Moral Meta-Narratives, Marginalization, and Youth Development

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Morality, a central dimension of culture, is crucial for research on the development of youth experiencing marginalization. In this article, we discuss two main meta-narratives as moral frameworks that provide different meaning to the past and to cultural change: liberal progress, focused on the struggle of those who have historically experienced marginalization (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities), and community lost, focused on those who are experiencing some forms of marginalization in response to cultural and economic changes (e.g., rural Whites). Because these two meta-narratives represent a false dichotomy, we use relational epistemology principles—holism, identity of opposites, opposites of identity, and synthesis of wholes—to formulate an integrated metanarrative, community progress, to overcome this polarity and promote research on the development of all youth experiencing marginalization. Acknowledging and understanding these moral meta-narratives is crucial because they influence scientific discourse, political action, and policy that impacts marginalization and youth development.

Keywords: culture, morality, meta-narratives, marginalization, development

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The role of culture,¹ as well as research on racial/ethnic minority youth (henceforth, minority youth²), have been historically neglected in developmental science. If marginalization is defined as relegating ideas and groups to the fringe of society, both culture and minority youth have experienced considerable marginalization in developmental research. It took decades for scholars to convince their colleagues that culture is not peripheral but of central importance in human development (e.g., Quintana et al., 2006; Rogoff, 2003; Super & Harkness, 1986) and that minority youth are under- and misrepresented in developmental research (e.g., García Coll, Akerman, & Cicchetti, 2000; S. Graham, 1992; MacPhee, Kreutzer, & Fritz, 1994; McLoyd & Randolph, 1985). One of the major achievements of García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model is that it addressed both forms of marginalization by placing culture and minorities at the forefront of developmental science.

In this article, we advance this endeavor by presenting morality as a domain of culture that is often neglected in developmental research on marginalization and by discussing the role of meta-narratives as moral frameworks that have profound impact on the development of youth experiencing marginalization.³ We center on two opposing meta-narratives that are implicitly used to approach youth marginalization: liberal progress and community lost. We use Overton’s (2010, 2015) relational epistemology to frame and propose their integration. Fundamental split dichotomies, such as these oppos-

¹ We define culture as a system of practices, symbols, values, and ideals that are shared by a community, transmitted from one generation to the next, dynamic and constantly changing, operating at the individual and societal levels, and related to ethnicity and race (Causadias, 2013; Cohen, 2009; Kitayama & Uskul, 2011).
² We use the term minorities to represent membership in any non-White groups in the United States, including, but not limited to, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders.
³ Consistent with the editorial for this special issue (see Causadias & Umaña-Taylor, 2018), we focus on “youth experiencing marginalization” or “youth marginalization” rather than “marginalized youth.”
ing meta-narratives, are typical of Cartesian dualistic epistemologies. However, from a relational epistemological viewpoint this separation represents a false dichotomy, because both are in constant interpenetration, coaction, and reciprocal bidirectionality (Overton, 2010, 2015). We employ relational epistemological principles—holism, identity of opposites, opposites of identity, and synthesis of wholes—to approach these meta-narratives and developmental research on youth experiencing marginalization and to formulate a new integrated metanarrative: community progress. We believe this metanarrative can guide research, policy, and interventions to support the development of all youth experiencing marginalization.

Following García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model, we focus primarily on youth residing in the United States.

Culture, Morality, and Development

García Coll and colleagues (1996) situated cultural influences in minority youth development not as isolated but within the dominant stratification system of society. According to this framework, minority youth development is inherently linked to culture, ethnicity, race, gender, and class. Reflecting on the role of morality can further advance the understanding of marginalization, because morality plays a central role in human development and culture (Jensen, 2008, 2015). Moral development is conceptualized as a universal aspect of children’s socialization in all cultures and societies (Jensen, 2015). Within the field of developmental psychology, research has focused heavily on the development of children’s moral reasoning regarding principles of justice, fairness, and individual rights (see Haidt, 2008). Kohlberg (1963, 1969) proposed a cognitive developmental theory of moral reasoning that posits an invariant sequence of stages through which individuals progress. Although this theory was informed by data from youth and young adult males in the United States (Colby et al., 1983; Kohlberg, 1963), Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning were postulated as universal (e.g., Nisan & Kohlberg, 1982; Snarey, Reimer, & Kohlberg, 1985). However, scholars have argued that moral reasoning concepts among children from different cultural groups are broader than the concepts articulated by cognitive-developmental (Kohlberg, 1963) and domain approaches (Turiel, 1983).

