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The Face of the Future: Risk and Resilience in Minority Youth

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About a decade ago, as we moved into a new millennium, demographers and journalists galore noted that the “look” of America was changing. But, not a one of them would have predicted that this new look would be seen so soon in the face of our nation's President.

The Presidency of a bi-racial Black man, part of an extended family that he described as a “mini-United Nations” and that includes Kansanians, Southeast Asians, Ethiopians, Christians, and Muslims, was not easily predictable, especially by those in the baby-boom or pre-boomer generations. Yet, from a demographic perspective, there is nothing anomalous about his background. Not only does President Obama's multiracial background foreshadow the look of the future, it is what present day America already looks like for those of us who work with youth. For example, Fig. 1 shows the racial and ethnic distribution of the US population under 18 based on present census data and on projections for 2020. Fueled by immigration and larger family sizes, racial and ethnic minorities already account for more than 40% of today's youth. In a quarter of US counties, such youth are already a majority, and no longer a minority (Roberts, 2008).

Is this majority–minority future something to look forward to, or something to worry about and fear? This chapter will address this question by first focusing on adolescence as a critical life stage, especially for minority youth. We first examine behavioral, educational, and related indices of well-being among this age group and then move on to review the literature on two key factors that affect youth development—the neighborhood/school context, and the family context and parenting styles. These factors can serve to increase the risk for negative developmental outcomes or to mitigate the risk and lead to resilience. They were chosen because they serve as good examples of factors at different points along the ecological continuum, with neighborhood and school more distal influences, and parenting acting as a more proximal influence. Throughout we focus on African-Americans and Latinos, the two minority groups that our research teams have worked with most closely, and groups where the data base is strongest, albeit still more limited than desirable. At various points, we will use the Obama story, which has been told and re-told so often these last few years, to illustrate how these general processes might play out in the life of a specific individual and family. While science necessarily focuses on understanding general principles, it is applying these principles in order to enhance the lives of individuals that ultimately is of interest to us.

Adolescence as a Critical Life Stage

Adolescence holds a special role in virtually all cultures as a time of transition between childhood and adulthood. It is time of rapid physical and cognitive growth, second only to

the first 2 years of life in the amount of change that takes place in a short time span. This, in turn, necessitates adjustments and realignments within the family, as young people are granted a new status in relationships with others in their social world (see Feldman & Elliott, 1990 for a good overview of this life stage).

Adolescence brings new freedoms. Some of these freedoms are small, like moving between classrooms, when previously it was the teachers who moved around. Some are major, like beginning to date, obtaining a driver's license, or a car of one's own. The unique combination of youthful vigor and maturing sensibilities and passions can make this a time of incredible achievements; adolescents have started companies, written symphonies, painted masterpieces, and led armies. But, this troika of physical, cognitive, and social changes, which do not always happen in the preferred order, also lead to heightened vulnerability for youth, as physical maturation is often attained well before brain development has completed (Dahl, 2004). Particularly noteworthy is the slower development of the brain's frontal lobes, which continue to develop through the mid-twenties, especially for boys. Given the rapid and asynchronous growth in these years, it is not altogether surprising that adolescence is also marked by impulsive behavior and imprudent risk-taking. Hence adolescents and their families too often deal with the negative consequences that come from car accidents, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and alcohol and drug use.

In light of this vulnerability, adolescence, at least in its ideal form, is a relatively protected time of exploration, where youths can try on adult roles without fully taking on adult responsibilities. However, the ideal may be much more typical of majority youth, especially those from middle-class or affluent backgrounds. This protected period may actually be getting longer for such youth, as they stay in school for extended periods of time. But it may not exist at all for others whose families do not have the wherewithal or resources to protect them from adult responsibilities or the consequences of taking them on so early in life (Burton, Obeidallah, & Allison, 1996).

