a positive contributory to youth development and the relationship between family support and youth development should be viewed as an important investment in youth development. These results should serve as a call to families, schools, and community persons to create opportunities to build and expand youth assets in MS. Community leaders should approve policies that promote youth leadership and engagement, organize events that foster autonomy, and develop programs that will enhance social competencies and positive values. With controversy in the school context related to corporal punishment, sex education, common core, and science education, school officials should engage youth in positive experiences that will increase their commitment to learning and shape the school environment such that youth will feel safe and valued. Families and neighbors should actively connect with youth by modeling positive adult-child interactions, establishing appropriate boundaries and expectations, and making youth feel safe, supported, and respected (Search Institute, 2009). Lastly, consideration should be given to developing family-school-community programs that foster links between all of the contexts that youth experience.

From a research perspective, this study adds to the youth development literature as fewer studies specifically focus on the youth development in rural areas or specifically the strengths and developmental assets of youth in Mississippi. Results of the study illuminated a need for continued focus on youth development and the acquisition of

developmental assets for youth living in smaller populated regions, especially in the southern U. S. Results of the current study can be used as a baseline data for the respective schools/counties in which data were collected. It may also be used to identify specific asset areas that need attention and then used to develop programs/interventions to address the depleted asset areas. More specifically, in both counties, youth reported greater developmental assets in the areas of support and family context and fewer assets in community context. This is meaningful. It suggests that youth value the relationships fostered and provisions received from their families; however, they may not receive the same validating messages from their community. The task now is to extend these relationships and provisions to the depleted context and asset categories. After implementing these changes, the end results could be compared to the range of developmental assets in the current study to gauge improvements or increases in developmental strengths.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study were associated with the sample studied and methods used to assess certain factors. Participants in the study were students residing and attending school in areas of northern Mississippi considered to have fewer socio-economic, school, and community resources. A more diverse sample would have included participants residing and attending schools in metropolitan areas with a wider range of socio-economic, school, and community resources as well as students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. As such, asset profiles and other results are limited in their applicability and should not be extended to other areas.

A major limitation of the study was the lack of variability in context factors, and in methods used to assess school and community context. School and community factors were assessed at the group level and assigned to each participant in that setting. However, only two settings in total were collected for comparison. This did not allow for enough group variability to examine differences between settings (2 schools) or contexts (school vs. community). Assessment of additional settings may have allowed for within district/county comparison and between district/county comparisons. Unfortunately, this resulted in the researcher not being able to assess for the impact of school and community context on development. Information regarding whether individual participants received free/reduced lunch, were enrollment in after-school programs (e.g. sports, 4-H, other educational or leadership organizations, etc), involved in community activities, such as the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brother and Big Sister, and religious events, should have been examined as other indicators of positive youth development.

### **Future Directions**

Future studies should continue to utilize strengths-based strategies to understand youth development in multiple contexts. Studies that only capture youth development in a single context overlook the impact of other contexts on development (Search Institute, 2005b). How youth experience their different contexts should be assessed on an individual level, which could be achieved through the administration of quantitative instruments that measure multiple contexts. This approach helps to assess for individual differences in development regardless of participants exposure to the same family, school, and community contexts. For example, youth with more access to individual resources may experience their community context differently than youth living in the same



context but have fewer family resources. Additionally, measures that assess school and community efficacy, such as the community collective efficacy scale, should be used to assess youth's beliefs in their ability to be effective agents of change within their school and community. Valuable information could be derived from these efficacy measures as they may offer an explanation for lower school and community assets. Researchers should consider the benefits of employing a longitudinal study design to track changes in developmental assets over an extended period of time. This method would afford researchers an opportunity to better understand how developmental assets are built and strengthen during the period of adolescence.

