We use Hamilton’s (1999) tripartite conception of the positive youth development (PYD) literature – that is, PYD as a theoretical construct, PYD as a frame for program design, and PYD as an instance of specific youth development programs – as a framework for reviewing scholarship involved in the PYD field across the second decade of the 21st century. Advances were made in all three domains and, as well, new issues emerged; chief among them was a focus on the promotion of social justice. We discuss ways in which social justice issues are being addressed within each of these domains and we present a vision for enhancing the PYD-social justice relation in future scholarship involving theory, research, program design, and community-based PYD programs.

INTRODUCTION

Toward the end of the 20th century, Stephen Hamilton (1999) observed that the prior 10 or so years had seen the study of positive youth development (PYD) evolving into three distinguishable but integrated areas: PYD as a theory of youth development, as a model of theory-predicated youth development programs or practices, and as an instance of such programs. About fifteen years later, several of the present group of authors contributed a review chapter on PYD to the 7th edition of the Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science (Lerner et al., 2015) that was framed by this tripartite conceptualization of PYD. At this writing, 5 years later, the present group of authors still find Hamilton’s (1999) tripartite conception of the PYD literature useful as a means to discuss the areas of basic and applied scholarship involved in the PYD field.

In all three domains, key advances have been made and, as well, new topics and issues have emerged. Key among the emerging issues has been a still-growing focus on the contributions that developmental science can make to the promotion of social justice (Fisher & Lerner, 2013), that is, on assuring that all individuals, no matter their specific characteristics or contextual circumstances (e.g., living in adverse conditions because of poverty, systemic racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and xenophobia), have equitable treatment and the fair allocation of the resources needed for healthy and positive development (Barbarin et al., 2020; Lerner, 2018a; Murry & Anderson, 2020). Smith and Lee (2020, p. 208) explain that the commitment within developmental science to the promotion of social justice involves affirming the validity of three points:

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First, social justice is the radical assumption that all people are worthy of the right to humanity. Second, social justice is the recognition and denunciation to a legacy of oppression in the United States. Finally, social justice is the courageous act of directly addressing oppression.

In the context of these defining features of social justice, Barbarin et al. (2020) explain that social justice involves recognition of the pervasive and complex impacts of adversity on marginalized youth, such as African American boys and men in their specific developmental model and, as well, using knowledge about the effects of this adversity to interrogate the context of youth in order to revise theories about the meaning of normal behavior in toxic environments (see too Spencer et al., 2015). Moreover, Barbarin et al. (2020) explain why the study of PYD and the promotion of social justice should be linked in developmental science. They note that:

PYD suggests that children growing up in harsh environments acquire psychosocial competence that enables them to avoid the adverse effects of racism, racial denigration, resource insufficiency, and inequality. Moreover, PYD underscores the notion that desired prosocial developmental outcomes such as an integrated moral system, altruism, and emotional attachment to others can occur in parallel with behaviors that may be judged as disruptive or antisocial. (p. 201)

Accordingly, whereas we use Hamilton’s tripartite conception of the field of PYD scholarship as a frame for the organization of this article, we also point to the ways that social justice is manifested within each of these areas, that is, in theory, in the conceptualization of programs and practices promoting PYD, and in instances of actual PYD-oriented programs. As we shall note again in this article, the links to social justice are, at this writing, of significant concern in regard to the goal of promoting positive development among all marginalized or oppressed youth. Events that occurred in the decade ending in 2020 underscored the importance of this goal.

That is, the decade ended in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, a disease that has disproportionately impacted individuals of color in the United States (Ettekal & Agans, 2020). In addition, youth and families in the United States witnessed punitive policy proclamations regarding immigration coupled with oppressive and racialized treatment of immigrant youth and families at the southern borders of the United States (Cardoso et al., 2020; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Moreover, communities of color experienced horrific instances of the historically persistent epidemic in the United States of systemic racism and White supremacy, marked by the murder by police of unarmed Black people (Murry & Anderson, 2020; Smith & Lee 2020).

Whether fortuitous or providential given this context, to a very substantial extent, changes in theory, research, and programs across the decade involved increasingly greater attention to different instances of diversity and converged on the idea that developmental science can be a means for the promotion of social justice (Murry & Anderson, 2020). Accordingly, as we discuss the evolution of PYD scholarship in regard to theory, program models, and existing programs, we will point to ways in which social justice issues are being addressed and, as well, ways in which addressing these issues may be enhanced. However, the emphasis on social justice is not just a response to events of the past decade. The evolution of the field of PYD has had, as its raison d’être, a concern with equitably promoting thriving among all young people. It is useful to provide an overview of this history.

THE LONG PAST AND THE SHORT HISTORY OF INTEREST IN PYD

Hermann Ebbinghaus (1908) famously observed that psychology had a long past but a short history. Psychological ideas had been discussed for millennia. However, the history of the field could be dated from 1879, when, in Leipzig, Germany, Wilhelm Wundt opened the first laboratory conducting psychological research.

The concept of positive youth development also has a long past and a short history. Discussions of the ways in which thriving (a term that may be used synonymously with PYD; Benson, 2008; Lerner, 2004, 2018a) among youth could be developed were discussed by Greek philosophers more than 2,000 years ago (Muuss, 1975). In more recent centuries, youth clubs to promote a healthy body, mind, and spirit were founded in 1844 by Sir George Williams and evolved into the YMCA/YWCA. In addition, the belief that boys roaming the streets of Hartford, Connecticut, should have a setting wherein positive character development
could occur resulted in the establishment of the first Boys Club in 1860, and this organization evolved into Boys & Girls Clubs of America in 1990. In addition, practitioners in the 1880s established the Settlement House movement (e.g., in New York City in 1886 and in Chicago in 1889) in order to create positive social contexts for socioeconomically poor youth.

However, the set of ideas summarized by the phrase “the positive youth development perspective” can be traced to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Rick Little was founding the International Youth Foundation (IYF) (Lerner et al., 2015). Using conversations with youth program practitioners from around the world and, as well, with a few developmental scientists (e.g., Urie Bronfenbrenner), Little formulated a strength-based conception of adolescence and labeled the emerging ideas as “positive youth development.” He operationalized this term with four “Cs,” that were repeatedly mentioned in his conversations: Competence, Confidence, Connection, and Character. Little founded the International Youth Foundation (IYF) in order to build programs around the world that mirrored a key idea he heard repeated by practitioners about how PYD could be developed: Align the strengths of young people with the resources found in community-based programs and thriving in youth will occur.