Efforts to integrate developmental and cultural perspectives on moral reasoning has led to an expansion of the concepts that are pertinent to moral development to better represent the diversity of human experience in different cultures (Jensen, 2008). One such model involves an emphasis on moral reasoning regarding autonomy (i.e., individual rights and needs), divinity (i.e., spirituality, religiosity, and divine law), and community (obligations and concerns for the group’s welfare; Jensen, 2008; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). These expanded concepts of morality are pertinent to the study of youth marginalization in the United States. For example, many Latino youth are socialized to value concepts of community, such as placing the needs of the family above the needs of the individual (Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987). As such, understanding moral development from a perspective that is informed by developmental and cultural models has the potential to advance the field. But it also entails recognition of the supraindividual nature of culture (Kitayama & Uskul, 2011), the acknowledgment that morality goes beyond the development of moral reasoning at the individual level. It also operates at the societal level through moral meta-narratives that impact the development of youth experiencing marginalization.

Morality and Meta-Narratives

Morality specifies ideals, norms, values, virtues, ethics, and goals (Wuthnow, 1987), informing the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, fair and unfair, and meaningful and meaningless (Smith, 2003). Morality is made of interrelated sets of values, rules, practices, identities, and organizations that work together to regulate individual behavior and make social life possible. For individuals, morality provides a cohesive—but not always coherent—set of assumptions, expectations, commitments, beliefs, aspirations, thoughts, judgments, obligations, and feelings. But morality is not merely a set of abstractions far removed from everyday life. Morality is...
and rapid social change (Greenfield, 1999; Rogoff, 2003), to
tions. Furthermore, although narrative research on youth
two that they include, in some cases, all history, experience, and meaning in a single story. Meta-Narratives function like invisible constitutions that guide and inspire communities. They are shared stories that lay out the foundation for a moral order, offering a system of beliefs, ideology, and obligations (Haidt, 2008). Meta-Narratives go beyond chronicles of separate events placed in time, but they aspire to express the magnitude and meaning of actions and events in a unified, interconnected explanation (de Rivera & Sarbin, 1998). Meta-Narratives are therefore purposefully created to provide accounts and meaning to human history, usually by articulating three common components: (a) a cast of characters who are the subjects or objects of action; (b) a plot with a structured sequence of beginning, middle, and end, although not always in that order; and (c) the transmission of an important message, whether it is a revelation, explanation, or insight about life and the world (Smith, 2003). Many Western meta-narratives parallel or emulate the Christian narrative, including elements of paradise lost, fall or awakening into sin, temptations along the way, and a road to redemption (Smith, 2003).

In addition to providing meaning and social cohesion, meta-narratives have the function of enforcing moral systems that challenge, perpetuate, or seek to reclaim social power. Power dynamics lie at the center of meta-narratives because they serve to maintain a moral and social order. They define who experiences marginalization and who does not, and who is entitled to rights and privileges, access to resources, and even justice. They inform ideology and serve for system justification, motivating individuals and communities to defend the status quo and to view current social arrangements as just, legitimate, and necessary (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). But they can also articulate system resistance by challenging the status quo and illuminating the present conditions of some groups as unfair and oppressive. Thus, these meta-narratives are not power-neutral: They are biased toward responding to perceived threats to privilege and social status or toward denouncing oppression. Next, we discuss the metanarrative that arguably inspired García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model, and that is at the core of most developmental research on youth marginalization.

5 For a discussion of differences and similarities between master narratives and meta-narratives, see the online supplemental materials.
The Liberal Progress Moral Metanarrative

One of the more consequential moral frameworks for the study of youth marginalization is the “liberal progress” metanarrative (henceforth, liberal progress), described as follows:

Once upon a time, the vast majority of human persons suffered in societies and social institutions that were unjust, unhealthy, repressive, and oppressive. These traditional societies were reprehensible because of their deep-rooted inequality, exploitation, and irrational traditionalism—all of which made life very unfair, unpleasant, and short. But the noble human aspiration for autonomy, equality, and prosperity struggled mightily against the forces of misery and oppression, and eventually succeeded in establishing modern, liberal, democratic, capitalist, welfare societies. While modern social conditions hold the potential to maximize the individual freedom and pleasure of all, there is much work to be done to dismantle the powerful vestiges of inequality, exploitation, and repression. This struggle for the good society in which individuals are equal and free to pursue their self-defined happiness is the one mission truly worth dedicating one’s life to achieving. (Smith, 2003, p. 82)

The core message of liberal progress is that injustice, oppression, and inequality provoked significant suffering in the past, but modern democracy and science offer a chance to reverse these effects by promoting equality and fighting to overcome the lingering consequences of exclusion (Haidt, 2012). Issues of power are central to this metanarrative because it focuses on groups that have historically faced marginalization (e.g., racial/ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities; women; immigrants6). According to liberal progress, these groups have been oppressed, victimized, excluded, and neglected by those who hold positions of power and enjoy exclusive social advantages and privileges (e.g., Whites,7 religious majorities, heterosexuals, men, nationals). Thus, liberal progress is not an abstract issue disconnected from the reality of children and youth who have historically experienced oppression and exclusion. On the contrary, this metanarrative has had a profound impact in the development of youth experiencing marginalization. It has provided a roadmap for group action aimed at ending racial segregation and discrimination, like the American civil rights movement. In turn, these movements resulted in landmark legislations (e.g., Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Civil Rights Act of 1964) that have led to some improvements in the educational opportunities and lives of minority youth over the last decades.

