2020

Examining Links Between Culture, Identity, and Learning

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Learning as a cultural process is deeply rooted in our biology and in our evolutionary history. Prior generational intrusions and major events have implications for patterned interactions, processes, and outcomes for subsequent cohorts. Elder's "Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience" (1974) provides an illustration determined by a major socioeconomic fluctuation. Specifically, his description of the long-term impacts of the early 20th century economic depression on youth as observed across time are parallel to current 21st century observations of developmental expressions of cultural processes having under-acknowledged foundations (Davis, Burleigh, & Gardner, 1941; Davis & Havighurst, 1946; Franklin V.P., 1979; Havighurst & Davis, 1943; Siddle-Walker, 2013). The impact of the latter temporal interval on social science conceptual leanings, particularly with reference to youth of color, was made worse for current analyses due to the penchant to ignore or "problematize" developmental expressions of *humanity in context*. Varied cultural expressions of learning have been devalued or "othered" as compared against a particular privileged standard (e.g., see Spencer, 2019; Spencer et al., 2019; Spencer & Dowd, upcoming).

Alternatively, we put forward a viewpoint which recognizes *not simply that culture impacts development. Moreover, we posit that the* ***expression*** *of intergenerationally determined patterns of development and social experience may be cultural in nature* given significant fluctuations or social disruptions associated with prior generations. Particularly significant to contemporary life, there are *few 18th through 20th century* ***contexts serving as conduits*** for interpreting and reacting to *learning patterns as cultural expressions*, other than schools (i.e., both as the context of student learning and the institutions serving as the producers of knowledge utilized for teaching and socialization). The early observations by Havighurst and Davis in "Child Socialization and the School" illustrate the perspective emphasized in this section:

> Educators and other students of human development increasingly are viewing human learning as a function of the total biological and social history of the learner. It seems clear also that all new learning involves the changing of previously learned behavior. Since social behavior is learned, these principles indicate that what the child learns in his school culture is influenced by what he learns in his social life outside of school and what he has learned before he entered school.…His socialization in these groups largely determines what aspects of the school culture are experienced by him as either punishing or rewarding.
>
> *(Havighurst & Davis, 1943, p.29)*

DOI: 10.4324/9780203774977-4

Introduction

Development (and learning) is constituted by social and cultural processes as individuals develop through their participation in cultural practices. The perspective argues that individuals navigate diverse spaces and places, make attendant meanings about, and engage in, culturally mediated interactional processes. Accordingly, development occurs as individuals engage in and make meanings of cultural learning and opportunities. Both for self and as group members, particularly structured social pathways are navigated. As socialization experiences, members respond to the requirements of developmental tasks through youthful participation in cultural practices and culturally mediated interactional processes.

As a cultural tradition particularly in the social sciences, we refer to the longstanding penchant to characterize *cultural variation and social differences from a designated norm as "less than" an assumed performance standard and, thus, presumed to be deficit, deficient and/or deviant* (Allen, 1985; Epps, 1985; Fisher, Hoagwood, Boyce, Duster et al., 2002; Guthrie, 1976); Pierce, 1985; Spencer, 2019; Spencer et al., 2019). This perspective assumes that only those considered "the other" represent and have culture and that the group "having power to define" represents the *privileged* ***performance standard***.

Developmental outcomes as cultural products of coping and adaptation—given stage specific developmental tasks including learning—produce particularly patterned findings. As a consequence of context-imbued conditions of inequality, outcomes frequently stray from those considered "the societal norm." The situation generates values-specific complexities (i.e., patterned processes and outcomes) observed for privileged members of society who demonstrate unparalleled access to awards and supports and thus are viewed as the expected norm without regard for the benefits associated with whiteness, privilege, and power (Spencer, 2019; Spencer et al., 2019). Adding further convolution, developmentally linked meanings are made of observed outcome differences between cultural communities. The particular cultural adaptations enacted by individuals within socially constructed systems of high risk may communicate meanings associated with particular under-valued cultural products. Also possible—as well—*are under-acknowledged access to effective but novel supports and resources* functioning as impactful protective factors (McGee & Spencer, 2013, 2015; Rious, Cunningham & Spencer, 2019). These might include cultural models generally not considered, as such, for privileged groups; thus, the latter might comprise cultural socialization resources, racial identity formation processes and culturally relevant achievement models which serve as supports. As community and/or family relevant protective factors and supports, such resources may increase engagement and psychological well-being (McGee & Spencer, 2013, 2015; Rious, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2019; Spencer et al., 2019).

Affectivity and cognition intersect and interact across the life course *and produce context linked cultural practices contributing to meaning making variation* (Spencer 1995, 2006, and 2008; Spencer et al., 2006). Particularly relevant to learning experiences are those associated with the various features of the *ecology of human development including historical factors* referred to by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the chronosystem, and which are broadly disseminated by education researchers and historians (e.g., see Franklin, J. H., 1967, 1993; Franklin, V. P. 1979; Siddle-Walker, 2013). When phenomenological processes as development specific "meaning making" are added as impactful factors determinative to how individuals make interpretations about their world, *stable outcomes are observed as a result*. Produced are patterned responses to structured conditions and interactions. Thus, the process results in psychosocial outcomes that are specific to development (e.g., sense of self as a learner, as a valued member of society, and an esteemed member of a cultural community). Although copious identity research and theorizing have occurred over the prior fifty years, nonetheless, fundamental aspects of Eriksonian (1964) theorizing along with others remain cogent for delineating the process.