Little’s conception of PYD, as arising from nurturing, positive relations between the strengths of a young person and the resources in the context—for instance, prosocial peer relationships (e.g., Smith et al., 2016) and, perhaps particularly, warm, trusting, and nurturing relationships between a youth and a caring and competent adult (e.g., Rhodes, 2020)—was both a product and a producer of the historical moment. That is, his conception was formulated in a zeitgeist that included discussions of several other ideas pertinent to a strength-based approach to youth development. As reflected by their focus on youth strengths, practitioners were disenchanted with the deficit-focused model of adolescence that psychologists and psychiatrists had been using to characterize youth for most of the 20th century (e.g., at least since the publication of the first textbook about adolescence by G. Stanley Hall, 1904). At the same time, researchers in developmental science and developmental biology were discovering new information about: (1) the plasticity of brain development (e.g., Cantor et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2006); (2) the fact that epigenetics invalidated reductionist ideas about genetic determinism (Moore, 2015); and (3) the usefulness of dynamic, relational developmental systems models to understand the coactions involving person and ecology that were involved in human behavior and development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Cantor et al., 2019; Fischer & Bidell, 2006; Mascolo & Fischer, 2015; Osher et al., 2020; Overton, 2015).

This zeitgeist created a fortunate convergence between practice and research that coalesced to provide a theory-predicated evidence base for interest in ideas about the plasticity of human development (e.g., Bateson, 2015; Lerner, 1984; Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2015), about strength-based conceptions of adolescence (Bowers et al., 2015), and about seeing mutually influential links between individuals and contexts (represented as individual⇔context relations) as the fundamental process of human development (Lerner, 2018a; Mascolo & Bidell, 2020; Overton, 2015). Together, these converging ideas suggested that young people’s pathways through life are malleable. That is, no matter where young people start in life, no matter the adverse character of their experiences and context (Masten, 2014a; Masten et al., 2015), the development of every young person can be enhanced by aligning their strengths (including their biologically based plasticity; Cantor et al., 2019; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019) and the resources in their sociocultural contexts (e.g., Osher, Cantor, et al., 2020).

The Fifth and Sixth “C”s of PYD and Other Models of Youth Thriving

The first decades of the 21st century reflected the coalescing of these ideas into the creation of several different theoretical models of PYD. Whereas all models shared the idea that dynamic, individual⇔context relations were the basis of PYD, they differed in regard to the manifest variables emphasized in the process of thriving. For instance, the original four Cs conception of Rick Little evolved to include a fifth “C,” of Caring and, as well, a hypothesis was added in regard to the outcomes of the development of these Cs: When the now five Cs were well developed in a young person, a sixth “C” Contribution (to self, family, school, community, and ultimately civil society) would emerge (Lerner et al., 2015).

Several other PYD models emerged during the first two decades of the 21st century. For example, Benson (e.g., 2008; Benson et al., 2011) proposed that thriving involved an integration of individual and ecological developmental assets. Catalano,
Hawkins, and colleagues (e.g., Catalano et al., 2002) operationalized PYD through the use of scores on a set of 15 cognitive, socioemotional, and behavioral variables. Damon (2004, 2008) focused on the development of purpose as the key to understanding PYD. Eccles (2004) studied stage-environment fit within the context of expectancy-value theory. Hamilton and Hamilton (e.g., 2009) studied the transparency and permeability of roles during the adolescent to young adult transition. King (e.g., 2011) studied spirituality and religiosity as essential bases for the positive development of young people. Larson (e.g., Larson & Angus, 2011) focused on motivation and active engagement in organized youth development activities. Lerner, Lerner, and colleagues (e.g., Lerner et al., 2015) focused on the individual and contextual variables associated with development of the five Cs and Contribution. Masten (2014a, 2014b) was concerned with the dynamic, individual↔context relations associated with resilience. Spencer (e.g., 2006) studied coping and identity within the context of her Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVVEST).

In sum, the history of PYD theories involved the elaboration of different models that pertained, at least in principle, to the constructs involved in the youth↔context relations that instantiated thriving. In addition, because all of these models were based on concepts that emphasized the relative plasticity of human development, they converged on the idea that when individual and context were aligned in manners that promoted the constructs of interest in a specific model (e.g., purpose or resilience), the thriving of every young person could be enhanced. In this way, the set of PYD theories that existed were at least implicitly directed to promoting social justice (e.g., as discussed in Lerner & Overton, 2008) because all models emphasized that all young people could thrive when given equitable treatment and the fair allocation of the resources needed for healthy and positive development (Barbarin et al., 2020). However, although supporting the idea that social justice could be promoted, the specific ways in which it needed to be promoted to enhance the lives of specific youth needed articulation.

Understanding the Specificity of Individual ↔Context Relations in PYD

The different PYD models that evolved across the initial years of the 21st century presented an array of variables that may reflect thriving in youth (see, too, Eccles & Gootman, 2002). The research linked to these models depicted how variables providing the basis of PYD (e.g., variables such as intentional self-regulation; spirituality, hopeful future expectations, school engagement, executive functioning, or relationship skills) may enhance the development of PYD and, in turn, how PYD may be positively related to other indicators of positive behavior and development (e.g., community contribution, civic engagement) and negatively related to indicators of risk or problem behaviors (e.g., depression, substance abuse, bullying) (Lerner et al., 2015).

However, Spencer and Spencer (2014) explained that something quite essential was missing from most of these models and from the research derived from them: This work gave little explicit attention to the meaning or measurement of positive development among diverse youth and, particularly, to youth of color. Spencer and Spencer (correctly) pointed out that, as was the case with the Lerner and Lerner 4-H Study of PYD (Bowers et al., 2014; Lerner et al., 2015), insufficient attention, both conceptually and in regard to measurement, was given to the study of specific, differentiated developmental pathways of PYD among youth varying in regard to race, ethnicity, immigrant status, or culture. Simply, there was little attention paid to the voices of diverse youth (e.g., youth of color, youth living under adverse conditions associated with poverty, immigrant youth). What was PYD to these youth? What did thriving look like to youth who lived under the conditions of systemic racism, persistent and pervasive poverty, or the trauma of war and political injustice? Answers to these questions were largely absent from PYD theory and associated research.