While the study employed a mixed method research design, additional qualitative data could have offered a more insightful picture of youth development in MS. In addition to asking youth to identify three positive characteristics of a youth role model, questions such as why participants felt the identified characteristics were important, did participants have a specific role model in mind when identifying the characteristics, and if so, what were their connections to the person they considered to be a role model (e.g. relative, school administrator, community leaders, peer, etc). Participants also should be asked to provide a few characteristics that describe themselves. This would give researchers an opportunity to compare the responses (characteristics of role model vs. characteristics of self) to investigate whether participants felt they possessed characteristics of a role model. Also, in the future, researchers should ask participants to provide descriptors of the participants' family, school, and community environments. This information could be used to examine participants' perceptions of their different environments, including meaningful key relationships, their connectedness to their

community, and their ability to express concerns to family, school, and community persons and whether they feel as though their voices were heard. Lastly, asking participants to provide recommendations that would strengthen their family, school, and community contexts would also yield useful information. .

### **Conclusion**

The current study explored the developmental assets of youth living in Northern Mississippi. A strengths-based approach was employed that allowed researchers to assess levels of developmental assets in Mississippi youth. Overall, results revealed that youth in Mississippi possessed a fair range of total developmental assets, with a good range of developmental assets in the support and boundaries and expectations external asset category. Additionally, participants in North Panola reported more developmental assets than youth in Tate County. Supplementary exploratory analysis revealed gender differences in the possession of developmental assets with females reporting higher levels of developmental assets than males. Examination of DAP context scores showed that the experiences of participants' family context were stronger than their school and community context experiences. The family context is influential and greatly impacts youth developmental outcomes; therefore, it should be used to influence connections between family, school and community contexts.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTION OF DAP CONTEXT AREAS**  
**(Search Institute, 2005)**

DAP Context Areas	Description
Personal	Individual psychological and behavioral strengths such as self-esteem, valuing honesty, taking responsibility, planning ahead, managing frustration, enjoying reading, and feeling in control of one's life.
Social	Assets based on social relationships with one or more people outside of the family such as friendships, positive peer and adult role models, resisting pressure from others, resolving conflicts peacefully, being sensitive to others, and feeling valued by others.
Family	Positive family communication and support, clear family rules, quality time at home, advice and encouragement from parents, and feeling safe at home.
School	Clear and fair school rules, encouragement from teachers, a caring school environment, feeling safe at school, caring about school, being motivated to learn, and being actively engaged in reading and learning.
Community	Activities and involvement in the larger community such as sports, clubs, groups, and religious activities, creative activities such as music and the arts, having good neighbors, accepting others, and helping in the community.



**APPENDIX B: PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, SCHOOL, &  
COMMUNITY CONTEXT ITEMS**

Family Context	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
13. Seek advice from my parents	15%	36%	28%	21%
17. Feel safe and secure at home	4%	67%	21%	8%
29. Included in family tasks and decisions	9%	39%	27%	25%
42. Spending quality time at home with my parent(s)	9%	45%	22%	22%
47. Parent(s) who try to help me succeed	2%	70%	17%	11%
52. A family that provide me with clear Rules	5%	52%	29%	13%
53. Parent(s) who urge me to do well in School	3%	71%	18%	8%
54. A family that gives me love and Support	3%	67%	19%	9%
56. Parent(s) who are good at talking with me about things	9%	50%	22%	18%
58. A family that knows where I am and what I am doing.	7%	58%	22%	13%

Percentage of Individual School Context Items

School Context	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
7. Care about school	11%	32%	30%	27%
8. Do my homework	6%	38%	38%	18%
10. Enjoy learning	11%	23%	32%	31%
25. Feel safe at school	10%	43%	28%	19%
26. Actively engaged in learning new Things	5%	28%	33%	32%
38. Eager to do well in school and other Activities	4%	51%	29%	14%
44. A school that gives students clear rules	9%	43%	30%	19%
49. A school that cares about kids and encourages them	6%	52%	26%	15%
50. Teachers who urge me to develop and Achieve	7%	50%	28%	14%
57. A school that enforces rules fairly	11%	34%	35%	20%

