Social Policy Report

Positive Development of Minority Children

Natasha J. Cabrera
University of Maryland
and
The SRCD Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee[1]

Abstract

Although the development and well-being of ethnic and racial minority children have received sustained attention over the past few decades from policymakers, researchers, and practitioners (Cabrera, Beeghly, & Eisenberg, 2012; Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012; McLloyd, 1990, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006), these efforts have contributed to a body of knowledge that, while rigorous and insightful, has often been deficit-oriented, emphasizing the negative effects of inadequate economic and social resources and an elevated rate of behavior problems, decreased social competence, and lower rates of school success among these children. A primary focus on adversity has had the unintended consequence of eclipsing the strengths or assets that minority families possess to raise healthy children. Consequently, we know more about maladaptation than adaptation among minority children. Because the number of ethnic and racial children now constitutes the numeric majority (U.S. Census 2012), there is an urgency to increase our efforts to conduct rigorous studies of the positive development of ethnic and racial minority children. A focus on positive development, broadly defined as research that focuses on adaptation and adjustment rather than maladjustment and adversity (Dodge, 2011; Guerra, Graham, & Tolan, 2011) is important because it would highlight the significant variability in this population and allow for the identification of the multiple sources and pathways of adaptation, leading to more targeted programs and interventions.

From the Editors

This issue of *Social Policy Report* (SPR) is going to press just after the 50TH anniversary of the March on Washington. There is much discussion about what has been gained since then—and what is still left to accomplish. It seems apropos to have this issue of SPR focus on the positive development of minority children. Natasha Cabrera and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee note that most research on minority children utilizes a deficit framework—and they then provide an overview of the growing body of research that focuses on the positive development of minority children. Their paper underscores the importance of the researchers' framework in building the knowledge base of minority children's development and the need for researchers to learn more about the variability within a particular minority group as well as the similarities across minority groups. SRCD has played a central role in advancing the research agenda on minority children, especially those in poverty. Two special issues of SRCD's journal, *Child Development*, have focused on research on minority children. Following these special issues, SRCD funded its first themed meeting in February 2012 on the positive development of minority children. This *Social Policy Report* is based on that meeting.

Three commentaries expand on the issues raised in the Cabrera et al. paper. Cynthia García Coll underscores the need for a major paradigm shift in child development so that the field builds the needed knowledge base about all children—including "minority" children who will soon represent the majority demographically. Ivelisse Martinez-Beck highlights the need for a theoretical framework to guide research on the positive development of minority children, referencing a new research framework for young dual language learners. Vonnie McLoyd applauds the inclusion of the concept of culture in the research to understand the strengths of minority children and offers recommendations for a research agenda that will disentangle race and ethnicity from socio-economic status and explore the interaction of these and other key social categories.

Together, Cabrera, García Coll, Martinez-Beck, and McLoyd jointly call for more sophisticated research and more intentional sampling of minority children across socioeconomic categories. Historically, the field has focused primarily on minority children in poverty conditions. That must change—and these leaders have provided the essential concepts of a research agenda for the coming decade. Where will the field be in 10 to 50 years—and will we have built the research base to understand the strengths and complex developmental processes of non-White children in America?

— Kelly L. Maxwell (Issue Editor)
Samuel L. Odom (Editor)
Iheoma Iruka (Editor)

Positive Development of Minority Children
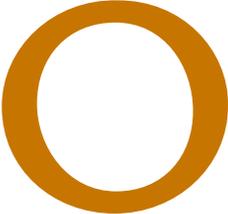
Our goal in this report is not to provide an exhaustive review of the literature but to highlight research presented at the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) February 2012 themed meeting on the positive development of minority children and supplement it with emerging research that illustrates how multiple factors at the individual, family, and community levels might provide opportunities for children's positive developmental trajectories across domains (e.g., social, emotional, cognitive, and physical) and developmental periods (e.g., infancy, childhood, and adolescence). Given space constraints and the fact that much more research has been done on some groups (e.g., African American) than on others (e.g., Asian Americans) and on some periods (e.g., early childhood) than on others (e.g., middle childhood), we favored research that exemplifies areas of strength in minority children, youth, and families across groups and developmental periods.

Keeping in mind that *race* is a social construct and that there are no certain biological differences among different racial groups (Collins, 2004), the term *minority families and children* generally refers to individuals from a variety of non-White racial groups, and *ethnic groups* refers to people coming from a particular region of the world or country who share characteristics such as culture, language, or beliefs. For example, Latinos are defined as people who come from Central or South America, including Mexico, or from the Caribbean area (e.g., Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic) and may be from any racial background. The term *immigrant children* refers to children from any racial or ethnic group, not necessarily children of color. Given recent immigration patterns, the two largest immigrant groups in the United Sates are Latinos and Asians—although immigration from Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South East Asia is rapidly increasing. Children growing up in poverty in the United States, however, are disproportionately non-White and often the offspring of immigrants.

This report is meant to be a springboard that encourages researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to pay closer attention to what families and communities are currently doing right to promote optimal child development, so that these efforts can be supported and fine-tuned through programs and interventions. To this end, this report discusses: (1) SRCD efforts to advance research on minority children, highlighting the 2012 themed meeting, (2) key questions for the field, (3) a brief history of research on positive development, (4) some promising intervention programs, and (5) conclusions and implications.

SRCD Efforts to Advance Research on Minority Children

Since 1933, SRCD's mission has been to promote multidisciplinary research on child development and to encourage the implementation of findings to improve the lives of children and families (Cameron & Hagen, 2005). We highlight two efforts that address this mission and specifically focus on minority children: The SRCD Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee and Special Issues of *Child Development*.

The SRCD Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee

In 1977, SRCD established the Committee on Minority Participation (COMP). In 1985, COMP became a standing committee and was renamed the Committee on Ethnic and Racial Issues (ERI; McLoyd, 2006). The ERI has been responsible for the development and oversight of activities pertaining to the participation of minority scholars in

SRCD and for promoting developmental research on ethnic minority children and adolescents. In order to carry out this responsibility, the committee focuses on the following four objectives: (1) developing an academic pipeline with the purpose of increasing the number of ethnic minority scholars conducting research in the field of child development; (2) examining the current state of research in the field and promoting opportunities that result in increased levels of research focused on the development of ethnic minority children and adolescents; (3) providing guidance and recommendations to SRCD concerning the inclusion of such research through the Society's publications, biennial meetings, and other external outlets; and (4) serving as a liaison to other groups and organizations concerned with research on ethnic minority children and adolescents. The ERI committee (2009–2012) addressed these goals by organizing the February 2012 themed meeting in Tampa, Florida on the positive development of minority children.

Special Issues of Child Development

An extensive historical account of SRCD efforts to advance the research agenda on minority children is beyond the scope of this report. We highlight three efforts because of their long-lasting influence on the way researchers conceptualize race, ethnicity, culture, and development.

In 1990, *Child Development* published the special issue, *Minority Children,* to provide a highly visible outlet for research on minority children and because it would be "myopic, costly, and perilous to ignore the cultural, ecological, and structural forces that enhance or impede the development of a growing segment of the population" (McLoyd, 1990, p. 61). The research published in that special issue and beyond highlighted marked variability in terms of culture and ecological context and questioned the utility of the commonly employed deficit approach to the study of minority children. The legacy of the 1990 special issue is that it fostered change in the field both conceptually and ideologically on how to conduct research with minority children (McLoyd, 2006).