Foreshadowing the Future: Mental Health, Well-Being, and Educational Outcomes for African-American and Latino Youths

Assessing the mental health status and well-being of Latino and African-American youth is neither easy nor straightforward. The gold standard for gauging the prevalence of mental health disorders in a population is established through epidemiological studies that assess psychiatric disorders as measured by the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, which at present is in its fourth edition (APA, 2000). Over the last decade there have been various large, population-based epidemiological studies conducted with Latinos and/or African-Americans (Takeuchi, Alegria, Jackson, & Williams, 2007). Unfortunately, these have focused only on adults and there are no equivalent studies on children and youth. More recently, the National Comorbidity Survey-Replication (NCS-R: Kessler & Merikangas, 2004; Kessler et al., 2009) did include a multi-ethnic adolescent sample, but results by race and ethnicity are not yet available.

Fortunately, a number of other national data bases that include indicators of mental health and problem behaviors provide us with a reasonably good indication of how African-American and Latino youth fare compared to their White counterparts. The most comprehensive of these is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance* System (CDC, 2007) which includes a national school-based survey which monitors health-risk behaviors among students in grades 9–12.

Figure 2 shows survey responses to questions about participation in problem or deviant behavior, including violence (e.g. been in a physical fight one of more times during the last 12 months, carried a weapon at least 1 day in last 30 days), risky sexual behavior that could lead to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection (e.g. sexually active in last 3 months, had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during life), and emotional distress (e.g. attempted suicide in last 12 months, sadness or hopelessness which prevented usual activities). In general, these results suggest that African-American and Latino youth are more likely to participate in risk behavior related to violence and sexual risk than their White counterparts. They are also more apt to show signs of emotional distress.

Another national data set that examines adolescent health across ethnic groups is the National Survey of Children's Health which interviewed parents by telephone. An analysis of this data (Fox et al., 2007) also provides some reason to be concerned about African-American and Latino youth. Figure 3 shows health disparities for adolescents ages 12 through 17 and indicates that African-American, and Latino youth fare considerably less well than White youth on key health-relevant indicators, including being overweight or at risk of overweight and in poor health. They also exercise less than is optimal.

These results are reinforced by results from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) which indicate that African-American female youth have higher overweight rates than White and Mexican American females. Among males, Mexican Americans are significantly more likely to be overweight than White and African-American youths (Ogden et al., 2006). In addition, Latino youths have been found to engage in less exercise than either their African-American or White counterparts (Fox et al., 2007). However, it is important to recognize the limited access to resources among such groups. For instance, low income minority adolescents report having reduced access to recreational facilities in their neighborhoods, which leads to less physical activity and, in turn, increased levels of overweight status (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page, & Popkin, 2006). Individuals living in low income neighborhoods also have less access to the types of grocery stores that allow them to buy healthy, high nutrition food for themselves and their families (Morland, Wing, Roux, & Poole, 2002).

One further area of concern is the higher rate of adolescent pregnancy and birth for Latino youth. As seen in Fig. 4, by the age of 15 African-American and Latino youth are already more than twice as likely to give birth than White youth, with that trend continuing into the later teens (Martin et al., 2009).

An additional source of information about the state of adolescents are the reports and data briefs issued by *Child Trends*, especially those briefs released as part of their *Current Population Series* in 2007. These draw upon population surveys administered by the CDC, National Center for Health Statistics, or National Center for Education Statistics. Figure 5, which is based on this data, shows the percentage of African-American, Latino, and White youths, aged 16–19, who are neither engaged in paid work or in school. The fact that African-American and Latino youth are about twice as likely as their White counterparts to be disengaged from conventional society by the time they are entering adulthood is especially disturbing (Wirt et al., 2006).

In sum, while the research available on mental health and well-being amongst minority youth is not as comprehensive as desirable, results are fairly consistent in suggesting that African-American and Latino adolescents are not faring as well as their White counterparts. Whether looking at indicators of emotional distress, risk or problem behaviors, physical health, teen births, or school and job involvement, there is reason for concern.