Percentage of Individual Community Context Items

Community Context	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
24. Accept people who are different from me	4%	45%	32%	19%
30. Helping to make my community a better place	20%	20%	31%	28%
31. Involved in religious group or activity	19%	37%	24%	19%
34. Involved in a sport, club, or other group	12%	58%	16%	12%
35. Trying to help solve social problems	19%	22%	31%	25%
36. Given useful roles and responsibilities	6%	38%	36%	18%
37. Developing respect for others	3%	43%	32%	21%
40. Involved in creating things such as music, theater, or art	27%	36%	17%	18%
41. Serving others in my community	22%	19%	26%	30%
46. A safe neighborhood	10%	46%	28%	16%
48. Good neighbors who care about me	17%	37%	23%	21%
55. Neighbors who help watch out for me	20%	33%	24%	22%

## **APPENDIX C: INSTRUMENTS**

**Please write in the blank, check the correct box, or circle the correct response.**

1. Are you female or male? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What language(s) do you speak? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What school do you attend? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Is your school a boarding school? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you stay at home with your family? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many years of schooling have you had (beginning with primary 1 or 1<sup>st</sup> grade)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What city, town, or community do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Please check the box that best describes where you live.
  - Major City
  - Medium sized city
  - Small town
  - Rural land/Country
10. Does your immediate family have enough money for basic needs (food, clothing, shelter)?
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Usually
  - Always
11. What is your **father's** highest level of education?
  - None
  - Elementary / primary / grade school (1-8)
  - High school / secondary school (9-12)
  - Some college or technical school
  - College graduate
  - Graduate degree
  - Do not know
12. What is your **mother's** highest level of education?
  - None
  - Elementary / primary / grade school (1-8)
  - High school / secondary school (9-12)
  - Some college or technical school
  - College graduate
  - Graduate degree
  - Do not know

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Below is a list of positive things that you might have in yourself, your family, friends, neighborhood, school, and community. For each item that describes you **now or within the past 3 months**, check if the item is true.

**I...**

	<b>Not at All or Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat or Sometimes</b>	<b>Very or Often</b>	<b>Extremely or Almost Always</b>
1. Stand up for what I believe in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Feel in control of my life and future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Feel good about myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Avoid things that are dangerous or unhealthy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Enjoy reading or being read to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Build friendships with other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Care about school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do my homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Stay away from tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Enjoy learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Express my feelings in proper ways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Feel good about my parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Seek advice from my parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Deal with frustration in 1 positive ways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Overcome challenges in positive ways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Think it is important to help other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Feel safe and secure at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Plan ahead and make good choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Resist bad influences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Resolve conflicts without anyone getting hurt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Feel valued and appreciated by others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Take responsibility for what I do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Tell the truth even when it is not easy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Accept people who are different from me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Feel safe at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note: The term “Parent(s)” means 1 or more adults who are responsible for raising you.**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Below is a list of positive things that you might have in yourself, your family, friends, neighborhood, school, and community. For each item that describes you **now or within the past 3 months**, check if the item is true.

**I AM...**

	<b>Not at All or Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat or Sometimes</b>	<b>Very or Often</b>	<b>Extremely or Almost Always</b>
26. Actively engaged in learning new things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Developing a sense of purpose in my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Encouraged to try things that might be good for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Included in family tasks and decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Helping to make my community a better place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Involved in a religious group or activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Developing good health habits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Encouraged to help others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Involved in a sport, club, or other group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Trying to help solve social problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. Given useful roles and responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. Developing respect for other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. Eager to do well in school and other activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Sensitive to the needs and feelings of others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Involved in creative things such as music, theater, or art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. Serving others in my community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. Spending quality time at home with my parent(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**INSTRUCTIONS:** Below is a list of positive things that you might have in yourself, your family, friends, neighborhood, school, and community. For each item that describes you **now or within the past 3 months**, check if the item is true.

I HAVE...