In 2006, another special issue, *Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Child Development,* was published that focused on research that attempts to disentangle race, ethnicity, culture, and immigrant status, and identify potential mediators and moderators of sociocultural variables on children's developmental outcomes (Quintana et al., 2006). This issue was important because it highlighted growing methodological challenges and innovations and

showcased research on the normative development of ethnic and racial minority children in context, addressed racial and ethnic identity development, and considered intergroup processes (Quintana et al., 2006).

In 2012, *Child Development* published a third special issue, *Immigrant Children* (Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012), that highlighted the heterogeneity of immigrant families in terms of parental socioeconomic status (SES), country of origin, as well as child gender and a myriad of other important political, cultural, and social factors. Equally, the special issue emphasized the diversity in immigrant children's outcomes, presenting evidence for both risk and paradox (Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012). In the same year, *Child Development Perspectives* published a special section on the *Positive Development of Minority Children* (Cabrera et al., 2012) sponsored by the ERI Committee. The 2012 special issue highlighted research that uses dynamic, integrative bioecological, and cultural models to examine the strengths and positive adaptation of ethnic minority children. The most recent effort was the February 2012 themed meeting, which forms the basis for this report.

Collectively, these and other efforts resulted in calls for more nuanced attention to research that identifies the strengths that minority children and their families offer to the community and not merely the challenges they may experience. In response, scholars have paid renewed attention to how contextual factors such as family, neighborhoods, and schools might be associated with positive development (Dodge, 2011; Guerra et al., 2011; Larson, 2000). Guided by modern developmental systems approaches and consistent with cultural theories highlighting multiple pathways of influence for successful development and multiple conceptions of well-being, contemporary research on minority children has focused increasingly on adaptation rather than on risk (e.g., APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2012).

The February 2012 Themed Meeting

The goal of the themed meeting was to provide a forum for the dissemination of research focused on the *positive* development of minority children. Building on long-running calls for this emphasis from the field (e.g. Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012; McLoyd, 1990, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006), this meeting highlighted new and emerging theoretical, methodological, and empirical findings to further our understanding of positive adaptation among minority children. The themed meeting was organized by

members of the ERI committee, Latino, Black, and Asian Caucuses. Natasha Cabrera (Chair of the ERI) chaired the meeting with co-chairs Monica Rodriguez (ERI member) and James Rodriguez (Latino Caucus member). The themed meeting, one of SRCD's first, was fully attended at 350 participants, an accomplishment recognized and encouraged by the SRCD Executive Committee for future themed endeavors.

The themed meeting program included plenary and invited sessions, panel discussions, and workshops on the following topics: (1) interdisciplinary and theoretical approaches—understanding ethnic minority children in the context of family, schools, and community; (2) conducting research with immigrant children and families using different methodological approaches; (3) designing and implementing interventions for minority children and families; and (4) positive developmental outcomes. The meeting opened with a talk from keynote speaker, Cynthia Garcia Coll, entitled, *Positive Development of Minority Children: We've Come a Long Way, Baby*. Ronald Ferguson opened the second day with the keynote, *Excellence with Equity: A Social Movement for the 21st Century*. Invited presenters included: Cigdem Kagitcibasi, Carola Suárez-Orozco, Moin Syed, Niobe Way, Thomas S. Weisner, Nancy A. Gonzales, Diane L. Hughes, Judi Mesman, Velma McBride Murry, and Margaret Beale Spencer. The speakers focused on diverse children and youth, at varying stages of development, and presented research that used a variety of methodologies and prevention approaches to understand promoting positive development among minority youth. The meeting concluded with a roundtable, during which panel chairs highlighted key findings from the meeting, with integrative closing and summary remarks by Martha Zaslow, Director of the SRCD Office for Policy and Communications. Part of the success of the meeting was that it included not only senior leading scholars in the field but also junior and mid-career researchers as well as graduate students, providing opportunities for meaningful discussion and networking.

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Key Questions for the Field

Overall, the findings presented at the themed meeting highlighted important advancements in the areas of conceptualization/theory and methodology but also raised important questions that can guide future research. The following three sections address key questions that emerged at the meeting.

Who Are Minority and Ethnic Children?

With the exception of the indigenous peoples of America who were here before the White-European settlers arrived, the majority of people living in the United States during its first 200 years were White-European settlers and their descendants; a smaller minority of the population was non-White. Today, however, the ethnic and racial mix of the U.S. population is changing. For the first time in its history, half (49.9%) of American children under the age of five are of a non-White racial or ethnic minority group, according to 2012 U. S. Census Bureau estimates. In contrast to data from 2010, when minority babies accounted for 49.5% of all births, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reports that between July 2011 to July 2012, 50.4% of children born were Latino, African American/Black, Asian American, or from other ethnic minority groups, including those from Middle Eastern countries. Non-Latino Whites accounted for 49.6% of all births in that time span. Additionally, approximately 40 million Americans, or 13% of the U.S. population, are foreign-born. In light of the increasing diversity in the U.S. population, the label *minority* is inappropriate and needs to be reconsidered. Yet, the label *minority* remains in use, likely as a reference more to issues of social power and equity than to numeric, demographic composition. Children growing up in poverty in the U.S. are disproportionately from non-White ethnic groups, and/or children of immigrants, again owing in part to structural issues of access and equity (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002; Darity & Nicholson, 2005).

The ethnic and racial diversity of the population in the U.S. also operates alongside tremendous within-group

variability in SES and immigrant status, family structure, childrearing beliefs, and religious values. Ethnic groups currently residing in the United States are strikingly heterogeneous. For example:

❖ Asian American children represent a diverse group of individuals with origins from countries all over Asia and other parts of the world (U.S. Census, 2010).

❖ Minority children are overrepresented in poverty relative to White children. According to a 2011 Congressional Research Service Report, 27.6% of African Americans/Blacks (10.9 million) and 25.3% of Latinos (13.2 million) had incomes below poverty compared to 9.8% of non-Latino Whites (19.2 million) and 12.3% of Asians (2.0 million; Shrestha & Heisler, 2011). Among American Indians/Alaska Natives, 34% of families with children under six live in poverty, which constitutes twice the overall U.S. rate (U.S. Census, 2009). However, this also means that 66% of minority children do not live in poverty.

❖ Most children born to immigrant parents are native-born, but by some estimates approximately 1 million children and youth are unauthorized (Passel & Cohn, 2010). Most children and youth in immigrant households are living in mixed status homes with some family members authorized and others not (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Takanashi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). The contexts of development of children and youth growing up in unauthorized homes are likely to be substantially different from those in documented families (Suárez-Orozco et al, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011).

❖ In terms of family structure, according to the 2010 U. S. Census data, 55% of immigrant families include two married parents. In terms of education, 29% of immigrant parents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, 17% have attended some college or have an associate's degree, 26% have graduated from high school, and 28% have completed less than high school.

❖ In the last decades, great advances have been made in education. In 2009, 81% of the African American population had obtained a high school degree, 10% less than the academic attainment of majority White students. Asian Americans have a high school graduation rate of 94%, exceeding that of majority group members (Ryan & Siebens, 2009).

What Do We Know About the Life Course of Children, Youth, and Families Who Are Not White?

Our knowledge of the life course of non-White children has improved substantially in the past 30 years (McLoyd, 2006). However, despite several efforts devoted to advancing research on minority children (e.g., special issues/section in 1990, 2006, and 2012), this body of research is still not as rich or nuanced or prevalent as is research on White children.

