Research on Positive Youth Development in Boys of Color: Implications for Intervention and Policy

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Abstract

Boys of color (BOC) face unique challenges related to the intersection of being male and an ethnic minority in our society. There is an urgent need for a more balanced view of psychosocial functioning in BOC that highlights positive developmental trajectories. In response to this need, the current chapter provides an overview of the research on positive youth development (PYD) in BOC with a focus on implications for programs and policies. The chapter presents an historical overview and the theoretical perspectives on PYD, including the need for examining PYD in BOC and the current conceptualizations of PYD. Next, the empirical findings of studies that explicitly examine PYD in BOC are reviewed, with a discussion of the implications for programs and interventions, and research questions that are raised by findings in these studies. In conclusion, policy implications and future directions for research and intervention efforts in this area are discussed.

"Over the years, we've identified key moments in the life of a boy or a young man of color that will, more often than not, determine whether he succeeds, or falls through the cracks. We know the data. We know the statistics. And if we can focus on those key moments, those life-changing points in their lives, you can have a big impact; you can boost the odds for more of our kids."—President Barack Obama, *My Brother's Keeper Initiative*, February 24, 2014.

In February of 2014, President Barack Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper Initiative to provide opportunities for boys and young men of color to reach their full potential, noting that coordinated philanthropic efforts and enhancement of effective community solutions should target critical intervention points in the lives of boys and young men of color. Now, more than

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ever, adolescence can be regarded as a critical intervention point in development due to the increasing shifts in roles, responsibilities, expectations, and instability in the lives of today's adolescents (Tolan 2014). Boys of color face these challenges, as well as challenges unique to the intersection of being male and an ethnic minority in our society. Given that this intersection brings with it lower expectations and negative stereotypes, there is a need for a more balanced view of development of boys of color that can be informed by a positive youth development approach (Barbarin 2013). In response to this need, the current chapter provides an overview of positive youth development (PYD) in boys of color with a focus on implications for programs and policies. Since the launch of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, over $300 million has been committed by corporations, foundations, and social enterprises to support programs and efforts that promote positive youth development in boys of color. As such, there is a need to ensure that there is a strong theoretical and empirical basis for these efforts (Catalano et al. 2004). In this chapter, boys of color (BOC) are defined as boys from African American, Latino, and American Indian ethnicities (Barbarin 2015). First, we provide an historical overview and the theoretical perspectives on PYD, including the need for examining PYD in BOC and a brief discussion of the current conceptualizations of PYD. Next, we review the empirical findings of studies that explicitly examine PYD in BOC, provide implications for programs and interventions, and discuss research questions that are raised by findings in these studies. Finally, we discuss policy implications and future directions for research and interventions in this area.

Historical Overview and Theoretical Perspectives

Historical perspectives on adolescent development characterized adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" (e.g., Hall 1904), in which adolescents experience significant difficulties characterized by conflictual parent–child relationships, mood disruptions, and risky behaviors (Arnett 1999). Misconceptions regarding adolescence are deeply embedded in our societal belief system, and these strongly-held beliefs have guided research inquiries and developmental theories for many years (Damon 2004; Offer and Schonert-Reichl 1992). A qualitative review synthesizing the content of over 2000 adolescent research articles over a ten-year period found that the majority of articles focused on adolescent turmoil, instability, and abnormality, leading the authors to characterize research on adolescent development as possessing an "obsession with the dark side of adolescence" (Ayman-Nolley and Taira 2000). The bias in basic research spills over into applied work, with pathogenic mental health models emphasizing psychopathology, disability, and distress (e.g., Antaramian et al. 2010), zero tolerance discipline policies criminalizing behavior in schools (e.g., Fenning and Rose 2007), and punitive models of juvenile justice emphasizing punishment over rehabilitation (e.g., Steinberg 2009).

In addition to the general preconceptions in adolescent research, a closer examination of how research with youth of color is approached reveals this bias is particularly characteristic of the literature about this population. Content analysis of single-ethnic group studies of adolescents showed that the most frequently examined topic for African American and Latino youth was "risk-taking behavior," compared to the topic "family" for White youth (Ayman-Nolley and Taira 2000). The stark contrast in research topic prevalence reflects an unfortunate pattern in research and theoretical perspectives of psychosocial development; to frame the development of youth of color, and particularly boys of color, in deficit-based models (García Coll et al. 1996; McLoyd and Randolph 1985; Tucker and Herman 2002). Deficit-based models emphasize the problems of youth of color as most informative, rather than

focusing on normative development and cultural strengths. These models explain differences between ethnic groups as deficits, maladaption, or pathology among youth of color (García Coll et al. 2000; Gaylord-Harden et al. 2012; McLoyd 1990). This proclivity among researchers often couches these differences as due to an increased likelihood for maladaptive functioning as a result of exposure to more serious and frequent stressors. Consequently, the implication is that youth of color are at once pathologized (characterizing behavior as abnormal based on the assumption that youth of color differences from other youth are signs of stress-induced pathology) and also "idealized" (characterizing those boys of color who do not show these behavioral patterns as "exceptional" or "rare"). Capability and contextual variations in demands and resources are absent or at least overlooked in such models.

The intersection between misconceptions about adolescent development and the framing of development of boys of color in deficit models leads to these boys being overdiagnosed with "socially disruptive" psychiatric disorders, such as conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder (Mizock and Harkins 2011; Schwartz and Feisthamel 2009), being suspended and expelled from schools at disproportionately higher rates than other youth (Fenning and Rose 2007; Reynolds et al. 2008), and being overrepresented in the juvenile justice system where punitive policies and practices increase the rates of recidivism (Steinberg 2009). These same orientation features lead to a common belief that boys of color are a particularly problematic and pathology vulnerable population, spawning either villianizing them or rendering them tragic figures. Among the many harmful examples is the myth of BOC as super predators: a hardened, lawless violence prone group threatening to society (Jennings 2014). For example, recent research demonstrates that Black boys are perceived as older and less innocent by police officers (Goff et al. 2014) and Latino males are seen as threats to national security and American

values (Chavez 2013; Fujioka 2011). Certainly, recent events in the United States involving the shootings of unarmed adolescent males of color highlight the firmly-held societal beliefs that BOC are problematic and threatening and their deficits and limitations are what is of most interest.