An identity focused cultural- and ecology-emphasizing framework has been helpful in describing the process (see phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory [PVEST: Spencer,

1995, 2006, 2008]). It provides a social-justice-relevant and equity-sensitive conceptual base for understanding the "how" and "why" of the patterned and context linked process and outcomes. Specifically, phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) explains how patterned and episodic physical conditions and psychological processes as cultural practices and context relevant traditions unavoidably shape the nature of mediating cultural processes and products of development (Spencer 1995, 2006, 2008). Accordingly, our strategy for linking culture, identity, and learning suggests a particular chapter organization.

Following the paper's introduction, we first provide *historical contributions* which aid obtaining insights for appreciating the power and nature of contexts of human development. Our paper makes use of research perspectives designed primarily from adolescent research in the United States (i.e., both minority youth of color and white, non-minority privileged adolescents). Following the historical framing, we present phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory in order to articulate the ways by which historical circumstances, the biology-based maturation of individuals and brain changes—particularly at adolescence—are linked with context features. And as a demonstration, we provide studies conducted in unique cultural communities around the globe for demonstrating the efficacy of the conceptual strategy for understanding (and ultimately decreasing) human vulnerability and increasing resiliency. In the paper's third section, we describe brain science's contributions and challenges via interpreting cultural influences and impacts on development in order to delineate the role of biology in the cultural process of learning.

Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Context of Learning: Historical Factors Acknowledged from a PVEST Perspective

Although discussions of reparations have continued to resurface over the last two decades (see e.g., Coates, 2014; Robinson, 2001), and although they formally ended over 150 years ago, the residual impact between and within racial group relationships continues to rage, albeit under-acknowledged by many non-minority United States citizens. The history of North American slavery is generally viewed as a period having no relevance for 21st century United States politics and everyday cultural practices. North America's economic interests and evolved cultural traditions have remained generally under-addressed in the scientific literature though, of course, there are exceptions (e.g., see Roediger, 1991). But the 21st century—as particularly evidenced in developmental science—is depicted without attention to the role of slavery, a persistently under-acknowledged source of impact on human development and everyday cultural practices. It too frequently remains invisible as a source of social class and ethnicity/caste contributors to human development.

Reciprocally, the various developmental requirements for health, well-being and myriad types of learning relevant competencies are important. Considered at either the group or individual level, in response to specific *risks and challenges* as well as seamlessly accessed *protective factors and supports* associated with *contextual conditions of stress and trauma*, phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) posits that ***coping is required***. It is our perspective that the responses produced, considered jointly or as collective responses, *include particularly patterned cultural practices.* The alluded-to behavioral traditions are characterized—too frequently—as devalued and functionally destabilizing stereotypes. The behavioral responses to particular reinforcement conditions (e.g., the benefits or "wages of whiteness"), as described by Roediger (1991) and others, give rise to stable conditions of bias. Stereotyping sets of historical conditions include unavoidable associations with power. Consequent responsive behavioral characterizations of others precipitate societal cultural practices requiring coping processes (i.e., both those which are "reactive" and manifested in the moment as well as those that are internalized given redundancies and then "internalized" as more stable identity processes, thus, observed over time). The viewpoint is consistent with the cultural meanings suggested by the volume's editors and certainly referenced as the chronosystem

by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and suggests the utility of an identity focused cultural ecological perspective represented by the PVEST developmental perspective (Spencer, 1995, 2006).

As a function of the problem of racism and other forms of institutionalized bias, there has been a history of resistance concerning to whom a normal *human development* perspective has been applied, and those individuals and groups who have been historically excluded (Spencer et al., 2019). Acknowledging "the challenge" concerning whose humanity is recognized in the literature has been only very recently addressed in developmental science. Other interdisciplinary fields such as education may have "pushed the perspective" (e.g., see Franklin, 1979; Siddle-Walker, 2013). However, the more recent focus on trauma has helped to articulate the sources and varied impacts of trauma on development, thus representing a particular responsive orientation as a cultural practice, both for those serving as sources of trauma and those providing cultural responses.

Racial/Ethnic Trauma as Context for Learning: PVEST and Marginalized Youth

Salient to acknowledge is that the formal study of trauma as an aspect of the standard contextual experiences over time for particular citizens is no less complex than the prior conundrum concerning whose humanity is assumed in programs of research. The study of racial trauma reveals several obstacles to incorporating it into an acknowledged clinical category as a consideration for effective programing and policy decisions. Jernigan and Daniel (2014) point out that definitions of trauma are limited to physical incidents as defined by the DSM-IV. Additional challenges include a lack of conceptualization of racial trauma and fears of diluting the meaning of "legitimate" (i.e., physical trauma). They note that additional work is needed to better highlight racial incidents as trauma as opposed to mere stressors (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). Some have sought to broaden the definition of trauma as a "deeper psychological harm arising from a wide array of events and experiences that interact with development over time and exist in a cultural context" (Graves, Kaslow, & Frabutt, 2010; Danzer, Rieger, Schubmehl, & Cort, 2016).

Particularly relevant to the institution of American slavery, intergenerational transmission of trauma (ITT) consists of the effect of parental trauma adversely affecting their descendants (immediate and future generations). This has led to increased traumatic symptoms and the increased vulnerability to later psychopathology (Braveheart, 2011; Sirikantraporn & Green, 2016). This model draws from our understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Sotero, 2006) as a model which references three frameworks: (1) psychosocial theory where traumatic stressors can increase susceptibility to disease and have other negative influences on human physiology; (2) political-economic theory, which looks at the impact of political, economic, and structural inequalities on the individual; and (3) social-ecological systems theory, which examines dynamics and interdependences between the past and present life course development factors that influence susceptibility to disease (Danzer, Rieger, Schubmehl, & Cort, 2016).

