Scales, Peter C.; Benson, Peter L.; Roehlkepartain, Eugene C.; Hintz, Nicole R.; Sullivan, Theresa K.;
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El Rol del Vecindario y la Comunidad en la Promoción de Competencias Evolutivas en Niños y Jóvenes: Un Estudio Nacional de Normas Sociales en Adultos Norteamericanos

Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Nicole R. Hintz, Theresa K. Sullivan, and Marc Mannes
Search Institute

Unrelated adults play potentially important roles in the positive socialization of children and youth, but studies of adolescents suggest the majority of adults do not engage positively with young people on an intentional, frequent, and deep basis. As a result, only a minority of young people report experiencing key developmental assets that have been associated with reduced risk-taking behaviors and increased thriving. Social norms theory suggests that adults will be more likely to get deeply involved with young people outside their family if that involvement is viewed as highly important, and if they perceive a social expectation to do so. A nationally representative sample of 1,425 U.S. adults was surveyed to determine the degree of importance American adults ascribed to 19 positive asset-building actions, and the degree to which the adults they knew actually engaged with young people outside their own families in those positive ways. The results showed that only a minority of Americans experience consistent normative motivation for engaging with other people's children. There is a large gap between what adults consider important and what they actually do to construct positive, intentional relationships with children and youth. Community stability and extent of community-building activities in which adults engage, including participation in religious services, volunteering, and neighborhood meetings, are associated with differences among adults in the degree of normative motivation for engaging with young people. In addition to these group differences, however, there also are nine asset-building actions –two functioning as genuine social norms and seven as social values– that great majorities of American adults consider highly important. The foundation therefore exists in public opinion to make explicit greater permission for adults to become more deeply engaged in the lives of children outside their families and to thereby define new normative expectations for all adults to share in being responsible for the well-being of young people. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Los adultos no familiares juegan potencialmente roles importantes en la socialización positiva de niños y jóvenes, pero estudios de adolescentes sugieren que la mayoría de los adultos no se involucran positivamente con jóvenes de manera intencional, frecuente y profunda. Como resultado, sólo una minoría de jóvenes reportan experimentar competencias evolutivas fundamentales que han sido asociadas con una reducción de comportamientos riesgosos y un aumento de conductas positivas. La teoría de las normas sociales sugiere que es más probable que los adultos se involucren intensamente con jóvenes no familiares si ese involucramiento es visto como muy importante, y si perciben una expectativa social de que lo hagan. Una muestra representativa nacional de 1425 adultos estadounidenses fue encuestada para determinar el grado de importancia que le atribuían a 19 acciones positivas de desarrollo de competencias, y el grado en que adultos que ellos conocían se involucraban en acciones de este tipo con jóvenes que no formaban parte de sus familias. Los resultados mostraron que sólo una minoría de estadounidenses experimentaron motivación normativa consistente para involucrarse con los hijos de otros. Hay una gran brecha entre lo que los adultos consideran importante y lo que realmente hacen para construir relaciones positivas e intencionales con niños y jóvenes. La estabilidad de la comunidad y el grado en que los adultos se involucran con actividades de fortalecimiento de la comunidad, incluyendo participación en ceremonias religiosas, voluntariado y encuentros de vecindario, son asociados con diferencias en la motivación de los adultos para involucrarse con jóvenes. Sin embargo, además de estas diferencias de grupo, hay también nueve acciones de desarrollo de competencias –dos que funcionan como normas sociales genuinas y siete como valores sociales– que una gran mayoría de estadounidenses consideran altamente importantes. Por lo tanto, existen en la opinión pública los fundamentos para explicitar un mayor permiso para que los adultos se involucren más profundamente en las vidas de menores que no forman parte de sus familias y así definir nuevas expectativas normativas para que todos los adultos compartan la responsabilidad por el bienestar de los jóvenes.

Peter C. Scales, Senior Fellow. Peter L. Benson, President. Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Chief Communication Officer. Nicole R. Hintz, Senior Research Assistant. Theresa K. Sullivan, Senior Consultant. Marc Mannes, Director of Research and Evaluation, and Partner Services Coordinator of the Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to: Peter C. Scales, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Search Institute, 940 Chestnut Ridge Road, Manchester, MO 63021. E-mail: scalespc@search-institute.org

Both common sense and social research indicate that young people need adults to be involved with them, not just their own parents or other family members, but adults in their neighborhoods, their schools, the stores they frequent, and the organizations they join. A synthesis of more than 800 research studies concluded that adult connection with and caring for children and youth is consistently associated with positive outcomes among young people. These outcomes include higher self-esteem, greater engagement with school and higher academic achievement, lessened delinquency, lessened substance abuse, better mental health, and better social skills (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

In this paper, we report on a national study of adults' relationships with children and youth outside their own families. The study examined how important adults think it is to engage positively with young people outside their own families, and how much the adults around them have such relationships with children and adolescents (detailed in Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2001; Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, et al., 2002). The study had two over-arching conclusions: (a) large majorities of Americans -70% or

more- rated 9 of 19 positive engagement behaviors "most important," but (b) rarely did these ways of relating to young people become norms in their own social networks. That is, there was considerable social value attributed to these behaviors, but little in the way of social expectation that adults will engage with young people in developmentally attentive ways.

Table 1 shows the large gaps our study found between what adults think they ought to do in relationship with young people, and what they actually do. It also shows that there were only two actions that were both considered highly important and done by the majority of adults, that is, that functioned as social norms: Encourage children and youth to take school seriously and do well in school, and expect children and youth to respect adults as authority figures.

Thus, the majority of the adult actions in relationships with children and youth, despite being thought at least reasonably important by large majorities of Americans, actually function more as social values or personal preferences than as social norms -that is, they were considered very important by a majority, but only a minority lives those actions.

Table 1

Percentage point gap between importance of adult asset-building actions and adult engagement with young people those actions

	Importance	Engagement	Gap
Social Norms			
Encourage success in school	90%	69%	21%
Expect respect for adults	68%	67%	1%
Social Values			
Expect parents to set boundaries	84%	42%	42%
Teach shared values	80%	45%	35%
Teach respect for cultural differences	77%	36%	41%
Guide decision making	76%	41%	35%
Give financial guidance	75%	36%	39%
Have meaningful conversations	75%	34%	41%
Discuss personal values	73%	37%	36%
Personal Preferences			
Report positive behavior	65%	22%	43%
Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	63%	35%	28%
Report misbehavior	62%	33%	29%
Discuss religious beliefs	60%	35%	25%
Pass down traditions	56%	38%	18%
Know names	50%	34%	16%
Seek opinions	48%	25%	23%
Provide service opportunities	48%	13%	35%
Model giving and serving	47%	16%	31%
Give advice	13%	17%	-4%

N = 1,425

There does not appear to be a great amount of social support or pressure to reflect these actions in daily living, although the values they represent receive wide agreement.

Some adults, however, are more likely to engage with young people. In the remainder of this paper, we consider how community stability and the degree to which adults engage in community-building activities such as volunteering, participating in meetings, and attending religious services, may affect the level of adults' attentiveness to young people's development.