As shown in Fig. 6, by the time African-American and Latino youth are 25–29, the negative risk, health, and problem behavior just documented has solidified into even more negative outcomes with lifelong consequences. By early adulthood, compared to Whites, more African-Americans and Latinos have failed to complete high school, and a much higher percentage of males are in state, federal or local jails (Brown, Moore, & Bzostek, 2004).

Many of the negative indicators just reviewed are highly correlated to factors that transcend race and ethnicity, such as a low socioeconomic status which is nested within race/ethnicity. Nonetheless, based on these data, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, to the degree that the past predicts the future, a future that is more Black and Brown is not necessarily an America that will be healthier or more nationally competitive.

Despite what these indicators predict for our nation's youth of color, President Barack Obama represents their potential. As recounted in his autobiography, *Dreams of My Father* (Obama, 1995), Obama was born to a young mother and raised apart from his father. His adolescent years were not easy and his search for identity difficult and marked by at least moments of considerable emotional distress and some experimental drug use. At various points in his life, he would not have scored especially high on an adolescent well-being index and he would have showed up on the positive side of some problem behavior measures. In the face of risks aplenty, he overcame adversity to achieve at the highest level. Whether his presidency comes to be known as a successful one or not, there is no question that he, a graduate of Columbia and Harvard universities, a renowned author, politician and world leader, a Nobel prize winner, and by all accounts a loving husband and father, is a success. If his is the face of the future, we have much to look forward to.

We refer to President Obama, and others who, like him, have succeeded in the face of multiple risks in their life as “resilient.” This descriptor may bring to mind a bo-bo doll, that always bounces back despite a barrage of punches or kicks. However, research conducted in the last several decades suggests that it is best to think about resilience, not as a characteristic of the individual, but rather as both a process, that evolves over time, and as a product of one's environment, including the people, institutions, or practices in it that can mitigate the effects of risks upon the individual (Masten & Obradovi, 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

Ecological theory, whether in its original form (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), or as adapted to more specifically encompass minority youth (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) predicts that people are affected by the places and contexts in which they spend time. Those people and contexts closer, or more proximal, to youths, such as their families, have the greatest influence on their lives. But, more distal environments, such as the school or neighborhood environment, can also have powerful effects. These effects can be direct, as when a neighborhood with a high concentration of drug activities makes it easier to obtain drugs or when a neighborhood with lots of parks and recreational facilities makes it easier for children to exercise. Distal environments can also affect a youth directly through their effects on proximal environments. For example, if a parent's workplace adopts policies that make it easier for them to take time off for family issues, it will facilitate good parenting.

The Neighborhood Context for African-American and Latino Youth

With the greater autonomy and freedom accorded to adolescents, they spend increasingly large amounts of time outside the home, and in their neighborhoods. As such, in recent years, there has been growing interest among researchers in how neighborhoods affect those residing in them, especially adolescents and their families (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Haynie, Silver, & Teasdale, 2006; Roosa et al., 2009).

There is little question but that most parents want their children to grow up in what are considered “good” neighborhoods with high quality schools, successful and pro-social neighbors, and safe surroundings. Various attempts have been made to assess neighborhoods over the last decade on the diversity of characteristics that matter to families (Israel et al., 2006). Despite its rather narrow focus, one of the most straightforward and widely used ways to categorize neighborhoods is by poverty level. From this perspective, neighborhoods where more than 40% of the residents are at or below the federal poverty level are called “extremely poor”, those where 20% or more of the residents are below the poverty level are called “poor” or “high poverty”, and those where less than 20% of the residents are below the poverty level are considered “non-poor” (Jargowsky & Bane, 1991). Among non-poor neighborhoods, those where less than 10% are poor are called “low poverty” and those where less than 3% are poor are considered “affluent” (Timberlake & Michael, 2006).

As we began this decade, less than 15% of extremely poor neighborhoods were primarily White, while two thirds of them were primarily African-American or Latino (Jargowsky, 1997). Moreover, almost half of all African-Americans (48%) and Latinos (43%) live in neighborhoods where their own ethnicity made up the majority of the population (e.g. 48% of African-Americans live in majority African-American communities). Putting these facts together, it becomes clear that many African-American and Latino youths are growing up in neighborhoods where they are both economically and ethnically isolated.