Over the last 20 years, several classic longitudinal studies of non-White children (e.g., Baltimore longitudinal studies, the New Haven study of teenage mothers, Perry preschool and Abecedarian projects) included primarily African American families (Brody & Flor, 1998; Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987). Other later studies also included mainly African American children and youth (e.g., Brody et al., 2001; Luster & McAdoo, 1996; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, & Stephens, 2001; Spencer, 2001). Much less research has been conducted with other non-White groups, such as Latinos and Asians, in part due to their later migration to the U.S. (García Coll, 2001). More recently, longitudinal studies based on geographically and racially representative national samples have included children of multiple ethnicities and sometimes oversampled groups of interest (e.g., Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth and Kindergarten Cohorts, Fragile Family and Child Well-Being Study, Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods).

Apart from national studies, most of the above studies are based on low-income families, who are more likely to experience hardship due to economic, social, and language barriers. Findings from these studies have well documented the deleterious effects of poverty on families and children (Huston & Bentley, 2010). Consequently, we have a good understanding about the problem behaviors or academic failure of minority children. Comparably, efforts to understand adaptation have not been as focused or extensive. There is less knowledge about the considerable within-group variation regarding family education, income, beliefs and values, childrearing styles, and the economic and social investments that families make for their children (McLoyd, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006). In addition, studies of middle class minority families are rare.

With few exceptions, we have little information about what adaptation looks like for minority families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (McAdoo, 1978; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Emerging research, some of it presented at the themed meeting, is demonstrating that promotive factors such as engaging in interactive peer

play in preschool (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012), developing positive attachment relationships with healthy adults (Hurd, Varner, & Rowley, 2012; MacDonald et al., 2008), building social capital with other parents, and participating in growth-promoting activities such as early childhood education or after school programs may not only create a positive developmental pathway for children but also prevent the occurrence of later problems (Fredericks & Simpkins, 2012; Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008; Reid, 2012; Valdez, Mills, Bohlig, & Kaplan, 2012). In addition, the cognitive advantage of being bilingual or the strong social or oral narrative skills that some minority children bring to the classroom are developmental assets that can explain why some minority children exceed expectations (Gardner-Neblett, Pungello, & Iruka, 2012; Galindo, Fuller, 2010). Similarly, the formation of a strong ethnic identity can be an important predictor of positive outcomes for children (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Smith, Levine, Smith, Prinz, & Dumas, 2009; Yip, Seaton & Sellers, 2006; Yip & Shelton, 2012).

How Should We Conduct Research with Minority Families?

One challenge to understand positive adaptation has been the limited tool kit available to researchers (Knight et al., 2009). How can we best design studies that recognize the unique resources ethnic minorities draw upon? What are the links among theory, research questions, and study design? Scholars have emphasized the importance of culturally informed theory in guiding quantitative research conducted with ethnic minority children (García Coll et al., 1996; Knight et al., 2009; Rogoff, 2011; Weisner, 2002). Although there is agreement that we need to study the association between cultural environments and children's development, these links may not be linear. For analytical purposes though, researchers often represent these associations as if they were, losing some of the complexity of these associations (Weisner, 2012).

Similarly, research with minority children is more likely to use either quantitative or qualitative methodology, but scholars have argued that using multiple methods that integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to research are essential to more accurately represent the diverse cultural learning environments of all children (Hughes et al. 2008; Weisner, 2012). This multi-faceted approach can yield rich information on the dynamic processes that lead to positive developmental outcomes among diverse groups. Studies that use mixed methods (e.g., Huston et al., 2005) suggest that researchers should employ experimental designs or large community samples that include intensive qualitative and ethnographic methods and are nested and fully integrated within them.

What is the right comparison group? A persistent issue in research with ethnic minority children and youth is determining the appropriate control or comparison group (Syed, 2012). The deficit view of minority children taken in many prior studies generally has taken a static between-groups/comparative approach that focuses on average between-group differences. Including a White comparison group is problematic because of SES disparities among groups, which implicitly assumes a deficit perspective and contributes to negative stereotypes about minority children (McLoyd, 1990). This view that focusing on developmental outcomes in a single ethnic minority group must include a White "comparison" or "control" group has been ardently debated in the literature (e.g., McLoyd, 2006; Wong & Rowley, 2000). Of course, the opposite argument is not necessarily true or expected: studies of White youth do not require an ethnic minority "control" group, for instance.

The decision about whether or not to include a White sample may depend on the particular research question, which has implications for how we theorize about the role of ethnicity in development (Syed, 2012). If the goal is to examine differences on some aspect of development between one or more ethnic minority groups and Whites, then a White sample equivalent to the minority group(s) in SES and other contextual factors should be included. If the research question is to describe the experiences of a particular group or to examine individual differences within an ethnic group—and make no claims to uniqueness or difference between groups—then including a White comparison sample is not necessary (Syed, 2012).

Furthermore, when examining data for ethnic or racial differences, it is essential to develop theoretical and empirical methods for ensuring that a between-groups comparative design that includes a White sample is not conceptualized or interpreted within a deficit framework (Syed, 2012). Syed suggests that one way to do this is by analytically replacing static social group markers (e.g., ethnicity) with dynamic psychological constructs (e.g., ethnic identity) that may have a stronger potential to explain group differences. Such analyses, Syed contends, can help to clarify whether existing theories have universal applicability or whether a theory needs to be revised or discarded altogether. Finally, it is worth noting that the bulk of research on minority and disadvantaged families has not used rigorous sampling and recruitment strategies, which can also limit generalization to the larger popula-

tion and confound interpretation (Knight et al., 2009).

Is SES a better way to understand group differences? Might the appropriate comparison group be based on SES instead of race/ethnicity? What we currently know about minority children's skills and developmental trajectories is, in general, based on research that tends to confound minority status with SES. This is because it often focuses on highly select samples of ethnic and racial children from high risk and disadvantaged environments. Studies that have tried to disentangle the effects of SES from ethnicity show that differences between groups are mostly accounted for by differences in SES (Hill, 2006). An analysis based on a nationally representative sample of mothers and their children found that race and ethnicity was initially associated with subtle differences in children's proximal caregiving environments (e.g., the mother-child interaction) which in turn predicted children's later outcomes (Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & García Coll 2001). A closer look at data from the national sample revealed that SES differences exerted stronger effects on children's outcomes than race/ethnicity. A recent review showed that maternal sensitivity is lower among low-income minority families due to poverty-related family stress (Mesman, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). These findings are supported by recent analysis showing that the greatest source of inequality is SES rather than race (Duncan & Murnane, 2011).

What are the implications?

Research that disentangles race and SES can shed light onto the processes that are similar or different across groups. For example, recent research suggests that the family stress model holds for African American, Whites, and English-speaking Latinos (Iruka, LaForet, & Odom, 2012). That is, across ethnic groups, being poor means experiencing material hardship and living in dangerous neighborhoods that can result in parental depression, irritability, and harsh parenting, which, in turn, may lead to child adversity. Similarly, research has shown that an investment model that explains how parents' education and income matter for children's developmental outcomes holds across ethnic and racial groups (Mistry, 2008). Moreover, within-ethnic group differences may also reflect variations among participants in level of

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parental education or other factors that might explain why some studies have found that middle-class minority families are more similar to middle-class majority families than to low-income minority families. Preliminary findings from a study comparing middle-class and low middle-class Chinese immigrant parents presented at the 2012 themed meeting found that middle-class Chinese parents were more likely to be engaged in literacy activities with their children than low-income Chinese parents, and that low-income Chinese children performed worse than middle-class Chinese children in reading and math (Yamamoto & Li, 2012).