The Role of Adults in Building Young People's Developmental Assets

Through survey research with more than one million 6th-12th graders in more than 1,000 U.S. communities since the early 1990s, Search Institute has identified 40 developmental assets or building blocks of success that help young people be healthy, caring, responsible, and productive (Benson, 1997; Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999). These 40 assets are not all that young people need in their lives, but the research foundation for their importance in promoting healthy development is comprehensive and compelling (Scales & Leffert, 1999). For example, the more assets youth report in their lives, the less they engage in various kinds of high-risk behaviors (Leffert et al., 1998), and the more they show evidence of developmental thriving, such as doing well in school, valuing racial diversity, helping others, and overcoming adversity (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Although comparable data do not yet exist for children in Grades K-5, there is reason to believe that similar, age-appropriate relations would be found: The research clearly suggests that younger children require similar developmental experiences for positive growth (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 1997). For most of the assets, whether young people experience them depends directly or indirectly on their relationships with adults. In the present study, we examined 19 positive adult actions that could build some of these developmental assets. Table 2 shows how the actions studied relate to the categories of developmental assets.

Data from a 1996-1997 school year sample of nearly 100,000 6th-12th graders in 213 U.S. communities[1]

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[1] Although this aggregate sample is not nationally representative, it is large and reasonably diverse, and provides a useful perspective on adolescents' self-reported experience of developmentally important influences. Details on the sample are found in Benson et al. (1998) and Leffert et al. (1998).

suggest that too few young people experience the adult relationships that build these key developmental assets.

- Only about two-thirds say they experience consistent love and support from their own families, or adequate time connected to a religious community.
- Only about half feel a connection to their schools, contribute service in their communities, or experience consistent rules and expectations in their schools and neighborhoods.
- Only about 40% experience consistent rules and expectations at home, a caring neighborhood, or supportive relationships with adults other than parents.
- Only about one-quarter say they have good adult role models in their lives, or feel cared for at school.
- Only one-fifth feel valued by the community (Benson et al., 1999).

Americans believe in general that raising successful young people should be one of the nation's top priorities, even more important than preventing crime and creating more jobs (Farkas & Johnson, 1997). That level of priority suggests that adults other than a given child's parents have a stake in that child's well-being. However, most adults remain decidedly ambivalent about whose responsibility it is to help other people's children grow up to be caring, responsible, and productive.

For example, a Child Welfare League of America survey (1999) found most Americans do not intervene when they see a child being mistreated, mainly because of fear of being responsible for any resulting negative consequences. A Public Agenda survey of American adults found that 43% think most parents resent getting unsolicited advice about their children (Duffet, Johnson, & Farkas, 1999).

Adults' apparent reluctance to help enforce boundaries for other people's children is just one example of the disconnection between adults and children who are not in the same family. A Lutheran Brotherhood-sponsored Yankelovich survey of 1,000 adults found that only a little more than one-third of adults (36%) said they currently participated in any activity or volunteer setting where they interacted with young people outside their own families (Youth Involvement, 1998).

The conundrum for those who are committed to developing healthier communities for children and youth is that adult relationships can be powerful positive influences in young people's lives, but most adults do not relate much to children and youth outside their family. What stops most adults from doing more?

Table 2

Relationship of developmental assets to adult asset-building actions studied

Asset Type	Asset Name and Definition	Adult asset-building actions explored in this study
Support	1. **Family support -**Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. **Positive family communication -**Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s) advice and counsel. 3. **Other adult relationships -**Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults. 4. **Caring neighborhood -**Young person experiences caring neighbors. 5. **Caring school climate -**School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. **Parent involvement in schooling -** Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succed in school.	- **Have meaningful conversations -**Have conversations with young people that help adults and young people "really get to know one another." - **Know names -**Know the names of many children and teenagers in the neighborhood. - **Give advice -**Give advice to young people who are not members of the family.
Empowerment	7. **Community values youth -**Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. 8. **Youth as resources -**Young people are given useful roles in the community. 9. **Service to others -**Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. 10. **Safety -**Young person feels safe at homme, school, and in the neighborhood.	- **Report positive behavior -**Tell parent(s) if they see a child or teenager doing something right. - **Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids -**Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the young people in their neighborhood. - **Provide service opportunities -**Give young people lots of opportunities to make their communities better places. - **Seek opinions -**Seek young people's opinions when making decisions that affect them.
Boundaries and Expectations	11. **Family boundaries -**Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts. 12. **School boundaries -**School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. **Neighborhood boundaries -**Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. 14. **Adult role models -**Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. 15. **Positive peer influence -**Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. 16. **High expectations -**Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.	- **Expect respect for adults -**Expect children and youth to respect adults and elders as authority figures. - **Parents set boundaries -**If they are parents, enforce clear and consistent rules and boundaries. - **Report misbehavior -**Tell parent(s) if they see the child or teenager doing something wrong. - **See parents as sole discipliners -**Parents should be able to discipline their children without interference from others.** - **Model giving and serving -**Volunteer time or donate money monthly to show young people the importance of helping others.

(Continued)

Table 2
Continued

Asset Type	Asset Name and Definition	Adult asset-building actions explored in this study
Constructive Use of Time	17. **Creative activities -**Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. 18. **Youth programs -**Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations. 19. **Religious community -**Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. 20. **Time at home -**Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do", two or fewer nights per week.	- **No items**
Commitment to Learning	21. **Achievement motivation -**Young person is motivated to do well in school. 22. **School engagement -**Young person is actively engaged in learning. 23. **Homework -**Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. 24. **Bonding to school -**Young person cares about her or his school. 25. **Reading for pleasure -**Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.	- **Encourage success in school -**Encourage children and youth to take school seriously and do well in school.
Positive Values	26. **Caring -**Young person places high value on helping other people. 27. **Equality and social justice -**Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. 28. **Integrity -**Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. 29. **Honesty -**Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy". 30. **Responsibility -**Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. 31. **Restraint -**Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.	- **Teach shared values -**Teach children and youth the same core values as other adults do, such as equality, honesty, and responsibility. - **Discuss personal values -**Openly discuss their own values with children and youth. - **Discuss religious beliefs -**Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with children and youth.

Table 2
Continued

Asset Type	Asset Name and Definition	Adult asset-building actions explored in this study
Social Competencies	32. **Planning and decision making** -Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. 33. **Interpersonal competence** -Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. 34. **Cultural competence** -Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. 35. **Resistance skills** -Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. 36. **Peaceful conflict resolution** -Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.	- **Respect cultural differences** -Teach children and youth to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures, even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own. - **Guide decision making** -Help children and youth think through the possible good and bad consequences of their decisions. - **Give financial guidance** -Offer young people guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money.
Positive Identity	37. **Personal power** -Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me". 38. **Self-esteem** -Young person reports having a high self-esteem. 39. **Sense of purpose** -Young person reports that "my life has a pupose". 40. **Positive view of personal future** -Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.	- **Pass down traditions** -Actively teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious culture.