Given the physiological manifestations of persistent stress, discrimination from law enforcement is known to have contributed to trauma in its immediate effects of PTSD and, as some have speculated, that subsequent delinquent behavior might stem from the initial interaction (Kang & Burton, 2014). "In lower income, urban African American neighborhoods, police tend to over patrol and counterproductively treat African American males with suspicion" (Kang & Burton, 2014). Additionally, "racist events exacerbate preexisting racial tensions and lead to widespread reluctance to seek protection from the police and other institutions that have historically safeguarded Whites" (Graves et al., 2010).

African American women are at a greater risk of being traumatized multiple times and are less likely to seek mental health services than white women (Osobor, 2009; Graves, Kaslow, & Frabutt, 2010; Danzer, Rieger, Schubmehl, & Cort, 2016). It has been shown that this results from fears concerning what might happen to the perpetrator, particularly if that person is also African American. Some have pointed out that this reflects the notion that an attack on one is an attack on

all (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999; Graves, Kaslow, & Frabutt, 2010; Danzer, Rieger, Schubmehl, & Cort, 2016). It is also noted, ironically, that despite being raised to be fiercely independent and willing to help others (often at their own expense), being a black woman can furthermore exacerbate symptoms of trauma (Stevens-Watkins et al., 2014).

One area where symptoms of trauma have brain relevant implications is when delineating how it can impact long-term outcomes (e.g., in higher education) (Boyraz et al., 2013). For trauma-exposed females, PTSD symptomatology in the first semester of college was associated with an increased likelihood of not completing college. This was not significantly associated with academic achievement or persistence for males. For trauma-exposed females, in addition to PTSD symptomatology, being a student at a predominantly white institution and entering college with a low high school GPA were identified as risk factors for low academic achievement and college dropout. They also found that involvement in on-campus activities and higher levels of perceived academic integration by the first semester were associated with a higher first-year GPA as well as increased likelihood of remaining in college (Boyraz et al., 2013).

There has been some work on the implications for psychologists and therapists in dealing with racial and generational trauma. One interesting item of note is the value of ethnic matching. African American patients generally prefer to be matched with a mental health care professional who is of the same race/ethnicity. This has been seen in the study of African American college students in particular. They have observed that up to 50% of African Americans who see a White practitioner will drop out after a single session. It is noted that it is usually because of their own reported feelings of not being understood or connected with (Duncan & Johnson, 2007; Parham et al., 1999; African American Psychologist, 2008; Graves, Kaslow, & Frabutt, 2010; Danzer, Rieger, Schubmehl, & Cort, 2016).

As reported nearly forty years ago by Allen, Spencer, and Brookins (1985), unfortunately, *developmental science* has contributed to a history of reserving analyses concerning *developmental processes*, and attendant considerations and implications about same, as reserved for non-minorities; thus, it has not been a conceptual and research orientation inclusive of all learners. As noted previously, *culture* has been treated generally as meaning "others" not of Euro-American ancestry. The penchant for a less than "humanity equivalent" conceptual strategy is highly salient. It is a critically important conceptual challenge to acknowledge when referencing anything having to do with 21st century developmental science (see Spencer, 1985; Spencer et al., 2019).

Consistent with a PVEST systems theoretical perspective (Spencer, 1995, 2006) young people of various nationalities, genders, racial backgrounds and ethnic groups engage in adaptive and/or maladaptive processes as they negotiate the complex implications of their particular social positions, including learning how they fit into their culturally specific social groups (e.g., Thompson, Harris, & Clauss-Ehlers, 2013). Such entities comprise multiple culturally specific and culturally overlapping groups. This chapter employs an ecological perspective in examining how young people interact with and internalize aspects of their cultural context in psycho-biologically relevant ways as they learn to adapt their unique selves to the various social roles that are a necessary part of their multiple cultural communities.

International Exemplars and Contributions of a PVEST Perspective: Three Case Studies

Thus far, our conceptual orientation focuses on the overlap between *culture, learning, and identity* by making use of the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) to understand identity formation in adolescence as identity relevant processes of culturally situated learning (Spencer, 1995, 2006). Of course, it is critical to acknowledge that frequently—as a methodological failure—sample descriptions fail to delineate and report distinctiveness within unique cultural communities of adolescents

The PVEST framework was integrated throughout the preceding sections. Accordingly, as the third section following the introduction, the current segment uses the framework with multiple international data sources to demonstrate the dialectical relationship between culture and identity as a culturally mediated learning process. We frame these examples with an identity-focused cultural ecological perspective (i.e., PVEST) to demonstrate how these groups of young people come to identify with and learn strategies to fulfill culturally specific social roles which, in turn, are internalized in the form of *social-class identity, civic identity, and occupational identity*.

We present our work from three different contexts in Latin America to demonstrate this perspective about learning processes as representative of broader identity processes influenced by different cultural contexts. The three specific cases—Argentina, Peru, and Brazil—were chosen because they draw on our own work to cover a range of contexts and identity domains. The individuals in each study are developing within particular national and local histories, racial and ethnic dynamics, and social roles and expectations. Therefore, important factors like race or socioeconomic status play different roles in each case, and our empirical support focuses on particularly salient cultural aspects of the specific case, rather than comparing across the contexts. We support our argument—that learning can be understood as an element of identity development through the processing of and response to environmental contexts— and make use of the PVEST theoretical framework to demonstrate its utility for researchers in deepening understandings of learning as a process shaping civic, occupational, and social identities that are situated within cultural contexts and frames.