To counter misconceptions regarding development in youth of color, scholars have begun to argue that the paucity of focus on positive functioning is biasing or allowing biases to prevail (Cabrera 2013). Moreover, descriptive studies are showing that for youth of color, as for other children, capabilities and assets may explain functioning at least as well as risk factors (Tolan et al. 2013). Moreover, a range of factors that promote and maintain positive development are embedded in the families and communities that socialize these youth (e.g., Gaylord-Harden et al. 2012). A collective effort to highlight positive development in BOC is reflected in the recent work of the Boys of Color Collaborative (Barbarin 2013), developed to utilize existing longitudinal data sets to advance research on development in BOC. As noted in a 2013 special issue of the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* devoted to research on BOC, the purpose of the Collaborative is "to provide a more balanced view of the development of BOC by including a focus on strengths and resilience, not only to understand the problems that BOC face but also to place a spotlight on the fact that many are doing well in a way that helps us to figure out how to expand the numbers of these BOC who thrive (Barbarin 2013, p. 143)." As a consequence of this intention, research in the special issue emphasized the development of individual, family, and environmental characteristics, as well as trajectories that bring about positive development in BOC. It is important to highlight efforts such as the BOC collaborative, as they represent a critical shift in the narrative on development in a segment of youth who will soon be part of the majority of the U.S. youth population (Sesma and Roehlkepartain 2003). Thus, the intellectual

and cultural climate is ripe to merge this burgeoning body of empirical research with theories on how positive development occurs in youth.

Conceptualization of Positive Youth Development

The field of Positive Youth Development (PYD) developed in response to the negative, deficit view of adolescent development that dominated theory and research on youth for several decades (Lerner et al. 2009a; Tolan 2014). Prior to the development of a literature on PYD, positive development was regarded as the absence of or decreases in risk, problems or mental health symptoms. The PYD framework changes the perspective on youth development from one that focuses on deficits and risks to one that focuses on strengths and potentiality for healthy development. According to the PYD perspective, all youth have strengths, and consistent with relational developmental theory, PYD is facilitated when there is alignment between the strengths of youth and the resources for healthy development present in the environments (families, school, communities) of youth (Lerner et al. 2009a, b). Rather than conceptualizing development as a process that is focused on overcoming deficits and risks, PYD posits that when there is alignment between strengths and resources, youth are poised to make significant contributions to themselves, their family, their community, and the society at large (Damon 2004).

While there is agreement that PYD is heavily related to environmental resources, termed assets, there is disagreement regarding whether specific assets are important, how many assets are needed for adequate functioning, and whether assets can be clearly differentiated from indicators of functioning (Lerner et al. 2009b). Among the various theoretical models of PYD, two approaches to defining assets have emerged as leading PYD models. Benson and colleagues at the Search Institute developed a framework of 40 developmental assets that they characterize as contextual and individual "building blocks" that

enhance positive developmental outcomes in youth (Leffert et al. 1998). These assets are categorized into 20 internal assets or personal characteristics of young people and 20 external assets or health-promoting features of the environment (Leffert et al. 1998). The 20 internal assets are further categorized into 4 groups: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity. Similarly, the 20 external assets are further categorized into 4 groups: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time.

The Five C's Model of PYD, developed by Lerner and colleagues, is regarded as the most empirically-support framework in the literature (Bowers et al. 2010). Developed from the experiences of practitioners and comprehensive reviews of adolescent development, the Five C's include the following assets for PYD: competence (intellectual ability and social/behavioral skills), confidence (positive self-regard, and sense of self-efficacy), connection (positive bond with people and institutions), character (integrity and moral centeredness), and caring (human value and empathy) (Lerner et al. 2009a; Phelps et al. 2009). Recently, scholars have added an additional "C" of contribution (Lerner et al. 2009a). The Six C's have been linked to the positive outcomes of youth development programs, and can be widely applied because they are terms used by practitioners, adolescents, and parents.

Finally, there are other models that emphasize the role of engagement and agency as important indicators of positive youth development (Larson 2000). In particular, Larson discusses youth's engagement in development that results from their internal motivation (agency) being activated and sustained by challenges (Larson 2006). In this regard, youth become producers of their own growth and the role of adults is to support youth's experience of ownership and agency (Larson 2006). A key emphasis of this model is initiative—the ability for an adolescent to be motivated from within to direct attention and effort toward a challenging goal (Larson 2000). Researchers have discussed PYD programs and mentoring relationships as key contexts that

facilitate the development of youth initiative (Larson 2000).

In addition to youth initiative, research suggests that the development of the assets presented in all of the PYD models above occurs in the context of youth development programs (Lerner et al. 2005; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003a). In fact, in a sample of 6000 adolescents across multiple ethnic groups, researchers examined the impact of 40 developmental assets on seven thriving outcomes (Scales et al. 2000). Of the 40 assets, time spent in youth programs showed the most pervasive positive effect on thriving indicators, predicting five out of seven thriving indicators and the composite index of thriving (Scales et al. 2000). As such, there is a need to synthesize research findings on PYD in BOC to ensure that evidenced-based goals can be established for PYD programs, and that the effectiveness of PYD programs or policies can be evaluated (Lerner et al. 2005).