A recent analysis of trends in the ethnic and socioeconomic composition of neighborhoods during the 1990s found that more than 80% of White children were born into non-poor or low poverty neighborhoods. In contrast, this was the case for less than half of African-American or Latino children. On the other end of the continuum, White children were almost four times as likely as African-American children and ten times as likely as Latino children to be born into an affluent neighborhood (Timberlake, 2006).

African-American and Latino children born into high poverty neighborhoods were also more likely to remain in high poverty neighborhoods, or to move into extremely poor neighborhoods, than similar White youth. African-Americans born in high poverty neighborhoods typically spend about 70% of their childhoods there, with more than a third of that time in an extremely poor neighborhood. By contrast, White children born in high poverty neighborhoods spend less than 10% of their time in neighborhoods characterized by extreme poverty (Timberlake, 2006). Therefore, the neighborhood advantage enjoyed by White youth at birth is magnified if one assumes that the effects of neighborhood accumulate over time.

There is substantial room for debate about the magnitude and range of effects of growing up in poor neighborhoods. But, while some studies have found much larger and wide-ranging effects than others, the evidence clearly shows that youth who grow up in high poverty neighborhoods are less likely to complete high school, and more likely to become teenage parents (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Crane, 1991). Some studies have suggested that it is the absence of affluence or wealth that leads to poorer outcomes for youth, rather than the presence of poverty per se (Wen, Browning, & Cagney, 2003). Others researchers have suggested that it is the nexus between poverty and ethnicity which traps so many minorities in *ghettos* or *barrios* that may be most harmful. In his book, *Poverty and Place: Neighborhoods, Barrios and the American City* (1997), economist Paul Jargowsky argues that it is not any one, but rather a multiplicity of factors, that leads to more negative outcomes for youth growing up in these poor, largely minority, neighborhoods. He argues that chief among them is the culture in poor neighborhoods that places more importance on short-term goals over long-term ones, the dearth of positive role models for youth in poor neighborhoods, and the way living in poor neighborhoods isolate youths and families from

connections to more affluent individuals and organizations that can lead to future job opportunities.

A recent report of the Pew Foundation's Economic Mobility Project (Sharkey, 2009) found that growing up in a poor neighborhood increases a youth's chances of downward economic mobility by a staggering 52%. Indeed, the study concludes that childhood neighborhood poverty accounts for a bigger share of the black-white gap in downward mobility than parent's education, occupation, or labor force participation. In this way, the effects of living in a high poverty neighborhood reverberates into a child's future.

In addition to the social and psychological effects that may stem from coming of age in a poor neighborhood, these neighborhoods, and the schools within them, pose real physical dangers for youth, turning them not only into places of potential failure, but ones of fear. Some have gone so far as to compare some inner-city neighborhoods to war zones because of their high crime rates. These crimes are often perpetrated on youth by other youths, whether alone or in gangs (Garbarino, 2001).

Most of us know that youth, between the ages of 15 and 25, commit a disproportionate amount of crime, especially violent crime (Loeber & Farrington, 2001). Fewer are aware that youth are also more apt to be the victims of crime, especially when the offender is another youth. About two-thirds of all crimes experienced by those under 18 are committed by other youths, and over 90% of all sexual crimes committed by youths have other youths as victims (Office of Justice Programs, 2009). More generally, regardless of the age of the perpetrator, adolescents are twice as likely to be victimized as the national average, with 12–15 year olds the age group most apt to be victimized (Perkins, 1997).

The most common form of crime experienced by adolescents is property crime—having a bike stolen, backpack taken, or camera or I-Pod snatched. When compared to Whites, African-American youth were somewhat more apt than youth of other ethnicities to experience this type of crime, although there is no statistical difference between African-Americans and Latinos (Finklehor & Ormrod, 2000). However, the disparities in rates of victimization become more pronounced when violent crimes, especially serious violent crimes, are examined.

