



# Resilience and Positive Youth Development: A Dynamic, Relational Developmental Systems-Based Perspective

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Adolescents are not resilient. Resilience is also not a functional feature of the ecology of adolescent development (e.g., as may be represented by the concepts of “protective factors” or “ecological assets”; e.g., Benson, 2006). Rather, resilience is a concept associated with a dynamic understanding of the relations within the human developmental system (Overton, 2015; see too Mascolo & Fischer, 2015), a concept denoting that the relations between adolescents and their ecologies have adaptive significance.

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Masten (2014b) defined resilience as “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successively to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development” (p. 1012). She explained that this definition was intended to be “scalable across systems and disciplines, from the level of micro-organisms and systems operating within the human organism to the systems of family, school, community, culture, economy, society, or climate” (p. 1012). In addition, given that the present authors wrote this article in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuing US epidemic of systemic and interpersonal racism, white supremacy, and brutalities against and murders of individuals of color, Masten (2014b) was prescient in noting that a key reason for using this broad, systems-based definition of resilience was the increasing international concern with integrating scientific fields to address problems of interdependent systems of function and recovery, such as preparing for disasters or promoting resilience in specific cities or countries.

Accordingly, to understand the dynamic, developmental systems approach to resilience that both Masten (2014b) and the present authors adopt (e.g., Lerner, 2018; Lerner et al., 2019), it is important to briefly review the concepts associated with

such systems and, as well, the relational developmental systems metatheory within which our approach to resilience is embedded. This discussion will also enable us to explain the connections between the concepts of resilience and positive youth development (PYD), or thriving, that are used by both Masten (2014b) and the present authors (e.g., Lerner et al., 2019).

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### **Relational Developmental Systems-Based Concepts, Resilience, and PYD**

A metatheory is a philosophy or a theory of theories. It is a set of ideas that prescribe and proscribe the attributes that are involved in lower-order theoretical models. Simply, metatheory is a set of ideas about how theories should be constructed and/or about the ideas that should be included in (or omitted from) a theory (Lerner & Chase, 2019).

In the contemporary study of human development, models that are derived from relational developmental systems (RDS) metatheory (Overton, 2015) are at the cutting-edge of scholarship about human life and development (Lerner, 2018). Within RDS metatheory, human development involves universal functions of a living, open, self-constructing (autopoietic), self-organizing, and integrated/holistic system. RDS metatheory is derived from a process-relational paradigm, wherein the organism is seen as inherently active, self-creating (autopoietic), self-organizing, self-regulating (agentic), nonlinear/complex, and adaptive (Overton, 2015).

In addition, RDS metatheory includes ideas emphasizing that the integration of different levels of organization within the dynamic, developmental system frames understanding of human development across the life course of individuals and families (Lerner, 2018; Overton, 2015). The conceptual emphasis in RDS-based theories is placed on mutually influential relations between levels of organization within the dynamic (coacting) developmental system. Individual and context coactions (mutually influential relations) may be represented as individual–context relations.

The individual–context relations envisioned within all instances of RDS-based theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fischer & Bidell, 2006; Immordino-Yang, 2010; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Immordino-Yang & Yang, 2017; Mascolo & Fischer, 2010) vary across place (e.g., community, country, or culture) and across time (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015). The “arrow of time,” or temporality, is history, which is the broadest level within the ecology of human development. History imbues all other levels with change. Such change may be stochastic (e.g., non-normative life or non-normative historical events; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006) or systematic (e.g., history- or age-graded changes). The potential for systematic change constitutes a potential for relative *plasticity* (i.e., the potential for systematic change in structure or function; Lerner, 2018) across the life course for individuals, families, and the broader ecology of human development.

Such plasticity is regarded as a fundamental strength of human development; it provides a basis for optimism that the course of development for all individuals may be enhanced (Lerner, 1984, 2018). As well, this optimism may promote an emphasis on social justice (Lerner & Overton, 2008). If there is plasticity in every individual’s developmental pathway, then policies and programs can be aimed at capitalizing on this plasticity to decrease social, educational, economic, and health disparities and to enhance the quality of life of all youth. This implication of dynamic, relational developmental systems-based ideas both enables developmental scientists to view with optimism the possibility of promoting individual–context relations that reflect resilience and PYD and, as well, enables the connections between these two constructs to be understood.