* Because these asset-building actions emphasize informal, non-programmatic relationships outside of the family, they do not directly address the constructive-use-of-time assets, which focus on involvement in activities, programs, and organizations. Shaded actions are those that at least 70% of respondents considered "most impotant" for adults to do (5 on a scale os 1-5).
** Parents being able to discipline their children, "without interference from others", was an action conceptualized as inconsistent with the theoretical and empirical framework of developmental asset building (Benson, 1997). An asset-building perspective calls for all adults to share in the responsibility for setting and enforcing a variety of rules and boundaries, and considers corporal punishment by any adult, including parents, to be generally both ineffective and inappropriate. Thus, this item was reverse-scored, with participants who gave it a "5" in importance receiving a "1" for a score.

The Role of Social Norms

The ambivalence American adults seem to have about their relationships with children and youth other than their own may stem from a lack of clarity and consensus over how they are *expected* to behave, and about the perceived consequences for behaving one way or another. Indeed, parents may be unsure about how they are expected to parent their own children. Indications of a broad lack of consensus even about parenting include the plethora of often conflicting parenting advice given in books and columns in popular magazines and television talk shows, and the debate over the last few years in both the popular and scientific media about whether parents even have much of an influence (e.g., Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Heatherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Vandell, 2000). The choices parents have to make these days are sufficiently challenging that a national poll found that 80% of Americans think it is much more difficult to be a parent today than ever before (Duffet et al., 1999). If expectations around raising one's own children can be so varied, how much more difficult might it be for adults to accurately

understand what the norms or expectations are for them in their relationships with *others'* children?

All societies exhibit some degree of social norms that directly or indirectly guide people's behavior. Indeed, Elster (1989) argued that there are two principal problems of social order, coordinating expectations and achieving cooperation, and that social norms are especially important for coordinating the expectations of society. Studies have demonstrated the powerful role that social norms play in regulating people's behavior across countless situations. These include the effect of norms on prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996), the development of property rights (e.g., Young, 1998), aggression (e.g., Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999), international standards of secrecy or transparency over military capabilities (e.g., Florini, 1996), and who gets to play pickup basketball (e.g., Jimerson, 1999).

Anthropologists also have argued that the main effect of norms is to "stabilize social expectations and thus establish commitments to particular ways of acting in common social situations" (Ensminger & Knight, 1997, p. 2). The unique feature of social norms is that deviations from social norms bring "sanctioning of deviant behavior" (p. 3). It is not simply the reaction of powerful others to enforce the norm that brings obedience, but, as Florini (1996) observed, a "sense of 'oughtness'" that reflects the norm's status as a "legitimate behavioral claim" (pp. 364-365).

Social norms have two important features: They are shared, and they have consequences. For an expectation to function as a norm –to guide or even direct behavior– it must be shared by enough members of an individual's primary reference groups, or by enough members with the power to reward and punish, that the individual is motivated to *care* about complying or not complying with a norm. There may be little more reward for abiding by a norm than social indifference to one's behavior, but a genuine norm requires that there be a perceived consequence for violating the norm. If one perceives that a social norm can be violated without penalty, then it is more of a social *value* that can be applied or not in a given situation; it is not a shared rule that prescribes behavior, but merely a preference that might influence behavior.

There seem to be social expectations that parents and extended family adults will teach children and youth some basic conventions and values, such as table manners, returning favors, or exerting effort at school or work. Society also regulates adult behavior in such ways as prohibiting adults from having sexual relations with children and youth under the age of 18, or selling alcohol and tobacco products to underage youth.

However, the role of unrelated adults in the socialization of the young may fairly be described as quite limited when it concerns rules for adult behavior that are not as simple as modeling good table manners, encouraging children to obey the law, or not breaking laws designed to protect children from adults. Who teaches adults what is expected *of them* as nurturers of other people's children?

If clear norms for adult engagement with young people are lacking, so will be adult involvement. For example, research has shown that when the norms for expected performance of a task are either weak, or only weakly related to a person's perception of identity, then personal sense of responsibility and engagement around that task also will be weak (Britt, 1999).

Norm activation theory (Schwartz, 1970) states that complying with a norm is more likely if it is clear that noncompliance will result in negative consequences, and if individuals ascribe personal responsibility for those consequences to themselves. Adults often may perceive the possible negative social consequences of getting involved with children and youth to be stronger than any reward, and thereby be discouraged from greater engagement. This may be true for two reasons: The absence of punishment for failure to get involved with other people's children, and the presence only of limited rewards for doing so. For example, although there might well be social disapproval leveled at a neighbor who speaks meanly to children on a regular basis, there is unlikely to be any sanction for more common adult passivity. Simply ignoring children, failing to smile and wave hello when one sees children and youth in the neighborhood, failing to encourage youth decision making or community service, or failing to promote their liking of school, all are omissions hardly likely to generate feelings of guilt and anxiety. But Elster (1989) suggested those feelings might be the internalized emotional guardians of true social norms and the root source of the power of norms to shape behavior.

The Influence of Context and Culture on Adults' Responsibility for all Kids

Among the cultural themes that have worked in concert to keep Americans from placing children and adolescents at the center of civic life are the isolation of families, civic disengagement, the professionalization of care, the loss of socialization consistency, and the marginalization of youth (elaborated in Benson et al., 1998). Indeed, some of these trends may have affected not only how we relate to children and youth, but also other broad indicators of social health and happiness: Whether gathered by liberal-or conservative-leaning

commentators, whether focused on social and economic indicators such as welfare, charitable giving, and AIDS, or those characterized as moral and cultural indicators, such as divorce, community participation, and levels of trust or mistrust in government, measurements of Americans' well-being tend to show we are richer but unhappier than we were 30 years ago (Myers, 2000; Stille, 2000). The malleability of many social norms in contemporary society, their inconsistency over time and circumstances (Fukiyama, 1999), may have contributed to those trends.

Today, a majority of American adults perceive that giving advice to children or youth who are not their own will bring negative repercussions in the form of resentment and perhaps anger from the parents of those children or youth (Farkas & Johnson, 1997). The present study too suggests that many adults might give lip service to the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child," but they do not feel the social permission and expectation more commonly experienced in a true village to actually help "raise" the next generation.

There may be a number of sources potentially giving "permission" for involvement with young people outside one's own family. "Good Samaritan" laws, for example, provide legal permission for intervening in critical situations. Media ads encouraging adults to serve as mentors to youth may be another implied source of permission. A more direct source of permission for adults getting involved with kids may come from parents. Being able to anticipate a parents' support or irritation at being involved more deeply with a given child or youth enters into the behavioral equation determining action. But, in large measure, how I as a neighbor would predict parents might feel about my relating to their son or daughter is a function of how well I know or think I know those parents and their values.

A Knight Foundation National Community Indicators Study of American adults is a reminder that such knowledge is not common in America. The study found that nearly two-thirds of adults (63%) said they either knew only *some* of the names of the "neighbors who live close to you," or did not know *any* of their closest neighbors' names (The Community Indicators Survey-National, 1999). If knowledge of even this most basic information about one's geographically closest neighbors is lacking for the majority of American adults, how much more difficult might it be for a neighbor to accurately understand those neighborhood parents' values and norms around relating to their children? How likely is that neighbor to feel permitted or even encouraged to get involved? It is hardly then surprising that most adults keep their engagement with young people fairly limited. In this paper we examine the role of several neighborhood features that should be associated with higher levels of involvement with young people: Neighborhood stability, and frequency of participation in religious services, volunteering, and neighborhood meetings.