Empirical Findings of PYD Studies with BOC

While the empirical research devoted to positive youth development in BOC is sparse, the potential for understanding how PYD manifests in BOC has been attracting increasing amounts of attention recently as researchers begin to take advantage of longitudinal data sets and advanced statistical analyses that highlight growth and change over time. To help facilitate the progressive development of the literature on PYD in BOC, a review of existing empirical studies in the area is presented below with three specific objectives. The first objective was to provide a brief summary of the current state of the research on PYD in BOC, as well as highlight methodological features of existing studies. The second objective was to discuss the implications of the existing research for intervention and programming efforts with BOC. The third objective was to identify unanswered questions that may assist in further advancing the application of PYD frameworks to BOC. Given the lack of empirical research examining the effectiveness of PYD

programs and interventions specifically for BOC, we focused our review on basic research studies that included the following: (1) an explicit focus on assessing positive youth development using existing PYD frameworks, and (2) a focus on boys of color, as defined by Barbarin (2015) or on youth of color with gender-specific findings reported.

Some of the earliest work on positive development in BOC is demonstrated in the Overcoming the Odds (OTO) study, a longitudinal study that examined characteristics of positive functioning and individual and ecological developmental assets among African American male youth either involved in gangs or in community-based organizations (CBO's) designed to promote positive development in youth (e.g., 4-H club, churches, and Boys and Girls Clubs). By employing the Search Institute framework of developmental assets (Benson 1997; Benson et al. 1998), the OTO study collected qualitative data from interviews with African American male adolescent gang-involved youth and CBO youth (Taylor et al. 2002a, b; 2004). Results showed CBO youth scored higher than the gang-involved youth on the presence of individual and ecological assets for positive youth development such as boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, support, social competencies, empowerment, commitment to learning, and positive values; however, the contrast in assets between gang and CBO youth were not absolute (Taylor et al. 2002a, 2004). All gang-involved youth possessed at least one asset across the seven asset categories' studied in OTO and 15.6 % had total mean asset scores at the first wave of testing that were more positive than the average total asset score among CBO youth (Taylor et al. 2002a). Further, for gang-involved youth, the individual assets of commitment to learning, positive values, and social competencies, and the ecological assets of support and boundaries and expectations were associated with an increase in positive functioning over time. Thus, findings suggest that there are subsets of gang-involved youth that, despite high levels of environmental risk, possess individual and ecological assets that are associated with positive

functioning (Taylor et al. 2002a). Further, when gang-involved youth maintain high levels of assets over time or show increases in the levels of assets over time, they show more positive youth development over time (Taylor et al. 2002b).

A more recent prospective study sought to understand PYD's role in mitigating HIV-related risk behaviors among rural African American male youth (Murry et al. 2014). Using 5 waves of data from middle childhood to young adulthood, the researchers tested a conceptual model in which positive parenting practices (e.g., involved-vigilant parenting; supportive relationships; parent–child communication regarding risky behaviors; racial socialization) led to PYD via future orientation and self-regulation skills. These skills represent the Competence and Confidence factors, respectively, in the Six Cs model of PYD (Lerner et al. 2009a; Phelps et al. 2009). These PYD factors were predicted to increase prosocial peer affiliation, and such affiliation was then predicted to increase the utilization of conventional norms and values in interpersonal relationships. Finally, these social norms were expected to mitigate HIV-related risk behaviors (e.g., unprotected sex; drug use). The results demonstrated that parenting strategies (vigilant parenting and racial socialization) during middle childhood predicted youth future orientation, which in turn, predicted self-regulation during early adolescence, which increased affiliation with prosocial peers during the transition from early to late adolescence. Affiliation with prosocial peers led directly to positive developmental outcomes of risk avoidance prosocial norms and values as these African American males transitioned to young adulthood. Profile analyses revealed that, in comparison to high-risk males, low-risk males were more likely to have positive experiences with parental socialization, to have like-minded peers and in turn, espouse more prosocial norms and values.

Another prospective study sought to examine a developmental-ecological framework of both positive development and risky development in a sample of 315 African American and Latino male adolescents from high-risk urban communities (Tolan et al. 2013). In particular, the study examined how stress measured during early adolescence impacted two indicators of positive functioning (prosocial values and engagement to school) and two indicators of problems in functioning (depressive symptoms and external behavior) later in adolescence, as well as how family functioning, engagement in potentially protective prosocial activities, and individual coping skill might mitigate those outcomes. The results revealed that stress was a significant predictor of depressive symptoms and problem behaviors, but did not directly predict indicators of positive functioning. Instead, stress interacted with coping to predict engagement in prosocial values with a positive association between coping effectiveness and later endorsement of prosocial values when stress levels were low. Likewise, there was an interaction between stress and family functioning in the prediction of school engagement, with a positive association between family functioning and later school engagement when stress levels were low. Stress also interacted with coping effectiveness in the prediction of problem behaviors, such that there was an inverse association between coping effectiveness and later problem behaviors when stress was low. In sum, the pattern of results in this study demonstrate that positive and negative outcomes are not in direct opposition, underscoring the importance of examining both positive functioning and problem functioning in BOC to obtain a more holistic understanding of development in this population (Tolan et al. 2013).

A cross-sectional study examined the relationships between lifetime community violence exposure, family functioning, and PYD in a sample of 110 predominantly African American (>96 %) adolescents from urban communities (McDonald et al. 2011). Approximately 46 % of the sample was male. The researchers expected family functioning to act as a buffer or protective factor for the effects of community violence exposure on PYD outcomes, as assessed by the Six Cs model of PYD (Lerner et al. 2009a). In this study, youth were allowed to define family as "whoever they considered to be family" to account for the role of fictive kin and extended

family relationships in African American families (McDonald et al. 2011). Although healthier family functioning was consistently predictive of PYD, there were some gender-specific findings for males that are worth noting. Specifically, PYD was significantly lower for boys reporting unhealthy family functioning in comparison to girls reporting unhealthy family functioning. Further, unlike girls, for boys in the study, the global dimensions of family functioning assessed were more important for PYD than the specific presence of a parental figure.

