**Abstract**

This study examines external assets that predict hope and self-esteem, with a focus on girls of color, including bisexual girls of color. The grouping variable was sexual orientation, and analyses were conducted with respect to hope and self-esteem. Overall, our study highlights the various external developmental assets that girls of color access within different contexts such as school, families, and communities that may be associated with the development of their self-esteem and sense of hope. By examining external assets across multiple sexual orientation groups, we are able to gain a more nuanced picture of the unique lived experiences of girls of color when it comes to their self-esteem and sense of hope.

**Background**

Cultivating a sense of hope and self-esteem may promote positive youth development to counter the deficit narratives imposed on girls of color (Nakayama-Andrade, 2009, Ginns et al., 2016).

Previous research highlights how systemic oppression impacts girls of color due to their intersecting identities, including race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. These experiences heighten or exacerbate levels of depression in bisexual compared to lesbian girls of color (Beauvais, Gomina, & Russell, 2008).

Previous research has focused on sources that promote self-esteem with a special focus on students of color (Diller et al., 2016). These sources of support are important in the context of social anxiety and low self-esteem (Steele, 2017).

Our study examines how external assets, which are defined as structural supports available to girls of color, relate to self-esteem and hope.

We use an intersectional lens and developmental assets framework (Beauvais et al., 2016) to examine differences by sexual orientation in a diverse sample, including heterosexual and LGBT girls of color.

**Method**

Participants.

The sample includes middle and high school (n = 22,256, Mage = 14.70) female-identified youth of color. Most (84.6%) identified as heterosexual, 7.6% as mostly heterosexual, 6.4% as bisexual, 0.8% as mostly lesbian or gay, and 0.7% as lesbian or gay. Our sample consisted of 22,144 cisgender female and 113 transgender females. This study used the Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes & Behavior dataset (n = 121,150) collected from hundreds of US communities and schools by the Search Institute.

Descriptive statistics were run in SPSS. We conducted multigroup structural equation modeling in Mplus (Version 7.0) to examine whether external assets predict hope and self-esteem in girls of color. The grouping variable was sexual orientation. Confidence intervals for standardized beta coefficient estimates predicting hope (see Table 1) and self-esteem (see Table 2) were examined across sexual orientation groups.

**Note.** Confidence intervals for standardized beta coefficient estimates plus minus 2(4961) = 39771.09, p <.000, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .043, SRMR = .061.

**Results**

- **Heterosexual girls of color:** External assets significantly predicted self-esteem and hope, with a few exceptions.

- **Heterosexual girls of color:** Parent involvement in school negatively predicted hope and self-esteem.

- **Gay and Lesbian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander girls reported lower levels of hope and self-esteem**

- **Gay and Lesbian girls of color:** Our study highlights the various external developmental assets that girls of color access within different contexts such as school, families, and communities that may be associated with the development of their self-esteem and sense of hope.

- **By examining external assets across multiple sexual orientation groups,** we are able to gain a more nuanced picture of the unique lived experiences of girls of color when it comes to their self-esteem and sense of hope.

Future research should focus on why reports of self-esteem and hope vary by type of external assets across racial/ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation and gender identity in girls of color. For example, future research should investigate what possible barriers exist that make structural supports unavailable to gay/lesbian girls of color.

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