The Specificity Principle proposed by Bornstein (2006, 2017, 2019) supported the Spencer and Spencer call for more diversity-sensitive theory and research. The Specificity Principle emphasizes that the study of development should focus on the specific relations between attributes of a specific individual and specific facets of that person’s context, as they coact at specific times in ontogeny and history, and within specific families, communities, and cultures. Therefore, both Spencer and Spencer (2014) and Bornstein (2017) called for greater theoretical attention to the specific attributes of development of specific groups and, even more so, to the specific individuals within them. These arguments created a foundation for measures of PYD to not only be sensitive to intraindividual change but, as well, to such changes within specific youth developing in specific settings.
This attention to the diversity of individuals and contexts meant that the essence of PYD could not be determined through research that focused on one sociodemographic group (e.g., White middle- and upper-class youth). As such, it was clear that there was a need to attend to the specific resources for and constraints on PYD among specific groups of youth; the emphasis on the diverse groups of youth who experienced marginalization and oppression was a foundation for a more socially just approach to PYD. In addition to psychometric concerns of validity and reliability, a focus on measurement invariance, across age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, community and cultural contexts, and history, was seen as necessary (e.g., Card, 2017) in order to ascertain if measures of PYD or related constructs (e.g., attributes of character or socioemotional learning, discussed later in this article) were valid and reliable for specific youth living in specific communities.

An Explicit Social Justice Lens for Models of PYD

The theoretical models of Spencer (2006; Spencer et al., 2015) and of Masten (2014a, 2014b; Masten et al., 2015) were especially suited to move in the direction of specificity, particularly in regard to marginalized youth such as youth of color and, relatedly, youth living in adverse circumstances (e.g., separation of immigrant children from their parents at the U.S. southern border, poverty, and systemic sociocultural conditions that create and reinforce racial injustice and inequities in health care; education; and safety; Franklin & Higginbotham, 2011; Goff & Kahn, 2012). Examples of such adverse situations abounded in the second decade of the 21st century, involving living in the midst of war, during a viral pandemic, or in communities beset by systemic racism, White supremacy, and brutalities toward and the murder of people of color.

These adverse contextual conditions were coupled with theory-predicated research that focused explicitly on PYD among, and the empowerment of, youth of color in the U.S. (e.g., Barbarin et al., 2020; Cabrera et al., 2013; Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Gaylord-Hardin et al., 2018; Murry, 2014, 2019; Smith, 2007; Smith et al., 2016; Travis & Leech, 2014). This scholarship occurred at the same time that other work focused on the diverse pathways of thriving among youth from national settings other than the United States (e.g., Banati, 2020; Koller et al., 2019; Lansford & Banati, 2018; Petersen et al., 2017; Tirrell, Gansert, et al., 2019; Tirrell, Geldhof, et al., 2019). Together, this scholarship coalesced to advance PYD models and research about the specific pathways of thriving among racially and ethnically diverse youth in both the majority and minority worlds.

For instance, Spencer’s (2006; Spencer, et al., 2015) PVEST model integrates social structural factors, cultural factors, and specific individual experiences, as well as an individual’s specific perceptions of these contextual constructs. Spencer emphasizes the ways in which youth make sense of their context, especially in the case of environments perceived as reflecting social inequities or injustices. Focusing particularly on youth of color and poor youth, her scholarship is a critique of researchers’ failure to adequately consider the specific human development experiences, the specific strengths (e.g., resilience, coping processes, racial identity, critical consciousness), or the specific meaning of PYD of youth of color in socially constructed and culturally specific contexts, such as underserved neighborhoods, impoverished communities, and families under stress. These contexts often characterize the lives of urban, and frequently, African American, children and require interrogation in regard to the ways in which these settings may limit or constrain youth thriving.

Consistent with the Specificity Principle, Spencer (2006) pointed to the individual character of the phenomenological experiences and perceptions of each youth and explained that what one adolescent experiences as stress may not affect a neighbor or sibling in the same way. Such youth-specific perceptions of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious, cultural, or economic inequality may shape the conditions affecting privilege and marginalization. Thus, to understand the impact of adverse experiences on youth requires attention to specific youth-context relations.

A focus on such specificity is a feature of the integrative model of stress in Black families proposed by Murry et al. (2018). This model highlights the reciprocal and recursive processes through which the sociohistorical context (e.g., vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow laws) creates systemic racism that, in turn, relegates families and youth to minoritized position pathways. The model captures the processes through which cultural strength-based coping assets, as protective processes, foster positive development among Black youth and complements Masten’s (2001)
conceptualization of ordinary magic: the capacity to respond to adversity in a promotive, positive, and adaptive manner.

Masten’s (2007, 2014a, 2014b; Masten et al., 2015) model of resilience also focuses on how youth experiencing adversity may show, at a minimum, good adaptation or positive developmental outcomes. Masten (2014b) discussed the relation between the concepts of PYD and resilience and defined the latter construct as “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successively to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development” (p. 1012). She explained that this definition was intended to be “scalable across systems and disciplines, from the level of microorganisms and systems operating within the human organism to the systems of family, school, community, culture, economy, society, or climate” (p. 1012). In addition, Masten (2014b) was prescient in noting that a key reason for using this broad, systems-based definition of resilience was the increasing international concern with integrating scientific fields in order to address problems that threaten networks of interdependent systems function, such as preparing for disasters or promoting resilience in specific cities or countries.

In regard to the link between the concept of resilience and the concept of thriving, Masten (2014b) explained that scholars studying PYD conceptualize both resilience and thriving as involving a dynamic, mutually influential relation between youth and their contexts. In addition, both resilience and thriving involve “positive aspects of development, function, resources, and strengths, both in the individual and in the context” (Masten, 2014b, p. 1013). However, Masten (2014b) described resilience as a subset of youth-context relations located at the high end of a continuum of risk or adversity. Masten (2014b) indicated that resilience is not in the adolescent or the context but in their specific relation to each other.

In addition, Masten (2014b) explained that studying either the concept of thriving or the concept of resilience requires understanding a specific young person’s positive adaptation to the specific features of their specific context. However, thriving involves a focus on optimal functioning, whereas resilience attends to adequate or “okay” functioning. Masten notes that this distinction is due in large part to the fact that the study of resilience has understandably involved a focus on youth and families facing enormous challenges, adversity, or trauma (e.g., see Masten, 2007, 2014a; Masten, et al., 2015).

A Social Justice Lens for Research Illuminating the Specificity of PYD

The focus on the specificity of PYD among youth of color and the relations between specific youth and specific settings as a basis for PYD, even in adverse circumstances, was a major focus of PYD research within the theoretical zeitgeist within which the models of Spencer and Masten were presented (e.g., Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Lerner, Wang, et al., 2017; Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017; Schoon, 2017). The scholarship of Murry and colleagues (e.g., Murry, Berkel et al., 2014; Murry et al., 2015, 2019) and Smith and colleagues (2007, 2017) exemplifies this work.