The Role of Neighborhood Stability and Community-Building Activities

Neighborhood stability is frequently conceptualized as a key element of a neighbor-hood's social organization and an influence on residents' capacity to construct a desirable quality of life. For example, Garbarino and Sherman (1980) found that neighborhoods with high and low rates of child abuse could be distinguished on the basis of the proportion of residents living in a neighborhood for less than five years. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) reported mixed results using this dimension as a predictor. The number of years adults lived in the neighborhood was not related to their willingness to intervene on behalf of the neighborhood (collective efficacy). However, adults' reports of being in the same *house* as five years earlier did have a significant, positive association with collective efficacy, and the number of moves a respondent had made in the last five years was negatively associated with collective efficacy.

Volunteerism, attendance at religious services, and participation in neighborhood meetings have been associated with prosocial attitudes and behaviors such as caring and generosity (Mattis et al., 2000), greater senses of community and, if absent, undesirable health outcomes such as low birth weight (Caughy, O'Campo, & Brodsky, 1999). Religious involvement also predicts mortality rates: People more involved with religion are healthier and live longer, a finding attributed in part to greater experience of social support and positive attitudes and emotions associated with religious involvement (McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoreson, 2000). In addition, all those community-building activities may provide additional sources of close relationships and meaning in life, elements of experience associated with more effective coping under stress, greater physical health, more joy, and less depression (Myers, 2000).

It is not unreasonable to suspect that people might well be more likely to overcome implicit norms that prevent involvement with other people's children (e.g., minding one's own business, worry over parents' reactions) if they (a) identify more strongly with prosocial values and behaviors, (b) invest more and feel safer in their communities, (c) experience more social support and feelings of community, and (d) report generally greater physical and emotional well-being than other people.

This may occur in part because the social networks they form through congregational involvement, volunteering, and community activism more strongly support norms of relationship and nurture, both as social expectations and sources of identity. In this paper, we explore the extent to which this reasoning is reflected in the relation of neighborhood stability and activism to adults' positive involvement with children and youth outside their own families.

Method

With the assistance of the Gallup Organization, Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute conducted a nationally representative telephone poll of U.S. adults, and more in-depth interviews of adults based on responses to hypothetical scenarios or situations.

Participants

A national cross-section of households was systematically selected from all telephone-owning households in the continental United States. A random digit dialing technique was used to ensure the inclusion of households with both listed and unlisted telephone numbers. Within each household one person, 18 years of age or older was interviewed. Interviews with 1,425 participants were completed from March through April 2000. Within the total sample Hispanic and African-American households were over sampled to obtain a minimum of 300 within each group. In addition, a split-sample format was used; half the respondents were asked about children ages 5 to 10 and the other half about youth ages 11 to 18.

Sixty-five percent of all phone numbers called three times resulted in contact with an eligible adult. Of that group, 92% agreed to participate in the poll. According to Gallup researchers, those figures are quite typical for Gallup polls (E-mails from Harry Cotugno, Gallup Organization, to Peter C. Scales, Search Institute, July 27-28, 2000). Intentional oversampling and differential contact and refusal rates produced a sample that in some respects differed from a representative sample of all adults ages 18 and over in telephone households. Thus, Gallup applied weighting procedures to correct results for distributional errors. All results reported here are weighted, and are not distorted by a group's representation in the sample that is different from that group's distribution in the U.S. population of telephone-owning households.[2]

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[2] Percentages reported for the total sample have a 6 margin of error of 2-4 percentage points at the 95% confidence interval, i.e., in 95 out of 100 similar samples, the true result would lie within 62to4 percentage points of the results reported here. The range of 2 to 4 percentage points is dependent upon the percentage response reported; for example, a sample response of 33% would have a margin of error or sampling tolerance of 63 points, whereas a percentage of 60% would have a margin of error of 64 points. Margins of error for subgroups (e.g., comparing males to females, across different racial/ethnic groups) vary from 64 percentage points to 611 percentage points, with the range dependent upon the size of the subgroup samples involved as well as the size of the percentage responses reported.

Table 3 displays the actual and weighted proportions of participants by various demographic categories.

Table 3

Demographic composition of national sample

Feature	Actual Proportion	Corrected (weighted) Proportion
Gender:		
Female	63	54
Male	37	46
Race/Ethnicity:		
African American	22	11
Hispanic	22	10
Other (mostly Non-Hispanic White)	57	80
Age:		
18-34 years old	33	31
35-54 years old	41	40
55 + years old	24	27
Marital Status:		
Married	49	53
Single, never married	30	25
Separated, Divorced, Widowed	21	22
Parental Status:		
Parents	75	74
Non-parents	25	26
Education:		
Some post-high school	59	52
No post-high school	41	48
Annual income:		
$60,000 or >	22	22
$20,000 - $59,999	46	46
< $20,000	22	21

N = 1,425

Note: Proportions might not add to 100 because of rounding.

Measures

Two instruments were created for this study, a forced-choice telephone poll averaging 16 minutes in duration, for use with the nationally representative sample of U.S. adults, and a 25-minute, situation-based telephone interview for use with a subset of the larger sample's participants.

The forced-choice poll is the primary focus of this paper. The poll contained 19 positive statements about potential adult actions that the developmental assets framework suggests are important elements of promoting healthy child and adolescent development (e.g., "some adults know the names of many youth in their neighborhood"). In addition, it included one reverse-scored item about parents being able to discipline children without interference, an action contrary to the framework of asset building. The survey further contained 12 background or demographic items (e.g., level of weekly contact with children and youth, involvement in volunteering, race/ethnicity, and gender).

Participants were asked two questions about each of the 20 asset-building actions: (a) *how important is this for adults to do or believe* (5 = *most important*, 1 = *least important*),

and (b) *how many of the adults you know actually do or believe this* (5 = *almost all*, 4 = *a large majority*, 3 = *about half*, 2 = *some*, 1 = *very few*)? Adults "you know" was defined as "adults you know from your family, neighborhood, workplace, community activities you might be involved with, and so forth."[3]

Thus, two different dimensions of adult asset-building actions were tapped: the *importance or worthiness* of the action as a normative expectation (personal motivation to engage in the action) and the *degree of conformity* to the normative expectation which adults in the respondent's world of regular contacts are believed to exercise. The latter dimension may be considered a measure of environmental motivation or implied social pressure for the adult also to live the action. The actions that adults say are both important and done by the majority of adults they know may be considered to function as core social norms-they are among the key unwritten expectations or rules for how American adults should relate with children and youth.