In sum, the results of these studies provide strong support for the applicability of the PYD model to boys of color and provide direct implications for PYD interventions and programs. First, the findings of these studies demonstrate that positive growth can occur over time in boys of color, and that this growth can be predicted by a number of individual and ecological assets. The range of assets linked to positive developmental outcomes across these studies bodes well for intervention efforts. A qualitative review of PYD programs revealed that effective programs targeted a minimum of five assets, with an average of eight assets across programs demonstrating positive effects on outcomes (Catalano et al. 2004). Thus, the findings across the studies reviewed above suggest that the number of potential intervention targets for BOC is sufficient for PYD programs to produce positive effects. In addition, the significant interaction effects and path models demonstrating relationships between various indicators of PYD in the studies above highlight the dynamic and interactive nature of individual and ecological assets in the lives of BOC. The range of assets coupled with the interactive associations between assets may boost the promotive effects of PYD interventions for BOC by increasing the range of outcomes that are impacted (Taylor et al. 2003). Third, the findings highlight the importance of parental socialization strategies and family relationships as predictors of PYD for BOC, with some findings showing that assets in the family are more important for BOC than for girls. The importance of family is particularly encouraging for intervention efforts with BOC,

as family relationships and processes are a flexible and malleable intervention target during adolescence (Granic et al. 2003). Thus, intervention efforts with BOC should focus both on building individual assets of youth and building support systems and interventions for the family unit (McDonald et al. 2011). Finally, the gender differences identified in these studies suggest that BOC may benefit from gender-tailored intervention programs (McDonald et al. 2011; Murry et al. 2014).

Research Methodology in PYD Research with BOC

The larger body of empirical literature on PYD encompasses a variety of research methodology, but interestingly, the emerging empirical PYD literature on BOC is predominantly longitudinal. Of the studies on BOC reviewed above, only one study utilized a cross-sectional research design (i.e., McDonald et al. 2011). Although cross-sectional research is informative, the inability to infer causality between constructs limits the utility of this work to inform prevention and intervention efforts. Longitudinal, prospective investigations of PYD using advanced statistical methods (e.g., growth modeling) help to identify specific developmental periods of growth and change, critical levels of individual and ecological risk and assets, and, consequently, determine when, where, and how to intervene with BOC. The existing longitudinal studies reviewed here (i.e., Murry et al. 2014; Taylor et al. 2004; Tolan et al. 2013) include variables at multiple levels of influence, such as youth, parenting, family and community factors, and there is a need for continued longitudinal research in this area that examines the dynamic transactions among these multiple levels of influences (Cabrera 2013; Lerner et al. 2011). Such ecological-transactional investigations of BOC can provide information regarding how assets in various contexts in the lives of BOC transact with each other over time to shape PYD outcomes. Further, when examining the transactional nature of ecological and individual assets,

there is a need to include biological processes, as well as cultural processes (Cabrera 2013). The roles of culture and biology are often approached as separate lines of inquiry in developmental research, but recent work is beginning to show the dynamic interplay between biological processes and cultural experiences in youth, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of youth development (Causadias 2013).

In addition, the existing research on PYD in BOC employs either survey methodology or structured interviews. Other methodologies may provide a deeper understanding of responses to survey items or interview questions, such as the use of mixed-methods designs that integrate qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches (Johnson et al. 2007). In PYD research, variables representing individual and ecological assets are most frequently assessed via youth self-report surveys (Leffert et al. 1998, Lerner et al. 2005). However, some researchers have called for less reliance on quantitative data as the sole source of information on youth of color (Cabrera 2013). For BOC, integrating survey approaches with in-depth interviews can provide a richer understanding of youths' perceptions of the availability of assets as a function of context, the sequential nature of assets and PYD outcomes, and transactional relationship between assets at various levels in youths' ecologies.

Current Research Questions

The results of the studies on BOC reviewed above also lead to questions regarding how PYD should be conceptualized in specific intervention efforts with BOC. In examining the utility of a PYD framework to BOC, each study included a focus on understanding how assets linked to PYD may operate under conditions of high levels of ecological stress, such as gang-involvement, community violence, and HIV risk. These studies provide critical insight into PYD in the lives of young men in settings marked by limited resources and developmentally-appropriate opportunities; however, such research may blur the line

between PYD and the concept of resilience, leading to questions regarding whether programs should be based on promotion effects models or preventive science and, relatedly, how to maximize the inclusion of context in PYD programs for BOC. Given this, there are a number of research questions that should be explored regarding the overlap between resilience and PYD, as well as the balance between promotive and preventive intervention models.

Are Resilience and PYD Conceptually Distinct or Overlapping Constructs for BOC?

While theorists make clear distinctions between PYD and resilience, the majority of research on PYD with boys of color is conducted from a resilience perspective, leading to questions of whether the conceptualization of PYD should be different for BOC or whether research on PYD in BOC should be more mindful of the distinctions between the two constructs. Often, in the developmental systems literature, the terms PYD and resilience are used interchangeably to refer to adaptive traits or assets observed in youth. As discussed below, these terms both place emphasis on a strengths-based approach to understanding youth development, but it is important, in the effort to develop a theoretically grounded and empirically supported operational definition of PYD, to carefully examine ways in which resilience both reflects this concept and diverges from it. In turn, a more clear understanding of the relationship between resilience and PYD can provide more direction with regard to interpreting these respective literatures.