When rates of victimization by serious violent crimes, including homicide, rape, and aggravated assault, were examined, they were about twice (13.5 per 1,000) as high for African-Americans than for their White counterparts (6.5 per 1,000; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). Moreover, while less than a third (31%) of non-fatal crimes were classified as “serious” among White youth, serious, they represented 40% of similar crimes for Latinos and 48% of those crimes for Africans (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007).

Figure 7 shows youth mortality rates for African-American, Latino, and White males. Race and ethnic disparities are most marked when homicide is examined, with African-Americans six times more likely to be victims of homicide than Whites, and Latinos murdered about three times more often (Aguirre, Turner, & Aguirre, 2008). In addition to being more often directly victimized, African-American and Latino youth living in high poverty neighborhoods are more apt to experience secondary exposure to violence, as defined by witnessing it. Higher rates of exposure to secondary violence are also more common in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of immigrant youths (Gibson, Morris, & Beaver, 2009).

The type of violence we have just described does not just happen in housing projects or back alleyways. One of the places within their neighborhoods where youth experience violence and victimization is their school. African-American and Latino youth clearly report being

more afraid of violence and victimization inside their school than do White youth. In the mid-90 s more than 20% of African-American and Latino youth reported that they felt afraid at school, or on the way to school, compared to 8% of their White counterparts. Although rates of victimization, and hence fear, fell considerably over the next decade, in 2005 African-American and Latino youth continued to feel fear in school at almost twice the rate of others (6–7%) of African-American and Latino youths reported fear, compared to 3–4% of Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

African-American and Latino youth are also more likely to report that gangs were present in their school. More than a third of Latino youths, aged 12–18, reported that their schools had gangs, regardless of whether they attended suburban (34.6%) or urban (42.6%) schools. More than a quarter of African-American youths in suburban schools (28.3%) and almost a third of those in urban schools (32.8%) reported the presence of gangs. By comparison less than a fifth of White youth reported the presence of gangs in their school, whether urban (19.8%) or suburban (13.8%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

In sum, African-American and Latino youths typically grow up in very different neighborhoods than do White youths. These neighborhoods, and the schools within them, have higher concentrations of poverty and expose youth to higher rates of violence, both directly and indirectly. There is no way to downplay the potential risk that African-American and Latino youth face in too many of their neighborhoods and schools. The adverse relationship between negative neighborhood and school characteristics and adolescent's school success, and aggressive behavior, for example, has been found even after controlling for socioeconomic status more generally (Meyers & Miller, 2004). These effects are not only contemporaneous, they reach far into the future.

However it is precisely because of the high density of minorities living in high poverty, high crime neighborhoods, that institutions within minority communities are also more apt to offer services and activities directly geared to their needs. For example, schools with high concentrations of Latino students are more apt to have bilingual teachers, and there is a higher chance of finding ESL (English as a second language) services in these neighborhoods or *barrios* (Katz, 1999; Patthey-Chavez, 1993). Neighborhoods with a high concentration of Latinos are more apt to have grocery stores with Latino foods, and to have bilingual clerks at supermarkets or banks. In a similar vein, neighborhoods with high concentrations of African-Americans are more apt to find barbershops or beauty shops with hairstylists used to working with thick, curly hair, and retail stores carrying products aimed at African-Americans. The dangers of crime are all too apparent and quite real, but there are other risks involved in being in a neighborhood or school where one is in the minority, or the “only” (see Mengesha, 2009 for a description of being “the only Black student” in a college setting). A comprehensive study of neighborhood mobility and selection (Sampson & Sharkey, 2008) found that African-Americans in Chicago ended up in ethnically isolated neighborhoods in large part, due to the fact that others tended to exit neighborhoods with growing concentrations of Blacks. But, it was also the case that African-American families, even those with the means to make the choice, felt they could either live in a more affluent (White) neighborhood or in a more hospitable and racially diverse neighborhood, what the authors called “a not unreasonable calculus given the grim history of race relations in Chicago” (p. 26). Indeed, while it is typical for White youth to live in a low poverty or affluent neighborhood that is also culturally consonant and responsive, this is an extremely rare experience for African-American or Latino youth. Regardless of exactly how the incident ensued or what it says about racial profiling, the recent arrest of Professor Henry Louis Gates (Editors, New York Times, 2009) in his own house, in an affluent Cambridge neighborhood near Harvard University, was viewed by many as one more reminder that African-Americans or Latinos are only *guests* in such neighborhoods. Too often they are