### **Links Between Resilience and PYD**

Masten (2014b) explained that dynamic, relational developmental systems-based concepts can be used to understand connections between the constructs of resilience and PYD. She pointed

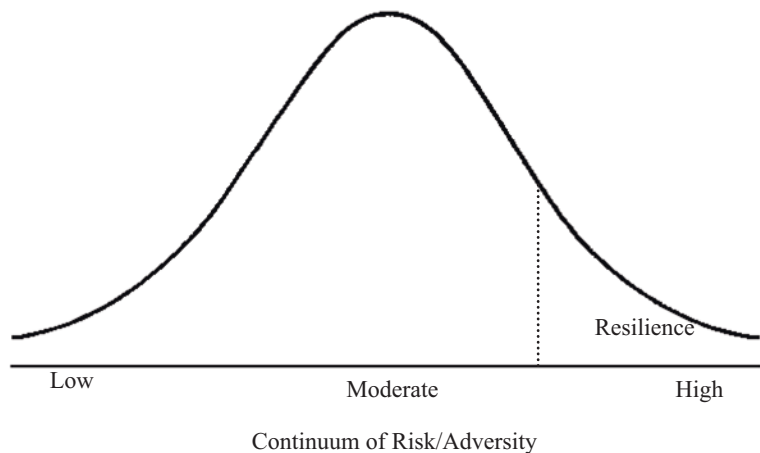
out that scholars studying PYD (e.g., see Lerner et al., 2015 for a review) conceptualize resilience and thriving as both involving a dynamic, that is, mutually influential, relation between specific youth and their specific contexts (Bornstein, 2017, 2019). In addition, both resilience and thriving involve “positive aspects of development, function, resources, and strengths, *both in the individual and in the context*” (Masten, 2014b, p. 1013, italics added). However, Masten (2014b) sees resilience as a subset of youth–context relations located at the high end of a *continuum of risk or adversity*. Figure 18.1 is an illustration of this continuum.

Therefore, in agreement with the present authors, Masten (2014b) indicates that resilience is not in the adolescent or the context. Resilience resides in the specific individual–context relation. In addition, Masten (2014b) explains that studying either the concept of thriving or the concept of resilience requires attention to understanding a specific young person’s positive adaptation to the specific features of their specific context. Whereas thriving involves a focus on optimal functioning, Masten explains that the literature of resilience has tended to focus on adequate or “okay” functioning at the high end of the continuum of risk and adversity, due in large part to the fact that the study of resilience has understandably involved a focus on youth and families facing enormous challenges, adversity, or trauma (e.g., see Masten, 2007, 2014a; Masten et al., 2015; see also Lerner et al., 2019, *in press*).

In sum, the relations involved in the concept of resilience involves a dynamic (i.e., a mutually influential) coaction among components of the attributes within an integrated, holistic developmental system (Fischer & Bidell, 2006; Lerner, 2018; Lerner & Overton, 2020; Mascolo & Fischer, 2015). As emphasized by Masten (2014b), this coaction integrates characteristics of an individual youth (e.g., positive racial identity, agentic skills) and features of their ecology (e.g., high-quality mentoring; Rhodes, 2020) that reflect either adjustment (i.e., a change) in the face of altered or new environmental threats or challenges (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic or increases in racism, white supremacy, and brutalities toward members of one’s race), or constancy or maintenance of appropriate or healthy functioning in the face of environmental variations in the resources needed for appropriate or healthy functioning (e.g., access to tests for, or access to masks needed for protection against, the COVID-19 virus).

As such, to Masten (2014a), the individual–context relation summarized by the term “resilience” reflects an adequate degree of individual well-being at a given point in time, in the face of features within the ecological context that challenge this degree of adaptation. In turn, this relationship also implies that, within a specific ecological setting (e.g., low-income communities in the United States or development in low- or middle-income countries [LMICs] around the world) at a specific time in history (e.g., during

**Fig. 18.1** Theoretical probability distribution of instances of adaptive individual–context relations in the face of differing levels of risk and adversity



the COVID-19 pandemic), there are actions of the individual (e.g., creating protective masks from cloth available in the home or community; sheltering at home while also using available technological resources, such as a smart phone, to maintain contact with teachers) *and* actions within the context (e.g., involving the use by family members, educators, or leaders of community-based youth programs of innovative platforms to deliver educational, recreational, and health-promoting programs for youth development; e.g., Cantor et al., 2019, [in preparation](#); Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Lerner et al., 2015; Osher et al., 2020). Of course, these same individual and contextual attributes can be involved in programs or policies intended to locate the adolescent–context relationship at a point along the continuum illustrated in Fig. 18.1 wherein PYD is possible. We discuss this possibility by focusing on the study of resilience and PYD among, in particular, youth of color in the United States.