Resilience has been defined broadly as the process of positive adaptation from or in the face of experiences of adversity (Ungar 2010). That is, the necessary components that come together to bring about resilience include experience of a significant adverse event or set of events or circumstances, the presence of assets or resources that blunt the impact of the adverse event, and therefore a positive adaptation to the stressor (Windle 2011). While similar to PYD concepts

such as positive development indicators, specifically PYD factors are generally conceived as promotive main effects on development, not simply acting as protective in the face of threat or adversity. The blurring of lines between PYD and resilience appears to result from the similarity in interest of protective and directly promotive influences on functioning as well as frequent reference to developmental influences as assets that also serve as protective factors (e.g., positive parenting). These terms and their corresponding developmental influences have both been defined across the ecological context of youth, encompassing the individual, family, and community settings (Damon 2004). However, while researchers often use the terms protective factor and developmental assets interchangeably, they are conceptually-distinct concepts in that protective factors operate only in the presence of risk or adversity, whereas developmental assets operate without the influence of risk (Kia-Keating et al. 2011). Distinct from protective factors and more akin to conceptualization of PYD characteristics are promotive or main effect positive development promoting influences.

In resilience research, positive adaptation to stress may be conceptualized as maintaining or regaining mental health (or other indicators of adjustment) following adversity, but is often operationalized as the absence of deleterious outcomes that would be expected to result from exposure to adversity (e.g., mental health symptoms, problem behaviors, etc.) (Luthar et al. 2000). On the other hand, PYD is not typically discussed in the context of adverse events and risk, but is rather considered to be a general index of developmental success for all youth (Guerra and Bradshaw 2008). In fact, the relationship between PYD and problem behaviors or negative outcomes is not a linear inverse relationship, as very few youth show the assumed pattern of linear increases in PYD coupled with linear decreases in problem behaviors (Lerner et al. 2009b). According to PYD theorists, preventing problems or symptoms from occurring is not equivalent to promoting positive youth development and does not guarantee that youth are provided with the assets that are necessary for

positive development or that they will be capable of making positive contributions to family, community, and society (Lerner and Benson 2003; Lerner et al. 2000).

The ongoing theoretical and empirical exploration of PYD among boys of color is particularly warranted as it relates to the resilience and PYD literatures. African American, Latino, and Native American male youth are often described as facing disproportionate levels of adversity, and this emphasis reflects many disparities that ethnic minority youth face compared to White counterparts, such as poverty, community violence (Bellair and McNulty 2005; Sun and Li 2007), and racial stereotyping (Swanson et al. 2003). The majority of research, even PYD research, focuses on how these youth become successful "despite the odds" (Lerner and Steinberg 2004), which has positive implications for youth who present with a number of risk factors. However, the sparser emphasis on variables that might promote positive development and thriving, for boys of color *across* the continuum of adversity is concerning. Models of resilience incorporate a "deficit perspective", as represented by the expectation of susceptibility to stress and adversity. Further, resilience research and the perspective of "overcoming the odds" categorizes the trajectory of the young men who show resilient outcomes as "atypical" (Luthar et al. 2000; Roosa 2000), in stark contrast to PYD models that promote positive outcomes as normative for all youth (Lerner et al. 2009a, b). Given that youth of color are subject to negative bias and the "criminal justice" mentality described above, both intentionally and unintentionally, PYD researchers must be mindful not to paint the positive development of youth of color as always occurring within the context of adversity. This is not to suggest that researchers ignore the disproportionate levels of adversity experienced by BOC, but rather, to caution against the proclivity of research to view all BOC as high-risk.

As follows, the majority of developmental research on boys of color focuses on boys in "high-risk contexts," such as low-income, high-crime urban communities or low-income,

rural communities that are predominantly or almost exclusively composed of populations of color. There is a need for PYD research on boys of color in communities that may be considered low-risk settings, such as middle and upper-middle class communities with low levels of crime, as well as under researched settings for BOC, such as suburban communities and communities with diverse racial and ethnic groups. When percentages are presented on BOC, research often highlights the small percentage of youth who are on challenging trajectories (dropping out of high school, teen parents, crime victims); however, PYD research is warranted on the larger percentage of BOC who are not on these trajectories (Cabrera 2013; Rozie-Battle 2002). Such research is needed to dispel the belief that being a male of color is synonymous with being disadvantaged and to highlight the variability within males of color as a group (Cabrera 2013). For example, educational aspirations in middle-class African American youth are strongly related to academic performance (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2004). However, a study with African American male adolescents from various SES backgrounds showed that SES significantly impacted educational aspirations, such that males from middle-class, suburban neighborhoods had significantly higher aspirations than males from low-income rural and urban communities (Strayhorn 2009), underscoring within-group variation. Also, recent research findings show that even in "high-risk contexts," the majority of boys of color are not categorized as "high-risk" (Copeland-Linder et al. 2010; Gaylord-Harden et al. 2015; Murry et al. 2013), challenging the existing notions of normative and atypical developmental trajectories for BOC (Gaylord-Harden et al. 2012) and underscoring the need for more emphasis on redefining positive development for all BOC (Barbarin 2013).

How Should Context Be Included in PYD Programs for BOC?

In light of the above discussion regarding resilience and PYD, questions remain as to how context should be incorporated into PYD intervention efforts with BOC without limiting the availability of these programs to a small subset of BOC, namely BOC in high-risk contexts. The development of BOC occurs in an ecological context and successful PYD interventions with BOC must incorporate an understanding of the role of context on developmental trajectories (Livingston and Nahimana 2006), along with the consideration of "contextual variability" across BOC. As noted earlier, a key component of the PYD framework is that youth are embedded in family, school, and community contexts that possess important ecological assets (Lerner et al. 2013). However, in under-resourced or high-risk settings the availability of ecological assets may be limited, posing a challenge for interventionists attempting to apply comprehensive models of PYD to BOC in these settings. Given this, some researchers propose that an integrative model be applied to guide such work with BOC. For example, context can be used determine whether an integrative model incorporating aspects of both resilience and PYD should be applied with BOC (Murry et al. 2014). For BOC *in under-resourced contexts*, the resilience perspective can be used as a framework for examining trajectories of BOC to support them in the face of adversity in these settings, *in conjunction with* the PYD framework to identify the *internal* assets that may help BOC show resilient outcomes in contexts with low external assets (Murry et al. 2014). In contrast, the integration of resilience and PYD may not be necessary or advantageous for BOC in contexts with higher levels of external assets or resources.