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

The research of Murry and colleagues indicates that, despite the marginalization of African American boys and young men, as well as the marked adversity produced by the combination of racism, economic disadvantage, oppression, segregation, and other trauma-inducing experiences, these youth are in large proportion able to overcome these challenges and show prosocial development. PYD among African American youth, and males in particular, occurs through their use of resources that promote and enhance capabilities and strengths and may involve developing adaptive calibration strategies to navigate contextual challenges (Barbarin et al., 2020; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). For example, the Adaptive Calibration Model proposed by Murry and colleagues specifies that chronic adversity influences the development of overlooked competencies that, when identified, may uncover protective processes that African American youth utilize to successfully adapt and respond to challenges associated with growing up in toxic environments. Coupled with the influence
of familial relationships and community assets, youth can exhibit resilience and prosocial development despite experiencing chronic adversity (see too Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Murry and colleagues emphasize that research documenting this process can advance a social justice agenda for developmental science (Barbarin et al., 2020; Murry, 2019; Murry et al., 2016; Murry et al., 2018) by deliberately examining ways in which youth align resources with capabilities and needs within a given context and at a specific phase of development (Lerner et al., 2015).

Smith et al. (2003, 2016, 2013, 2017, 2019) agree and present a social justice view of PYD that acknowledges the agency of young people who are inspired by supportive adults who do not subjugate youth endeavors but, instead, advise and guide them to intervene directly in their own circumstances. This perspective is evidenced in the research of Smith and colleagues that also focuses on youth of color and studies the role of contextual settings such as the family, the peer group, and community-based out-of-school time (OST) programs. Smith and colleagues view these settings as ones within which individual ↔ context relations may promote PYD.

Evidence in support of this conception of these settings was reported by Smith et al. (2016). They found that positive social relationships with family members, peers, and community members were linked to indicators of PYD among both African American and White, male and female, adolescent offenders. Whereas much prior research assessed the deficits of development in disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., see Sampson, 2016), Smith et al. (2016) assessed the role of community assets linked to important institutional resources and people in those settings. Consistent with the findings of Murry et al. (2014), Smith et al. (2016) also found that positive personal relationships and linkages to important community resources, including recreational, school, faith-based, extended-family, and work-related sources, were related to better family functioning, positive peer relations, and youth self-reliance. Smith and colleagues emphasized that a strength-based approach to youth offenders that involves positive community networks and supportive social relationships can put these youth on thriving pathways.

Building upon the important role of community contexts, Smith et al. (2017) studied more than 500 elementary school children in Grades 2–5, composed of White (49%), African American (27%), Latino (7%), and mixed race (17%) youth; almost half (45%) of the youth were eligible for free/reduced lunch. Participation in quality OST programs (marked by supportive relationships, appropriate structure, and engaging interactions) positively impacted competence, connection, and caring for all youth. Moreover, these settings were also linked to the enhancement of cultural values for racial–ethnic minority youth.

Similarly, using latent profile analysis, Yu et al. (2019) studied a group of over 200 youth of color in late childhood/early adolescence (77% African American and 23% Latino). The researchers found that youth in a profile marked by high PYD, racial–ethnic pride, optimism, and low levels of perceived racial–ethnic barriers had fewer overall adjustment problems and higher standardized achievement test scores than youth in other profiles. Yu et al. concluded that relationships that help youth feel competent, caring, connected, and proud may be associated with indicators of PYD.

Smith and her colleagues (Leman et al., 2017) extended the study of PYD among youth of color to global settings (see too Koller et al., 2019; Petersen et al., 2017; Schoon, 2017; Wiium & Dimitrova, 2019). In a special section of the journal Child Development, they presented scholarship that documented the importance of social and cultural context in the positive development of youth of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Once again, the importance of positive relationships in these settings in promoting the development of positive social identities was underscored (e.g., Koller & Verma, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2017).

Leman et al. (2017) also pointed to the need to refine the measures and methods used for collecting data to understand and promote PYD among individuals from specific racial–ethnic backgrounds around the globe. This point underscores the idea that, in order to study PYD among diverse youth, measurement invariance across facets of the individual and facets of the context must be interrogated. As emphasized by Spencer and Spencer (2014), quantitative and qualitative data should jointly inform the development of measures that pertain to the specific pathways of development of specific youth developing in specific settings at specific times in ontogeny and history (Lerner, 2018a; Rose, 2016). Such measurement is needed to appropriately assess the development of youth of specific age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, etc., and, as well, for depicting the specific youth ↔ context relations of each specific young person (Bornstein., 2019; Rose, 2016).
This approach to measurement will illuminate the facets of PYD that are specific to specific youth and communities, that are generalizable to some other youth and communities, or that may be applicable to all youth and all communities. Such illumination is called for by Loyd and Williams (2017), who emphasize that researchers and practitioners should consider specific instances of race, culture, and identity among the defining attributes of PYD; they note that this specificity is important at both the individual and program levels if culturally informed PYD is to be promoted.

However, at this writing, such systematic and specificity-oriented idiographic, differential, and nomothetic knowledge awaits future research. Fortunately, developing the statistical tools needed for creating such a knowledge base has been a focus of considerable methodological interest among developmental methodologists (e.g., Hamaker et al., 2018; Molenaar & Nesselroade, 2012, 2014, 2015; Ram & Grimm, 2015; von Eye et al. 2015).

Next Steps for Theory-Predicated, Social Justice Research

Due to the contributions of PYD scholars, such as Spencer, Masten, Murry, Smith and their colleagues, PYD theory has evolved to become a differentiated set of models of the specific resources for and constraints on thriving among diverse youth, for instance, youth of color living in adverse circumstances involving poverty, systemic racism, and social, educational, health and safety inequities, or youth living under conditions of social unrest, war, or environmental calamities. Research and interventions framed by these models contribute key means to instantiate a social justice orientation to developmental science and, when coupled with innovations in methodology that produce psychometrically sound person- and group-specific measurement tools, may enable researchers and youth development practitioners to better create ways to describe, explain, and enhance the specific paths of positive development of specific young people.

Importantly, scholars have pointed out that, to be used in the service of promoting social justice, theories need to accommodate the specific voices of youth. The phenomenological experiences of youth can provide a means to understand the specific ways in which thriving may be instantiated in the specific communities of youth, perhaps especially among youth who have been marginalized or traumatized because of the poverty, systemic racism, and inequitable access to the resources needed for health and positive development (e.g., Smith & Lee, 2020; Spencer et al., 2015). Part of these recommendations include the need to interrogate the context of youth of color in order to understand how facets of specific settings (e.g., White teachers in classrooms with mostly youth of color) may either promote and/or constrain PYD. The out-of-school-time context provides an important developmental setting for many youth (Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020). Across the past decade, theoretical scholarship pertinent to issues of diversity and specificity has occurred in the conceptualization or design of youth development programs aimed at promoting PYD.