The impact of this metanarrative in developmental science on youth marginalization cannot be overstated. We argue that García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model is firmly embedded within this metanarrative, because it conceptualizes marginalization as central rather than peripheral to the theoretical understanding of minority youth development. Grounded within social stratification theory, a key emphasis of this framework is on its underlying processes, including racism, discrimination, oppression, and segregation (García Coll et al., 1996). Furthermore, this metanarrative impacts development by inspiring, providing life purpose and meaning and articulating political, ideological, social, and professional goals for those who embrace it (e.g., the struggle against inequality), including many minority scholars (see Syed, 2017).

The Community-Lost Moral Metanarrative

The community-lost metanarrative (henceforth, community lost) represents history and morality in stark contrast to the liberal progress metanarrative. Also framed as the Reagan narrative (Westen, 2008), this metanarrative is defined as follows:

Once upon a time, folk lived together in local, face-to-face communities where we knew and took care of each other. Life was simple and sometimes hard. But we lived in harmony with nature, laboring honestly at the low and in handcraft. Life was securely woven in homespun fabrics of organic, integrated culture, faith, and tradition. We truly knew who we were and felt deeply for our land, our kin, our customs. But then a dreadful thing happened. Folk community was overrun by the barbarisms of modern industry, urbanization, rationality, science, fragmentation, anonymity, transience, and mass produc-

6 Individuals can belong to more than one of these groups, as proposed by the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991). We do not utilize this model, because it has already been employed to approach marginalization (e.g., Santos, 2016), whereas using moral meta-narratives to address marginalization has not.
7 We use the term Whites to represent membership in any racial/ethnic group in the United States of European ancestry, including, but not limited to, European Americans, Anglo-Americans, and Caucasians.
timation. Faith began to erode, social trust dissipate, folk customs vanish. Work became alienating, authentic feeling repressed, neighbors, strangers, and life standardized and rationalized. Those who knew the worth of simplicity, authentic feeling, nature, and custom resisted the vulgarities and uniformities of modernity. But all that remains today are tattered vestiges of a world we have lost. The task of those who see clearly now is to memorialize and celebrate folk community, mourn its ruin, and resist and denounce the deprivations of modern, scientific rationalism that would kill the Human Spirit. (Smith, 2003, pp. 85–86)

In contrast to liberal progress, community lost focuses on groups that are now experiencing some forms of marginalization (e.g., rural and working-class Whites, alienated men) and argues that the excessive pressures and demands of modern societies—science, urbanization, industrialization, secularization—have eroded and fragmented communities that were previously harmonious, integrated, religious, and traditional in values and lifestyles. The present plays a central role in community lost, and it is usually viewed as a splendid period of prosperity and cohesion, happiness and harmony, and obedience to tradition and God. Cultural change is perceived as negative, as alien ideas championed by intellectuals (e.g., professors, journalists) challenged and perverted this order. Those who endorse this narrative see the present as decadent and yearn for the past. They “have discovered that nostalgia can be a powerful political motivator, perhaps even more powerful than hope. Hopes can be disappointed. Nostalgia is irrefutable” (Lilla, 2016, p. xiv).

In part, community lost articulates the reaction to major demographic shifts in the United States, including the rapid growth in minority populations. By 2044, Whites will no longer be the numerical majority in the country (Colby & Ortmann, 2015). Community lost also accounts for economic and cultural changes, including the decline in health and rise in mortality as a result of worsening economic conditions of rural and working-class Whites in the country (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2017) and their struggle to keep up with rapid cultural changes, deep resentment of urban liberals, and feelings of betrayal and abandonment by the federal government (Hochschild, 2016). However, it is problematic to equate the experience of rural, working-class Whites to that of groups that have historically faced marginalization in ways that are quantitatively and qualitatively different (see Causadias & Umaña-Taylor, 2018). For instance, marginalization of rural Whites is often related to class and education, whereas minority marginalization is also based on culture, ethnicity, and race (Isenberg, 2016), which have different developmental implications.