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### Changing Adolescent Pathways from Resilience to Thriving

Research on the development of youth of color in the United States is all too often framed in a deficit approach, focusing on problematic behaviors and outcomes (e.g., Lerner et al., [in press](#)). PYD research on youth of color (and on all youth) illustrates the relative plasticity of development, and focuses on the individual–context relations that reflect resilience and thriving that are possible to evidence (in regard to the location of youth along the continuum shown in Fig. 18.1).

In regard to this continuum, youth of color living in the U.S. face specific challenges, such as structural and interpersonal racism, inequities and inequalities in education, health care, and employment, and safety, given the historically ongoing brutalities toward, and murders of, individual of color in the United States. Thus, youth skills and contextual resources need to be aligned to address the specific interpersonal and structural challenges to both survival *per se* and to thriving that are encountered in the everyday lives of these young people.

The theoretical and theory-predicated research contributions of Margaret Beale Spencer are particularly relevant here (e.g., Hope & Spencer, 2017; Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 2015). Spencer's (2006) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological System Theory (PVEST) explains how youth of color often use self-appraisal and social support from meaningful relationships to achieve positive identity and adaptive adjustment outcomes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a, b; Spencer et al., 2002, 2003). The scholarship of Velma M. Murry and colleagues (e.g., 2019; Murry et al., 2014, 2015) and Emilie P. Smith and colleagues (e.g., 2007; Smith et al., 2017) exemplifies this work (Lerner et al., [in press](#)).

Murry and colleagues have conducted longitudinal studies of PYD among African American boys and young men within the context of their families and life within rural settings (e.g., Murry et al., 2009, 2011). For instance, in a sample of 378 rural African American males, Murry et al. (2014) found evidence for the power of positive relationships between youth and adults in the development of thriving (see, too, Rhodes, 2020). Confidence in one's ability to self-regulate and a sense of competence to be successful in the future were associated with having caring, involved, vigilant parents. Confident, competent males were likely to connect with prosocial peers, which in turn provided opportunities to reinforce norms and values to avoid engaging in risky behaviors (Murry et al., 2014).

The research of Murry and colleagues indicates that, despite the marginalization of African American boys and young men, as well as the marked adversity produced by the combination of racism, economic disadvantage, oppression, segregation, and other trauma-inducing experiences, they are in large proportion able to overcome these challenges and show prosocial development. Their PYD occurs through their use of resources that focus on their capabilities and strengths and involve adaptive calibration to contextual challenges (Barbarin et al., 2019; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). The Adaptive Calibration Model proposed by Murry and colleagues specifies that chronic adversity influences the development of overlooked

competencies that, when identified, may facilitate successful adaptation in toxic environments. Coupled with the influence of familial relationships and community assets, youth can exhibit resilience and prosocial development despite experiencing chronic adversity. Murry and colleagues emphasize that research documenting this process can advance a social justice agenda for developmental science (Barbarin et al., 2019; Murry, 2019; Murry et al., 2016, 2018).

Smith and colleagues (e.g., Smith et al., 2003, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2019) also focus on youth of color and study the role of contextual settings such as the family, the peer group, and community-based out-of-school time (OST) programs as settings within which individual–context relations can promote PYD. Evidence in support of this idea was reported by Smith et al. (2016). They found that positive social relationships with family members, peers, and community members were linked to indicators of PYD among both African American and White, male and female, adolescent offenders.