Conceptualizing PYD Programs

The second component of Hamilton’s (1999) tripartite conception of the PYD field is theoretically predicated ideas about the key features of programs promoting PYD. Specific PYD theories have been used to define the envisioned outcomes of such programs, for example, the Five Cs within the PYD model of Lerner and Lerner (Bowers et al., 2015; Lerner et al., 2015), coping (e.g., Murry et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2015), or purpose (Damon, 2008). As well, theory has been used to focus programs on building the youth–adult relationships that are seen in all models as vital resources for promoting PYD (e.g., Barbarin et al., 2020; Murry, 2019; Murry et al., 2014; Rhodes, 2020; Smith et al., 2016).

These contributions of theory to ideas about how PYD-promoting programs should be designed may be identified in literature reviews of, literally, hundreds of studies that sought to identify the different sets of attributes of youth development programs that are linked to indicators of positive youth development (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Vandell et al., 2015). The reviews provide remarkably consistent—and thus cross-validating—evidence for both causal and correlational associations between participation in youth development programs and youth attributes that reflect positive development (e.g., positive racial identity; Yu et al., 2019).

These reviews note that, within contexts that are physically and psychologically safe for youth, PYD may be promoted when the key, relational component of dynamic developmental systems models exists, that is, mutually beneficial relations (positive individual↔context relations) between the strengths of a young person and the resources in the context
that are needed to promote thriving. Lerner (2004, 2018a) operationalized these dynamic, relational ideas through identifying what he termed the “Big 3” curricular features of these settings: 1. positive and sustained positive relationships between youth and adults (e.g., see Hamilton et al., 2017; Murry et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016); 2. activities designed to build important life skills (e.g., Jones & Kahn, 2017); and 3. opportunities for youth to use these life skills as both participants in and as leaders of valued family, school, and community activities (e.g., Jagers et al., 2017; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). The presence of the “Big 3” operationalizes the individual⇔context relations within a safe program setting, one wherein youth will show gains in agency, academic and social-emotional functioning, and reductions in problem behaviors across childhood and adolescence (Vandell et al., 2015). When safety and the “Big 3” characterize OST settings, the probability of PYD and, as well, positive civic engagement and contributions to family, community, and civil society increases (Lerner et al., 2015; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). Several scholars have noted that such engagement and contributions can be enhanced when the specificity of race, ethnicity, and culture are part of youth development programs and practices (e.g., Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011; Loyd & Williams, 2017; Williams & Deutsch, 2016).

Both in the United States (e.g., Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017; Redd et al., 2020) and internationally (Koller et al., 2019; Petersen et al., 2017), these “design principles” for youth programs aimed at promoting PYD have involved the following: 1. a focus on individual⇔context relations, and 2. assessment of individual and context diversity as moderators of the specific course of PYD. Examples in the United States include approaches to intervention programs and policy innovations for boys of color (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017), using Spencer’s PVEST model as a frame to promote civic engagement among youth of color (Hope & Spencer, 2017), and the development of an ethnic–racial identity intervention (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). Additional examples that are used both nationally and internationally include using youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) and technology to promote PYD (Ozer et al. 2017).

YPAR may be a particularly useful approach for including youth voice and, as well, for promoting agency among young people who are experiencing marginalization due to racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression (Smith & Lee, 2020). This method involves a cyclical process of learning and action in which youth inform solutions to problems they want to address in their lives and in their communities. In addition to YPAR, other international programs involved employing a dual-generation approach to optimize adolescent motherhood in the context of economic downturns and poverty in low- and middle-income countries (Wuerml & Yoshikawa, 2017), and developing intervention programs for youth involved in bullying (Pureza et al., 2017).

In addition to the burgeoning explicit use of PYD models, concepts, and terminology in the design of youth development programs in the United States and internationally, across the last decade at least three other approaches to promoting positive behavior and development among diverse youth grew in use and impact. These three approaches— involving social and emotional learning, character virtue development, and resilience science—often used (explicitly or implicitly) similar dynamic, relational developmental systems-based ideas to frame research and program designs; however, these approaches focused on different manifest variables or used different terms to label variables.

**Related Approaches to Describing, Explaining, and Enhancing Youth Development**

The fields of social and emotional learning (SEL), character virtue development, and resilience science have contributed theory, research, and design principles for programs aimed at enhancing understanding of the bases of thriving among diverse youth and, as well, for creating programs or policies to enhance their positive behavior and development. The contributions of these three related areas of scholarship exist with PYD as a

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**FIGURE 1** Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Related Concepts.
conceptual Venn diagram (see Figure 1) that includes four circles (i.e., the three related fields and PYD).

As discussed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) involves educational programs aimed at making evidence-based SEL curricula a core part of education from preschool through high school. The conceptual framework for SEL seeks to promote five core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills). As documented by researchers collaborating within the CASEL framework (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Jagers et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2015) and by the Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (Jones & Kahn, 2017), there is evidence that SEL programs enhance academic performance and behaviors related to the five competencies and, as well, long-term indicators of thriving, including positive civic engagement. Moreover, although not explicitly subscribing to any of the models of PYD that we have discussed, researchers working within the SEL framework have published theory-predicted research consistent with dynamic, developmental systems concepts and, in particular, with the dynamics of individual-context relations (e.g., Bailey et al., 2019; Immordino-Yang, 2015; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019).

Second, the field of character virtue development emerged as another significant frame for conceptualizing programs aimed at promoting thriving among diverse youth (e.g., Lerner, 2018b, 2018c; Lerner & Vandell, 2017a, 2017b; Lerner, Wang, et al., 2017). Character virtues are morally based actions that enable individuals and the people and institutions comprising their social worlds to thrive across time and place (Berkowitz, 2012; Nucci, 2017). Although most models of character virtues emphasize that a moral component must be associated with actions that reflect character (Berkowitz, 2012; Nucci, 2017), several other domains of character have been suggested. For example, Lickona and Davidson (2005) suggested that, in addition to moral character, another instantiation of virtues involved performance character, conceptualized as “the qualities such as effort, diligence, perseverance, a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, ingenuity, and self-discipline needed to realize one’s potential for excellence in academics, cocurricular activities, the workplace, or any other area of endeavor” (p.18). In turn, Seider (2012) suggested that a third possible component of character consists of attributes that constitute contributions to civil society; that is, civic character is comprised of the knowledge, skills, and commitments involved in being an active and positively engaged citizen (Seider, 2012). In addition, Seider et al. (2017) included the construct of critical consciousness within this notion of civic character. In turn, Baehr (2013) proposed a component of character involving intellectual attributes such as love of learning, seeking truth, creativity, and other attributes of cognition associated with leading a life devoted to “the pursuit of distinctively epistemic goods” (p. 1).

