

# Linking External Assets to Predict Self-esteem and Hope in Girls of Color

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## Background

- **Cultivating a sense of hope and self-esteem may promote positive youth development** to counter the deficit narratives imposed on **girls of color** (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2016).
- Previous research highlights how systemic oppression impacts girls of color due to their intersecting identities, including race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. They experience higher rates of gender-based violence (Nanda, 2011), harsher school disciplinary practices compared to White girls (Blake et al., 2011) and higher rates of depression in bisexual compared to lesbian girls of color (Baams, Grossman & Russell, 2015).
- Previous researchers have focused on sources that promote self-esteem within models of positive youth development specifically for girls of color (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs & Nakkula, 2016) and how lack of hope and depressive symptoms are significantly correlated (Romero, Toomey & Pina-Watson & Toomey, 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 (Benson et al., 1998) 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 ( $n= 22,256$ ,  $M_{age} = 14.70$ ) 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 females and 112 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.

Construct name	# of items	Sample item
Family support	3	I get along well with my parents.
Parent involvement in school	4	How often does one of your parents ask you about homework?
Open family communication	2	I have lots of good conversations with my parents.
Other adult relationships	3	How many adults have you known for two or more years who Talk with you at least once a month?
Caring school climate	3	My teachers really care about me.
Community values youth	7	In my town or city, I feel like I matter to people.
Family boundaries	3	If I break one of my parents' rules, I usually get punished.
Neighborhood boundaries	1	If one of my neighbors saw me do something wrong, he or she would tell one of my parents.
Extracurricular activity participation (non-sports)	5	How many hours do you spend practicing or taking lessons in music, art, drama, or dance?
Sports involvement	1	How many hours do you spend playing on or helping with sports teams at school or in the community?
School boundaries	3	If I break a rule at school, I'm sure to get in trouble.
Self-Esteem	3	All in all, I am glad I am me.
Hope	4	I have little control over the things that will happen in my life.

**Correlates** included race/ethnicity, age, parent education, rurality, gender identity and sexual orientation.

## Results

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.

Table 1. Confidence intervals for standardized beta estimates of hope, by sexual orientation

Independent Variables	Straight	Mostly Straight	Bisexual	Mostly Gay/Lesbian	Only Gay/Lesbian
Family Support	(0.19,0.38)	(-3.74,14.02)	(-0.37,0.55)	(-4.61,9.07)	(-1.55,1.25)
Open Family Communication	(0.15,0.33)	(-13.1,4.08)	(-0.07,0.76)	(-2.02,1.31)	(-0.40,1.44)
Parent Involvement in School	(-0.24,-0.17)	(-1.54,0.27)	(-0.27,0.02)	(-2.02,1.31)	(-0.36,0.70)
Other Adult Relationships	(0.12,0.17)	(-0.25,0.51)	(0.03,0.23)	(-0.62,0.80)	(-0.14,0.54)
Caring School Climate	(0.17,0.25)	(-1.24,0.72)	(0.05,0.34)	(-2.50,1.49)	(-0.86,1.13)
Community Values Youth	(0.18,0.24)	(-0.34,1.95)	(0.16,0.39)	(-0.08,1.24)	(-0.52,0.42)
Family Boundaries	(-0.01,0.07)	(-1.88,0.57)	(-0.22,0.28)	(-2.02,1.02)	(-0.43,1.02)
Neighborhood Boundaries	(-0.05,-0.01)	(-0.13,-0.02)	(-0.07,0.07)	(-0.32,0.08)	(-0.28,0.25)
Extracurricular activities (non-sports)	(-0.06,-0.02)	(-0.10,0.03)	(-0.22,-0.06)	(-0.20,0.29)	(-0.27,0.35)
Sports involvement	(0.04,0.08)	(-0.03,0.11)	(0.05,0.21)	(-0.13,0.34)	(-0.46,0.16)
School Boundaries	(-0.12,-0.03)	(-0.62,1.91)	(-0.44,-0.002)	(-1.45,2.73)	(-1.47,0.62)
Age	(0.05,0.08)	(-0.04,0.08)	(0.11,0.25)	(-0.19,0.22)	(-0.17,0.32)
Parent Education	(0.004,0.04)	(-0.09,0.03)	(0.01,0.15)	(-0.52,-0.17)	(-0.12,0.38)
Rurality	(-0.04,-0.001)	(-0.04,0.07)	(-0.02,0.11)	(-0.27,0.12)	(-0.24,0.28)
Cisgender girls (=1)	(-0.02,0.01)	(-0.05,0.06)	(-0.05,0.08)	(-0.33,0.06)	(-0.13,0.37)
American Indian	(-0.02,0.01)	(-0.05,0.06)	(-0.08,0.06)	(-0.37,-0.003)	(-0.35,0.14)
Asian	(-0.08,-0.04)	(-0.10,0.04)	(-0.07,0.08)	(-0.16,0.25)	(-0.08,0.45)
Black or African American	(0.06,0.10)	(0.04,0.17)	(0.03,0.18)	(-0.08,0.34)	(-0.06,0.49)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	(-0.02,0.02)	(-0.05,0.06)	(-0.11,0.03)	(-0.23,0.14)	(-0.14,-1.77)
Other race/ethnicity	(-0.02,0.02)	(-0.03,0.09)	(-0.07,0.08)	(-0.14,0.26)	(-0.22,0.26)
Multiracial	(-0.01,0.03)	(-0.04,0.09)	(-0.06,0.10)	(-0.13,0.30)	(-0.10,0.48)

Note. Reference group coded 0= Latinx girls. Yellow highlighting indicates a significant negative association; blue highlighting indicates a significant positive association.