Four of the statements dealt with adults' supporting children and youth to become giving, helping people, financially as well as with their service. Those prosocial values and behaviors are important contributors to young people's overall well-being (reviewed in: Scales & Leffert, 1999, for example pp. 53-54, 152-153; Chaskin & Hawley, 1994). Consistency of values and expectations across the pieces of young people's lives also has been found to be a meaningful contributor to positive outcomes such as succeeding in school and being mentally healthy (reviewed in Scales & Leffert, 1999, for example, pp. 41, 88, 137; Sanders, 1998). Thus, a number of statements asked about values and expectations, including sharing one's personal and religious values with young people, and encouraging them to do well in school. Because American adults consistently rate the quality of children's education as one of the nation's top priorities ("All for All," 2000), it ought to be important and acceptable for most adults to reinforce with children and youth the value of school.

Other items asked about boundaries and expectations, and were derived from Sampson and colleagues (1997). In that study, it was reported that adults' collective efficacy –their working together to promote and protect shared values and norms such as the inappropriateness of youth skipping school– was related to lower levels of both perceived and actual violence in those neighborhoods.

The research reviewed earlier suggests adults' interactions with young people are generally limited. Therefore, we asked: How important it is for adults to know the names of many children or youth in their neighborhood, have conversations with them that allow each to "really get to know" the other, help children or youth "think through" the possible consequences of decisions, ask children and youth for their opinions on decisions that affect them, and give advice to children or youth who are not members of their own family. Together, these may be considered a description of how acceptable and common adults feel it is for them to connect with, support, empower, and guide children and youth, or, in contrast, to be essentially ignorant of and uninvolved with young people outside their own families.

Finally, the asset-building philosophy is constructed explicitly on the premise that "all kids are our kids" (Benson, 1997). If that fundamental premise is not the norm, that is, it is contradicted by most adults in everyday life, and most adults *really* believe instead that only "our" kids, not "your" kids, are our kids, then it is difficult to imagine how many of the other adult asset-building actions asked about in the rest of the poll could themselves become normative. Thus, a direct question was asked about how important it is for adults to "feel a responsibility to help ensure the health and well-being" of all the children and youth "in their neighborhood."

The referent of "neighborhood" was used in a number of items for two reasons. First, if adults do not feel such a responsibility for the children and youth geographically nearest them, many of whom, because of their proximity, may be among the people those adults see and observe the most (and for many of whom adults may also know something about their parents), then it is difficult to imagine adults feeling greater responsibility for children and youth who are even more unknown to them and whose parents also are more unknown to them. Second, the neighborhood may for many people be the social unit that comes closest to Picker's (1997) notion of the "payoff neighborhood." This is a relatively small number of people in relatively closer association with oneself who, depending on the issue at hand, serve as a key normative reference group to illuminate what behaviors are acceptable and expected, or are unacceptable and prohibited.

Norm Importance and Norm Conformity scales. The 20 importance questions and the 20 conformity questions were combined into a Norm Importance scale and a Norm Conformity scale. Scale scores were created by summing the individual item scores.[4] Alpha reliabilities were computed, showing good internal consistency reliability for both scales (Norm Importance scale = 0.82, Norm Conformity scale = 0.85).

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[3] It has been observed for decades that people have a tendency to respond in socially desirable ways when they feel that, in today's term, there is a "politically correct" way to respond (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1972). We were concerned that asking directly whether adults personally were engaged with young people in these ways might elicit socially desirable responses. An extensive research tradition has described the role that similarity of background, interests, and values plays in both adult and adolescent friendships (Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Bagwell, 1999). Given that they probably are similar in many important attitudinal and value respects to other adults they "know from your family, neighborhood, workplace, community activities, and so forth," asking adults how many of those adults they "know" did these actions, seemed a reasonable and less biased proxy for reporting on their own behavior. Moreover, since the central interest of this study was in the very social pressure that the idea of norms reflects, asking about the degree to which adults feel surrounded by others doing these actions is a more appropriate measure of normative expectation than even asking about their own behavior. The fact that so few adults said the majority of the adults they knew did these asset-building actions in their relationships with young people clearly suggests we were successful in obtaining responses that were not exaggerated in a positive direction.

[4] The scores for parents disciplining their children without interference from others were reversed, as it was considered more desirable, from an asset-building perspective, for adults not to believe this was highly important and not to be surrounded by adults who believed in parental exclusivity over discipline.

Attendance at religious services. Participants were asked: "About how often do you attend religious services?" Response choices ranged from 1 = *daily* to 6 = *never.*

Frequency of volunteering. Participants were asked: "How often do you do volunteer work for your neighborhood, religious congregation, or other community group?" Response choices ranged from 1 = *never* to 6 = *more than a few hours a week.*

Participation in community meetings. Participants were asked: "How often, if ever, do you attend neighborhood or community meetings?" Response choices ranged from 1 = *never* to 4 = *often.*

Length of community residency. Participants were asked: "For how long have you lived in your current neighborhood?" Responses choices ranged from 1 = *less than two years* to 5 = *20 or more years.*

Data Analysis

Several types of data analysis were conducted. First, we examined *percentage responses* to each item, for the whole sample and across demographic subgroups (i.e., by gender, parental status, etc.). To better understand the degree of personal and environmental motivation for these actions among American adults, we were especially interested in the intensity of participants' attitudes. Thus, we focused on the proportion that rated each asset-building norm a "5," or *most important*, and the proportion that said either *almost all* adults they knew (a response of "5") or a *great majority* of them ("4") actually did the action. We also examined differences in *means*, on both individual asset-building actions, and the Norm Importance and Norm Conformity scales.[5]

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[5] Where two groups were compared, we computed two-group analyses of variance (ANOVAS, p level of 0.05), because the SAS statistical package used could not calculate t tests using weighted data. The F value in these cases is simply the square of the t statistic. We also included a Bonferroni correction applied when these multiple F values were computed in the same two-group analysis; where more than two groups were compared, we conducted analyses of variance with Tukey multiple comparisons on all ANOVAs with significant overall F values. For these analyses, individual item responses were recoded so that there were only two responses: Either respondents rated an action "most important," or they did not, and either they said the majority of adults around them engaged in the action, or they did not. The means created by that binary recoding were used in the subsequent analyses. In some cases, where variables were likely to be moderately or strongly correlated, we conducted multiple analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to assess simultaneous main and interaction effects. Finally, in order to get an overall picture of which adults were most likely to rate the asset-building actions important and be surrounded by adults who lived the actions, we combined the importance and conformity ratings to yield a "consistency of motivation to engage" score. We then conducted canonical discriminant analysis to determine which variables discriminated among adults experiencing high, medium, and low degrees of consistency in their personal and environmental motivation for engaging in these asset-building actions.