These ideas about the composition of character virtues have been embedded in conceptions of programs that seek to promote specific instances of character, for instance, purpose (e.g., Bundick et al. 2010) or spirituality (e.g., King et al., 2011) or, in turn, character virtues in general (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2017). For instance, the Berkowitz et al. model is targeted for use within schools and in OST settings. Berkowitz et al. (2017) note that effective character education programs are consistent with their PRIMED model (i.e., involving the Prioritization of character education, Relationships that build character, Intrinsic motivation to manifest character, Modeling of character virtues, Empowering youth, and Developmental pedagogy). Berkowitz et al. note that their approach to character virtue development aligns with the SEL programs promoted by CASEL and, in fact, scholars working across the areas of both character virtue development and SEL agree that such alignment exists (e.g., Durlak, 2017; Elias et al., 2015; Moroney & Devaney, 2017).

Conceptions of PYD Programs and Social Justice

There is theoretical and substantive alignment of SEL and character virtue development approaches with the models and substantive foci of theory-predicted PYD research (e.g., Clement & Bollinger, 2016, 2017; Hensely & Sperp, 2019; Lerner, 2018c). Moreover, as we have already noted, there is also alignment between PYD models and theory, research, and programs promoting resilience (Masten, 2014b). In particular, there is alignment between programs aimed at enhancing thriving and programs seeking to promoting resilience in the face of not only adversity but, even more so, trauma (e.g., Luthar et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2015; Ungar, 2011, 2013).

The knowledge derived from this work is, then, especially timely and important at this writing, given the potentially enormous likelihood of trauma facing youth in the United States and
internationally caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and, perhaps especially, facing youth of color whose family members are overrepresented in COVID-19 cases and deaths in the United States (e.g., Agans & Ettekal, 2020). Added to this crisis, is the trauma-producing situation associated with the long-ongoing U.S. epidemic of structural and interpersonal racism, the heightened and open presence of White supremacy, and the murders of Black people by police (Cantor, 2020).

To illustrate, Luthar et al. (2015) explained that resilience research involves the study of processes predicting better-than-expected adjustment following exposure to adversity. The authors noted that the risk of trauma can be modified (attenuated) by both individual and contextual factors. Furthermore, the Murry et al. (2018) integrated model for studying stress in Black families specifies pathways through which individual, family, and contextual processes can prevent risk due to truncated optimal developmental outcomes in youth. As also noted by Murry et al. (2014) and Smith et al. (2016), positive, trusting, and nurturing proximal relationships—particularly with primary caregivers in the family, but also and with teachers, mentors (Rhodes, 2020), and peers in the community—are particularly effective as protective or attenuating forces and, as well, may help shape the young person’s own “protective” attributes, such as self-regulation and self-efficacy/competence.

In turn, Masten et al. (2015) discussed trauma induced by exposure to the dangers of disasters, war, terror, and political conflict. Using relational developmental systems-based theory (see, too, Cicchetti, 2010; Schoon, 2017), Masten et al. explained that variation in response to these mass-trauma experiences is related to the magnitude of the traumatic “dosage,” developmental cascades associated with the impact of other experiences (Cicchetti, 2010), and various individual, family, and sociocultural variables (see too Unger, 2013). Masten et al. noted (2015) that, given the scope of the threats to global youth development posed by traumatic events such as wars and disasters, there was remarkably little intervention about how to promote the recovery of youth—a fact that developmental scientists have realized more generally in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ettekal & Agans, 2020). The work of Rhodes and her colleagues surrounding Hurricane Katrina is one of the few examples of efforts to promote recovery (in regard to mental health) in the face of an environmental disaster (Chan et al., 2015). Together, the focus by Masten and others on the nature of trauma raises questions for future research linking PYD and social justice and, as well, points to the importance for future research to operationalize the degree to which racialized, discriminatory events and brutality are traumatic for youth and also points to the need to investigate the individual ↔ context relations that may promote healing and recovery in specific youth, families, their communities.

In sum, PYD models and the related models associated with the fields of SEL, character virtue development, and resilience science have resulted in a plethora of ideas for program design and, as well, for applications of these programming ideas for enhancing the lives of youth who have been marginalized by systemic racism and/or who have experienced adversity or, even more, trauma because of who they are or where they live (see too Redd et al. 2020). Not surprisingly, then, the interest in and the reach of these PYD and PYD-related ideas for the design of programs pertinent to the development of adaptive behavior and/or thriving have resulted in literally thousands of instantiations of PYD/PYD-related programs in the United States and internationally. A preponderance of these programs have had the aim of promoting social justice and equity for diverse youth.

The Diversity of PYD Programs in the United States and Internationally

The third component of Hamilton’s tripartite conception of PYD involves the enactment of programs aimed at promoting PYD or related concepts pertinent to youth thriving (e.g., resilience, character virtues, or SEL). Table 1 presents a sample of the diverse PYD/PYD-related programs and organizations that exist in the United States and internationally. A sample of these programs is all that can be presented because, both in the United States and internationally, it is difficult to find a youth development program that does not assert that it promotes the positive development of its youth even if there is not an explicit theory of change linked to the “Big 3” curricula design principles we have discussed. Moreover, although the enhancement of social justice may not be an explicit aim of a program, the goals of the organization or its programs may reflect such a goal. One example is the aspiration to alleviate poverty among youth in the majority world, which is a stated goal of the programs of the child-sponsorship programs of Compassion International (Sim & Peters, 2014). Another example is the Scout Reach
program of Boy Scouts of America, which has the goal of providing free access to its programs to traditionally underserved youth, that is, youth of color (Wang et al. 2017).