	<b>Not at All or Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat or Sometimes</b>	<b>Very or Often</b>	<b>Extremely or Almost Always</b>
43. Friends who set good examples for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. A school that gives students clear rules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. Adults who are good role models for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46. A safe neighborhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. Parent(s) who try to help me succeed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48. Good neighbors who care about me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49. A school that cares about kids and encourages them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
50. Teachers who urge me to develop and achieve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
51. Support from adults other than my parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52. A family that provides me with clear rules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
53. Parent(s) who urge me to do well in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
54. A family that gives me love and support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
55. Neighbors who help watch out for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
56. Parent(s) who are good at talking with me about things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
57. A school that enforces rules fairly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
58. A family that knows where I am and what I am doing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

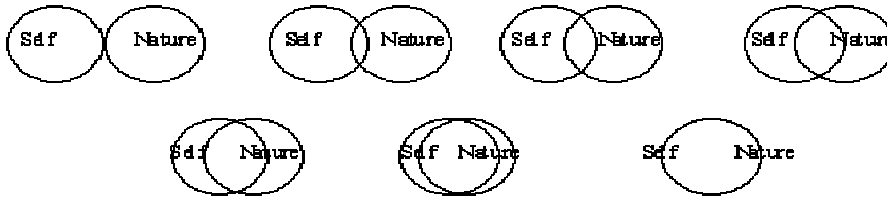
OPEN ENDED QUESTION: How would you describe a youth role model?

What are the three most important positive characteristics/traits that a youth role model should have?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**INS Scale**

Please circle the picture below that best describes your relationship with the natural environment. How interconnected are you with nature?



GSE SCALE

Please read each item on the following scale and circle how true the item is *For You*.

	Not at all true	Hardly True	Moderately True	Exactly True
1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	1	2	3	4
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	1	2	3	4
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	1	2	3	4
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	1	2	3	4
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	1	2	3	4
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	1	2	3	4
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	1	2	3	4
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	1	2	3	4
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution	1	2	3	4
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way	1	2	3	4

## MEIM Scale

In this world, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Your ethnic group could be related to your nationality, religious group, or tribal affiliation. As an example, some names of ethnic groups in the United States are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

*Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group such as its history, traditions, and customs	1	2	3	4
2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me	1	2	3	4
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership	1	2	3	4
5. I am happy that I am a member of the ethnic/cultural group I belong to	1	2	3	4
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group	1	2	3	4
7. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me	1	2	3	4
8. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group	1	2	3	4
9. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group	1	2	3	4
10. I participate in cultural practices of my own (ethnic/cultural) group, such as special food, music, or customs	1	2	3	4
11. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
12. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background	1	2	3	4

For U.S. Americans, choose below

1. Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
2. Black or African American
3. Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
4. White, Caucasian, Anglo, European; not Hispanic
5. American Indian/Native American
6. Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
7. Other (write in): \_\_\_\_\_

13. My ethnicity is: \_\_\_\_\_ (write in)

14. My father's ethnicity is: \_\_\_\_\_ (use numbers or write in)

15. My mother's ethnicity is: \_\_\_\_\_ (use numbers or write in)

### CHS

**Directions: The six sentences below describe how children or adolescents think about themselves and how they do things in general. Read each sentence carefully. For each sentence, please think about how you are in most situations. Circle the descriptor that best describes YOU the best. For example, circle "None of the time" or "All of the time," if this describes you.**

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1. I think I am doing pretty well.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. When I have a problem, I can come up with a lot of ways to solve it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6

PIL-SF

Directions: For each of the following statements, circle the number that would be most nearly true for you. Note that the numbers always extend from one extreme feeling to its opposite kind of feeling. "Neutral" implies no judgment either way; try to use this rating as little as possible.

1. **In life I have:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no goals or aims at all			(neutral)			very clear goals and aims

2. **My personal existence is:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
utterly meaningless without purpose			(neutral)			very purposeful and meaningful

3. **In achieving life goals I have:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
made no progress whatsoever			(neutral)			progressed to complete fulfillment

4. **I have discovered:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no mission or purpose in life			(neutral)			clear-cut goals and a satisfying life purpose

### Information about the Study

Thank you for your participation in this research project. During this research, you were asked to fill out surveys that asked questions about positive aspects such as confidence, relations with peers and caregivers, and activities you participate in. We want to learn about positive developmental aspects such as self-efficacy, confidence, and self esteem. If you have any questions please ask now.