Research on Positive Development

Increasingly in the literature, the deficit model is being replaced by strength models (e.g., positive youth development model). This shift is in part motivated by the growing diversity and numbers of ethnic and racial minority children residing in the U.S., as well as by some puzzling findings, including the suggestion that "becoming an American" might pose an added risk for minority children (immigration paradox; García Coll et al., 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Resilience versus Positive Development

A deficit model is also being replaced by a growing interest in resilient children—those expected to do poorly, based on risk factors (e.g., poverty), but who beat the odds and do well—and, conversely, those who are expected to do well, based on a lack of risk factors (e.g., affluent children), but do not. As recently highlighted by Ann Masten in her presidential address at the 2013 SRCD biennial meeting, increased efforts to understand resilience in child development have been central to investigators asking pivotal questions such as, "Why do some children who grow up in high-risk environments cope successfully with these challenges whereas others do not?" and "What are potential protective systems at different contextual levels, ranging from the individual child to the broader social, cultural, and religious context" (Masten & Wright, 2009)? Research on resilience has highlighted some protective mechanisms that help explain why high-risk populations (e.g., homeless children) or populations exposed to severe threats

and adversity (e.g., war) exhibit positive adaptation (i.e., doing okay or exceeding expectations). However, although the resilience paradigm has helped us to understand which factors and mechanisms are related to which outcomes in adverse conditions, it has been less helpful in identifying factors that promote and sustain adaptation in development or in the absence of risk.

The question is then, "What is a positive outcome?" Is it more than the absence of negative outcomes? Although some minority children may be faced with more and different challenges than majority children, many do not experience severe risk and adversity. Therefore, the resilience framework may be less suitable as a general framework for our understanding of the specific promotive (not merely protective) factors that support adaptation among minority children. For example, we know that acculturation might be a developmental risk factor for many second- and third-generation immigrant children, but we do not know what family- or individual-level influences promote well-being among the group of second- or third-generation immigrants (García Coll & Marks, 2011).

New insights from developmental neuroscience, including research on differential susceptibility—that some children are more affected, both for better and for worse, by their rearing environment than are others (Belsky, 1997; Meaney, 2010)—and studies focused on demographic, sociological, anthropological, and cultural factors are revolutionizing our understanding of how transacting biological, social, and psychological determinants may contribute to positive developmental pathways for minority children. Sophisticated developmental models and methods (Sameroff, 2009) and longitudinal research on ethnic minority children, grounded in modern dynamic bioecological systems approaches, are emerging (Shonkoff, 2010; Spencer, 2008). This groundbreaking research on the neurobiology of resilience aims to understand the correlative neuroendocrine markers that might serve to protect individuals who face extreme stressors but have positive developmental trajectories and avoid psychopathology (Cisler et al., 2012; Russo, Murrough, Han, Charney, & Nestler, 2012). Within this paradigm, other research is showing that the absence of all stress is not necessarily optimal. Research suggests that the experience of "everyday" and "tolerable" stress may have benefits for children's development of self-regulatory and coping skills, such as having a greater propensity for resilience when adverse life events occur (Seery, 2011). These findings have important implications for the development of intervention programs for minority children

and for a clearer understanding of the neurobiological basis for positive development.

Culturally-Situated Research

Cultural models are important because they highlight cultural assets of particular groups (García Coll et al., 1996; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2012; Kagitcibasi, 2012; Rogoff, 2011; Weisner, 2002). Findings from recent research have poignantly called attention to the importance of studying the set of values and beliefs that minority families use to raise healthy children (Kagitcibasi, 2012; Rogoff, 2011). This research has shown that certain cultural values (e.g., family obligation) or certain traditions (e.g., oral histories) may promote positive development and buffer children from the negative effects of poverty and other stressors (Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, & Yoshikawa, 2012). For example, a study presented at the themed meeting found that Latino youth who experienced SES stress believed that academic success was important only when they also reported high levels of family obligation (Kiang, Andrews, Stein, Supple, & Gonzalez, 2012).

Cross-cultural research can point to unique areas of strength and adaptation that might be important for the developmental outcomes of particular groups of children in the U.S. For example, Mayan families in the highlands of Guatemala often make their living in agriculture and weaving, and they speak several languages (Rogoff, 2011). Parental socialization of the specific skills necessary for survival in this society (e.g., weaving, being multilingual) may confer benefits on children as their parents teach them how to interact with adults, speak different languages, and gainfully contribute to the family's well-being. These capabilities or strengths seem to be adaptive for the Mayan families in their particular social milieu. Capturing the factors that promote cultural adaptation in a particular context is a complex process that cannot be described by conducting simple group comparisons (Kagitcibasi, 2012; Rogoff, 2011). The challenge for us is to examine the particular cultural practices that are adaptive for specific groups of minority families living in the U.S.

Positive Outcomes

Overall, research on ethnic minority child development increasingly reflects the recognition that a clearer understanding of cultural resources and constraints, as well as children's unique ecological contexts (Weisner, 2002), are critical to the study of positive development

in these groups (Harrison et al, 1990; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). However, as was evident at the themed meeting, the bulk of the research with this focus to date has been conducted with Latino and African American children. More research is needed that focuses on the cultural aspects of family dynamics among Asian American and American Indian / Alaska Native children and their families (Chao & Aque, 2009; Kenyon & Hanson, 2012). We acknowledge that this uneven research base is also reflected in the literature summarized in this report, but we highlight it as an area of research that needs further development.

Intra-individual characteristics such as temperament (e.g., emotional reactivity and regulation, sociability, effortful control, and attention/persistence), social skills, cognitive and language competencies (e.g., bilingualism, oral narrative skills) play important roles in early development and adaptation to rearing experiences and robustly predict developmental trajectories (Belsky, 1997; García Coll et al., 1996). In addition to these child effects, numerous studies have shown that low-income minority children, in general, show deficits in areas such as receptive language abilities and vocabulary mainly as a function of the economic hardship experienced by their families (Champion, Hyter, McCabe, & Bland-Stewart, 2003). However, recent research suggests that prior studies of development might have overlooked or under-studied developmental assets among minority children (Bialystok, Majumder, & Martin, 2003). New findings in the literature show that, overall, minority children show strengths in at least three domains of development: social, language, and ethnic identity.

Social competence. Self-regulation, defined as one's ability to manage one's behavior, emotions, and attention voluntarily and adaptively, is strongly predictive of children's success in school. Several investigators have found that many low-income ethnic minority children exhibit relatively high levels of self-regulation compared to other children (e.g., Blair & Razza, 2007; Cheah, Leung, Tahseen, & Shutz, 2009; Cunningham, Kliewer, & Garner, 2009; Li-Grining, 2012; Raver, 2004). Self-regulated children are also likely to be socially competent (i.e.,

able to cooperate and get along with others), which also promotes school readiness. Findings based on a nationally representative sample of kindergartners in the U.S. show that the majority of Latino children enter kindergarten with strong social skills (Crosnoe, 2006; DeFeyter & Winsler, 2009; Galindo & Fuller, 2010). Other studies have shown that low-income African American pre-schoolers exhibit specific social and social-cognitive skills, such as those required for sustained play with peers (Fantuzzo, Coolahan, Mendez, McDermott, & Sutton-Smith, 1998). A review of the literature found that positive peer play interactions at home and in school among African American preschoolers support early learning and development (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012). There is also evidence that Mexican American youth engage in relatively higher levels of prosocial behaviors—actions intended to benefit others—than European American youth (Knight & Carlo, 2012).