The ubiquity of interest in PYD or related constructs and an at least implicit goal of serving marginalized youth or youth living in adversity can be found by visiting the web sites that are noted for the organizations and programs listed in Table 1. For example, and perhaps obviously, 4-H—which sponsored the first national longitudinal study explicitly aimed at describing and explaining PYD (Lerner et al., 2015)—frames its programs as promoting attributes associated with PYD, including youth contributions to society. In turn, given the history of PYD-related organizations in both the United Kingdom and the United States that we briefly noted earlier in this article, it is not surprising to learn that a similar use of PYD concepts can be found on the web sites of several youth-serving organizations. Examples of these organization are Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the Y/YMCA, Girls, Inc., and Boys & Girls Clubs of America, among many others. In fact, the U. S. government has a web site that focuses explicitly on PYD and notes that there is an Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs that involves a collaboration of 21 federal departments and agencies that support youth under the umbrella concept of PYD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Program/Organization</th>
<th>Representative PYD Foci</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-H (<a href="https://4-h.org/about/research/">https://4-h.org/about/research/</a>)</td>
<td>The Five Cs of PYD and youth contributions to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts of America (<a href="https://www.scouting.org/">https://www.scouting.org/</a>)</td>
<td>Character virtue development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (<a href="https://www.bbbs.org/programs/">https://www.bbbs.org/programs/</a>)</td>
<td>Promoting educational success, higher aspirations, confidence, and better relationships though mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/YMCA (<a href="https://www.ymca.net/youth-development">https://www.ymca.net/youth-development</a>) Girls, Inc. (<a href="https://girlsinc.org/about-us/">https://girlsinc.org/about-us/</a>)</td>
<td>Healthy living and social responsibility Skills, character, and leadership characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States Government (<a href="https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development">https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development</a>)</td>
<td>Web site focused on PYD resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (<a href="https://www.usaid.gov/policy/youth;https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework">https://www.usaid.gov/policy/youth;https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework</a>)</td>
<td>Has supported programs throughout the majority world because of an explicit youth development policy framed by PYD concepts; policy focused on improving the skill sets of youth and facilitating the instantiation of their aspirations of youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF (<a href="https://www.unicef.org/media/57336/file">https://www.unicef.org/media/57336/file</a>)</td>
<td>Youth programming goals focused on PYD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank (<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/youth">https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/youth</a>)</td>
<td>Youth programming goals focused on PYD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Society for Research on Adolescence (<a href="https://www.s-r-a.org/">https://www.s-r-a.org/</a>)</td>
<td>Advancing understanding of adolescence and the well-being of youth in a globalized world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Society for Research in Child Development (<a href="https://www.srcd.org/">https://www.srcd.org/</a>)</td>
<td>Advancing developmental science and promoting its use to improve human lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (<a href="https://issbd.org/">https://issbd.org/</a>)</td>
<td>Promoting research on human development throughout the life span</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Society for the Study of Human Development (<a href="https://sshdonline.org/">https://sshdonline.org/</a>)</td>
<td>Taking an integrative, interdisciplinary approach to development across the life span</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Together, this degree of youth program activity involving PYD or PYD concepts/terminology means that there are, literally, thousands of programs across the United States that can be associated with the promotion of PYD. Moreover, if the Venn diagram presented in Figure 1 is considered, the number of local and national programs associated with PYD-related concepts may number in the tens of thousands.

In addition, and not surprisingly, the international activity we have noted in regard to the design of PYD programs (e.g., Koller et al., 2019; Petersen et al., 2017; see too Cabrera & Lefevre, 2017) has been associated with an even greater number of PYD-related programs. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has supported programs throughout the majority world because of an explicit youth development policy framed by PYD concepts. The policy has the objectives of improving the skill sets of youth and facilitating the instantiation of their aspirations. The goal of the policy is to enable youth to contribute to and benefit from more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities and nations.

Moreover, a USAID “Positive Youth Development Measurement Toolkit” was published in order to provide a practical guide for the implementation of youth programs around the world. A similar focus on PYD exists in the youth programs of UNICEF (Banati, 2020; Lansford & Banati, 2018), of the World Bank, and in the international child-sponsorship sector (Lerner et al., 2019). As a sample case of the latter instantiation of PYD programs around the world, we may point to the work of Compassion International (CI) (Sim & Peters, 2014). CI is a faith-based child-sponsorship organization that aims to promote thriving and alleviate child poverty using a holistic, PYD-based approach to its programs. CI partners with over 7,000 local churches and projects across 25 countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and serves more than 2.0 million youth living in poverty. CI uses the PYD model developed by Lerner and Lerner (Lerner, 2018a; Lerner et al., 2015) in each program site in each country it serves and, for instance, in one country alone (El Salvador) there are more than 200 program sites (Tirrell, Gansert, et al., 2019; Tirrell, Geldhof, et al., 2019).

The use of PYD models, terminology, and measures around the world is, therefore, extensive and likely to continue to grow, given the ongoing investment of public and private funders in such work. For instance, at this writing, the Templeton World Charity Foundation is urging that groups within the majority world that are applying for funding within its Global Innovations in Character Development initiative use measures of character virtue development, PYD, or SEL to index positive developmental changes in program participants. Similarly, Thogmartin et al. (2016) identified programs across about 60 countries that used the concepts and/or the measures of PYD that Lerner, Geldhof, and their colleagues have developed (e.g., Geldhof, Bowers, Boyd, et al., 2014; Geldhof, Bowers, Mueller, et al., 2014; Lerner et al., 2015).

PYD Programs and Social Justice: Opportunities and Constraints

The spread and likely growth of the use of PYD or PYD-related models and measures within the curricula or evaluation of youth development programs, both in the United States and internationally, has both challenges and opportunities. As we have noted, Leman et al. (2017) pointed to the need to enhance measurement in research, evaluations, or programs seeking to understand and promote PYD among youth from specific racial-ethnic backgrounds in the United States and internationally (and, as we have indicated as well, William & Deutsch, 2016, and Loyd & Williams, 2017, provide examples of just how such specificity may be implemented). Moreover, the observation of Leman et al. (2017) is shared by major providers of PYD programs in the United States and internationally.

For instance, the quality of program evaluation, even when conducted under the auspices of major U.S.-based programs, such as 4-H or Boy Scouts of America (e.g., Bowers et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2017) or international programs conducted by USAID, UNICEF, or the World Bank, is challenged because of being largely atheoretical, poorly designed, and marked by inadequate measurement and weak data analyses (e.g., YouthPower Learning, 2017). Because the presence of such methodological problems makes indeterminate the effectiveness of programs seeking to promote PYD, we point again to the initiative of the Templeton World Charity Foundation, which has set as a funding priority work that addresses these shortcomings in evaluation of programs in the majority world and, more specifically, in low- and moderate-income counties (LMICs). Grants are aimed at aligning practitioners and program evaluators in LMICs with minority-world developmental scientists to improve evaluation research capacities and quality and thus to provide evidence that
inequities in opportunities to thrive are being successfully enacted in LMICs.