Table 2. Confidence intervals for standardized beta estimates of self-esteem, by sexual orientation

Independent Variables	Straight	Mostly Straight	Bisexual	Mostly Gay/Lesbian	Only Gay/Lesbian
Family Support	(0.39,0.54)	(-3.28,13.42)	(-0.28,0.74)	(-6.55,12.06)	(-0.99,1.43)
Open Family Communication	(-0.04,0.11)	(-12.59,3.60)	(-0.39,0.54)	(-9.96,5.71)	(-0.65,0.98)
Parent Involvement in School	(-0.21,-0.15)	(-1.53,0.19)	(-0.13,0.14)	(-2.94,1.50)	(-0.49,0.38)
Other Adult Relationships	(0.04,0.08)	(-0.26,0.47)	(0.03,0.20)	(-0.76,1.00)	(-0.18,0.37)
Caring School Climate	(0.23,0.30)	(-1.08,0.78)	(0.20,0.46)	(-3.05,2.31)	(-0.57,1.17)
Community Values Youth	(0.12,0.18)	(-0.36,1.81)	(0.09,0.29)	(-0.35,1.23)	(-0.20,0.59)
Family Boundaries	(-0.03,0.03)	(-1.70,0.63)	(-0.41,0.13)	(-2.57,1.37)	(-0.73,0.50)
Neighborhood Boundaries	(-0.04,-0.01)	(-0.08,0.022)	(-0.02,0.09)	(-0.24,0.13)	(-0.23,0.19)
Extracurricular activities (non-sports)	(-0.04,0.00)	(-0.09,0.03)	(-0.18,-0.04)	(-0.21,0.23)	(-0.57,-0.08)
Sports involvement	(0.01,0.05)	(-0.004,0.11)	(0.09,0.23)	(-0.07,0.35)	(0.07,0.58)
School Boundaries	(-0.13,-0.05)	(-0.69,1.71)	(-0.41,0.05)	(-2.19,3.30)	(-1.11,0.80)
Age	(0.06,0.08)	(0.02,0.12)	(0.11,0.23)	(-0.13,0.24)	(-0.10,0.29)
Parent Education	(-0.03,-0.003)	(-0.09,0.01)	(-0.05,0.06)	(-0.37,-0.03)	(-0.23,0.17)
Rurality	(-0.002,0.03)	(0.02,0.12)	(-0.03,0.08)	(-0.16,0.19)	(-0.19,0.22)
Cisgender girls (=1)	(-0.03,0.00)	(-0.04,0.05)	(-0.09,0.02)	(-0.37,-0.02)	(0.005,0.39)
American Indian	(-0.02,0.01)	(-0.07,0.03)	(-0.08,0.04)	(-0.13,0.20)	(-0.29,0.12)
Asian	(-0.06,-0.03)	(-0.06,0.07)	(-0.08,0.04)	(-0.11,0.27)	(-0.27,0.16)
Black or African American	(0.14,0.17)	(0.08,0.19)	(0.10,0.23)	(-0.11,0.26)	(-0.15,0.30)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	(-0.02,0.00)	(-0.04,0.06)	(-0.10,0.01)	(-0.18,0.15)	(-0.21,0.22)
Other race/ethnicity	(-0.02,0.01)	(-0.003,0.10)	(-0.04,0.08)	(-0.20,0.17)	(-0.33,0.06)
Multiracial	(-0.01,0.02)	(-0.05,0.07)	(-0.09,0.04)	(-0.07,0.32)	(-0.29,0.17)

Note. Reference group coded 0= Latinx girls. Yellow highlighting indicates a significant negative association; blue highlighting indicates a significant positive association.

## Results

Model fit:  $\chi^2(4961) = 39771.09, p < .000$ ; CFI = 86, RMSEA = .043, SRMR = .061

- **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.
  - However, for bisexual, lesbian/gay and mostly heterosexual girls of color, none of these associations were significant.
- **Bisexual girls of color:** Other adult relationships, caring school climate, sports involvement and communities that value young adults positively predicted self-esteem and hope.
- **Black girls identifying as straight and bisexual** reported higher levels of hope and self-esteem
- **Heterosexual Asian girls** reported lower levels of hope and self-esteem.
- **Gay/lesbian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander girls** reported lower levels of of hope as well.
- School boundaries negatively predicted hope for straight and bisexual girls of color.
- Parent education positively predicted hope among straight and bisexual girls of color, however, parent education was negatively associated with hope **and** self esteem among mostly gay/lesbian girls.

## Conclusion & Implications

- 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 types 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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