Despite these differences, the impact of the community-lost metanarrative should not be easily disregarded, even if its premises are questionable. This metanarrative articulates arguments employed by the populist wave that depicts liberal progress as a threat to the social status, power, and privilege of Whites. It sheds light on the rise of Donald J. Trump to the presidency of the United States under the call for a return to the past and the status quo of unapologetic and uncontested White dominance (“Make America Great Again”). It has profound effects on the development of youth who have historically experienced marginalization because it directly threatens their well-being, not only by removing protections but by potentially criminalizing undocumented, transgender, and minority youth.

However, community lost may have the positive effect of calling attention to the adverse experience of rural White youth. In recent years, rural White youth have been affiliated by the heroin epidemic (Cicero, Ellis, Surratt, & Kurtz, 2014) and have surpassed urban youth in substance abuse (Lambert, Gale, & Hartley, 2008; Roberts et al., 2016). Landmark research on the development of White youth has documented the role of social class identity development in the context of educational and career pathways (Bettie, 2014; Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Fine & Sirin, 2007) and White youth and their feelings of marginalization in school, their multietnic communities, and more broadly, society (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008). Nevertheless, more developmental research on rural White youth is necessary.

Moral Meta-Narratives, Marginalization, and Youth Development

Liberal progress and community lost impact emotional responses and cognitive processing, provide meaning to the past, help explain the present, and give guidance for the future. Most important, these two meta-narratives are central to understanding the development of youth experiencing marginalization, because they define (a) who has been the victim of marginalization, (b) what are the causes of social injustice and exclusion, (c) what are the solutions to these issues, and (d) how morality influences the development of youth experiencing marginalization, as they operate at the individual and societal levels.

First, liberal progress and community lost are important because they define who has experienced marginalization and is entitled to supports and resources. By providing the blueprint of a moral order, they identify what is right or wrong and who has been treated unfairly. Thus, they challenge the status quo (system resistance) by advocating for social inclusion of minorities and other groups that have historically experienced marginalization (liberal progress) or rationalize maintaining the status quo (system justification) and restoring prosperity to ethnic majorities and historically dominant groups that have experienced the whiplash of globalization and threats to their social status (community lost). Liberals may support social justice programs because their morality is rooted in care for the disadvantaged and equality among groups, whereas conservatives may oppose such programs because they counter their
ethic of autonomy and personal responsibility (Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Graham, 2007).

Second, meta-narratives play a pivotal role in delineating the causes of marginalization. This usually involves identifying the sources of oppression and injustice, typically by portraying an outgroup as the causal agent in the marginalization of the ingroup. Liberal progress finds White supremacy and patriarchy to be the root causes of the oppression of minorities, immigrants, and women, which often leads to blaming conservative White men for their marginalization. The community lost places the responsibility for the unwanted changes to their communities on secularism, liberalism, and globalization, which often leads to blaming liberals, professors, journalists, women, minorities, and immigrants.

Third, meta-narratives play a pivotal role in delineating solutions to the problems of youth marginalization, which have a direct impact on cultural, ethnic, and racial relations and youth development. Whereas liberal progress places a major emphasis on systemic change to overcome structural issues of power, privilege, and exclusion, community lost argues in favor of individual agency and personal merit to achieve autonomy and prosperity, denying the role of structural forces. These opposite and apparently irreconcilable perspectives result in very different policies, programs, and legislation. They also prescribe very different research agendas.

Fourth, meta-narratives display how morality has a direct influence on the development of youth experiencing marginalization, because they operate at the individual and societal level. At the individual level, these meta-narratives shape development by providing a moral order and a historical account that gives meaning and purpose to how youth make sense of their own experiences. At the societal level, these meta-narratives can have a decisive influence in child development, because they provide a moral order to institutions that become the contexts of development (Super & Harkness, 1986). Neighborhoods, schools, and governments may explicitly or implicitly subscribe to liberal progress or community lost, which in turn, conditions how children and adolescents are treated, what resources are afforded to them, and their likelihood to overcome marginalization. This is consistent with research and theory linking societal-level cultural processes and individual development (see Greenfield, 1999, 2009).

Integrating Opposing Moral Meta-Narratives Using the Process—Relational Paradigm

It is challenging to find a middle ground between two seemingly contradictory moral frameworks (Stout, 1988) such as liberal progress and community lost. How does one reconcile what seems irreconcilable? How can one perspective that sees racial and gender equality as the goal (liberal progress) and another that sees it as a problem (community lost) be brought together? To answer this question, one must address the notion of “levels of metatheory.” Although meta-narratives operate at the metatheoretical level to provide grounding that informs the way specific domains of inquiry are studied, it is important to note that there several levels of metatheory (see Figure 1). Although liberal progress and community lost function at a high level of discourse (i.e., metatheoretical discourse—metatheory), the ontological—epistemological level is above it and informs all other levels (i.e., metatheoretical discourse—ontological—epistemological groundings). It is variously referred to as a “worldview” or, when applied specifically to science, a “scientific research paradigm” level of metatheory (Overton, 2010, 2015). And it is at this level that the solution to the integration of the two meta-narratives must be found.