Argentina Youth

In keeping with the idea that individual coping behaviors are learned in dialogic interaction with their sociocultural context, our conceptual strategy examines how cultural patterns of behavior and thought are taken up by individuals, and employed as they make meaning of their experiences. Individuals form and test their own values and actions based upon personal experiences as well as collective and cultural narratives about their community's history. How youth learn to manage possibilities and constraints and to navigate their environment as agents have implications both for their identities and their life course outcomes. Learning as conceptualized through PVEST can be understood as learning to be agents, as individuals come to test their own capabilities as they face different stressors and engage in reactive coping strategies. This section provides a case study that examines the influence of culture and class in shaping how highly vulnerable Argentine youth develop agency.

Though the self is often privileged in discussions of agency, the locus of agency is not exclusively situated within the self (Strathern, 1988). In many ways action is motivated by external conditions, suggesting that agency is better defined in relation to "systems of objective potentialities inscribed in the present" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.77). Individuals must learn to both exercise their agentive capacity and from these experiences form an understanding of their agency, and we argue that experiences of economic precarity and social exclusion can shape the way that youth come to understand their agentive power. By examining different individual and collective narratives about agency, we can explore how agency is defined by different actors, and how it is individuals come to learn their agentive capabilities in response to challenges they face.

We will take as a case study an educational program meant to facilitate social mobility for homeless youth in Argentina. This program focuses on the promotion of agentive capacity among young adults with highly constrained structural resources at their disposal—due to their homelessness—and thus serves as a context in which narratives of agency were particularly salient. After a period of severe economic and social instability, the government of Buenos Aires began to implement programs focusing on the importance of preparing young people to construct new forms of democratic citizenship in order to facilitate upward social mobility for impoverished groups. These intervention programs aimed to promote the well-being of youth, but our analysis reveals that these programs also promote a particular representation of agentive capacity that sometimes

conflicts with their participants' experientially learned sense of agency. This section will present conclusions based on the analysis of qualitative interview and ethnographic data taken from one particular intervention program, *El Hogar de los Jóvenes.*[1]

Dominant Narrative of Internal Agency

The intervention intends to teach youth to process and respond to their environmental context as agents capable of creating change in their environment. Underlying this interventional strategy lies a particular narrative emphasizing the value of learning future-oriented habits so that youth can direct their own paths towards adulthood. One employee described the process through which they begin to shape youth's agency:

> We go accompanying them in the process to get their national ID, their documents, to improve their health, things they need, and to deepen a bond with them through the cultural workshops, they are all excuses to develop a link with the kid, to accompany them in their track, to generate strategies oriented towards the future, to generate their potential towards solutions.

By getting their first legal ID, the adolescent gains both legal and symbolic proof of social belonging which is intended to facilitate their confidence as agents of change in their own life.

Individual Narratives of External Agency

While program staff focused on teaching youth to exercise their agentic capacity in planning towards long-term goals, youth shared how they had learned to consider their agentive capacity as embedded within and dependent upon situational contingencies. Melina describes:

> How can a person get a job if they say 'no, I'm in front of a pharmacy, sleeping in the streets?' They can't say that. Because society is created like that, you get it?…It's all a chain. If I have a house and food, I can go to school, or work. But if you have nothing, what do you do? I can come here and make art, play for a while, but after that? Because life is a chain, it's all a chain.

Homeless youth in Buenos Aires experience vastly different forms of daily existence than other citizens, and many youth feel unable to take control of their lives due to a lack of access to the "chain" of resources needed to meet institutional expectations for belonging. Often these youth describe their actions as dependent upon shifting sets of contingencies; to survive, they must react to fleeting opportunities or sudden risks. Drawing on PVEST, we can understand their actions as reactive coping as they learn to adapt to their precarious circumstances. Julian explains his strategy: "You move it around, tac, tac, looking for the right path, and you go molding. You can't be very rigid because if you're too straight the unexpected will roll right over you. So you have to live every day like it's your last." It is important that youth don't let life take them by surprise, as Julian shares, so they deny expectations and live in the moment. This can often lead to actions that provide short-term rewards, but are detrimental in the long-term. Alejo describes an incident in which "the urge to do bad" struck him:

> I'm impulsive. I can't control myself. Today the urge to do bad struck me, I crossed paths with someone selling weed and then I went out all night. I knew what was going to happen when I was there, but I couldn't not do it…You understand that you don't want this…But, being a kid of the street, you light a fire and say 'My errors die here', and go forward.

Alejo characterizes his behavior as contingent upon impulses that are activated by his environment, and beyond his control. He recognizes that his actions are not strategic, but narrates agency as a force embedded within his circumstances, and depicts himself as lacking the power to control his own behavior. Ultimately, he has learned to conceive of his own agency as being that of contingent reaction, propelled by his context, rather than from internal motivations.

Alejo's expression of agency echoes Dewey's (1922) notion that motives do not exist prior to an act and produce it, but rather that action and the idea are imbricated completely. Because routine habits are only useful where conditions recur in uniform ways, they do not fit the unpredictable circumstances that characterize the lives of street youth. Street youth instead learn to respond to their environment through instinctive reactions, in order to respond to shifts in their surroundings. However, because the youth conceive of their own agency as reactive and motivated by contingencies within their environment, my participants felt unable to adopt routine behaviors that fit more predictable environments. They felt incapable of maintaining future-oriented action, which the dominant narrative portrays as desirable for young agents.