Linguistic strengths. Although low-income African American preschoolers are often portrayed as exhibiting delays in expressive vocabulary that place them at risk for school delays (Champion, et al., 2003), their oral narrative skills may be a unique area of strength that may promote later success in reading achievement (e.g., Curenton & Justice, 2004; Gardner-Neblett et al., 2012). For example, a review of the literature revealed that African American children produce narratives of higher quality and have greater narrative comprehension than White children (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2012). Similar findings have been reported for bilingual children (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010; Cummins, 2001; Engel de Abreu, Cruz-Santoz, Tourinho, Martin, & Bialystok, 2012; Han, 2012; Stoessel, Titzmann, & Silbereisen, 2011). For instance, bilingual children are reported to have enhanced executive control in nonverbal tasks requiring conflict resolution as compared to monolingual children (Bialystok & Craik, 2010; Cummins, 2001; Diamond, 2010). However, there are also costs to being bilingual, at least initially, such as having smaller vocabularies and weaker access to lexical items. It is possible that researchers and policy-makers may have overemphasized the costs and de-emphasized the benefits of becoming bilingual.

> New findings in the literature show that, overall, minority children show strengths in at least three domains of development: social, language, and ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity. In later childhood and adolescence, other intra-individual factors, such as the formation of a strong ethnic identity, emerge as potentially promotive. A central premise of racial socialization research is that positive youth outcomes (competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring) are often directly supported through traditional racial socialization messages (e.g., preparation for bias, self-worth and egalitarianism; Evans et al., 2012). Security and pride in one's own racial and ethnic identity promote more positive peer and family relationships and self-esteem among racial and ethnic minorities (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012; Phinney, 1993). Consistent with the idea that a group-based identity might be helpful to youth, studies of collective efficacy—a sense of connectedness and willingness to intervene to encourage or sanction peer behavior among diverse African American, Latino and majority youth—have shown that it is related to reduced problem behavior and substance use (Smith, Osgood, Caldwell, Hynes, & Perkins, 2013).

Civic engagement, especially via interactions with members of other racial and/or ethnic groups through meaningful activities, has also been shown to relate to positive functioning (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Although opportunities for such activities abound and are often popular among students at four-year institutions of higher education (e.g., CityYear, 2011), a growing number of younger minority adults in community colleges can and are engaging in growth-promoting civic activities. Such activities promote positive other-oriented prosocial behavior, build social relations, decrease risky behavior, foster citizenship (e.g., voting and campaigning), and help build and sustain the community (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

How Families and Parents Foster Positive Adaptation

As with any parents, ethnic minority parents socialize their children to be socially competent individuals and, in turn, their children learn how to navigate the world and function in it adaptively. Research on how parents, families, and communities contribute to the positive development of ethnic minority children and youth has exploded recently (e.g., McLoyd, 2006). Three aspects of family life in particular have been linked to children's positive adaptation: family orientation, discipline, and cultural/racial socialization.

Family orientation. Family orientation, or familism, is a multidimensional construct emphasizing family support, solidarity, and obligations within the family (Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado,

2005). Not surprisingly, the family plays a strong role in how children grow and develop. The family represents children's primary source for love, affection, support, monitoring, and caregiving. Although we know that families play a critical role in teaching children culturally- and community-relevant values, beliefs, and expectations that can guide their social interactions with others in the community, we know less about how specific family factors, including family orientation, operate similarly and differently in various ethnic groups.

There are a growing number of promising studies showing that children who have a strong family orientation (sometimes assessed as family obligation) exhibit fewer behavior problems, report having more friends, and are more socially competent than children who do not have a strong family orientation (Kiang et al., 2012; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002). The positive effects of family on children's functioning have been noted across developmental periods. A review of the literature revealed that familism may have a moderating role in the socialization of Latino preschool-aged children's self-regulation (Li-Grining, 2012). Other research shows that Latino children between the ages of 5 and 9 who value their strong family connection are less likely to engage in antisocial behavior over time than children without a strong family connection (Morcillo, Duarte, Shen, Blanco, Canino, & Bird, 2011). With older children, a study of Mexican-American youth and their parents found that children who have a strong sense of familism are less likely to become involved with deviant peers over time (Roosa et al., 2011). A strong sense of family cohesion and loyalty may offer protective benefits to youth by creating a more positive and less conflicting home environment (e.g., reduced inter-parental conflict), which is associated with better child adjustment (Taylor, Larsen-Rife, Conger, & Widaman, 2012). Similarly, new research with American Indian/Alaska Native youth shows that traditional family values and worldviews can protect youth from risky behaviors (Kenyon & Hanson, 2012).

Discipline. Much has been reported about the greater tendency of minority families, compared to majority families, to engage in strict disciplinary practices with their children that can negatively affect children's development. While harsh punishment is indeed linked to negative outcomes in children across racial and ethnic groups (Ispa et al., 2004), there are indications that this association is not necessarily linear. Some researchers have found that minority parents' strict disciplinary strategies may have positive effects, or at least not

detrimental effects, on children's development under certain conditions, such as when discipline is given in the context of parental warmth (Ispa et al., 2004), when families reside in dangerous neighborhoods (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002), or when children have a positive relationship with their fathers (Cabrera et al., 2012; Fuligni & Pederson, 2002; Hofferth, 2003). A recent review of the literature showed that parental support and authoritative parenting may be an asset and play a protective role for Asian American youth (Zhou et al., 2012).

Cultural/racial socialization refers to teaching children about the norms, values, and expectations of ones' particular cultural group. Research has shown that parental socialization of racial-ethnic and cultural beliefs and values is prevalent among ethnic minority families and largely considered adaptive (Evans et al., 2012; Gardner-Neblett et al., 2012). In addition to promoting cultural pride, racial and ethnic socialization includes socialization surrounding racism awareness and coping with racism and bias (Evans et al., 2012; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bay, 2009; Umaña-Taylor, Alfaro, Bámaca, & Guimond, 2009). Studies have shown that parents' efforts to teach their children about their family's cultural background and children's identification with their culture's norms, values, beliefs, practices, and rituals offer protective benefits in the form of higher self-esteem, a greater sense of belonging, and a more positive outlook which protects them from the negative effects of discrimination and prejudice (Evans et al., 2012). Parents who discuss issues of discrimination and help children to feel proud of their culture and themselves have children who are less likely to be influenced by racial or ethnic discrimination (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006; Huges et al., 2009).

Caughy and colleagues (2002) report that African American preschoolers perform better on cognitive tests and exhibit fewer emotional and behavioral problems when they reside in home environments reflecting elements of African American culture. Similarly, American Indian/Alaska Native youth who report higher levels of identification with their culture and participation in activities reflective of their culture are more likely to be classified as resilient (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Kenyon & Hanson, 2012). One of the mechanisms by which cultural socialization might be related to adaptation may be through its impact on racial-ethnic identity (Hughes et al., 2009; Schweigman, Soto, Wright, & Unger, 2011). Such a pathway is important to study

because research shows that having a positive racial-ethnic identity is also predictive of positive psychosocial adjustment (Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guimond, 2009).

The research on the cultural socialization of Asian American children is less extensive and less straightforward. Unlike their minority counterparts, Asian American children confront stereotypes about being a "model minority," in part because of their higher rates of academic success and greater likelihood to obtain a college education (Qin, Way, & Mukhejee, 2008). Asian youth are also more likely to be perceived as perpetual foreigners who fail to assimilate properly to American culture (Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, & Li, 2011). These stereotypes are harmful because they ignore the marked variability in this group and overlook other issues that can undermine positive development in this population (Huang, Calzada, Cheng, & Brotman, 2012; Zhou et al., 2012). A study of Chinese American youth (ages 12-15) found that youth who exhibited a strong Western orientation or a lower anchoring in Chinese culture exhibited fewer delinquent behaviors than youth who did not (Deng, Kim, Vaughn, & Li, 2010). However, acculturated youth may also experience cross-generational tensions with elders in their own cultural group, which may contribute to psychosocial maladaptation (Phinney et al., 2000).