There are currently two alternative scientific research paradigms that can inform the meaning of moral meta-narratives: the Cartesian—mechanistic—dualistic and the process—relational paradigms. The Cartesian epistemology establishes relations between paradigms as an unavoidable dichotomy in which either one or the other constitutes reality. Thus, it offers no guidance for a reconciliation between the moral orders articulated and embodied by liberal progress and community lost. Embracing the tenets of this dualistic metatheory—that follows a reductionist “divide and conquer strategy” with re-

spection to fundamental concepts—leads to split, dichotomous either/or conceptual approaches to problem solutions. Thus, within this context, one must choose one of the two moral meta-narratives as the fundamental truth, and its opposite becomes derived, epiphenomenal, or a special case of reality (Overton, 2015). The idea that the two moral meta-narratives are simply rivals is one Cartesian solution; another is the idea that one can contain and subsume the other. In contrast, the process—relational paradigm demonstrates how the split or opposition of these two meta-narratives can be resolved and both can constitute a whole whose parts are reciprocally co-acting and interpenetrating. The process—relational paradigm is composed of four principles—holism, identity of opposites, opposites of identity, and synthesis of wholes—that serve to eliminate splits and offer a stable base from which to pursue science within a relational world (Overton, 2010, 2015).

The first principle is holism, which asserts that the meaning of any entity or event derives from the context in which it is embedded. Just as reductionism is the overarching principle of the Cartesian paradigm, holism forms the basic principle of relational epistemology. Any system is a relational set of processes such that the whole determines the nature of the parts and the parts determine the nature of the whole (Overton, 2015). Holism invites researchers to appreciate that even if they focus on one metanarrative or one component of each one—past as paradise lost, equality as promised land—they also need to recognize that these components must be contextualized as parts of systems that function as wholes: communities, states, and nations. Also, they need to pay attention to the historical development from which each moral metanarrative emerged: civil rights movements for liberal progress and modernity and globalization for community lost (see Figure 2).

This attention to the whole ecosystem of development and history is consistent with the aim of Garcia Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model of recognizing the role of culture in development, as well as historical and structural forces driving marginalization. Holism invites researchers to consider critical components of the experience of marginalization that impacts development and may be neglected, including ecological changes at the community, neighborhood, county, state, national, and global levels. For example, how climate change threatens the health, well-being, and life of vulnerable youth of every ethnic background (Wheeler & Von Braun, 2013). Likewise, it points out the role meta-narratives can play in promoting awareness of and action against climate change (liberal progress) or denial of research evidence and avoidance of action under the pretext that environmental protections will destroy jobs (community lost). Holism also encourages developmental researchers to consider not only ecological but also historical and cultural forces that shape the development of youth experiencing marginalization. Holism can foster a new appraisal of historical and cultural processes traditionally misrepresented as distal but that exert powerful influence on the development of youth experiencing marginalization and are commanding engines of meta-narratives. For instance, how the Atlantic slave trade impacts the development of African American youth and motivates liberal progress, or how the U.S. Civil War shapes the development of rural White youth in the South and fuels community lost. In the end, holism can help overcome the false dichotomy of liberal progress versus community lost by illustrating how they are both embedded in ecological, cultural, and historical forces that shape the development of youth experiencing marginalization.

Holism also encourages developmental researchers to look inward, in addition to looking outward. It underscores the notion that developmental science is a knowledge enterprise that is framed, pursued, and conducted by developmental researchers who are not morally neutral but are committed to certain meta-narratives. Ultimately, developmental research on youth marginalization is an exercise of power by the developmental researcher, because it documents and legitimates some experiences of social exclusion but not all. “One aspect of power is the ability to determine what counts as knowledge and to make knowledge appear ‘natural’ rather than a human construction” (Gjerde, 2004, p. 145).

The second principle of relational epistemology is termed the identity of opposites. It constitutes one moment of analysis that relaxes the logical law of contradiction and, thus, establishes an identity between parts of a whole. In this moment, the parts are understood not as exclusive contradictions (as in the Cartesian split epistemology) but as
differentiated and equal polarities of a unified and indissociable relationship (Overton, 2010). As differentiations, each pole is defined recursively: Each pole defines and is defined by its opposite. Here each category contains and is its opposite; they are coequal and inseparable. Consequently, based on the identity of opposites principle, community lost is liberal progress, and liberal progress is community lost. Both are part of the matrix of American history, culture, morality, and meaning-making (see Figure 3).