Whereas much prior research assessed the deficits of development in disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., see Sampson, 2016), Smith et al. (2016) assessed the role of community assets linked to important institutional resources and people in those settings. Consistent with the findings of Murry et al. (2014), Smith et al. (2016) also found that positive personal relationships and linkages to important community resources, including recreational, school, faith-based, extended-family, and work related sources, were related to better family functioning, positive peer relations, and youth self-reliance. Smith and colleagues emphasize that a strengths-based approach to youth offenders that involves positive community networks and supportive social relationships can put these youth on thriving pathways.

Building upon the important role of community contexts, Smith et al. (2017) studied more than 500 elementary school children in Grades 2–5, composed of White (49%), African American (27%), Latino (7%), and mixed race (17%) youth; almost half (45%) of the youth were eligible for free/reduced lunch. Participation

in quality OST programs (marked by supportive relationships, appropriate structure, and engaging interactions) positively impacted competence, connection, and caring for all youth. Moreover, these settings were also linked to the enhancement of cultural values for racial–ethnic minority youth.

PYD may also have more nuanced meanings among youth of color due to their uniquely challenging circumstance. In a study identifying sociocultural factors of PYD, Williams et al. (2014) found that PYD in urban African American and Latino adolescents could be understood by use of a bifactorial model, including both positive racial–ethnic identity and a more general PYD component (i.e., the Five C’s of PYD discussed by Lerner et al., 2015: Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, and Caring). Similarly, using latent profile analysis, Yu et al. (2019) studied a group of over 200 youth of color in late childhood/early adolescence (77% African American and 23% Latino). The researchers found that youth in a profile marked by high PYD, racial–ethnic pride, and low levels of perceived racial–ethnic barriers had fewer overall adjustment problems and higher standardized achievement test scores than youth in other profiles. Yu et al. (2019) concluded that relationships that help youth to feel competent, caring, and connected, as well as relationships that support racial–ethnic pride, may be associated with adaptive adjustment among youth of color.

In sum, resilience and PYD (thriving) are, then, dynamic attributes of a relationship between individual adolescents and their multilevel and integrated (relational) developmental systems. The fundamental process of dynamic individual–context relations involved in resilience is not distinct from the relations involved in PYD or, even more, in healthy and positive human development in general (Lerner, 2018). What is distinct, however, is that individual–context coactions involving resilience are located at a portion of a theoretical probability distribution of these relations that may be described as involving non-normative levels of risk or high levels of adversity (Fig. 18.1). In short, the process we study in seeking to understand resilience differs from the

other instances of individual–context relations only in regard to the location in this distribution.

Clearly, the translation of this theoretical probability distribution into empirical reality will vary in relation to individuals across the course of adolescence, as well as in relation to group differences and diverse contexts. Because there is intraindividual variability, and between-group differences in intraindividual changes, in the empirical probability distribution of adversity pertinent to resilience, there are specific implications for research about resilience and PYD.

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### Research Implications of the Adversity Continuum

Because resilience is not a characteristic of either component of the individual–context relationship (i.e., as we have emphasized in this chapter, resilience is not an attribute of the adolescent or of the context), it should be studied within a nonreductionist theoretical frame and through the use of measures that are sensitive to change in both the individual and the context. Moreover, Spencer (2006) has explained that the adverse experiences and ecological disadvantages that confront youth of color vary among youth and, as well, that what one adolescent experiences as stress may not affect their neighbor or sibling in the same way. Specific perceptions of racial and economic inequality may shape the nature of adversity for youth of color. Thus, to understand the impact of adverse experiences on youth requires attention to *specific* youth–context relations *and* the phenomenology of these relations associated with specific youth.

The specificity principle proposed by Bornstein (2006, 2017, 2019) emphasizes that the study of development should focus on the specific relations between attributes of a specific individual and specific facets of the context, as they co-acted at specific times in ontogeny and history within youth from specific families, communities, and cultures. Both Spencer (2006), Spencer and Spencer (2014) and Bornstein (2017,

2019) called for greater theory-predicated attention to the measurement of specific attributes of development of specific groups and, even more so, of the specific individuals within them. These arguments create a foundation for measures of resilience and PYD to not only be sensitive to intraindividual change but, as well, to such changes within specific youth developing in specific settings.