Results

The Near-Neighborhood and the "Virtual Village"

The relatively lower level of importance given to several asset-building actions may speak to a weakness in the sense of "villageness" or responsibility for the common good that was otherwise suggested by the consensus on the nine core actions Americans considered most important. For example, 63% of adults said it was highly important to feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of all children and youth in their neighborhoods (Table 1). The majority of Americans, then, seem to be saying that parents alone do not have the responsibility for successfully raising their children. And yet, despite this reluctance to cede sole responsibility for children's well-being to parents, and despite the solid support for the core nine norms and social values, there also was plenty of evidence (shown in Table 1) that Americans are either uncertain or divided about how best to assume a more shared responsibility for the welfare of all "our" children:

- Only 35% said the adults they knew actually did feel responsible for helping ensure the well-being of all neighborhood kids;
- Seventy-five percent thought it highly important to have more than casual conversations with children and youth, but just 50% thought it highly important for adults to know the names of many neighborhood children or youth (how likely are those more-than-casual conversations if adults don't even know young people's names?);
- Large majorities felt it highly important to tell parents either when children and youth do something right (65%) or when they do something wrong (62%), but only 22% and 33%, respectively, said the majority of adults they know actually do either;
- Less than half (48%) thought it highly important to involve children and youth in community improvement projects;
- Only 13% felt it highly important for neighbors to give advice to children and youth.

Most telling, there appeared to be no difference in adults' rating of the importance of or conformity to asset-building actions in one's neighborhood as compared to other life settings. We calculated the mean rating of norm importance and norm conformity on five asset-building actions that explicitly referenced the "neighborhood," and compared those results to the mean ratings for the remaining items that did not specify a location. There were no

significant differences favoring the neighborhood setting in those ratings. In fact, the mean importance and conformity ratings were slightly higher for items that did *not* reference the neighborhood, both for importance (non-neighborhood mean of 4.34 versus mean of 4.17 for the neighborhood items) and conformity (non-neighborhood mean of 2.97 versus mean of 2.70 for the neighborhood items).

Fukiyama (1999, p. 72) called the creation of individualized life spaces in technologically advanced societies the "miniaturization of community," as people join small, flexible interest groups they can get into and out of without much personal cost. Instead of a neighborhood responsibility, adults today may feel more of a responsibility to help ensure the well-being of the young people they know from their broader community activities. Those might include young people they know from their religious congregation, sports leagues, or volunteer work, or who work at the places where they shop, or their own children's friends (many of whom, especially for teenagers, may not live in the neighborhood or attend the school nearest their neighborhood). In this sense then, adults create their own "virtual villages," where they also come into contact with other people's kids, but not necessarily kids from their own neighborhood. The sum total of these interactions is not itself a geographical location, but a life space resulting from personal choices about time, place, and interests.

The level of personal relationship between adults and young people, however, makes a difference in whether adults act in a given situation, and how. For example, among the 100 adults who also responded to hypothetical situations, 22% said it would be more likely for adults to do something about young adolescents skipping school if they knew those young people or their parents well. In addition, in two of the other three situations –whether to advise a young person about how to spend his money, and what to do about skateboarders around a local business– 21% and 19% of the situation respondents, respectively, said they would be more likely to act if they knew the young people well.

Differences Among American Adults in Engagement with Young People

There were a number of differences among subgroups of Americans in their degree of engagement with young people. In this paper, we focus on differences that reflect indicators of community participation and community stability, such as adults' attendance at religious services, participation in volunteering, involvement in community meetings, and length of community residency. The findings, summarized in Table 4, suggest that weekly attendance at religious services, monthly volunteering, frequent participation in community or neighborhood meetings, and having lived in the community for at least ten years all are associated with significantly greater attribution of importance to adult asset-building actions with young people. They also were associated with adults being more embedded in social networks where relating to young people in these ways is the norm.

Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services

Not surprisingly, frequency of attendance at religious services makes a difference in how important adults rate the asset-building actions in relating to young people. However, on the average –that is, considering all the actions together– it makes somewhat less difference than might be expected. Religious service attendance makes more of a

Table 4

Analysis of variance in importance of and conformity to adult asset-building actions, by community stability and participation

Variable	Importance of Asset-Building Actions		Conformity to Asset-Building Actions	
	df	F value	df	F value
Attendance at religious services	5,1352	12.30***	5,1326	5.98**
Frequency of volunteering	5,1350	6.56***	5,1323	6.47***
Participation in community meetings	3,1351	3.82*	3,1325	14.07***
Length of community residency	2,1356	11.20***	2,1330	4.64*

*** $p < .0001$; ** $p < .0008$; * $p < .009$.

difference on specific actions than it does on the average. Table 4 shows that, on the Norm Importance scale, those who attended religious services weekly were more likely than those who never attended, attended monthly, or attended only once per year to rate these asset-building actions highly important. But those weekly attendees were *not* more likely even than people who attended services every few months to rate them significantly higher in importance. On the Norm Conformity scale, both people who attended religious services weekly and those who attended only monthly were more likely than those who never attend, but not more likely than merely infrequent attendees, to say they are surrounded by adults who actually engage in these asset-building actions.

Apparently, frequent participation in religious services –at least weekly– has an association with both favorable attitudes toward adult asset-building actions and actual asset-building behavior. However, a lower level of participation –monthly– also is related to being in a network of adults who live these actions. It may be that monthly participation affords increased opportunities for interaction with young people and with other adults who are so engaged with kids, but perhaps not much ref lection about the meaning of those opportunities. However, more frequent participation in religious community may be required for adults to *think* more deeply about the critical role of these adult behaviors in young people's lives. With the additional reflection about religion and society that is afforded by more frequent participation in religious community, many adults may have a greater chance of incorporating these principles for nurturing the young into their philosophical understanding of what their religious tradition asks them to believe as well as do.

Frequency of Volunteering

Although less than half the sample thought it highly important to volunteer or donate money monthly to show young people the importance of giving, this finding could be an artifact of question wording. We asked about "monthly" volunteering or donating, and the frequency of such behavior may be considered less important than periodically serving or donating occasionally to charity as a model for young people.

Nevertheless, the monthly level of volunteerism itself did seem related to how important adults considered the asset-building actions to be. Table 4 shows that those who volunteered at least a few hours

per month (as well as those who volunteered a few hours a week) were more likely than those who never volunteered to rate the actions more highly important on the Norm Importance scale. On the Norm Conformity scale, those monthly and weekly volunteers also were more likely to be surrounded by adults who do engage with children and youth in these various ways.

Volunteering can include both activities that are explicitly oriented to meeting basic needs of people (e.g., helping to feed and shelter the homeless) as well as activities that less directly have an immediate positive impact on human welfare (e.g., working on a political campaign). Perhaps it is more the former kind of volunteering that shares a quality in common with the values and beliefs that lead some adults to be quite involved with their religious congregation or to often participate in meetings that affect their immediate lives. Simply asking about "volunteering," as we did, may blur this distinction.

Participation in Neighborhood and Community Meetings

Table 4 shows that, on the Norm Importance scale, those who attended community meetings at least sometimes were more likely to rate the norms overall as highly important than were those who never attended such meetings, but not more likely than those who attended just rarely. However, on the Norm Conformity scale, those who participated often in neighborhood or community meetings were more likely than those who never or rarely participated to be surrounded by adults who live the actions. In addition, those who participated sometimes, or even rarely, were more likely than those who never participated to be in networks of adults who live the actions. Occasional participants might not be distinguished so readily from rare participants on their sense of how important the asset-building actions are, but those occasional participants seem to have more normative support or pressure in their own lives to live the actions. Unlike ratings of importance, however, still more frequent participation in neighborhood or community meetings –doing so often– does seem related to even greater embeddedness in a network of asset-building adults.

