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Parenting Adolescents in an Increasingly Diverse World:  
Defining, Refining, and Extending Theory and Research

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## Abstract

This introduction to the Special Issue on Parenting Adolescents in a Multicultural Context explores how increasing population diversity may provide a context for changes in the parenting of adolescents. In this issue, authors (a) explore the context for asking questions about parenting adolescents and diversity, (b) consider parents, adolescents, and parenting in different diversity contexts, and (c) reflect on crosscutting themes. Two articles examine the parenting in an international context and within changing domestic demographics. Four articles focus on parenting adolescents in traditionally marginalized groups with the goal of identifying lessons for supporting all youth to navigate an increasingly diverse world. Finally, two papers synthesize these articles to suggest important directions for future research.

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Demographic trends reveal increasing diversity within and between families, including among families in the United States (U.S.). For the first time in U.S. history, for example, two-parent families are no longer the norm and blended families (i.e., households that include a stepparent, stepsibling, or half-sibling) are on the rise (Pearce, Hayward, Chassin & Curran, 2018). U.S. families are also increasingly multicultural, with European American families constituting only half (56%) of families, and Asian Americans replacing Latin Americans as the fastest growing U.S. immigrant group (Pew, 2015). Moreover, families are themselves increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, with the recent rates of intermarriage (i.e., marital partners representing more than one race and/or ethnicity) more than doubling among newlyweds since 1980 (from 6% to 15% in 2010; Pew, 2010). Finally, although ethnic and racial minority families in the U.S. are more likely to be low, rather than high, income, at least one-third of the 13 million children living in poverty are Caucasian, a trend attributed to two recessions (2001, 2007-2009), the slow pace of economic recovery, the housing market crisis and, in turn, a shrinking middle class (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015; Pew, 2015; also see Jones, Loiselle, & Highlander, 2018 for a review). Such diversity represents a shift in the socio-political context navigated by today's adolescents and their families, challenging how we define the constructs of family, the developmental tasks of adolescence, and the process of parenting. However, state-of-the-art research on parenting adolescents has yet to fully consider the significance of this shift. To this end, the goal of this special issue is to frame a conversation that identifies the important questions for us to ask about what parenting looks like in today's world and how the impact of

parenting on adolescents, and vice-versa, may or may not be shaped by increasing population diversity.

This special issue is the result of a faculty-working group funded by the *Society for Research on Adolescence* to examine the parenting of adolescents in the diverse, multicultural reality faced by U.S. families today. Although the authors on each article are responsible for developing and expanding the ideas they present, core ideas reflected throughout the issue arose in conversations among working group members over the last two years. The special issue is divided into three sections that (a) explore the context for asking questions about parenting adolescents and diversity, (b) consider parents, adolescents, and parenting in different diversity contexts, and (c) reflect on crosscutting themes.

In the first section, Lansford et al. (2018) present an overview of the literature on the parenting of adolescents and tests whether key parenting dimensions (warmth and control) are similarly related to child outcomes across nine culturally-diverse countries. Importantly, this work highlights the cultural generalizability of a core tenant of parenting, namely bidirectionality or the extent to which parenting not only impacts adolescents (proactive effects) but also that adolescents shape parenting (evocative effects; Bornstein, 2015). As noted by Lansford and colleagues, significant cultural diversity exists not just between but within countries as well. For this reason, Pearce et al. (2018) review major demographic trends that reflect increasing diversity within the U.S. and innovations in methodological approaches that may allow the field to better capture such diversity within and between families. Together, this work explores what joins families as well as what may divide them.

In the second section, four papers explore how parents are preparing their youth to navigate an increasing diverse world, how parents from different diversity groups compare in

their approaches to parenting, and how adults differentially experience diversity issues in their roles as parents of adolescents. These papers consider whether novel parenting tools and approaches are needed for parents to help youth negotiate experiences of diversity as related to race and ethnicity (Stein, Coard, Kiang, Smith, & Mejia, 2018), socioeconomic status (Jones et al., 2018), sexual orientation (Mills-Koonce, Rehder, & McCurdy, 2018) and family structure (Murray & Lippold, 2018). In each case, these authors consider how parenting might help children of different backgrounds negotiate the diversity around them (e.g., children of color and European American children; children of high, middle and low-income families; children of LGBTQ and heterosexual parents; and children from non-traditional and traditional family structures). We do not assume that all parents hold a similar value for increasing multicultural competence in their children, but we do assume that parenting occurs in context and, therefore, parents must navigate and adapt their parenting values, choices, and behaviors within increasingly diverse, multicultural settings.

In the third section, we consider crosscutting themes, particularly how intersectionality extends from an individual to a family construct – a more wholistic approach to conceptualizing families' experiences of the world as occurring at the nexus of various dimensions of cultural diversity. Hussong, Jones and Jensen (2018) summarize these themes based on discussions at faculty working group meetings and during a semester-long speaker series in which authors of these articles (and others <https://cgs.web.unc.edu/consortium/seriesfall2017/>) presented their work at the Carolina Consortium for Human Development (located at the Center for Developmental Science, CDS). These discussions among CDS predoctoral trainees, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty enriched and broadened the articles in this issue. A resulting video from speakers in this series, *Parenting Adolescents for a Multicultural World*, provides another

window into these conversations (<http://hussong.web.unc.edu/drrl/pp/diversity/>). Finally, Dr. Valerie Malholmes, NICHD Executive Branch Chief, provides an outside commentary on the special issue to embed the work in the larger conversation on the future of Developmental Science (Malholmes, 2018).

Our goal in presenting this work is to identify important avenues for new research with the potential for significant impact. The methodological and theoretical challenges are evident in the papers that follows. However, we hope that our work lays the foundation for asking the important questions that will guide this field going forward.

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