In addition to psychometric concerns of validity and reliability, a focus on measurement invariance across age, gender, race, ethnicity, and community and cultural contexts and history, is also necessary (e.g., Card, 2017). Establishing measurement invariance, both across facets of the individual *and* facets of the context, is required. Quantitative and qualitative data should be triangulated in the service of developing measures that are not only change-sensitive but that, as well, pertain to the specific pathways of development (both actual and perceived) of specific youth developing in specific settings at specific times in ontogeny and history (Lerner, 2018; Rose, 2016). Simply, then, reliable, valid, and invariant measurement is needed to not only assess the development of youth varying in the specifics of age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and culture, etc., but as well for depicting the specific youth–context relations of each specific young person (Rose, 2016). Therefore, idiographic measurement, as well as group and nomothetic measurement, is needed and, in fact, has been a focus of considerable methodological interest among developmental scientists (e.g., Molenaar & Nesselroade, 2012, 2014; Ram & Grimm, 2015; von Eye et al., 2015).

The goal of developmental science is to describe, explain, and optimize individual development (i.e., intraindividual change) and interindividual differences in intraindividual change (Baltes et al., 1977; Lerner, 2012), and these issues of theory and theory-predicated measurement pertain to applications aimed at optimizing resilience and PYD as well as to describing and explaining it.

## Issues in the Optimization of Resilience and PYD

Our dynamic, relational approach to resilience means that resilience involves individual–context relations reflecting the maintenance or enhancement of links that are mutually beneficial to individual youth and contexts that involve adversity or trauma. Individual actions that are not supportive of the institutions and agents of the ecology (that are acting to support the individual) are ultimately not reflective of resilience and, as well, are not sustainable (Lerner, 2004).

In order to understand the bases of and, in turn, to promote individual–context relations that promote resilience among diverse youth, individuals engaged in the design or enactment of programs or policies aimed at enhancing either resilience or PYD must ask an admittedly complex, multipart question predicated on the Bornstein (2017, 2019) specificity principle. They must ascertain: what fundamental attributes of individual youth (e.g., what features of cognition, motivation, emotion, ability, physiology, or temperament); among adolescents of what status attributes (e.g., youth at what portions of the adolescent period, and of what sex, race, ethnic, religious, geographic location, etc.); in relation to what characteristics of the context (e.g., under what conditions of the family, the neighborhood, social policy, the economy, or history); are likely to be associated with what facets of resilience or PYD (e.g., maintenance of health and of active, positive contributions to family, community, and civil society)?

Addressing such a set of interrelated questions requires, at the least, a systematic program of research and/or of program or policy evaluation. Nevertheless, the linkage between the relational development systems-based ideas of relative plasticity, malleability, and dynamic relations that give rise to this set of specificity principle-based questions provides a rationale for an optimistic view of the potential to apply developmental science to promote individual–context exchanges that may reflect and/or promote health and positive, successful development in youth.

However, integrating actions between youth and their ecologies through program or policy interventions should be enacted in relation to understanding the developmental character of individual–context relations and the fact that, although ubiquitous across the adolescent period, these relations, by definition, undergo the transitions and transformations that compose developmental change. Moreover, as recognized by both Spencer (2006) and Bornstein (2017, 2019), the substance of these changes shows marked inter-individual differences in intraindividual change. Rose (2016) described this between-person variation as jaggedness and, because of such variation, he explains that, whereas all people walk “a road” from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood, jaggedness means that each of us walks a, at least, somewhat different pathway. Such idiographic, youth-specific diversity means that program and policy interventions need to be designed to expect and assess quantitative and/or qualitative variability among the different individuals and contexts involved in the intervention.

Moreover, the diversity of individual pathways across adolescence means that the interpretation of the effect sizes found in program or policy interventions needs to be made in light of the specificity of the diversity of individual–context relations within any group of intervention participants (e.g., Tirrell et al., 2019b). That is, the specificity principle points to the unique and specific features of individuals and contexts that interrelate to moderate the processes involved in human development interventions. Bornstein (2017) noted that, “Different individuals approach and understand the world in ways that reflect their unique interactions and experiences” (p. 31). We have explained that applying the specificity principle to program or policy interventions involves addressing a multipart question such as the one noted above. However, in practice to date, such questions have not been used frequently.