The PVEST framework emphasizes the centrality of meaning-making processes in considering how individuals understand and respond to their experiences. If social supports or learning opportunities are not perceived as such, or are not interpreted by young people as they might have been intended, they can in fact serve as additional challenges to young people's development. The homeless youth develop reactive coping strategies to accommodate the constant transitions associated with their uncertain living situations. However, they begin to solidify both reactive coping as a lifestyle (i.e., using both positive and negative strategies) and this frequently impedes their ability to plan long-term. As they develop these patterns of reactive coping, they might interpret intended supports as frustrating or threatening; for example, the feeling of frustration as one attempts to learn a difficult concept in school might motivate them to abandon the pursuit, rather than persist. This emotional dilemma, in fact, can add to the inherent challenges of their situation, which makes it difficult for them to maintain the consistent habits that adults insist upon, or understand why it is that adults expect them to behave in a particular way. While the intervention program of *El Hogar* did provide social supports to young people in their time of need, the conceptions of agency embedded within the intervention program were not aligned with the ways participants learned to view themselves as agentic subjects. Using the PVEST framework, we can see that these coping strategies are part of the process of identity formation for these young people, and that the ways youth come to understand their role and capacity as agents matters in determining how they interpret and ultimately make use of the resources provided by the intervention program.

Peru Youth

An effective democracy depends on active citizenry, which includes young people (Almond & Verba, 1963). Youth receive explicit and implicit lessons about civic structures and norms in many settings (e.g., home, school), but are not passive receptacles of political socialization (Flanagan, 2003; Hope & Spencer, 2017). Instead, they learn to be citizens by an iterative process of interpretation and response to norms and expectations inherently related to collective historical positionings with regard to ethnicity, race, and class. Within these contexts, individuals make meaning of social ecologies and their own social positions as they develop civic behaviors, attitudes, and identities (Sherrod, 2003).

In this section, *we argue that civic identity development can be understood as a learning process involving interpretation, response, and identification within cultural contexts*. Cultural contexts are nuanced and include civic meanings, expectations, and practices. We illustrate the robustness of our theoretical frame by applying it to post-conflict contexts and our study with youth from Tacna, Peru. By offering this comparative perspective, we highlight that across varied contexts, the formation of youth civic identity can be understood as a learning process of development in relation to their ecological contexts.

Civic Identity as Contextualized Learning in Peru

Previous research highlights developmental and contextually embedded processes underlying how youth build ideas about who they are as citizens. Adult civic outcomes like voting behaviors and community involvement are linked to experiences and attitudes in early adolescence (Pancer, 2014). Adolescents can be understood as emergent participatory citizens because of a number of social and cognitive developments that mark this time in the life course: interaction with broader social networks; developing abilities to think more abstractly; increasingly understanding themselves as members in social groups and systems; and being challenged to form personal identities (Arnett, 2004; Keating, 2004; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011). Expanding social interactions offer spaces to practice citizenship behaviors and attitudes (Sherrod, 2003). Youth civic engagement matters for individuals' psychological development and has been correlated with academic success (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001), self-esteem (Maton, 1990) and fewer problem behaviors (e.g. Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007).

Our goal in presenting this case is to demonstrate PVEST's utility in framing how post-conflict youth learn about culturally based norms and roles as they actively construct their own citizenship. We focus on how youth form these identities in response to civic culture rooted in historical legacies of conflict. Post-conflict countries are deeply marked by tension from the legacies of violence and human rights violations. Part of the transition to peaceful democracy involves rebuilding social fabric, trust, and vibrant and active citizenry (Schwartz, 2010). Positive civic attitudes and behaviors, especially among younger generations, are fundamental to stable, accountable democracies (Davies, 2004; McEvoy-Levy, 2006; Schwartz, 2010).

Peru offers a prime example of these dynamics. After an armed conflict in the 1980s and 1990s between the government and the Maoist guerrilla Shining Path, Peru underwent a process of transitional justice in the early 2000s in an attempt to address the conflict's legacies. The Peruvian government of the early 2000s openly tried to split from the past and recognize its problematic history through acknowledging the state's previous failures (Paulson, 2010). After a few years, however, political winds shifted and many reforms were never implemented. Today, the armed conflict is conspicuously absent from formal civics and history curricula, while militarized rituals, patriotic displays, and other remnants of the authoritarian government of the past are still salient in school contexts (Ministerio de Educación, 2014; Paulson, 2010).

Relatively little research in post-conflict countries has focused on how youth think about citizenship in relation to developmental processes. Our work utilizes PVEST to examine how youth in Tacna, Peru, form ideas about citizenship in relation to what they learn about local civic culture, norms, and expectations. This meaning making is part of interpretation and processing as youth form civic identities. In a mixed-methods study of 293 15-year-old adolescents, we found that respondents who demonstrated identity exploration—had actively thought about their values, beliefs, and roles in society (Marcia, 1994)—were more likely to hold nationalist feelings and beliefs that were rooted in ideas about self, as opposed to external pressures or instruction.

Respondents who demonstrated minimal identity exploration described their ideas about citizenship as coming from what they were taught either in schools or at home. For one, school was "where they teach us how to be citizens…you come to school and learn how to be a good citizen." Adolescents who demonstrated greater identity exploration reported similar attitudes, but also rooted nationalism in their own sense of self and internal values. One, for example, stated that

> being Peruvian means I identify with my country. Being Peruvian means I was born here and this is where I belong. If I see another Peruvian anywhere in the world, I identify with him because we are part of the same family that is Peru.

While a surface-level focus on outcomes might portray these attitudes as similar, there are different meaning making processes at work. For the former, civic norms and orientations are embraced

from external socialization, while for the latter these must be consonant with their own identities and identifications.