Examining results for each of the 19 individual actions suggests that the effect of community meeting participation may be even greater on behavior than it is on attitude. For example, those who attended meetings *often* were more likely than *all* other adults to be surrounded by adults who know many young people's names, $F (3, 1409) = 10.01$, $p < .0001$, have deeper

conversations with them, $F(3,1409) = 13.11, p < .0001$, and give them chances to improve their communities, $F(3,1409) = 12.00, p < .0001$. In addition, frequent attendees were more likely than those *never* attending to teach children to preserve their own cultural heritage, $F(3, 1409) = 3.95, p < .008$. Frequent attendees also were more likely either than rare or never attendees to feel a responsibility for all the neighborhood's children and youth, $F(3, 1409) = 10.82, p < .0001$, and to volunteer or give money monthly, $F(3, 1409) = 9.61, p < .0001$.

Occasional attendance, however, also was related to being in a network of adults who live some of these actions. For example, those who attended community meetings just sometimes were, along with those attended often, more likely than those who never attended community meetings, to discuss their values with kids, $F(3, 1409) = 5.27, p < .001$. Occasional attendees, along with frequent participants, also were more likely than those never attending to seek out young people's opinions, $F(3, 1409) = 6.76, p < .0002$.

Frequent attendance may not have much impact on favorable attitudes toward adult engagement with kids. However, it does seem related to greater social pressure overall for being involved with young people, and to specific asset-building actions, such as knowing neighborhood kids' names and feeling more responsible for the well-being of all children and youth in the neighborhood.

Because it may be that the same adults who often attend community meetings are the same adults who frequently volunteer and frequently attend religious services, we also conducted multiple analyses of variance on the Norm Importance and Conformity scales to examine the possible interaction among those variables. Each MANOVA was significant (Norm Importance: $F(131, 1342) = 2.04, p < .0001$; Norm Conformity: $F(131, 1315) = 2.22, p < .0001$). All three main effects were significant: attendance at religious services, $F(5, 1342) = 12.93, p < .0001$; participation in community meetings, $F(3, 1342) = 3.41, p < .01$; and frequency of volunteering, $F(5, 1342) = 2.56, p < .02$. There was a strong interaction between attendance at religious services and volunteering, $F(24, 1342) = 2.24, p < .0005$, with those who attended services daily and who volunteered a few hours a week considering the actions more important. A weaker interaction was observed between religious services and community meeting participation, $F(16, 1342) = 1.69, p < .04$, with those who attended services at least weekly and community meetings at least sometimes more likely to rate the actions important. Looking at the MANOVAs on conformity to the actions, there were significant

main effects for religious service attendance, $F(5,1315) = 6.17, p < .0001$, and community meeting attendance, $F(3, 1315) = 11.58, p < .0001$, but not for volunteering. There was a spurious three-way interaction effect caused by two-thirds of the 64 combinations having Ns of less than 10.

In summary, participation in religious services, attendance at community meetings, and volunteering all have separate effects on how important adults consider the actions to be and how likely it is they are surrounded by others who live the actions. When considered together, these activities reinforce each other on the importance attributed to adult asset building. Those who participate most frequently in *both* religious services and volunteering or community meetings have the highest ratings of importance. Considered together, however, religious services and meeting attendance have more of an effect on being surrounded by adults who live these actions than does volunteering.

Length of Neighborhood Residency

Adults were divided into those who had lived in their current neighborhoods for 10 or more years, 5-9 years, and less than 5 years. Table 4 shows that, on the Norm Importance scale, longer-term residents of 10 or more years were more likely than relative newcomers of less than 5 years residency to rate the asset-building actions overall as highly important.

A slightly different pattern emerged in looking at how length of community residency affects conformity to these asset-building actions. On the Norm Conformity scale, long-term residents were more likely than residents of 5-9 years, but not more likely than relative newcomers, to be surrounded by adults who live the actions. Length of residence clearly has an impact both on the likelihood that adults rate these actions highly important, and their reports of being surrounded by other adults who engage with kids. Residents of 10 or more years appeared to experience more personal and environmental motivation to engage in these actions.[6]

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[6] In order to test for an interaction effect between age and years residing in the community, we conducted multiple analyses of variance on the Norm Importance and Conformity scales. Each yielded a significant overall F (Norm Importance: $F(14, 1346) = 1.69, p < .05$; Norm Conformity: $F(14, 1322) = 2.45, p < .002$), but only the main effects for age and length of residency were significant. In neither case did the interaction of age and residence produce a significant result. Thus, the results reported here for residence are not confounded by the effects of age.

Discussion

This study has yielded several important insights into adults' relationships with children and youth. When it comes to the role all adults play in raising the next generation, there really may be truths we as a people hold to be self-evident. The great majority of Americans consider it highly important for all adults to teach and reinforce a core of beliefs and behavioral expectations to the young that reinforce such traditional values as taking school seriously and doing well, respecting adult authority, being honest and responsible, abiding by rules, and respecting people whose values and traditions differ from one's own.

The demonstration that there is a set of core understandings and values about adults' relationships with children and youth means that the majority of adults in America ought to be able to actually *live up to these normative expectations* without fear of negative consequences. In a sense, these results suggest that there is greater social permission for adults to be engaged with children and youth outside their families than most adults may have realized. A greater appreciation that there may be a more supportive normative climate for adult asset-building actions with young people may help diminish the great inconsistency between attitudes and behaviors that this study shows is the primary attribute of most American's normative framework for relating to young people.

It is possible, of course, that this study's participants underestimated (and, less likely, perhaps overestimated) the asset-building actions adults really do take. In order to decrease the chance of socially desirable responses, we asked not about adults' own behavior, but about the behavior of adults they know. There is likely to be some error in those estimations. Such a possibility suggests the need for an explicit epidemiological study of the asset-building behaviors in which adults do engage. But the evidence suggests our use of a "proxy" measure for adults' own involvement did not highly confound the results with error. The observed gap between attitudes and actions is consistent across the 19 positive actions in this study. Further, our findings are consistent with data from other public opinion surveys cited here about adults' connections with young people. The adult reports from this study, and what youth in Search Institute surveys say about adults' behavior (e.g., Benson et al., 1999), also are consistent with each other.

The current Lutheran Brotherhood-Search Institute study underscores a conclusion that is at once both banal and eye-opening: Quite apart from the influence any public policy may have, deeper engagement with young people may occur only if Americans get to know their adult neighbors, and especially neighborhood parents, more. The current research further suggests that a broader, more public community dialogue would be useful in helping adults explicitly name the ways adults are expected to engage positively with all children and youth in the community.

Such dialogue, paralleling calls that others have made for developing "charters" that describe norms for youth behavior in the community (Damon & Gregory, 1997; Ianni, 1989) might also be a means of more broadly improving the sense of trust in neighborhoods. Based on the work of Sampson and colleagues (1997) on collective efficacy, that increased trust should also be related to subsequently improved cooperation among neighbors to make the neighborhood the kind of place residents wish it to be. Improved articulation of an agenda for, and action around, building a healthy community for children and youth could well lead to improved collective action on other community issues as well, from environmental conditions to racial reconciliation.