Community lost and liberal progress are constantly engaged in a coconstructing feedback loop, nonadditive and reciprocal codetermination (Overton & Reese, 1973). First, landmark issues of community lost, such as perceived cultural change, threats to social status, and competition for scarce resources during economic crisis can directly trigger further disadvantage among groups championed by liberal progress. Recent studies have revealed that perceived scarcity may change perceptions of race in ways that aggravate racial discrimination, underscoring how marginalization can be exacerbated during times of economic duress (Krosch & Amodio, 2014). Times of economic scarcity also influence the educational opportunities of Latino youth, for example, but such impact depends on the developmental timing of the economic crisis in their lives (Pérez-Brena, Wheeler, Rodríguez De Jesús, Updegraff, & Umaña-Taylor, 2017). Latino youth who transitioned out of high school during the 2007 economic downturn, compared to their older siblings who transitioned prior to this historical event, were less likely to pursue postsecondary education and less likely to attend a 4-year higher education institution (Pérez-Brena et al., 2017). Second, one metanarrative can reinforce the other, because Whites who resent Blacks might feel that they are falling behind if they perceive that Blacks are making progress (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Whites who endorse the current U.S. status hierarchy as legitimate are more likely to support rising health care benefits mostly from different racial groups (Lafortune, Rothstein, & Schanzenbach, 2016), whereas minority groups might feel less inclined to support rising health care benefits mostly aimed at elderly Whites.

García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model showed the importance of culture, ethnicity, and race in the development of youth experiencing marginalization. The identity of opposites can inform and guide research on such youth by encouraging developmental researchers to see that minorities and majorities are part of the same matrix, because they are codependent and intimately connected. Majorities cannot exist without minorities, and vice versa, because their relationship exemplifies the dynamic of mutually constructed contrasts. For instance, in a hypothetical homogeneous society, ethnicity becomes irrelevant because the idea of ethnic groups is founded on differences and requires boundaries, contrasts, and interactions (Gjerde, 2004). Majorities and minorities are part of the same system, so changes in one component (demographic growth of minorities) triggers a reaction in the other (sense of alienation and loss of power among Whites), and this relation feeds into opposing meta-narratives. This idea of an inseparable connection between two poles has been employed successfully in developmental psychopathology, a framework that emphasizes the notion that normal development cannot be understood without studying abnormal development, and vice versa (Sroufe, 1997).

Studying the implications of the U.S. demographic shift in the balance of White versus minority youth is an example of the application of identity of opposites. Further, this major demographic shift is likely to impact distinct groups of youth at different developmental points (e.g., early childhood, adolescence, the transition into adulthood). More broadly speaking, identity of opposites presents a challenge to us to approach different groups at opposite developmental periods that can have important parallels. For instance, graying and browning are twin demographic revolutions currently reshaping American society (Pastor, Scoggins, & Treuhaft, 2017). First, graying refers to the growing trend in the senior population, which is predominantly White and is projected to double and outnumber youth for the first time in U.S. history by 2033 (Pastor et al., 2017). Second, browning refers to the growing trend in the minority population, which is projected to become the majority of the U.S. population by 2044 (Pastor et al., 2017). These twin processes—the aging White population and the browning of younger generations—can trigger a racial generation gap that can exacerbate opposing meta-narratives but also manifests the joint fate of these two groups. Seniors are less likely to support education spending on youth when they are from different racial groups (Lafortune, Rothstein, & Schanzenbach, 2016), whereas minority groups might feel less inclined to support rising health care benefits mostly aimed at elderly Whites.

The third principle of relational epistemology is the opposites of identity. This principle establishes a stable foundation for inquiry by moving to a second moment of analysis following the identity of opposites, in which the law of contradiction is restated and categories again exclude each other (Overton, 2010). As a consequence of this exclusion, parts exhibit unique identities that differentiate each from American History and Culture

Liberal Progress

Community Lost

Figure 3. Second principle: Identity of opposites.
the other. These unique differential qualities are stable within any dynamic system and thus may form a relatively stable platform for empirical inquiry. Hence, liberal progress and community lost now each attains a unique identity that differentiates one from the other. They become standpoints, points of view, lines of sight (Latour, 1993), or levels of analysis, not bedrock realities as in the Cartesian paradigm (Overton, 2010). Although explicitly recognizing that both meta-narratives exist, impact, and mobilize individuals and groups, alternative perspectives allow analyzing marginalization from a liberal progress or community-lost standpoint. They no longer represent competing accounts; rather, they are two reciprocally related points of view on marginalization. Liberal progress can provide a unique platform to approach the development of minority youth as they struggle with institutional and structural barriers, whereas from the community-lost perspective one can investigate how economic decline and rapid cultural change promotes adversity and alienation that affects rural White youth development (see Figure 4).