This distinction has implications for a post-conflict society where the roots and tensions of the past are still largely unaddressed. Young people learn in schools about the nationalistic expectations of Peruvian citizenship: to march and sing the national anthem regularly, to extol the virtues of Peruvian cuisine. Some have begun exploring their own sense of self in relation to these civic discourses and expectations, and ultimately have begun to internalize these concepts as part of who they are as citizens. Their civic identities are the result of internalized engagement with the civic cultures around them, rather than a simple adoption of the dominant narrative (i.e., they are socialized through schools, civic celebrations, and political discourses). The fact that these prosocial and nationalist orientations come from understandings of self may provide these youth with motivation to engage in critical civic engagement (Hope & Spencer, 2017). Their civic identities may be more robust and resilient as they become aware of complicated histories and lasting social inequities (tied to the previous conflict). The education system does not provide supports to engage and process this dissonance, and so young people who are taking on external discourses may struggle to manage the disconnect between these civic norms and discourses and their growing awareness of social positioning and historical inequality.

More broadly, post-conflict youth face complicated cultural contexts related to the past and its legacies. Their civic outcomes reflect how they process and respond to culturally salient expectations about citizenship, which have emerged in response to conflict (Davies, 2004). They develop civic identities by learning about expectations and responding with identity-based coping. Similar to minority youth in the United States, ecological context is not deterministic of civic outcomes. Young people have the potential to be active agents in processing and making sense of what they learn—explicitly or implicitly—about their social positioning and place as citizens. PVEST, with a specific focus on social ecologies as involving cultural discourses on citizenship, provides this framework for understanding how these identity-based processes involve learning, meaning making, and response as young people construct their citizenship.

Learning and Citizenship

We have argued that civic development can be understood as part of a contextualized learning process. While socialization experiences in the school, home, and peer group are spaces where civic norms and expectations are conveyed, our theoretical approach emphasizes the active role that youth take in processing this culturally embedded learning and responding by forming civic identities. Utilizing PVEST, the exploration and development of civic identity can be understood as rooted in individual interpretation and coping responses to social ecologies. To this end, youth are agents in their learning about citizenship, and not simply passive recipients of socialization. A focus on the perspective and active processing of youth also demonstrates how marginalized youth can succeed and become proactive citizens within structural inequalities and injustice. Learning involves active construction as situated within cultural and historical contexts (Haste, 2004). As young people come to form a sense of identity within their socio-cultural context, they can learn to identify themselves as agents of change and as citizens.

Brazil Youth

As discussed throughout the chapter thus far, learning is shaped and reinforced by the character of the contexts in which humans interact, providing implications for identity formation processes. This case provides an additional cultural context to which PVEST is applied in order to explore the role of social stratification on adolescent learning processes that shape occupational identities. We examined effects of social stratification on adolescent perceptions of career opportunity in Brazil to better understand variability in the learning of identity in educational experiences.

Literature on economic disparity in Brazil has frequently addressed the intersection of structural inequality and skin color identification (Htun, 2004; Marteleto, 2012; Telles, 2014). However it has not explored a considerable understanding of the complexity of self-identification and perceptions of upward mobility among adolescents. Examining identity processes of youth in Brazil provides an additional lens to conceptualize learning from cultural contexts, diverse meaning making processes and goal-oriented decision making in today's multiethnic societies.

Social Trajectory and Skin Color in Brazil

Brazil provides a rich context to discuss conceptualizations of race and identity formation as it houses the largest population of people of African descent outside of Africa (Mitchell, 2010). Researchers have indicated Brazil as one of the most racially heterogeneous countries of the world constituting a tri-hybrid population of Europeans (primarily represented by the Portuguese), Africans and Amerindians (Htun, 2004; Telles, 2014). Traditionally, the Brazilian government has condemned the racist ideologies and practices of the United States by encouraging racial mixing, described as individuals of African or Amerindian ancestry mating with a white partner. Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist, Gilberto Freyre, is viewed as the forefather of the national ideology, *democracia racial* or racial democracy (Perry, 2013).

Many researchers have challenged the validity of Brazil's racial democracy ideology by documenting the significant advantages of Brazilians with European features (i.e., light skin, straight hair) over Brazilians with African features (i.e., dark skin, curly/kinky hair), particularly in educational and labor market outcomes (Cicalo, 2012; Telles, 2014). Data from the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) illustrates that 33.5% of light-colored respondents in Brazil had high-status non-manual occupations, while medium-colored respondents represented 22.5% of high status occupations and dark-colored respondents represented 20% (Telles, 2014). Likewise, light-skin toned respondents reported 7.9 years of schooling, medium-skin toned respondents reported 7.0 years, and dark-skin toned respondents reported 6.3 years of schooling. Despite extensive discourses of racial paradise in Brazil, structures of career and educational opportunity are linked to physical appearance.

Perceptions of Opportunity among Brazilian Adolescents

Emerging identities of ethnically diverse youth are influenced by what they learn about the history of the social positions of their ethnic group within their nations and how they experience the opportunities that are available to their groups. Adolescents negotiate their own experiences with observations of inequalities in their social environments to determine the trajectories (opportunities and challenges as framed by PVEST) of their future. This case study investigated how Brazilian adolescents aged 14–17 at two high schools (one public, one private) in Salvador, Brazil, experienced economic disparity and skin color stratification in the context of educational and occupational attainment. We administered surveys to 68 participants and conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 of the 68 participants to discern (1) the relationship between skin color identification and occupational aspirations and (2) the relationship between skin color and perceived access to upward mobility.

While regression analyses from the survey data indicated that skin color did not predict the level of prestige of occupations (i.e., physician vs. administrative assistant) that participants aspired to obtain, darker skin color categories significantly predicted perceived disadvantage in competitive labor outcomes. In other words, participants illustrated awareness of societal barriers that prohibit or support them in achieving their goals irrespective of aspirations. Additionally, skin color did not predict occupational aspirations. These survey findings were consistent with research conducted with minority youth in the United States, suggesting that adolescents' career aspirations are con-

sistent across racial groups (Kao & Thompson, 2003). However, the interviews illustrated that the youth were aware of structural barriers that persist based on their physical features and socioeconomic status, regardless of the lightness or darkness of their skin. Thus, what they'd learned regarding socioeconomic mobility and success from social patterns within their nation was consistent despite differences among individual experiences.

