Chapter 2
Racial–Ethnic Minority Youth in Rural America: Theoretical Perspectives, Conceptual Challenges, and Future Directions

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“These two quotations exemplify just one of the challenges of studying racial–ethnic minority (REM) youth in rural America. Not only are the youth themselves quite diverse, but the settings they and their families inhabit are diverse as well. That diversity includes the historical, cultural, economic, and social conditions of the rural settings, as well as the family history and racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage of each child. Our goal is to describe how social scientists go about making sense of the dynamic interplay between the multiple environments and complex life circumstances.”

Gabriel (2014)

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experiences that shape the individual development and well-being of REM children and adolescents, and their families, living in rural America today. We start by outlining the changes taking place in rural America and describing the complex and multidimensional concept of rurality. Next, we propose a conceptual model, which brings together two parallel streams of research that have been developing over the past 2–3 decades. The first represents the research being conducted by rural sociologists, economists, and demographers who address the complex changes happening across rural regions of the United States, and the second represents the increasing awareness of the myriad issues that need to be addressed in furthering our understanding of the development of REM youth.

A Changing Rural America

Depending on what part of the country you are in, when you hear the word “rural,” it can conjure images of small towns set in rolling fields of corn in the Midwest, farms dotting the landscape in the Deep South, two-lane roads leading to isolated ranches, or the vast irrigated fields in the West. However, “rural” has come to represent a wide range of individuals and families as well, from Latino migrants working in meatpacking plants in the Midwest to African American farmers in the “Southern Black Belt” (Wimberley & Morris, 1997) to miners in small towns in the valleys of West Virginia.

Sociodemographic Changes The story of rural America at the beginning of the twenty-first century can be summarized with one word: change (as long-time inhabitants cope with larger farms but fewer farmers, the loss of well-paying manufacturing jobs in exchange for lower-paying positions in agricultural and food processing, a widespread shift from full- to part-time employment, and significant declines in mining and timberwork as businesses lose ground or close completely) (McCrate, 2011). Over the past three plus decades, social scientists have documented a changing economy characterized by diminishing employment opportunities and the out-migration of young, college-educated workers, or “brain drain,” from many of the nation’s rural regions (see Carr & Kefalas, 2009). However, in other places, change may have a more positive connotation as retirees move into slower-paced rural areas, bringing with them an infusion of economic resources and an increased demand for goods and services (Hamilton, Hamilton, Duncan, & Colocousis, 2008).

Historically, rural America (outside of the South and the Southwest) has represented a racially and ethnically homogeneous segment of our nation, inhabited almost exclusively by white people. However, along with the economic shifts in recent decades are the changing faces encountered on the Main Streets of small town rural America, with many more faces of color (i.e., brown, black, and tan faces) in some regions, such as the Midwest, than in the past (Brown & Schafft, 2011). These sociodemographic changes vary dramatically by region of the country. Some rural areas have become destination communities for ethnic minority workers.
and their families by providing financial opportunity and steady jobs; other areas have populations that are older and whiter, have fewer jobs, and are in decline. Many more diverse rural areas are also stagnating, with many residents living at or below the poverty line (see Brown & Schafft, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2008; Lichter & Graefe, 2011; Sherman, 2009).

Poverty is often quite high in rural settings (see Duncan, 1999; Gabriel, 2014; Lyson & Falk, 1993), but is also highly variable depending on the decline or growth of jobs in an area. In keeping with the focus on diversity, Lichter and Brown (2011) identified “10 common conceptions of rural America that reflect both its social and economic diversity and changing spatial and social boundaries” (p. 37). The ten conceptions include factors such as economic issues, cultural issues, and mobility issues and range from “rural areas as cultural touchstone (the idyllic repository of American values)” to “rural America as food basket”; they also include “rural America as dumping ground” (areas seen fit to house prisons, slaughterhouses, feedlots, landfills, and hazardous and toxic waste sites). Indeed, in many regions, rural America has “become a dumping ground for urban America” (Lichter & Brown, 2011, p. 18).

Defining Rural America

One might think that defining rural is quite straightforward; indeed, agencies of the local, state, and federal government often use a rural/non-rural designation in determining how money and resources are allocated (see Brown & Schafft, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2005). Despite the popular portrayal of rural and non-rural as a simple categorical, often dichotomous, variable, the concepts associated with this distinction are much more complex and multifaceted (e.g., Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2000). Moreover, understanding the complex nature and type of a rural setting has important implications for both adult and youth choices and opportunities (Hamilton et al., 2008).