García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model argues that there is “no theoretical or empirical reason to assume that individual primary developmental processes operate differently for children of color than for Caucasian children in Western society” (p. 1893). Developmental researchers can advance this idea by using the opposites of identity principle and recognizing that liberal progress and community lost are only standpoints—again, not rock bottom realities—from which to address youth development. But minority and White youth are not essentially different, even if they face very different and unique cultural and ecological influences. Taking the community-lost perspective, in addition to the liberal progress standpoint, can also advance the field. Proponents of liberal progress have been criticized for not including conservatives in their vision of social change. But advances in diversity and inclusion of youth experiencing marginalization cannot be maintained or consolidated if those who are opposed or feel affected by them are excluded from this conversation. Ultimately, including conservative voices and perspectives is crucial in advancing cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity because political beliefs are key components of culture (Redding, 2012).

Finally, the fourth principle, synthesis of wholes, functions as a third moment of analysis in the dialectical undertaking of relational epistemology. It establishes a resolution to the bipolar tension of the opposites of identity by moving away from this conflict and discovering a new system, a synthesis, that integrates these two moral meta-narratives and provides a more stable base for future research (Overton, 2010). The synthesis of wholes can also inform developmental research on youth marginalization. For instance, by using both liberal progress and community lost to approach the development of minority youth, one may account for the historical consequences of stratification and segregation articulated in García Coll and colleagues’ (1996) integrative model, as well as how recent cultural changes and growing populism can trigger further exclusion and compromise any social progress. One can even entertain the need for progress and the sense of community lost as moments experienced by both racial minorities and majorities, recognizing progress lost (the sense that there was a golden age of improvement in social justice and inclusion) and conservative progress (the desire for social change that brings about a stronger sense of God and country). Likewise, rural minority youth experience most of the same adversities as do White rural youth (in addition to others), whereas Black Muslims might feel as alienated by secularization as are White evangelists. The synthesis of wholes can inform and guide research on the development of youth experiencing marginalization by encouraging individuals to overcome the moral empathy gaps in American culture wars (Ditto & Koleva, 2011) and expand their moral compass to include all youth experiencing marginalization in their conceptualizations, research, training, interventions, and policy.

An Integrated Moral Metanarrative: Community Progress

Using the synthesis of wholes, we formulate a new metanarrative that integrates both liberal progress and community lost and endeavors to address both historical and new forms of youth marginalization. Toward this end, we propose the “community progress” metanarrative (see Figure 5, Community Progress):

Once upon a time, different groups came together under very different circumstances, creating the American experiment. Some came from another land voluntarily, others were forced, and others were displaced or conquered. Within each of these groups, some individuals did better than others. For a long period of time, some were treated unfairly, others inhumanely, whereas others enjoyed prosperity and wealth. Regardless of economic issues, many of these groups lived in communities united by culture, religion, and traditions. But then change happened, and it had an impact, both for the better and for the worse. The struggle for justice and equality resulted in the improvement in the lives of some who were previously treated unfairly or inhumanely, but this progress was insufficient and
that aims at addressing all forms of social exclusion. Important to this process is admitting the influence of meta-narratives on researchers themselves. The social and psychological sciences have been characterized as being ideologically homogeneous, favoring liberal progress (Redding, 2012). In fact, more than 80% of psychology professors have described themselves as liberal in their political views, and less than 10% have labeled themselves as conservative (Duarte et al., 2015; Inbar & Lammers, 2012). But even though liberal progress is largely endorsed in American psychology, minorities are still not well represented in the discipline, and research on marginalization is still lacking. Most doctoral recipients in the psychological and social sciences (72%) are White (National Science Foundation, 2015). Further, studies of culture, ethnicity, race, and stratification processes, although increasing, still accounted for less than 1% of all peer-reviewed articles targeting the periods of childhood and/or adolescence in the PsycINFO database in the past two decades.

In terms of applied developmental science, there is a need for policies, interventions, and training programs that embrace community progress and target the universal needs of all youth experiencing marginalization and the specific needs of particular youth populations. For instance, poverty, obesity, drug abuse, and limited access to quality health care and education are examples of social problems that currently affect both minority and rural White youth. At the same time, it is important to design, implement, and evaluate policies, interventions, and training programs specifically tailored to the development of specific groups. Policies and programs promoting the adaptation of refugee populations in the United States are one such example. Research that tests the direct impact of meta-narratives on youth marginalization is necessary, for instance, by examining how the rise of community lost can exacerbate anxiety among undocumented minority youth and compromise educational achievement, leading to leaks in the academic pipeline (see Cooper, Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002). Likewise, more investigations on the development of rural White youth afflicted by the heroin epidemic are needed ( Cicero et al., 2014).