Increased dialogue, informal and formal, about what adults expect of each other when it comes to sharing responsibility for nurturing children and youth, may also enable those already more involved with young people to serve as more explicit norm-shapers and models than they likely do currently. It is doubtful that most women, people of color, parents, and others we found to be more significantly engaged than other adults (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2001) do much in the way of advocacy with other adults to construct similar engagement with young people. Our results confirm those from an earlier study of voters, showing that many of the adults in those demographic groups can even be single-issue voters on "children's" issues (Coalition for America's Children, 1997). But, in their daily lives, they probably do not think of themselves as what has been called "asset champions" (Benson, 1997). Yet what if all the groups of involved Americans were to begin playing that advocate or champion role more explicitly? What if they told neighbors and friends how they relate to young people and the benefits it provides them? What if parents especially told neighbors explicitly how they hope they'll be involved with their

children? It is not unimaginable that some impact on the normative climate that supports adults' engagement with young people might well ensue.

But how might such dialogue begin in neighborhoods where residents do not already know each other well? At least a "threshold sense of safety is necessary to enable strangers to become neighbors . . ." (Saito, Sullivan, & Hintz, 2000, p. 28). Given that minimum required level of perceived safety, parents might take the lead by considering how they interact with their children's friends and asking themselves, "am I doing what I can to meaningfully participate in their lives?" Parents can also encourage their children to seek advice from other adults on important issues such as jobs, education, or living out one's faith in everyday life, and keep their children safe by regularly asking about those adult friends. Parents might begin telling neighbors what they're doing to broaden their children's relationships with other adults, and explicitly ask the neighbors how they can be helpful adult friends with the neighbors' children.

In most neighborhoods, there also are already indigenous leaders. Those adults can plan block parties, seasonal celebrations, neighborhood improvement efforts, or other events that include and connect all generations and break down barriers among residents. Any resident, not just a leader, also can make an individual decision to introduce themselves to one family in the neighborhood they do not yet know, and then get to know more about each family member.

In an in-depth study Search Institute conducted of 20 families, half living in an East Coast urban inner-city neighborhood and half in a small mining community in the Upper Midwest (both economically distressed communities), researchers found that the dreams residents had for their neighborhoods were essentially the same. They wanted green spaces, parks, and other safe places where adults and children can do things together, and to be surrounded by people who valued them and were involved in improving the community (Saito et al., 2000). Those common visions across neighborhoods that otherwise were significantly different suggest that even small steps toward increasing neighbors' knowledge of each other may kindle a spark that leads to meaningful improvement in shared expectations, social trust, and cohesion within a neighborhood.

As anticipated, our results showed that the more stable an adult's stake in the neighborhood, as evidenced by their long-term residency, and the more involved they are in community-building, through participation in religious services, volunteering, and neighborhood/community meetings, the more they are engaged with young people as well. Weekly religious service attendance, monthly volunteering, and neighborhood meeting attendance at even occasional levels all make a difference in how important adults think it is to be positively involved with children and youth outside their own families, and how many of the adults around them actually are connected deeply to young people.

Of course, all these data were collected concurrently, and so these relationships may suggest but cannot conclusively provide evidence for causality. A prospective longitudinal study would be required to establish these inferred causal links. But logic, developmental theory, and even common sense support the inference that these observed relationships may well reflect causally linked sequential patterns.

Congregational involvement is generally associated with both greater volunteerism and social activism (Mattis et al., 2000), but these three personal actions were found to have *independent* effects on involvement with young people. The associations were especially pronounced for participation in religious services and neighborhood meetings: More frequent participants were more likely to consider these asset-building actions important and to be surrounded by adults who are involved with young people. In some respects, this is not surprising. At least one in three youth-serving organizations is religiously affiliated, and a number of national youth organizations, such as the YMCA and YWCA have religious roots (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). Religious congregations provide one of the few organized places in America where adults and young people outside their families can develop nurturing relationships, and the traditions of major religions place heavy emphasis on the role of the religious in caring, compassion, and nurturing.

Participating in neighborhood meetings is related to engagement with kids, but why would there not be stronger overall effects of frequent participation in neighborhood or community meetings, especially on favorable attitudes? After all, organizational involvement has been found to predict a positive psychological sense of community membership, which affects a person's feeling of influence at the neighborhood level (Caughy, 1999). Greater participation in community meetings, therefore, should promote feelings of responsibility for the welfare of those in the community, and a sense that one can effectively do something about those needs.

Although the reasoning is speculative on our part, it may be that the high degree of social fragmentation in contemporary society allows a relatively low level of community meeting involvement –"sometimes"– to satisfy many individuals' needs for or reinforce their sense of belonging to the "community" or "neighborhood" group. If adults generally do not know even their neighbors' names, then a relatively small level of getting to know them, especially in considering issues of shared importance, may not only raise senses of belonging and influence, but senses of trust in each other as people who share similar values. It may take frequent participation for these dynamics to contribute to an interpersonal climate more conducive to neighbors *actually playing* a deeper and more active role in relating to children and youth outside their own families. But even occasional exposure to one's neighbors in dealing with issues of common interest may heighten the *attitudinal* salience of matters that affect families and children as being among the top priorities for collective action.

Conclusion

The evolution of contemporary American society has contributed mightily to a drift away from a prevailing set of social norms –expectations with real consequences– to competing clusters of values-personal or subgroup preferences. In large measure, this may be due to a considerably decreased similarity we share in the given circumstances of our lives. American society is more diverse than ever before in the foundational experiences that help to build culture: religion, race and ethnicity, and language. People define themselves (as does public policy in many cases) as never before by their membership in particular groups, by sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, parent of a child with special needs, cancer survivor, etc. Carried with those subcultural identities are sets of social norms for what the members of that group should believe and how they should behave. Economically, the gap between the wealthiest Americans and even the comfortably middle class has mushroomed in a generation, with the working class and the poor left very far behind indeed, creating strikingly different saving and spending patterns that both contribute to and reflect underlying norms tied to socioeconomic status. Culturally fragmenting us still further has been the explosion of media and entertainment choices available, from hundreds of cable television stations to thousands of magazines to millions of Internet sites, defining more and more narrow niches of interests and life-styles.

Against that backdrop of diversity and difference, this study has shown that American adults give overwhelming assent to the importance of nine actions adults should take to contribute to the healthy development of children and youth. Moreover, even though the majority of Americans do not consistently experience personal and social motivation for deep engagement with other people's children, some adults do. Among those are Americans who have resided in their current neighborhoods for at least 10 years, and who frequently attend religious services, volunteer, and participate in neighborhood and community meetings. The more other adults can be encouraged to participate in those kinds of community-building commitments, the more possible it may become to define a new norm of shared responsibility for nurturing and teaching the next generations that profoundly connects human development and community development, for the betterment of all Americans.

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