All too often, youth development programs or policies are treated as a “black box” by evaluators (Shonkoff et al., 2017; Tirrell et al., 2019b). Data

may be collected from multiple sites or contexts and then pooled into intervention and comparison groups because, ignoring specificity, an assumption enabling aggregation is implicitly used: the intervention is assumed to work in similar ways across contexts and individuals. As a consequence, researchers ask whether a particular measured outcome demonstrates a statistically significant difference, on average, between an intervention group and a comparison group. If such an average difference is found, the intervention may be deemed “evidence-based.”

However, from the dynamic, relational approach to resilience and PYD that we are presenting in this chapter, such analyses may obscure important contextual differences within treatment and comparison groups. As Shonkoff and colleagues at the Center on the Developing Child (2017) noted, “We believe that assessing program effects on average misses what may work exceptionally well for some and poorly (or not at all) for others. Moreover, attempting to create a single ‘did it work?’ test for a multi-faceted intervention obscures its active ingredients, leaving only a ‘black box’ that must be adopted in its entirety” (p. 4). The research agenda of Shonkoff and colleagues (2017) poses a set of questions that reflect the necessary disaggregation and specification described by Bornstein (2017)—what about the program works; how does it work; for whom does it work or not work; and where does it work?

To demonstrate such use of the specificity principle, Tirrell et al. (2019b) presented a sample case of the PYD programs of Compassion International (CI) (Sim & Peters, 2014). CI is a faith-based child-sponsorship organization that aims to promote thriving and alleviate child poverty using a holistic, PYD-based approach to its programs. CI partners with over 8000 local churches and projects across 25 countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, and serves more than 2.2 million youth living in poverty. As such, the mission and programs of CI relate both directly and indirectly to many of the Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda (Hackett, 2015). To meet these goals and promote youth

thriving, CI programs seek to align youth strengths (e.g., intentional self-regulation, hope for the future, and spirituality) with ecological resources (e.g., the “Big Three” of effective youth programs: providing mentoring, life-skill development curricula, and opportunities for participation in and leadership of valued family, school, or community activities; Lerner, 2004; Tirrell et al., 2020).

Consistent with the specificity principle, the SDGs call for disaggregating results of program effectiveness across subgroups. Accordingly, Tirrell et al. (2019b) analyzed data from 888 Salvadoran youth (50% female), aged 9–15 years, participating in the CI Study of PYD (Tirrell et al., 2019a). The researchers compared CI-supported youth with non-CI-supported youth on nine variables related to PYD, intentional self-regulation, hopeful future expectations, and spirituality. Whereas tests of group averages indicated no meaningful differences, disaggregated results across 20 exemplary-performing program sites indicated that two sites showed no group differences, seven sites showed better CI-supported youth performance, three sites showed better non-CI-supported youth performance, and eight sites showed a mixed pattern of results across the nine variables.

The comments of Shonkoff and colleagues (2017) and the findings reported by Tirrell et al. (2019b) bring us back to issues of measurement, but in regard to the design and enactment of evaluations. In well-designed interventions aimed at optimizing resilience or PYD, reliable, valid, and invariant measures of the individual participant, of the context and, in particular, of the individual–context relation must be used for both treatment and comparison group members. Moreover, measurement in normative settings may not be the same as measurement in the face of non-normative situations such as wars, natural disasters, or either the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the continuing epidemic of racism and white supremacy afflicting the United States and other nations at this writing.

Non-normative settings may transform the requirements that exist for instantiating adaptive individual–context relations reflecting resilience



or PYD among specific groups of diverse youth. For instance, across geographical locations and socioeconomic strata in the United States, all Black and Brown youth grow up in a society rooted in systemic and interpersonal racism, white supremacy and privilege, educational, health care, housing, socioeconomic, and employment inequalities and inequities, and concerns for their safety, as brutalities toward, and murders of, individuals of color continue (Franklin & Higginbotham, 2010; Goff & Kahn, 2012; Spencer et al., 2015). As a result, they experience repeated and multiple instances of adversity and trauma. Yet, relatively little is known about the simultaneous impact of multiple instances of trauma on either resilience or PYD, and relatively few instances exist of few interventions addressing such complex histories of trauma among these young people (e.g., Cantor et al., [in preparation](#); Masten et al., 2015).