Still others propose integrative models that can be applied to all BOC, regardless of levels of contextual risk. One such model incorporates two main pathways toward positive development: the protecting pathway, which is influenced by resilience research and includes concepts of risk and protection; and the promoting pathway, which is influenced by positive youth development research and includes the concept of assets (Kia-Keating et al. 2011). Both pathways lead to positive development, but the protecting pathway leads to healthy development when risk factors

are buffered by protective factors, whereas the promoting pathway leads to positive development directly from assets. In regards to the role of context, the protecting pathway and the promoting pathway are both influenced by individual, family, school, community, and cultural factors (Kia-Keating et al. 2011). While both pathways are active in this model, the relative influence of each pathway on a young man's positive development would depend on the level of risk that a young man's experiences in the contexts of family, school, and community. Similar to the findings of Tolan et al. (2013), this model may allow for the delineation of trajectories to both PYD and resilience for BOC in various contexts.

Can Intervention Efforts Integrate PYD and Prevention Science?

A discussion of context is critical for intervention efforts with BOC. A wealth of interventions exists for youth of color that are based on resilience models and target the prevention or reduction of emotional and behavioral problems that develop in risky contexts. However, advocates of the PYD approach assert that "problem-free" is not fully prepared (Pittman et al. 2011). In other words, while prevention is an important goal, in isolation, prevention is inadequate (Pittman et al. 2011). Similarly, research suggests that focusing solely on strengthening assets is insufficient, especially for youth exposed to very high levels of risk (Catalano et al. 2002).

How then should context be considered when PYD is applied to interventions and programs for BOC to ensure that programs are effective across various settings? One consideration is to include context through the integration of PYD promotion and prevention science approaches (Catalano et al. 2002; Guerra and Bradshaw 2008). Recent assertions are that if an exclusive focus on asset enhancement can mitigate the negative effects of risk factors, then youth development programs need not attend to contextual risk; however, if such an approach is ineffective, then intervention and policy work in this area should focus on both the reduction of risk factors to prevent youth problems and the enhancement of assets to promote positive development (Catalano et al. 2002). Consistent with the integrative theoretical models that can be applied to all BOC, regardless of levels of contextual risk (Kia-Keating et al. 2011; Murry et al. 2014), this approach calls for a balance between risk reduction and promotive approaches to prevention and intervention. For example, a quasi-experimental examination of an after-school PYD program targeting both prevention of substance use and promotion of well-being among 304 urban adolescents of color (75 % African American and 19.7 % Latino) demonstrated that PYD provides a useful platform for preventive intervention delivery (Tebes et al. 2007).

Although such work represents an important step in utilizing an integrative framework in applied PYD research, it is not yet clear from the literature whether interventions that combine the reduction of the effects of risk factors and the enhancement of assets are more effective than interventions that focus solely on the enhancement of assets (Catalano et al. 2002). While continued exploration of this issue will be fruitful for applied work with BOC, interventionists must consider how an integrative approach may prove more challenging than traditional approaches. For example, linking prevention efforts with positive youth development efforts requires that interventionists expand their definitions of "problems" and goals for programs (e.g., moving from gang prevention to civic involvement), which in turn may require a shift in their intervention strategies (Pittman et al. 2011). This shift will be particularly important for work with BOC given that their development is often framed in deficit-based models that emphasize problems rather than strengths (García Coll et al. 1996; McLoyd and Randolph 1985; Tucker and Herman 2002). Similarly, a shift in definitions and goals may require interventionists to think beyond the models and approaches with which they have expertise and also consider how youth behaviors may be defined by other approaches (Small and Memmo 2004). Finally, the comprehensive nature of integrative models may make it

difficult for communities or organizations to implement both PYD strategies and preventive strategies simultaneously at the start of a program. If this is the case, interventionists must attend to both the context (e.g., community support for programs) and focal issue to determine if prevention or promotion should occur first (Small and Memmo 2004).

Another approach to considering context in PYD programs and policy with BOC is the concept of community youth development (Hughes and Curnan 2000; Rozie-Battle 2002). Community youth development is based on both PYD models and risk and resilience models (Perkins et al. 2001). Community youth development is defined as "purposely creating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while concurrently providing an array of opportunities that enable youth to build their competencies, and become engaged as partners in their own development as well as the development of their communities" (Perkins et al. 2001, p. 47). Consistent with concerns that the concept of resilience may overemphasize the responsibility of the individual in overcoming the effects of contextual risk (Small and Memmo 2004; Tolan 1996) and the notions that healthy communities are more likely to contribute to positive youth development (Hughes and Curnan 2000), the community youth development approach to intervention and programming focuses on developing community-wide efforts to promote positive youth development for all youth, while simultaneously addressing risk factors that impact specific subsets of youth (Perkins et al. 2001). Key to this approach is creating partnerships between youth and adults that focus on engaging youth to be active shapers of their communities (Perkins et al. 2001). Kirshner and Ginwright (2012) provide numerous examples of successful community youth development in which networks of African and Latino adolescents mobilized and connected with adult allies and policy-makers to create community- and city-level changes to public education, juvenile justice policies, interracial relationships, and to secure public funding for youth opportunities. While many examples of the community youth development approach are from under-resourced, urban communities (Rozie-Battle 2002), the approach can be applied to other types of communities in which BOC reside.