These findings suggest that the strategies that Asian American families use to help their children adapt to U.S. society may be different from those used by families in other minority groups (Fuligni, Yip, & Tseng, 2002). To confront racial discrimination, Asian American parents might help children learn about American cultural values and norms. At the same time, these families may want to help their children negotiate competing tensions between mainstream and minority cultural contexts in a way that capitalizes on Asian American cultural strengths (Zhou et al., 2012).

Research-based Interventions
Obviously, interventions aimed at promoting optimal development among minority children should strengthen or support what families are already doing well within a cultural context and also address the challenges or barriers many low-income minority families face. Two interventions, presented at the themed meeting, illustrate the importance of context and culture for developing and testing theories that can better inform and guide culturally sensitive intervention and services: Bridges to High School (Bridges) and the Pathways for African American Success (PAAS) Project.

Bridges to High School/Puentes a La Secundaria

Bridges is a multi-cohort, experimental field trial of a culturally competent intervention to prevent school drop-out and mental health disorders for low-income Mexican American adolescents (Gonzales et al., 2012). It is based on the idea that a central pathway for prevention of negative outcomes for Mexican-origin youth is through engagement and investment in school. School engagement is hypothesized to prompt a cascade of positive effects, so that promoting adaptive behaviors in one domain can influence adaptation in other domains (e.g., alcohol and drug use, high risk sexual activity, mental health, as well as school engagement). The program also tested whether school engagement mediated the effect of the intervention on multiple problem outcomes in late adolescence (5 years post test). *Bridges* significantly increased school engagement measured in the ninth grade, which mediated the intervention effects on internalizing symptoms, adolescent substance use, and school dropout in late adolescence (when most adolescents were in the 12TH grade).

Although originally developed and tested with a Mexican American population, the intervention has been generalized to all low-income populations. Interventions such as *Bridges* are important because they target several domains of development and thus may prove to be cost-efficient (e.g., address mental health issues but also impact key academic outcomes) and more likely to be adopted by communities.

The Pathways for African-American Success Project

The Pathways for African-American Success Project (PAAS) is a youth development program for rural African American families (Murry, Berkel, Brody, Gibbons, & Gibbons, 2007). This federally-funded study is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a six-week risk behavior prevention intervention program targeting rural African American parents/caregivers and their seventh-grade children. The primary goal is to help rural African American adolescents improve their decision-making skills and avoid engaging in high-risk behaviors, such as substance use and sexual activity. The program focuses on strengthening families and individuals as a means to empower adolescents with the skills they need to engage in positive decisions and to start planning for their futures. The PAAS curriculum, a modified version of the Strong African American Families Program (SAAF; Murry et al., 2007) is the only technology-driven family-based preventive intervention designed to prevent rural African American youth from engaging in risky behaviors or to reduce risk-taking behaviors.

The SAAF and PAAS curricula are based on findings that Murry and colleagues have obtained from more than a decade of longitudinal research with rural African American youth and their families, feedback from focus groups of rural African Americans, and extant intervention research. The SAAF systematically targets general parenting behaviors (involvement, parent-child communication) and culturally specific behaviors (coping with racial discrimination, promoting racial pride). It also addresses youth skills building in coping with peer pressure, managing risky situations including sexual ones, assertiveness skills, and befriending positive peers.

Impressively, the intervention has been shown to be effective 29 months after the intervention ended (Murry et al., 2007). Compared with ethnically and SES-matched controls, parents who participated in SAAF reported increased use of adaptive universal positive parenting practices (e.g., greater parent involvement, monitoring, and communication) as well as racially/ethnically-specific parenting (e.g., use of racial socialization, including the promotion of ethnic pride, and self-acceptance). Furthermore, intervention-induced changes in these parenting behaviors were associated indirectly with decreased sexual risk behavior through heightened levels of adolescents' self-pride and positive peer orientation.

Although much progress has been made, further research is needed to address the following questions: Are these successful interventions tailored to specific ethnic groups, and are they effective? Would any of these specific interventions work equally well for families in other minority groups? What is unique about each of the interventions that makes it especially salient for a particular group?

Conclusions and Implications

Ethnic minority children are disproportionately more likely than White children in the U.S. to be raised in low-income households. In turn, poverty, with its myriad stressors, exerts deleterious direct effects on children's health and on a wide array of children's developmental and behavioral outcomes, particularly when poverty is persistent and risk factors accumulate. Indirect effects of poverty on children's outcomes (e.g., via its effects on caregivers' well-being and parenting quality) are also

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well documented (Mesman et al., 2012; McLoyd, 1998). However, not all minority children in the U.S. are growing up in poverty and, thus, not all minority children experience extreme adversity. In this report we highlight the significant variability among minority children in terms of SES, immigration status, and family structure and argue for the importance of further research to acknowledge this variability at the onset and not implicitly assume that all minority children are at heightened risk for developmental compromise.

Furthermore, we argue that through family oriented practices and cultural socialization practices, many minority children and youth are growing up within supportive and loving families, with a strong sense of ethnic identity and strong social competence skills as well as speaking at least two languages, with all the benefits that these confer. To continue to build evidence-based asset oriented research, we need carefully designed studies that do not confound SES and ethnicity; use longitudinal designs that capture the dynamic, transactional nature of development; and acknowledge that there are multiple pathways to successful development as well as multiple definitions of what it means to be successful in school and in life. Such studies should also use appropriate control groups when comparisons are necessary and include a comprehensive view of how culturally specific learning environments may support children's adjustment in different groups. Approaches that include the weighted sum of both positive and negative influences in the lives of minority children are more likely to be fruitful than approaches focusing on adversity.

Lessons and Implications:

❖ Future research needs to take a balanced approach that considers both adaptation and maladaptation because intervention science based only on findings of adversity and maladjustment can perpetuate a deficit perspective and promote harmful stereotypes that associate deficits

of a select group with an entire group of people who share the same ethnic or cultural origin. For example, research on whether, and under what conditions, becoming an American (acculturation) is a risk factor has shown that second- or third-generation children have worse behavioral and educational outcomes than their less acculturated parents but does not show which profiles of children in acculturated families do better (García Coll & Marks, 2009).

❖ There needs to be more translation of research into best practices in the classroom. For example, the findings that bilingualism confers cognitive advantages have not entirely trickled down to public school classrooms in the U.S., where there has been a decline in bilingual programs in recent years (e.g., with the passage of Proposition 227 in California), where emerging bilingual children (i.e., dual-language learners) are being educated.

❖ Promoting the view that minority children, including those from low-income backgrounds, have strengths (e.g., social skills, oral narrative skills) may predispose teachers and educators to view these children in a more positive light, avoid negative stereotypes, and build on these strengths. For example, when teachers refer to dual language learners as those who "do not speak English" rather than as children who "are becoming bilingual" they are inadvertently endorsing a negative perspective.

❖ We need more longitudinal studies of child development in minority families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds—including both middle- and low-SES families—that would send a clear message that being minority is not synonymous with being disadvantaged. This research needs to be conducted using sophisticated, modern developmental (longitudinal) designs, especially those that evaluate dynamic transactions among

multiple levels of influence (genetics/physiological process, child factors, parenting, family, neighborhood, schools, community, and culture).

❖ We need to acknowledge SES variability not only among minority children but also among White children. Further research is needed to understand adaptation among neglected groups: middle-class minority families and poor White families.