Occupational Aspirations within Context

As described earlier, Freyre's romanticized portrayal of Brazil as a racial democracy encompassed a cultural emphasis of racial mixing. This cultural ideology of miscegenation represents macrosystem values that contribute to how child and adolescent racial identity is formed and later crystallized during adulthood. The means by which this contribution unfolds, however, depends on socialization patterns at the micro level such as family relationships. It is very possible for families to create socialization practices that resist the meta narratives. The values that adolescents incorporate from Brazil's national identity in addition to family heritage and peer group influence, shape their own perception of skin tone and racial identity. Barbara, a 14-year-old girl with a light brown complexion, who identified as parda (brown), described:

> I am *parda*. I'm a mixture. There are a lot of blacks in my family; whites, Spanish, and blacks. So, I feel *parda*. Truthfully, I think that's really important because a white person isn't totally white because of their parents; like my father is black. So a white person isn't totally white and a black person isn't totally black. My friends call me *amarela* (yellow/Asian or Indigenous). For me, *amarela* is a mixture between the indigenous race and whites. There are indigenous people in my family but *pardo* means you have more black heritage. We have more blacks.

Barbara's account illustrates a nature of fluidity in identifying with a particular racial category. From her perspective, racial classification in Brazil does not exist along a black-white continuum; rather, everyone has some form of European, African or Indigenous heritage. Her position as someone whose physical appearance reflects a mixed racial heritage contributes to her perspective that a multiethnic and multiracial society is a positive aspect of Brazilian culture. Additionally, Barbara's upbringing in Bahia, a Brazilian state made up of a population that highly values African descent heritage exhibited through a plethora of public displays and festivities, situates her within an environment that very likely resists meta narratives that discourage positive portrayals of black culture in other parts of the country. Taisa, a 16-year-old medium brown skinned female, expressed a similar sense of pride in being *negra*.

> Here in Brazil it's a complicated thing because we're all mixed. We're like a fruit salad. I am black, but people will say, "no you're not black, you're 'cafe com leite'" (coffee with milk). Then they invent *pardo*, *moreno*. So many colors! So, I needed to study more. First, what region am I in? I am in Bahia. I am in the blackest city of Brazil. So, I can't say that I am white. I can't say that I am *parda*. Of course, I have these influences in my culture. My grandmother is Indigenous. My mom is black.

Taisa indicated that discovering her racial group was quite a difficult endeavor considering her country's history. While Barbara spoke positively about Brazil's diverse ethnic makeup, Taisa believed that the "fruit salad" of racial groups make it difficult to determine who she is and how she fits into society. Before Taisa discovered her own racial identity, she perceived that people simply stated who they wanted to be without considering their heritage. For her, learning about and acknowledging her heritage was more important than her physical appearance.

Gabriel, a 17-year-old dark brown skinned male, who identified as *negro*, illustrated his perception of present social disadvantages:

> In Brazil, whites have more opportunity and blacks have less opportunity because of racial prejudice, specifically with jobs. If you have a white person and a black person, the black person could have a great education and the white person could have nothing. Who's going to win? The white person. I've already seen this happen. And if you enter any university in Brazil, or in our case Salvador, you can go to a classroom and see that it is made up of more white people than black people. If there are blacks, the maximum amount will be three to ten whites, four to ten whites. It's always the same.

Gabriel illustrated an awareness of current inequalities between blacks and whites in higher education. According to PVEST's conceptualization of vulnerability, Gabriel indicated race as a risk factor that impacts the educational and occupational opportunities that blacks are permitted access to. The vulnerability level of PVEST consists of risk factors that create obstacles in an individual becoming mentally and physically healthy as well as economically successful, while protective factors may be positive aspects of an individual's life, such as parental support, that offset these risks. While a college education is typically perceived as a protective factor, Gabriel believes that the risk of being black outweighs the protective factor of education in Brazil's job market. Here, race represents an imbalance in vulnerability.

By applying a phenomenological perspective, we have framed racial identification and career aspirations within an ecological context in which adolescents actively negotiate their own identities with both the national ideology and economic reality of hierarchies of opportunity in their country. Youth learn what resources are available to them to achieve their long-term occupational aspirations, while the roles they take on become interconnected with social expectations of their abilities, often based on physical attributes and economic standing. The case acknowledges the complexity of racial narratives that can vary from state to state within a nation, giving Bahia a particular position of African heritage pride that illustrates a compelling influence on youth occupational aspirations.

PVEST Approach to Culture, Identity, and Learning

The specific cases illustrate examples of how societal contexts shape how adolescents come to learn their roles and culturally embedded responses as part of identity development. While our cases do not include every possible social role that young people must learn, we have particularly chosen three different aspects of identity across different cultural contexts to demonstrate the flexibility and broad applicability of this framework. Additionally, we open up the theoretical discussion to extend to broader geographical regions and contexts. Our purpose in choosing these cases is not to provide a complete summary of the possible applications of this framework or to cover identity development across Latin America. Rather—given adolescence as a period of significant and rapid biological changes and myriad context-linked life course relevant decision making points—our goal is different. We use the case studies to demonstrate the broad efficacy of the theoretical argument across diverse contexts. Accordingly, also critical to acknowledge are the specific contributions available from adolescent brain science.