Universal Versus Culture-Specific Mechanisms for BOC

A final issue involves whether PYD interventions and programs for BOC should focus solely on promoting universal assets or if they should incorporate culturally specific asset development. Because PYD represents a framework for understanding development rather than a specific set of characteristics that mark positive development (e.g. each of the concepts in the 6Cs and many of the assets in the 40 assets model are general terms), it is seen as applicable to youth across populations and circumstances (e.g., Leffert et al. 1998; Lerner et al. 2009b). Specific forms of assets or of how positive developmental processes are promoted can and are thought to vary by population and social circumstances.

The empirical studies reviewed earlier in this chapter suggest that assets from both the Six C's model and the Search Institute help to promote PYD in BOC. In other words, the set of studies can be fit to a 6 C's or 40 assets framework for interpreting results. Specifically, from the Search Institute's model, the individual assets of commitment to learning, positive values, and social competencies, and the ecological assets of support and boundaries and expectations were important for gang-involved BOC (Taylor et al. 2002a, b). From the Six C's model, indicators for competence and confidence predicted positive developmental outcomes in BOC from rural communities (Murry et al. 2014) and indicators for connection predicted positive developmental outcomes for BOC from urban communities (McDonald et al. 2011).

It should be noted that research comparing assets across multiple racial/ethnic groups shows that, while some assets (e.g., support, social competencies) are important for youth from all

racial/ethnic backgrounds, there are also clear differences between racial/ethnic groups on the importance of other assets (Scales et al. 2000; Sesma and Roehlkepartain 2003). Specifically, for American Indian youth, constructive-use-of-time assets were important for school success and other adult relationships, creative activities, and caring for important for overall thriving. Among African American youth, self-esteem and reading for pleasure assets were important for overall thriving, and empowerment was important for positive health outcomes for Latino youth. While these findings were not specific to boys, they suggest that some universal assets could be better suited for the cultural experiences of certain subgroups of BOC than other assets.

Given that the enhancement of particular assets for specific subgroups of youth in particular communities is a better predictor of PYD than increasing the quantity of all assets (Lerner et al. 2009b), the identification of universal assets that may be specific to the positive development of BOC is needed. However, such specificity research must also attend to within group variability with regards to contextual factors and boys' levels of identification with their racial/ethnic group. These findings may also suggest that definitions of risk, protection, promotion, and assets may vary across boys from various racial/ethnic groups (Kia-Keating et al. 2011). Similar to McDonald et al.'s (2011) approach of allowing participants to define "family" for themselves when examining how connections with others predicts PYD in BOC, PYD research with BOC should incorporate community engagement strategies and community-based participatory research strategies to ensure that conceptualizations of risk, protection, promotion, and assets are consistent with the cultural framework of BOC and their communities.

In addition to targeting particular universal assets, it may also be beneficial to consider the role of cultural assets that are specific to BOC. For example, research highlights the role of familism values as a predictor of PYD outcomes in Mexican youth (Knight and Carlo 2012). Also, engaging American Indian youth in Native

cultural practices and reinforcing traditional Native worldviews is regarded as important for promoting the 6 C's of PYD (Kenyon and Hanson 2012). Another example is seen in the importance of racial socialization efforts of African American parents for PYD development in African American youth (Evans et al. 2012). In response to the exclusion of normative developmental processes and cultural strengths in youth of color from mainstream models of youth development (García Coll et al. 2000; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990), models have been created that emphasize the importance of culturally-specific factors on the development and functioning of youth of color from a strengths-based perspective (e.g., García Coll et al. 1996; Harrell 2000; Miller 1999). For example, García Coll et al. (1996) proposed a comprehensive, integrative model of normative development that includes developmental factors unique to children of color (e.g., racial socialization), as well as mainstream developmental factors relevant to all populations (e.g., temperament). Other models like the Phenomenological Variant of Bronfenbrenner's model to attend to Black youth development (PVEST; Spencer 1995) demonstrate efforts to emphasize minority youth competencies. These models offer examples of cultural assets that can be incorporated into PYD interventions with BOC.

Very little empirical research examines the role of cultural assets as promotive for PYD. One notable exception is a recent study with boys of color (60 % African American and 39 % Latino) examining the role of ethnic identity as a PYD asset based on research showing ethnic identity is more salient for these youth (Williams et al. 2014). Results showed that the best fitting model was a two-factor PYD-ethnic identity model. The PYD factor related to a range of youth outcomes, while the ethnic identity factor related to fewer internalizing behaviors. The results suggest that establishing ethnic identity is an important means for minimizing the likelihood of negative mental health symptoms and counteracting the negative effects of discrimination. Across time, the model fit the better when the boys were ages 14–15, suggesting that ethnic identity may

become more central to youth as they move through adolescence, and that ethnic identity is a psychosocial asset that is related to, but distinct from, general indicators of PYD. By highlighting the importance of culturally specific assets for BOC, this research provides empirical evidence to guide the development of interventions that are both contextually- and culturally-relevant for BOC.

Policy Implications

Positive youth development is not only an intervention approach, it has become a policy perspective that focuses on providing services and programs to support the healthy development of all youth. However, the historical emphasis on risk frameworks for youth development has resulted in policy initiatives that support separate problem-specific programs funded by independent agencies, rather than initiatives to support programs that consider the common risk, protective, and promotive factors of multiple youth behaviors (Guerra and Bradshaw 2008). As policy makers seek to incorporate a positive youth development approach for BOC, it will be important to ensure that funding is designated for research that seeks to identify common risk, protective, and promotive factors for targeted behaviors in BOC. Further, once these shared factors are identified, policy efforts should support the development of multidimensional and multi-institutional PYD interventions for BOC informed by this research.