The positive adaptation of minority children is an important area of research that has been growing slowly and is not well synthesized yet. Thus, it is difficult to discern what specific gains have been made and what areas of research are ready for further exploration. This is a critical area for further research if we are going to leverage resources and provide opportunities to ensure that minority children, who are fast becoming the numeric majority, develop the competences and skills necessary to become productive members of our society. ■

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Commentary

Minority Children
The Future Majority of the USA

Cynthia García Coll
Carlos Albizu University

In this timely policy report, Natasha Cabrera and the Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee gives us a critical review of the accomplishments and limitations of the recent scholarship on minority children and youth in the USA. The use of the word *minority* in this context has been repeatedly contested and I applaud the use of it by Cabrera and others because this is not only a matter of numbers.

The word *minority* implies the lack of access to critical resources and to the positions of power that make decisions of the allocation of those resources. Blacks in Apartheid were the numerical majority and a real minority in terms of these indicators. And as Cabrera et al. aptly show, minority families and children are overrepresented in high risk conditions derived from the lack of access to such resources such as good medical care, high quality child care, preschools, housing, and schools as well as educational opportunities and high pay employment for the parents, the core of the problem. We are not talking about at-risk children and families; we are talking about at-high-risk living conditions.

Perhaps because of this overrepresentation, the literature on this population has been skewed toward the study of the poor minority families and children whose behavior and performance in our indicators are affected by these deficits: the mothers of preschool children that do not follow our parenting dictates, the children who fall behind in school and eventually drop out, the adolescent who gets involved with gangs or the justice system, etc. The pages of the field's most prestigious journals, *Child Development* and *Developmental Psychology,* have minorities overrepresented in articles of so called at-risk children and youth.

But things are changing, and that is what Cabrera et al. aptly point out. We have a growing understanding of these populations, and we have a lot to learn. We need to pay attention to their message for a variety of reasons. The demographics of our country are shifting such that the majority of children in this country will be soon so called "minorities." That is already happening in school systems and cities all over the nation. These populations are the future majority of our nation.

But aside from its practice and policy implications, the issues and recommendations raised by Cabrera et al. are a matter of good science. Do we want a science of child development that is not valid for the majority of children? That speaks of developmental processes that are unique to an increasingly unrepresentative population? That disregards important variables that are pertinent to understanding the most basic developmental processes?

It's not only a matter of just more research; what they are advocating is a paradigm shift that implies new theories, methods, etc. We need to ascertain the right parameters to understand adaptability, resilience and positive developmental outcomes. The basic questions are: What developmental processes seem to be operating similarly across populations? What are unique processes and contexts such as multi-racial/cultural families, bilingualism, extended family involvement, high value in education with little know-how, familism, coping with racism, various levels of acculturation and ethnic identity, biculturalism, etc.?

And thus as we watch the minority children become the majority in the USA, let's not become an esoteric and obsolete science but one that captures the important processes, those that matter for promoting positive development in these growing populations. Let's also embark on identifying not only the normative but also the richness of group and individual differences in these populations and providing a nuanced understanding of the unique adaptations and the ensuing and necessary institutional changes that will have to follow.

Commentary

Developing a Fully Specified Conceptual Framework to Guide Research and Practice in Support of the Positive Development of Minority Children

Ivelisse Martinez-Beck
U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

The selection of the topic of positive development of minority children for SRCD's themed meeting held on February 2012 in Tampa, came at a critical juncture in the history of the United States when, as stated in this *Social Policy Report,* close to half of the children in this country are of racial or ethnic minority status. Today, many developmental psychologists and other early childhood researchers acknowledge the need to focus research on the developmental trajectories of racial and ethnic minority children growing up in diverse societal, community, and familial contexts, and to separate the effects of socioeconomic status from those related to experiences determined by their racial and ethnic status. However, efforts to understand how contexts interact with individual characteristics in determining development have been hampered by a lack of theoretical and conceptual frameworks to guide research. This is especially true in the area of early childhood development, the period from birth through school entry, where much research has focused on the majority population of White, non-Hispanic children, or of children from low-income households regardless of race and ethnicity. Conse-

quently, theoretical and conceptual frameworks have been built on findings that do not reflect the experiences of racial and ethnic minority children.

Developing fully specified theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study of our youngest minority children is an important first step to guide new research that can fill critical gaps in our evidence base. A recent effort from researchers affiliated with the Center for Early Childhood Research, Dual Language Learners (Castro, 2013), drew from extant and emerging developmental frameworks related to sociocultural theory (García Coll et al., 1996; Rogoff, 2003) to propose a conceptual framework specific to the study of development in young dual language learners in the United States. The authors present the connections between macro- and micro-level influences on young dual language learners' development and caution about relying too much on macro-level factors, such as socio-economic status, thus neglecting variability within groups, and the idiosyncratic ways in which macro-level factors manifest themselves in different minority communities and families. The conceptual framework proposed by Castro et al. guides the specification of factors that

may affect development and the mechanisms through which differential development within groups could be explained. However, it also highlights large gaps in the evidence base and the measurement of key constructs, including the absence of measurement tools. Similar types of expanded frameworks are needed to guide the study of the development of young children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds as well as new tools to measure key factors affecting their development.

Although socio-cultural theories of development afford the development of frameworks to study cultural, ethnic and racial minority populations, they neglect to address some factors that may affect inter- and intra-individual differences in development. This is particularly true when studying the development of very young children due to the rapid rate of development between birth and six years, and because development is so interconnected across domains. There exists a disconnect between developmental research focusing on the sequencing of development in particular domains—what some would call basic developmental research in, for example, language, social cognition, reasoning, and socio-emotional, and how this may vary based on the

child's ethnicity, native language, and cultural history (Goetz, 2003; Heyman & Diesendruck, 2002; Martinez & Shatz, 1996; Shatz et al., 2003; Vinden, 1996)—and the study of young children's developmental status, including their knowledge and competencies at different ages and their school readiness skills.

This focus on assessment of children's developmental status is especially critical when assessing young minority children of different ages. These children are typically assessed with instruments that are based on evidence from the normative development of White, non-minority children, and do not account for normal variations in developmental trajectories that may be driven by characteristics of the minority child's native language, cultural norms, and other factors associated with minority status. Translation of findings from research on normal developmental trajectories of minority children, such as the research referenced above, is necessary to inform development of valid assessment tools to assess their developmental status and to increase our understanding of their strengths (e.g., cognitive flexibility of children learning two or more languages) and challenges. This focus on translating findings from basic developmental research should be a critical component of future research agendas focused on young minority children because of their potential to inform policies and practices related to the assessment of these children.

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What Are We Studying
When We Study Children of Color?
Asking New Questions, Advancing New Perspectives

Vonnie C. McLoyd
University of Michigan

The most compelling rationale for the focus on positive development is the need for a counterweight to the predominant emphasis on negative outcomes, risks, and adversities in prior research on children from certain ethnic and racial minority groups (e.g., African Americans). Positive outcomes and healthy adaptation are more than the absence of negative outcomes and problematic adaptation—and the precursors of positive development are not necessarily the obverse of the antecedents of problematic development.