Critical Issues in Adolescent Brain Research

Given the potentially significant bifurcation of experiences had by culturally diverse individuals, the early research on the adolescent brain continues to be informative. It emphasizes the heightened intensity and volatility of emotions particularly relevant to and experienced during that devel-

opmental period (Compas, Orosan, & Grant,1993; Guyer, Silk, & Nelson, 2016). The historically framed "sturm und drang" model emphasized tumultuous relationships (with peers and parents), moodiness (emotionality), and risky behavioral traits (crime, suicide), with the media reporting a generalized stereotype of adolescents—more generally—as lacking self-control due to their underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. This perspective was introduced at the same time that adolescence was defined as a distinct period (Hall, 1904). Critics have pointed out that their own research contradicted the idea that adolescence was inherently "stormy" (Bandura, 1964). In recent years, developments in neurobiological research and MRI brain imaging techniques has led scholars to further challenge this model. MRI brain imaging has revealed major structural changes occurring in the brains of adolescents that have particular significance for their social interactions. Well into late childhood, the prefrontal cortex continues to develop new synapses, becoming more complex and efficient. The sources of the heightened emotionality and erratic behavior are uncertain as an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex is present for younger children who do not display the same behavior, suggesting a nonlinear development. In fact, *research in the last few decades has revealed that the adolescent brain is more vulnerable to stress than children or adults*. These developments have led some to suggest that this period is better characterized as one of *increased vulnerability as well as opportunity* (Armstrong, 2016). The sensitivity of the adolescent brain is a risk factor but environmental influences can assist in mediating positive outcomes. Less frequently considered, of course, have been culturally mediated factors.

Casey and Caudle (2013) highlight *three major misconceptions about the adolescent brain and its relation to self-control and social interaction*. These include the notion that (1) adolescent behavior is irrational or deviant, (2) that adolescents are incapable of making rational decisions because of their immature prefrontal cortex, and (3) that all adolescents experience "sturm und drang." Their work suggests that *adolescents can demonstrate rational motivation and self-control, notably in emotionally neutral contexts with diminishing success in emotionally taxing ones*. Providing a neurobiological perspective, Casey et al. (2010) found that the *increased emotionality in adolescence is the product of an imbalance in the development of subcortical limbic (e.g., amygdala) relative to prefrontal cortical regions*.

Another stereotype concerning adolescent behavior is in their capacity and tendency towards risk taking behavior. Research has revealed that adolescents are much more nuanced in their assessments of risk (Blakemore, 2018). For example, and important for cultural communities and efforts at desegregation, risks associated with social interactions are often mediated by youths' perceptions of how their peers have assessed the particular risk behavior.

Research has shown that adolescents use different parts of the brain to process information compared to adults. fMRI studies have shown that the adolescent brain is inefficient in processing inhibitory tasks. Despite great effort, it does not adequately interact with the neural structures and can result in inappropriate behavior and poor self-control compared to adults (Casey et al., 1997). Many of these studies standardly compare adolescents with adults; however, one infers an assumption of similarity across adolescence. Our treatment of contextual variation, including the experience of trauma, suggested unique mediated cultural practices and learning experiences as exposures for culturally diverse youth. One can only ask whether the brain science outcomes described between adults and youth show parallel distinctiveness within adolescence for culturally diverse youth. As reviewed under the section on trauma, the level of stress engagement is different for the learning opportunities experienced by minorities versus privileged youth. The significant challenges experienced by minority youth, particularly male youths when one considers specifically disproportionate minority contact (DMC), suggests different levels of "coping practice." The brain research reported might be the result of minority youth of color needing to cope with greater observed imbalances in the subcortical limbic region versus those who systematically enjoy myriad sources of privilege or the benefits of the "wages of whiteness" (e.g., see Roediger, 1991).

Implications and Conclusions

Lives are never risk-free nor totally without supports. Thus, all individuals experience unique combinations of strengths, challenges, and levels of vulnerability at various periods of their lives. However, these strengths and myriad challenges are not exclusively situated within the individual, but rather occur as processes of learning about contexts, expectations, supports and risks that a particular socio-cultural environment provides. How young people learn to adapt and cope with developmental challenges and utilize the resources available to them is crucially important in determining their individual long-term outcomes, as well as the health and vitality of the communities in which they reside and develop. However, the processes through which development occurs are often significantly more complex, nuanced, and difficult to address than assumed. In this chapter, we have utilized PVEST, analyzing particular aspects of identity formation to illustrate the fundamental importance of understanding cultural context as we seek to deepen our understanding of learning as a social process. Young people are not simply passive recipients of knowledge, but perceive and create meaning within their social environments as they learn how to occupy the various roles they must inhabit within their communities.

Our analysis suggests that when considering social communities, it is a flawed assumption to infer that protective factors and risks are naturally balanced. There are some who experience exceptional burdens in their daily life, and for these people, everyday developmental tasks may morph into major trials, which precipitate heightened stress. These stressors require adaptations which influence how young people learn to navigate their societies, and in turn who they are, ultimately shaping their long-term outcomes. The field of human development points to the need for coordination between sources of support to serve as protective factors for the challenges young people face as they learn their social roles. It is imperative to develop more studies that adopt conceptually and theoretically driven approaches for supporting human development under diverse and highly challenging contexts and which produce cultural patterns too frequently simplistically critiqued. Accordingly, efforts for securing equality without an appreciation for equity are inadequate given that certain situations require significantly greater, intersectionally nuanced and culturally relevant assistance(!). We seek to support the cultural uniqueness and attendant practices surrounding developing young people and thus—by acknowledging, interrogating and offsetting linked challenges—create a more just and equitable world for youth and, ultimately, their progeny.

Note

1 "The house of the young people," a community center funded by the government to promote human rights and cultural expression. We will refer to it, in short, as "El Hogar."

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