It has been suggested that because program inputs for prevention, positive development, and engagement are largely the same, policy work related to PYD will benefit from a new set of questions that focus less on what BOC need and focus much more on (1) how to bring those conditions about and (2) how to ensure that BOC have access to opportunities (Pittman et al. 2011). The My Brother's Keeper Initiative may be an example of a policy initiative that focuses more on promoting solutions than outlining problems by identifying existing private and public intervention efforts that are effective and

supporting the expansion of those efforts, rather than supporting additional needs assessment. If successful, the goals of this initiative could serve as a model for policies than emphasize solutions to bring about conditions of change for BOC. Similarly, policy efforts must focus on understanding how BOC have access to these opportunities (Pittman et al. 2011). Research demonstrates that participation in youth development programs declines as youth enter adolescence, likely due to programs not meeting the needs or interests of adolescents, adolescents having more autonomy over their free time, and adults being more comfortable supervising younger children (Quinn 1999). The community youth development approach discussed above may be particularly helpful in ensuring that programs for BOC are developmentally appropriate, engaging, and contextually- and culturally-relevant by giving BOC a voice in the development of these programs. Other issues of access are more salient for subsets of BOC, such as those from low-income areas or rural areas. These issues include transportation issues, proximity to programs, participation fees, and whether youth will be made to feel welcome at the program (Quinn 1999). Thus, BOC will need, not just services, but also supports and opportunities to remain engaged with programs (Pittman et al. 2011). While programs can address these barriers to increase access to and engagement with programs for BOC, such outreach work is dependent upon policies to ensure that adequate funding is available from external sources (Quinn 1999).

While most policy makers would agree that early intervention is important, PYD research with BOC suggests that preventive intervention with BOC during adolescence is also critical for promoting their positive development as they transition to adulthood (Catalano et al. 2004; Rozie-Battle 2002). However, given the importance of early intervention to many policy makers, the call for longitudinal research may also lead to answers regarding how to promote healthy development in early childhood that can serve as a foundation for later development during adolescence and early adulthood. For example, Murry et al. (2014) included

developmental stages from middle childhood to young adulthood to provide empirical evidence regarding how early life experiences with parents and peers predict positive, healthy development in BOC later in life. While interventions and policies based on this work can focus on asset building in early childhood, the aims would be to target assets with lasting effects and ensure that supports are in place to sustain assets into adolescence.

Also for BOC, it is important for policy makers to provide opportunities not just to the BOC on the extremes of developmental outcomes (i.e., high-achieving, problem-free BOC and low-achieving BOC with behavioral and/or emotional problems), but all BOC, including those "in the middle" who are often ignored when such opportunities are created (Rozie-Battle 2002). Even the My Brother's Keeper initiative is based on a resilience framework and runs the risk of leading to the identification of effective programs for only a subset of BOC. Given that BOC are disproportionately exposed to risk factors that predict problem behaviors, policies for BOC must be aimed at both the prevention of risks and problems and the promotion of PYD (Catalano et al. 2004). Further, policy makers have more influence over contextual risks than individuals have, and an overemphasis on making individuals more resistant to risk can divert attention or responsibility away from policy-level efforts to reduce this risk (Small and Memmo 2004; Tolan 1996). The prevention of risk by policy makers must focus on the reduction of risk factors such as poverty, joblessness, crime, and poor quality schooling at the community-level, in addition to ensuring that BOC in these communities are equipped with individual resources that buffer the effects of these risk factors. Consistent with a community youth development approach to PYD, policy advocates must work with BOC to identify issues that are pertinent to the lives of BOC, to develop contextually- and culturally-sensitive solutions, and to communicate ideas for potential legislation to policy-makers (Perkins et al. 2001).

Future Directions

The experience of boys of color in our society involves a unique and diverse range of experiences that are influenced by a myriad of social, historical, and political factors, as well as complex intersections of community, family, and individual factors. In light of these experiences, positive youth development emerges as a progressive approach towards providing more balanced and holistic intervention efforts with BOC that encompass both promotion and protection. The existing basic research on PYD in BOC provides evidence of assets that can be targeted in intervention efforts. As such, future research on the developmental trajectory, antecedents, correlates, and consequences of positive youth development in BOC has the potential to narrow the critical research gap in knowledge on variability in the experiences of BOC to inform the development of effective programs and preventive interventions to promote positive and healthy development in these youth. While basic research is necessary to ensure that there is a strong theoretical and empirical basis for intervention and policy efforts (Catalano et al. 2004), there is a critical need for *applied* research on PYD programs for BOC. From the existing reviews of PYD programs (e.g., Catalano et al. 2004; National Research Council 2002; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003a, b), it appears that very few programs are developed for specific subgroups of youth by race/ethnicity, gender, etc. This is likely due to the belief that PYD theory is universally applicable to youth across populations and circumstances (Lerner et al. 2009a, b). These reviews of PYD programs suggest that the overwhelming majority of programs serve multiple ethnic groups (Catalano et al. 2004; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003b). While this fact is encouraging, it remains unclear if these universal programs are equally effective for the youth from different backgrounds, and in particular, if they are effective for BOC. Further, given the role of culturally specific assets in the promotion of PYD, additional applied research is warranted to identify effective PYD programs that are

developed specifically for BOC. While almost no examples exist in the existing PYD literature, it is likely that numerous small, grassroots, community-based programs exist for BOC, but due to funding concerns that render these programs unstable, there is a disconnect between research and small community-based programs. To fully understand the opportunities for BOC, research should be devoted to identifying and evaluating these programs. It should be noted that this level of understanding warrants deeper examination of within-group variability in the effectiveness of interventions for various subgroups of BOC, including a critical need for identifying effective programs for BOC across sociocultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, communities, and emotional/behavior problem histories. The promise of a positive youth development approach for boys of color is a one that advances the narrative of BOC beyond risk and pathology to one that sees possibilities and potential and works to advance opportunities for health and positive development.

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