It is important to note that these challenges for national and international growth in PYD programs aimed at enhancing the lives of marginalized youth, underserved youth, and youth whose lives have been marked by adversity, trauma, and oppression exist along with important opportunities for these programs. PYD programs can provide an umbrella for new, evidence-based governmental and philanthropic investments by foundations, corporations, and banks. These investments may contribute to enhancing the lives of diverse U.S. youth during a historic period when young people, and particularly youth of color, are facing both the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued U.S. epidemic of systemic racism, White supremacy, and institutional brutality. Investments focused on youth of color are timely and, indeed, essential. Given the critical importance of such investments, there is also an opportunity for the PYD umbrella to provide a context for collaborations among funders, within and across funding sectors (i.e., public and private). Such integration of resources could enable tipping points in the course of the lives of diverse U.S. youth.

Moreover, given the already broad international interest in PYD and PYD-related programs, there is an opportunity to create new means for addressing international disparities in the availability of human and financial capital for enacting strengths-based youth programs aimed at promoting thriving (e.g., Fradkin et al., 2017). The inequalities and inequities in life opportunities, safety, education, and health also exist within the United States, especially for racially and ethnically diverse youth. At the same time, there are ongoing inequities in, and brutalities visited upon, girls. These too must be addressed and ended. Therefore, the opportunity to focus attention—and integrate—human and financial capital in a worldwide effort to promote thriving is not a fantasy. We believe it is a realistic possibility, given will, leadership, and a commitment worldwide to social justice and social change. This belief leads to some final comments.

THE FUTURE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE OF PYD

Writing a decade review about positive youth development for the 2011–2020 ten-year period is perhaps a historically unique task. The decade began with U.S. world leadership and international respect continuing on a higher and higher path that was largely uninterrupted since the entry of the nation into World War II. However, this period also included relentless racism and disparities in economic, educational, safety, and health imposed on people of color in the United States and on youth in LMICs around the world. The decade ended with the world confronted with a pandemic of a magnitude not encountered for at least 100 years, with the almost complete eroding of respect for and reliance on the United States as a positive force for democracy and social justice in the world, and with world media and political attention paid to egregious instances of system racism and the oppression and marginalization of young people not only in relation to race but, as well, in regard to their ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. These injustices were coupled with inequities within and across healthcare systems, elementary and secondary education, higher education, business and industry, and politics. Around the world, these injustices were brought into stark relief by indignities and brutalities shown to, and the murders of, Black U.S. youth and adults, perhaps especially by police (supposedly sworn to protect and serve all citizens).

Given the course of changes across this decade, it might be easy, and even quite reasonable, to discuss PYD scholarship and application as a Sisyphean task. However, although we are not blind to the challenges and horrors visited upon youth and, particularly youth of color across the decade, we hope that this article will be read as an affirmation of the successes in PYD theory, research, and application that have marked the decade. In addition, we hope that the opportunities we see for advancing the application of developmental science to address the racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and international/cultural disparities that continue to confront youth will be read as genuine possibilities, especially if the end of the decade involves people in the United States and around the world acting to turn the tides of racism, White supremacy, White privilege, and vacuums of competent leadership.

In the context of our hope for the future, then, we believe it may be useful to envision specific scholarly activities, within each of the three parts of the PYD field discussed by Hamilton (1999). The scholarly activities we envision may enhance the embeddedness of efforts to promote social justice along with efforts to enhance the understanding and promotion of PYD. Our vision builds on the discussions of this integration provided by Barbarin et al. (2020), Murray and Anderson (2020), Smith and Lee (2020), and Spencer (e.g., Spencer et al. 2015; Spencer & Spencer, 2014).
Theory

There is a need for more theoretical models of positive development for specific youth developing in specific settings at specific moments in history. An exemplary instance of such a theory is the Barbarin et al. (2020) model of Adversity, Adaptation, and Positive Development for African American Boys and Men. Such models can illuminate what is adaptive and positive within toxic environments and, as well, point to strengths in individuals and to community assets for enhancing thriving in such settings. Research derived from theories that wed ideas about PYD with a focus on social justice can advance understanding of the impacts of systemic racism and health, educational, and economic inequities on development and, as well, on the ways in which specific individual-context relations can promote thriving in these settings. An example here is the work on helping youth to develop “critical consciousness” (e.g., Seider & Graves, 2020; Watts et al. 2011), which is scholarship that links the agentic facets of PYD to social justice.

Conceptualization of PYD Programs

Bringing a social justice lens to conceptualizing PYD-promoting programs requires attention to the specific resources that must be available for specific youth in specific communities (Hirsch et al., 2011; Loyd & Williams, 2017; Williams & Deutsch, 2016). If PYD is understood to be potentially instantiated differently in different communities, then programs must integrate the voices of youth and of other community members into the design of programs. These voices should be integrated with maps of the assets for PYD that exist in communities and, as well, with a plan for countering the constraints on youth thriving that may exist in a specific community. Examples of such constraints are fixed mind sets and accompanying stereotypes that contribute to social toxicity and to the absence of the resources needed to transform youth strengths and community assets into sustained actions promoting health and PYD (Barbarin et al., 2020; Smith & Lee, 2020).

The Enactment of PYD Programs

PYD programs should aim to reflect all facets of the “Big 3” curricular features of effective youth programs: positive and sustained youth-adult relationships (Lerner, 2004; Murry et al., 2014; Smith et al. 2016); life-skills-building curricula (e.g., Jones & Kahn, 2017); and opportunities to build agency through participation in and leadership of valued community activities (e.g., Jagers et al., 2017; Smith & Lee 2020; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). Reflecting the elements of YPAR we have discussed earlier in this article, such programs can provide opportunities for the voices and visions of youth to be expressed (Smith & Lee, 2020). This expression may be a source of community actions creating the opportunities for them to use and develop further their strengths and the community assets required for youth thriving.

In sum, we believe that the tripartite field of PYD identified by Hamilton (1999) has evolved into a domain of developmental science embedded in the goal of promoting social justice for youth in the United States and internationally. If our sense of the field is correct, then perhaps, when the next decade review of PYD scholarship is written, its authors will be able to point to the end of the second decade of the 21st century as a tipping point in the developmental science of adolescence. Our hope is that these future authors will be able to note that the end of this decade was the beginning of an explicit integration of PYD scholarship with social justice and, perhaps as well, the launching of sustained and meaningful contributions by developmental scientists to liberty and justice for all.

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