viewed by their White neighbors as at best simply outsiders, and, more often, with suspicion and fear.

Barack Obama was raised in a very unique setting, or set of settings. He spent his primary school years living in Indonesia, attending public and private schools there, followed by grades five to high school living in Hawaii and attending Ponahou School, both of which are noteworthy as truly multicultural environments. While African-Americans are minorities in Hawaii, so are Whites. In describing his experiences there Obama wrote, “The opportunity that Hawaii offered—to experience a variety of cultures in a climate of mutual respect—became an integral part of my world view, and a basis for the values that I hold most dear” (Charlton, 2007). This opportunity most likely also played a role in his pathway of resilience. But, as we have just illustrated with statistics and examples, we have a long way to go as a society before more African-American and Latino youth have a similar opportunity to grow up in non-poverty, safe, neighborhoods and school where they also feel a strong sense of respect and belonging.

Parenting in African-American and Latino Adolescents: Risk and Protection

No matter how involved youths may be in their neighborhoods and school, their parents typically stand a step closer to them, exerting both a stronger direct influence, and potentially mediating the effects of the neighborhood on their children. When researchers and policy makers first turned their attention to the unique aspects of parenting minority youth, their assessments were generally negative. Minority families, especially female-headed African-American families, were described as a “tangle of pathology” that either manufactured or promoted cultural disadvantage (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). The language of professional researchers may have been less inflammatory, but often their descriptions also led one to conclude that minority families were the cause of their children's ills. Their descriptions of minority parenting typically portrayed them as overly authoritarian, intrusive, and punitive, or disengaged and absent (see Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998, for a description of models used to assess minority families).

Recent comprehensive examinations of minority families have resulted in a much more nuanced portrait of them. These studies highlight the fact that African-American and Latino mothers and fathers often parent under conditions that can only be described as highly stressful. They typically face greater challenges to their parenting abilities than most White parents because of the high risk conditions that surround their children, including the more violent neighborhood and school environments we just described. In addition to facing greater challenges, they often have fewer resources to draw-upon, given their higher rates of poverty, with African-American and Latino youths are two to three times as likely to grow up in poverty (Proctor & Dalakar, 2002). These higher rates of poverty put children at risk for a host of negative outcomes, including poorer physical and mental health, school achievement, and involvement with violent or victimizing peer groups (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz & Simmons, 1994; Luthar, 1999; McLoyd, 1998). Poverty also affects parenting. McLoyd and colleagues have written extensively about the challenges faced by parents with very limited financial resources and how that can disrupt parenting (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; Huston et al., 2001; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002). To state it bluntly, parenting while poor can readily turn into poor parenting.

The family stress model developed by Conger and colleagues (Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Conger, Rueter, & Conger, 2000) describes how poverty puts a great deal of stress on the individual parent, and in two-parent families, on the marital relationships. This stress leads to family dysfunction and distress and to parenting practices and parenting that can be at once overly harsh, and insufficiently warm and involved.

Parents who experience high levels of stress are more likely to be punitive, react irritably with their children, and to exert discipline in a manner that is more inconsistent (Conger et al., 2000; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996; McLoyd & Smith, 2002). In turn, there is good evidence that this type of inconsistent parenting can contribute to adolescent conduct problems and lowered academic achievement (Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Thornberry & Krohn, 2003).

Yet, despite the stress so often experienced by African-American and Latino families, especially those in high risk neighborhoods, not all parenting is disrupted.