Obviously, addressing the issues of conceptualization and methodology in conducting and evaluating program and policy interventions aimed at promoting resilience or PYD is complex. Perhaps equally as obvious, however, is that such efforts are integral to the formulation and enactment of programs of research and intervention aimed at enhancing the lives of diverse youth, both in the United States and around the world. This observation leads to some final comments about basic and applied scholarship pertinent to resilience and PYD.

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## Conclusions and Potential Next Steps

The promotion of resilience and PYD, and learning how to move diverse youth along the continuum of adversity from resilience (and “just okay” development; Masten, 2014b) to thriving, is of fundamental concern to developmental science, both as a theory-predicated and methodologically rigorous research field and as an instance of science aimed at optimizing the lives of all people, at all points across the life span (Lerner, 2018, 2021; Lerner et al., [in press](#)). As such, a focus in research and application on resilience and PYD

may elucidate the ways in which relations between active youth and active facets of their ecologies can be constituted to be mutually beneficial to specific youth and to their specific families, communities, culture, and world.

The dynamic, relational developmental systems-based approach to the study of resilience and PYD that we have described (Lerner et al., 2019; Masten, 2014b; Masten et al., 2015) provides a vision for a program of research and application that aims to promote resilience, thriving, and to help youth in all settings, and with diverse starting points in life, to move across the continuum of adversity to maximize their opportunities for PYD. This vision involves the alignment of specific youth and their multi-level contexts within and across time in the service of creating mutually beneficial individual–context relations across time and place.

An ongoing program of research and evaluation predicated on such a dynamic, relational developmental systems-based approach to understanding and optimizing resilience and PYD—and positive development of specific youth across to the continuum of adversity—*may* create knowledge sufficient to enable developmental science to become an effective contributor to multisectorial efforts to promote social justice and equitable opportunities for healthy and positive development for all youth. Fisher et al. (2013) provided a vision for such social justice-relevant research in developmental science.

Some of the research foci they discuss include addressing the pervasive systemic disparities in opportunities for development; investigating the origins, structures, and consequences of social inequities in human development; identifying societal barriers to health and well-being; identifying barriers to fair allocation and access to resources essential to positive development; identifying how racist and other prejudicial ideologies and behaviors develop in majority groups; studying how racism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of chronic and acute systemic inequities and political marginalization may have a “weathering” effect on physical and mental health across the life span; enacting evidence-based prevention and policy research aimed at

demonstrating if systemic oppression can be diminished and psychological and political liberation can be promoted; taking a systems-level approach to reducing unjust institutional practices and to promoting individual and collective political empowerment within organizations, communities, and local and national governments; evaluating programs and policies that alleviate developmental harms caused by structural injustices; and, creating and evaluating empirically based interventions that promote a just society that nurtures life-long healthy development in all of its members (Fisher et al., 2013).

Such social justice-relevant research may be one of the best tools developmental scientists have for contributing to the creation of a more just society. However, at this writing, such scholarship remains relatively rare, certainly underfunded, and perhaps especially challenging during the historical moment within which this chapter was written.

Designing and enacting scholarship aimed at enhancing the individual and ecological resources to promote resilience and PYD within an historical period involving both the COVID-19 pandemic and the US epidemic of racism and white supremacy involve complexity of yet-unknown parameters. That is, undertaking such scholarship within an historical period that will involve the emergence of an unknown “new normal” for society is a challenge of presently undefinable parameters. However, one path forward is to use our individual and collective agency and autopoietic capacities to help shape a new normal that involves full collaboration in both basic and applied facets of developmental science with the youth and families that are experiencing the greatest degrees of adversity and, as well, trauma in the current historical moment. Clearly, communities of color are the experts about what is needed for equality and thriving among their individuals and families and about what constraints and challenges they are facing.

The dynamic, relational developmental systems-based theoretical ideas that frame our work emphasize that youth have agency and, because of their coactions with their context, that is, their individual–context relations, they are

active producers of their own development (Lerner, 2021). Youth should then not be viewed as people with whom we do interventions. Rather, they should be seen as experts about their lives, as people to learn from, and as people we have as our collaborators in research and applications aimed at promoting PYD. If developmental scientists function with intellectual humility and a commitment to collaboration, there is a chance that the challenges they face in contributing to the new normal can be transformed into an opportunity for the field to become a productive part of inclusive, multisectorial strategies for enacting and evaluating solutions promoting thriving among the diverse youth of the world.

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