If you have questions concerning your participation at a later time feel free to contact Dr. Johnson ([ljohnson@olemiss.edu](mailto:ljohnson@olemiss.edu)), Dr. Moore ([dmoore@olemiss.edu](mailto:dmoore@olemiss.edu)), or Umieca N. Hankton ([unhankto@olemiss.edu](mailto:unhankto@olemiss.edu)).

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

## VITA

### Umieca Nicolle Hankton

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**EDUCATION:**

The University of Mississippi Oxford, MS  
Degree Sought: Ph.D in Clinical Psychology  
Dissertation-“ Exploring Developmental Assets and  
Strengths in Mississippi Youth”  
Major Professor: Laura R. Johnson, Ph.D

The University of Mississippi (December 2011)  
Degree: Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology  
Thesis- “Cultural Factors that Predict Civic Engagement  
African American Youth”

Dillard University (May 2003) New Orleans, LA  
Degree: Bachelor of Arts, Cum Laude  
Major: Psychology  
GPA: 3.5/4.0 (overall)

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE:**

January 2012-May 2012

**University of Mississippi**

**Department of Social Work**

Title: Undergraduate Instructor

- Responsibilities included teaching research design and application tailored specifically for students majoring in social work. Content included understanding the role of the institutional review board, how to develop and submit a study for IRB approval, completing a literature review, writing in APA format, and using general statistics in research

August 2009-May 2011

**University of Mississippi**

**Department of Psychology**

Title: Undergraduate Instructor

- Responsibilities included teaching introduction to psychology to 190+ undergraduate students using a multi-modality approach, preparing and delivering lectures, leading classroom discussion, developing and administering exams, and providing academic advising related to the specific course.

## **CLINICAL EXPERIENCE:**

August 2012-present

**University of Mississippi**

**University Counseling Center**

Title: Graduate Therapist

- Responsibilities include intake interviews, triage, and individual therapy with university students and faculty related to psycho-social and academic difficulties. Additional responsibilities include updating GLBT training manual for faculty (ALLIES), facilitating therapy groups for anxiety reduction, providing therapeutic support during freshmen recruitment (RUSH), attending to after-hour (on-call) emergencies, and providing walk-in consultation services (Let's Talk).

Supervisors: Vicki Mahan, M.Ed., LPC, LMFT,  
Marc Showalter, Ph.D

July 2007-June 2009

**University of Mississippi**

**Desoto County School District**

Title: Graduate Intern

- Responsibilities included classroom observations, behavior consultations, and the development of functional behavior analysis and behavior intervention plans.



Supervisors: Shelia Williamson, Ph.D & Kathlene McGraw, Ed.M

August 2005-present

**University of Mississippi  
Psychological Services Center (PSC)**

Title: Graduate Therapist (In House Practica)

- Responsibilities include facilitating two weekly group support sessions (e.g. LAMBDA and C3). LAMBDA is support group designed to provide assistance to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered. Cultural Connections Group is another support group for international students coping with acculturative stress and who experience difficulties navigating the American education system. Clients are provided psycho-education regarding the coming out process, stages of sexual identity, how to cope with discrimination/homophobia, strategies to minimize acculturative stress, adjustment difficulties, and a plethora of other subject areas. Additional responsibilities include individual therapy with adults and children with various diagnoses ranging from depression to autism spectrum disorders, and behavior modification training with parents. Supervisors: Laura R. Johnson, Ph.D, Tom Lombardo, Ph.D, Karen Christoff, Ph.D

August 2006-present

**Behavior, Attention, and Developmental Disabilities  
Consultants, LLC**

Title: Behavior Specialist

- Responsibilities include providing applied behavior analysis to children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, developing behavior intervention plans, training teachers and assistants on classroom and behavior management, applied behavior analysis training, assessing students to rule out or confirm developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and other health impairments, providing recommendations, resources, and other tools to improve teacher/student relations, and attending Individualized Education Plan meetings in various school districts across Northern Mississippi. This description is not all-inclusive. Supervisor: Emily Thomas-Johnson, Ph.D

August 2004-May 2005

**University of Mississippi**      Oxford, MS  
**North Mississippi Regional Center (NMRC)**

Title: Psychology Intern/Practicum

Member of multimodal treatment team serving adults with mental retardation, developmental disabilities, and/or dual diagnosis of psychiatric and cognitive impairments.