It appears from the special section on positive development in ethnic minority children published in *Child Development Perspectives* (Cabrera, Beeghly, & Eisenberg, 2012) and Cabrera et al.'s report on the themed meeting that as a strengths-based perspective has taken hold, attention to cultural processes in ethnic minority families has burgeoned (e.g., familismo, communalism, collectivistic orientation, ethnic and racial identity and socialization). Underlying the co-occurrence of these trends is the idea that these families rely on cultural values and beliefs to promote healthy development in their children and to buffer the negative effects of various

stressors on child functioning. The ideological skirmishes that erupted during the 1960s and 1970s over notions such as "culture of poverty," "cultural disadvantage," and "cultural deficit" brought disrepute to the general concept of culture because of its link to a victim-blaming perspective (McLoyd, 2004), fomenting apprehension among scholars about its value in efforts to understand low-income and ethnic minority children's socialization and development (Sullivan, 1989). It is heartening that scholars studying positive development in ethnic minority children have reclaimed the concept of culture and incorporated cultural processes as assets in their conceptual models and research designs. They have also played a central role in advancing the measurement of culture-related concepts, an important accomplishment given the longstanding and problematic tendency to use racial/ethnic group membership as a proxy of culture.

Cabrera et al.'s report suggests broad consensus about the importance of developing a rich knowledge base on the development and socialization experiences of middle-class ethnic minority children. Progress toward filling this glaring gap over the next decade is essential. The need to study strengths, assets, and

positive development in low-income and working-class ethnic minority children seems no less critical given their sizable representation in these populations, reduced chances to actualize their potential, and the disparaging attitudes they encounter in numerous contexts stemming from a mixture of ethnic bias and American's steadfast ideological commitment to individual (and in this case, parental) culpability as a primary explanation of poverty (Haller, Hollinger, & Raubal, 1990).

A research agenda that includes a focus on low-income and working-class children may also have the advantage of advancing our understanding of the role of culture in the positive development of ethnic minority children. It is conceivable that psychological and behavioral repertoires rooted in the culture of origin are more salient and consequential among low-income and working-class children than their middle-class counterparts because their economic circumstances to a significant degree segregate them from the everyday practices of mainstream society. Allen and Boykin (1992) reached this conclusion in their analysis of sources of heterogeneity in the expressions of African American culture. They found preliminary evidence from laboratory

experimental studies that learning conditions informed by the Afro-cultural dimension of African American culture (i.e., beliefs, values, and behavioral styles of contemporary African descendants throughout the diaspora rooted in traditional West African culture) enhanced the performance of low-income African American children but not middle-income African American children (Boykin & Allen, 1999).

Cabrera et al. point out that an implication of research that disentangles race and socioeconomic status (SES) includes the idea that many processes will be similar for different ethnic minority groups and that within-ethnic group differences may reflect SES differences. These observations call to mind that all individuals occupy multiple social categories simultaneously and prompt questions about the interaction of ethnicity/race and SES and other salient social categories such as gender. The research agenda on positive development in ethnic minority children could be enriched by purposeful attention to the intersection of multiple categories of social group membership as predictors of developmental trajectories, in keeping with the growing recognition that social categories depend on one another for meaning and that one category can modify the meaning and consequence of another category (Cole, 2009). Two examples illustrate this point. Compared to lower-class families, middle-class families generally enjoy more resources that promote positive child development, but sociological research makes clear that the Black middle class generally is not equal to the White middle class in ways that have implications for child development. In addition to having mark-

edly less wealth, the neighborhoods where Black middle-class families reside, compared to those where their White counterparts reside, tend to have worse schools, higher crime, fewer services, and greater social and lifestyle heterogeneity (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999).

Another example illustrates how gender interacts with race/ethnicity in predicting developmental discontinuity. When Kmec and Furstenberg (2002) examined a sample of urban youth in Philadelphia in adolescence and later during the transition to adulthood, they found that minority men were more likely to be "off track" in terms of employment than minority women and both White men and women. The African American and Puerto Rican men were doing worse than would be expected from their status in early adolescence. They had greater difficulty than the other race/gender groups sustaining their status from early to later adolescence and translating their early educational attainment into further schooling and positive labor market experiences.

Greater clarity about a range of definitional and conceptual issues will help advance the research agenda on positive development, addressing questions such as: What are the criteria or markers of successful development in ethnic minority children in different domains at each stage of development? Through what means are these criteria established? What criteria establish particular skills as group-level strengths or developmental assets? How can such characterizations be framed in ways that affirm heterogeneity within the ethnic group in question? In addition,

as Cabrera et al.'s report indicates, questions remain about how to best design studies that reveal and document the developmental effects of strengths in ethnic minority families. Scholars in human development can profit from the work of scholars in other subfields of psychology (e.g., community psychology, cross-cultural psychology) and in other disciplines attempting to "decolonize" key concepts and research methods used in the study of ethnocultural groups (e.g., Bernal, Cumba-Aviles, & Rodriguez-Quintana, 2013; David, Okazaki, & Giroux, 2013; Suarez-Balcazar, Balcazar, Garcia-Ramirez, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2013). Research collaborations with these scholars could prove even more profitable and significantly advance the multidisciplinary perspective for understanding human development that the Society for Research in Child Development espouses.

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About the Authors

Natasha Cabrera Dr. Cabrera joined the University of Maryland faculty in 2002 and arrived with several years of experience as an SRCD Executive Branch Fellow with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Her current research topics include: father-child and mother-child relationships, predictors of adaptive and maladaptive parenting, children's social and emotional development in different types of families and cultural/ethnic groups, and the mechanisms that link early experience and parenting to children's later cognitive and social development. She has published in peer-reviewed journals on policy, methodology, theory, and the implications of minority fathers' and mothers' parenting on children's cognitive and social development. She is the co-editor of the *Handbook of Father Involvement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2012), and two co-edited volumes entitled *Latina/o Child Psychology and Mental Health* (2011). She won the National Council and Family Relations award for best research article regarding men in families in 2009.

Cynthia García Coll was the Charles Pitts Robinson and John Palmer Barstow Professor of Education, Psychology and Pediatrics at Brown University until 2011. Then, she moved back to Puerto Rico and became the Dean of Graduate Programs and Research at the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras campus until she recently joined Carlos Albizu University as Professor and Director of the Center for Scientific Research. She received a Bachelor's degree from the University of Puerto Rico in 1974. She received her Ph.D. in Personality and Developmental Psychology from Harvard University in 1981. She has published extensively on the sociocultural influences on child development with particular emphasis on at-risk and minority populations. She has served on editorial boards of multiple journals and has co-edited several books. Her current research seeks to document and explain immigrant pathways in education and risky behaviors as evidenced by U.S. children and adolescents. She is the Incoming Chief Editor of the *Child Development* journal.

Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, Ph.D. is a Senior Social Science Research Analyst and Child Care Research Team Leader in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. She received her graduate degree in Developmental Psychology and Linguistics from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where she focused her research on the influences of language on young children's cognitive development. Her work at OPRE involves developing the child care research agenda, managing research projects, and representing the OPRE and child care policy research perspective in diverse federal interagency research work groups. Dr. Martinez-Beck is the Federal Project Officer for the National Survey of Early Care and Education and has lead research efforts in OPRE on topics related to quality of early childhood programs, professional development of the early childhood workforce, and evaluation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems. Dr. Martinez-Beck is co-editor of three volumes: *Critical Issues in Early Childhood Professional Development* (2006), *Quality Measurement in Early Childhood Settings* (2011), and *Applying Implementation Science to Early Care and Education Programs and Systems* (2013).

Vonnie C. McLoyd is the Ewart A. C. Thomas Collegiate Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor. She has written extensively about methodological and conceptual issues in the study of African American children and families and has a longstanding interest in how race, ethnicity, and culture shape child socialization and development. Her research has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the William T. Grant Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. McLoyd's work has been published in *Child Development, Developmental Psychology, Journal of Marriage and Family, American Psychologist, Journal of Adolescent Research, Developmental Review,* and the *Journal of Social Issues*. Currently, she is an Associate editor of *American Psychologist*.

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