There is much evidence that warm and involved parenting can serve as a source of protection for adolescents. Minority adolescents generally do better when their parents are warm and use firm, even strict, disciplinary practices. This type of positive parenting can help to protect youth from the negative influences they are exposed to in poor neighborhoods and schools (Brody et al., 2001; Duncan & Raudenbush, 2002; Loukas, Prelow, Suizzo, & Allulua, 2008; O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002). While much of this research has been conducted with African-American families, research focusing specifically on Latino families has likewise found that warm, involved parenting can lead to more positive developmental outcomes in their children, even in high risk circumstances (Gandara, 1995; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Hernandez, 1993). For example, family support has been found to moderate the negative effects of acculturative stress on Latino youth (Hovey & King, 1996; Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987).

Moreover, some forms of parenting that, on first blush, may appear less than optimal, may work well within these ecological niches. Various studies have suggested that, in part due to the higher risk environments they typically live in, parenting styles that are stricter or more high-control may be adaptive in raising African-American and Latino adolescents so long as the high levels of control are leavened with high warmth and affection (Cauce et al., 1996; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000; Pittman & Chase-Landsdale, 2001).

More specifically, parental monitoring, defined by parents' knowledge of their children's friends, activities, and whereabouts, appears to play an especially important role in protecting adolescents from harm, and ensuring their positive developmental outcomes. Research with both African-American and Latino families suggests that parental monitoring may be instrumental in shielding adolescents from the anti-social, deviant peer groups found more often in poor neighborhoods and schools (Brody et al., 2001; Gonzales, Cauce, & Mason, 1996; Quane & Rankin, 1998; Rankin & Quane, 2002). Thus, accumulating empirical evidence shows that parenting is both shaped by the social environments that surround families, and in turn, that parenting shapes adolescent behavior. The complex interaction and interplay between these factors is most vividly captured in qualitative studies. In Robin Jarrett's (1997, 1999) ethnographic analyses, she has described the work of African-American parents in high risk neighborhoods as "bridging"; it is their role to provide their children a bridge away from the antisocial values they are exposed to and towards more pro-social, conventional lifestyles and values. Some of what has been described as intrusive, harsh behavior or over-protective parenting, Jarrett describes as parental attempts to shield their children from a street culture that has been described as "predatory". Cauce, Gonzales, Mason and colleagues (Cauce et al., 1996; Mason, Cauce, & Gonzales, 1997; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1994; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996) have likewise described the very real quandary that African-Americans can feel when, on the one hand, they want to support and encourage their teenager's autonomy, but, on the other, want to protect them from the dangers that exist in high risk neighborhoods and schools.

An ethnographic study of Puerto Rican and Mexican American adolescent girls and their mothers led to similar observations. Foremost amongst mother's concerns was fear about their children's exposure to community violence and drug use. In order to counteract these dangers, they paid careful attention to their contacts outside the family, set strict family rules for behavior outside the homes, and involved other family members in the supervision of their daughters (Villarruel, 1998).

It is not surprising that the protective parenting strategies developed by African-American and Latino parents are so similar given the similarities in the risks they face. In this vein, it is important to note that while overly harsh and punitive parenting has been found to lead to poor adolescent outcomes and to magnify risk, what is "optimally" and what is "overly" harsh or strict may vary by context and ethnicity. Numerous studies have found that perhaps overly strict parenting, from a White perspective, might not only be protective, but African-American and Latino youths may interpret the strictness as a sign of their parents love and concern (Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Mason, Walker-Barnes, Tu, Simons, & Martinez-Arrue, 2004; Parke, 2004).

It is not easy to describe with any accuracy or authority the type of parenting that Barack Obama received, especially given the number of different "primary" caretakers in his life. He lived for a time with his mother and Indonesian stepfather, for a while with his grandparents with a long-distance mother, and for a time with all three. But, extrapolating from his accounts, one could certainly conclude that his family life was characterized by a great deal of warmth and caring, and that when a firm hand was needed, it was there—whether in the form of grandmother, grandfather, or mother. The absence of his father loomed large, and most likely exacerbated the difficulties he had when struggling for ethnic identity. But, all in all, he seems to have mostly experienced the type of positive parenting that leads to desirable outcomes.