Other potentially fruitful future research directions include looking at the link between meta-narratives and master narratives in youth development; the association between meta-narratives and the development of moral reasoning regarding autonomy, divinity, and community (Jensen, 2008; Shweder et al., 1997); and the role of meta-narratives on the interplay between culture, development,

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In complete. At the same time, others experienced a deterioration of their communities and quality of life. Traditions started to vanish, faith eroded, and the bonds that kept the community together started to weaken. Rapid cultural change and globalization also affected their economic well-being and have led to rising inequality. Today, we strive to recognize and address the fact that many continue to struggle to overcome social exclusion, whereas others are coping with the deterioration of their communities. The future of America depends on including all of them, to build a more perfect union with liberty and justice for all.

Guided by this proposed metanarrative, we strive to promote a shared moral foundation that can guide conceptualizations, research, training, interventions, and policy to overcome all forms of youth marginalization, moving away from the false dichotomies of liberal progress and community lost. Community progress gives a new meaning to the American experiment by illustrating the existence of different forms and degrees of marginalization, the simultaneous coexistence of social exclusion for some groups and prosperity for others, and the urgent need to come together to make this experiment viable and sustainable. This complex perspective promotes inclusion without illusion, a more nuanced appreciation of the unique and interconnected experiences of marginalization of different groups in the history of the United States.

This proposed metanarrative cannot magically bridge the moral divide or reverse the current political, cultural, and economic polarization, because this divide operates within a Cartesian framework. For the community progress narrative to be plausible, first one must understand that human beings are profoundly moral creatures who gravitate toward different meta-narratives (Haidt, 2008, 2012; Smith, 2003). These meta-narratives, in turn, provide individuals, communities, and institutions with different moral foundations that guide the things they care about, hold sacred, and determine who is experiencing marginalization and who are the beneficiaries of power, privilege, and resources. Developmental research on youth marginalization can advance by recognizing the importance of morality, embodied in meta-narratives, and building a program of research, training, interventions, and policy inspired by community progress.

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8 A PsycINFO search (childhood OR adolescence) AND (racism OR discrimination OR segregation OR prejudice OR oppression) AND (race OR ethnic OR culture) conducted on April 10, 2017, yielded 317 peer-reviewed articles from 1975 to 1995 and 2,233 from 1997 to 2017, accounting for .002% and .006% of all articles on childhood and adolescent samples during these periods, respectively.
and psychopathology (Causadias, 2013). Because this discussion was focused on the role of meta-narratives in the development of youth experiencing marginalization in the United States, more research on how these processes unfold in other regions of the world with unique meta-narratives and cultural, ethnic, and racial dynamics is necessary. It is important to note that further investigations are indispensable to address how effective community progress can be in mobilizing resources and institutional support for all youth experiencing marginalization. While pursuing diversity and inclusion, one should avoid color-blind racism that perpetuates inequality by denying subtle forms of bias, discrimination, and marginalization (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2015). After all, good intentions are insufficient to accomplish social justice (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). But people should also admit that the current cultural and political polarization in the United States is unsustainable and that they should strive to find a shared moral framework.

Admittedly, morality is not the only dimension of culture that accounts for youth marginalization. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, antisemitism, islamophobia, and classism, to name a few, also play a meaningful role in perpetuating social exclusion. But morality is another important piece of the puzzle, one that requires further research in developmental sciences addressing youth marginalization. If it is true that “rarely that requires further research in developmental sciences addressing youth marginalization. But it is true that “rarely is progress made in conceptualizing, measuring, and understanding human behavior without appreciation of and response to the inadequacies of extant, dominant conceptual frameworks and methodologies (Mclloyd, 2004, p. 185),” then developmental research can benefit from expanding one’s view of culture to consider the role of moral meta-narratives in development and from taking into account all youth experiencing marginalization. More broadly, understanding the important role of morality and meta-narratives also forces one to face the limitations of developmental science and science in general. Human beings are ultimately believers who embrace moral orders, even when these beliefs and assumptions cannot be verified empirically; are not derived from a deeper, objective, or independent body of knowledge; and are not universal, self-evident, or shared by all groups (Smith, 2003). Instead of individuals using reality and verifiable facts to guide their beliefs, beliefs condition to a large degree how facts are construed and knowledge is built (Alston, 1993). The result is that they rely on their faith in beliefs that cannot be proven except by those same beliefs (Haidt, 2012). Thus, developmental research is not enough, and advocating against marginalization based on scientific arguments is insufficient. As scientists, we must also rely on the moral argument that youth marginalization is wrong, unfair, and unacceptable. To do so, as citizens, we must find a common moral ground, like the one articulated by the community-progress metanarrative.

References


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