- Job description included the administration of dementia assessments, facilitated weekly Behavior Analysis Training (BAT) with staff members, conducted individual in-patient therapy with clients, identified techniques to maintain appropriate behaviors and decrease inappropriate behaviors, provided behavior modification training using reinforcement schedules, assisted psychologist with report writing and test analysis.

Supervisors: Everlean Mathis, M.S.; Paul Deal, Ph.D

### **Professional Presentations and Symposiums**

Johnson, L.R., **Hankton, U.N.**, Bastien, G., Johnson, C. (2011, November). *Positive Youth Development and Civic Engagement in an International Context*. Roundtable discussion (to be) presented at the Caribbean Regional Conference of Psychology in Nassau, Bahamas.

**Hankton, U.N.**, Bastien, G., Johnson, C. N., Martin, R., & Johnson, L.R. (2011, August). *Does Racial Identity Predict Civic Engagement among African Americans?* Poster session presented at the 2011 APA Annual Convention in Washington, D.C.

**Hankton, U.N.**, Drescher, C.F., Johnson, L.R., & Schulenberg, S. (2011, August). *Purpose in Life and Civic Engagement*. Poster session presented at the 2011 APA Annual Convention in Washington, D.C.

Bastien, G., Johnson, C.N., Martin, R.C., **Hankton, U.N.** (2011, August). *Assessment of the Campus Climate for GLBT Students and the Programmatic Response at a Conservative, Southern University*. Presented at the APA Conference. Washington, D.C.

**Hankton, U.N.** & Johnson, L.R. (2011, February). *Gay and Lesbian Concerns in a Global Context*. Presented at the University of Mississippi's 2011 Isom Student Gender Conference in University, MS

Johnson, E. T. & **Hankton, U.** (2009). *Tutorial: Psychological Assessment and the 2009 Revised Eligibility Criteria for Mississippi Special Education*. Symposium presented at the 2010 Mississippi Psychological Association annual convention, Gulfport, MS

**Hankton, U.**, Tucker, C., Makino, H., & Johnson, L. (2006). *Illuminating the International Student Voice: Translating adjustment needs into culturally competent programs*. Poster presented at the 2006 annual convention of the Association for the Advancement of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy, Chicago, IL.

**Hankton, U.**, Johnson, L. R. & Burns (2004). *Stress associated with racism and general stress as predictors of psychological symptoms in African Americans*. Poster presented at the 2004 annual convention of the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, New Orleans, LA

**Hankton, U. N.**, Gibbs, S., & Murphy, R. T. (2003). *Predictors of undergraduates' stress symptoms six months after September*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, New Orleans, LA.

Murphy, R. T., **Hankton, U.**, & Gibbs, S. (2002). *Characteristics and evaluation of PTSD associated with violence among youth*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Educational Diagnosticians Association, New Orleans, LA.

### **Colloquia and Workshops:**

Johnson, L.R., & **Hankton, U.N.** (2005). Institute for International Studies--Pre-departure and Re-entry Workshops (Intercultural Communication and Cross Cultural Adjustment) University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

**Hankton, U.N.**, & Bastien, G. (July 2007). Anger management workshop for undergraduate and graduate sorority chapters. Presented at the Chamber of Commerce. Oxford, MS.

Johnson, L.R., Bastien, G., Stewart, R.W., **Hankton, U.N.**, & Drescher, C. (2011). Culture & Communication Part I: Identifying and working with barriers in the clinical setting. A colloquium delivered to the clinical graduate students and faculty at the University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

Johnson, L.R., Stewart, R.W., Bastien, G., **Hankton, U.N.**, (November 2010 – April 2011). ROTC cultural sensitivity training. A series of workshops delivered to ROTC cadets and midshipman attending The University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS.

**SPECIAL TRAINING:**

Early Intensive Behavior Intervention 40-hour online training course completed July 2011 through Behavior Attention and Developmental Disabilities, LLC

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Workshop led by Kelly G. Wilson, Ph.D., Memphis, TN, August 2008