Toward a Majority–Minority Future

In this chapter, we have attempted to provide an overview of some of the most salient risks faced by African-American and Latino youth, and also of some of the sources of stress and protection they might experience. In doing so, the view we have provided is a high level one, largely glossing over some of the very real differences between African-Americans and Latinos, as well as the huge diversity within African-American and Latino subgroups. Anyone working directly with youth, whether as a practitioner or researcher, should proceed with care in making generalizations to their specific context and population.

While some general trends can be readily discerned from a review of the literature in this area, there is still a great need for longitudinal research, with good measurement of both the characteristics of minority youth and their families, and of the neighborhoods they live in and schools they attend. While there is much to suggest that risk and resilience accumulates and/or plays out over time, too much of the research is cross-sectional, especially when African American or Latino youth are the subjects of study.

We also know very little about the advantages or risks faced by these youths when they do live in, or attend, more affluent schools. Indeed, it has begun almost common for affluent primary and secondary schools to reach out to poor, but talented, African American and Latino youth, in part, to provide them better educational and social opportunities, and in part, to enrich and diversify the experiences of the affluent White majority student body. But, there has been little long-term follow-up examining how these social experiments impact the social, emotional, and educational outcomes of the youth who experience such dissonance between what they see and experience in their home/neighborhood and school

environments. Such studies may help identify what cultural scaffolding may lead to optimal bridging between these environments.

In summary, it seems quite clear that any analysis of the social context surrounding African-American and Latino youth will show that, as a group, they start their lives at a disadvantage compared to their White counterparts. They are more likely to be poor, more likely to live in neighborhoods marked by disorganization and violence, and more likely to attend poor quality, potentially violent schools. The same pressures these forces exert on adolescents also create stress for the family, and can disrupt parenting. When parenting is disrupted, environmental risk is magnified for adolescents.

Given the conditions they grow up in, it is no wonder that, on average, African-American and Latino youth often have developmental outcomes that are less than positive. Indeed, for those youth where all of these factors come together, especially in their most negative form, it is hard to imagine positive, or resilient, outcomes. Someone cannot pull themselves up with their bootstraps unless they, at least, have boots.

Fortunately, for many youths there is just enough positive to offset the risk. For example, when parents are able to provide their children with firm and involved parenting, environmental risks can be somewhat mitigated. And, it would be a mistake to believe that even in the worse schools or neighborhoods there are not pockets of protection. Some youth manage to access them, even against the odds.

In order to make abstract points more tangible, we have drawn from Obama's biography, albeit fairly lightly. Obama's writings suggest that while he faced some risks, similar to those of other African-American or Latino youths, he also benefitted from a great deal of protection. Such protection came for him in the form of grandparents providing emotional stability and consistent parenting and a highly educated mother who instilled in him a love of knowledge and passion for learning. He grew up in a safe, middle-class neighborhood, and attended an academically rigorous school. Both of these were located within an extremely multicultural context, which is especially rare in the mainland United States.

Obama's trajectory is surely not a roadmap that the typical African-American or Latino youth, or their parents, can use to plot out a successful path. Still, it does provide a very visible example of just how much is possible. There is no one formula, or magic bullet, to ensure positive outcomes for youth of color, especially the many who experience multiple risks to their well-being. To make that possibility a reality for more of our youth will take the efforts not just of their parents, but of all of us.

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Fig. 1.
US population—ages 0–17

Fig. 2.
Selected risk or problem behaviour in high school students (2007)

Fig. 3.
Health status—National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

Fig. 4.
Adolescent births per 1,000 (2006)

Fig. 5.
Youth neither enrolled in school or working (ages 16–19)

Fig. 6.
Young adult outcomes—child trends

Fig. 7.
Male youth mortality rate (15–19)