One of the biggest challenges in conceptualizing rural America is that the concept of rurality is not easily or consistently defined by any governmental or research entity and is often viewed only as those areas of the country that are not urban (for detailed discussion, see Brown & Schafft, 2011). “Rural” is variously defined as the number of people per square mile, by a region’s location relative to a larger population center or by distance to services such as health care and grocery stores (Hart et al., 2005). Indeed, even within the US government, there is little agreement on the definition of “rural”; the USDA, the US Census, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) do not agree on what constitutes rural/urban/suburban or metropolitan/nonmetropolitan (see Brown & Schafft, 2011; Hart et al., 2005). Often, when two categories are used, the variability within both urban and rural areas is drastically underestimated: “Depending on how categories are combined, the rural population can vary from 10 % to 28 % of the nation’s total (i.e., a population of 29–79 million)” (Hart et al., 2005, p. 1150).
While most common definitions of “rural” use population size and density along with other factors such as commute distances to major cities, there are many other aspects of rurality such as access to education, jobs, health care, and social services. In addition, social scientists and policy makers need to consider a variety of characteristics, such as economics, culture, demographics, and physical features of the environment, that help define specific types of rural settings and, in turn, help us make important distinctions within the broad term of “rural.” These distinctions are important for researchers attempting to understand the effect of context or place on youth, in particular, REM youth. Hart et al. (2005), who looked at definitions in relation to health research and policy, even suggest that researchers need to use specific definitions depending on the research or policy questions: “Careful attention to the definition of ‘rural’ is required for effectively targeting policy and research aimed at improving the health of rural Americans” (p. 1149).

The Four Rural Setting Types Hamilton et al. (2008) suggest that a more inclusive definition provides a better way of thinking about and classifying rural areas in the United States. Using an extensive survey of different regions in the United States, they found that rural areas were diverse and complex and that this diversity could be better represented by typologies that incorporated economic, political, and environmental changes, in conjunction with the diversity of inhabitants. In other words, the definition was neither simple nor one dimensional! Through interviews conducted with 7842 rural residents in nine states, Hamilton et al. (2008) identified four types of rural settings which incorporate economic, demographic, community, and environmental factors. In addition, they addressed the key issue of how residents saw the future of their rural region. The four types that emerged are as follows: (1) amenity-rich rural America (such as the rural Colorado Rocky Mountain region where population grew 71% between 1990 and 2005 and poverty was low [10%]), (2) declining resource-dependent rural America (such as rural Kansas where the population has continued to drop, especially among young adults aged 25–34), (3) chronically poor rural America (such as Appalachia, Mississippi, and Alabama, which saw a large out-migration of young adults and has an average poverty rate of 26%), and (4) amenity/decline rural America (represented by the Pacific Northwest and the Northeast—regions with natural amenities but declining economies).

We believe the four categories developed by Hamilton et al. (2008) may prove to be a useful tool in capturing the evolving sociodemographic complexity of rural regions of contemporary America and attempting to advance our understanding of the lives of REM youth in rural places. Understanding these issues is crucial if we, as developmental researchers, are to address some of the unique challenges of (a) conducting research on REM youth in rural settings, (b) identifying and accessing representative samples, and (c) producing comparable results from studies across different regions of the country. In addition to the inherent difficulties of adequately defining rural places, there are specific challenges regarding the multiple theoretical perspectives and concepts such as generational status, culture, language use, and ethnic identity that must be considered when designing and implementing research on REM youth in rural America; the next section addresses these issues.
Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Challenges

The second stream of research used to inform this chapter draws from a wide array of theoretical perspectives and concepts used to examine youth development, social processes, and contexts in disciplines such as sociology, economics, psychology, demography, ethnic studies, political science, anthropology, and human development. For this section, we reviewed over 200 articles, chapters, and books focused on ethnic minority youth and families (e.g., Gershoff, Mistry, & Crosby, 2014; Parke, 2013; Quintana et al., 2006). Our review demonstrates that in order to address the complexity of studying REM youth in today’s society, researchers, educators, and policy makers need to take into account family history, culture, interpersonal processes, and social contexts while remaining mindful that all of these elements may change over time. Many researchers have addressed this complexity by using an ecological approach that considers the processes and conditions that govern the course of human development across the life span (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Marks, Godoy, & Garcia Coll, 2014; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Before turning to the theoretical perspectives that inform our conceptual model, we address some of the concepts and issues that we have found repeatedly in the literature and that are central to any examination of REM child and adolescent development (hereafter referred to as REM youth development) in rural places; we start by considering the issue of race and ethnicity.


“The distinction between racial and ethnic criteria of group membership, although analytically important, should not be understood to mean that the groups to which they refer are mutually exclusive. . . . Nonetheless, phenotypical differences (that is, anatomical features such as skin color and body and facial shape) between groups have been far more salient in the United States as an organizing principle in social relations than cultural ones, and groups socially defined as racial ethnics [sic] have historically been at a considerable disadvantage in their treatment in American society (Leiberson and Waters 1988; Omni and Winant 1986). Moreover, family life has been profoundly affected by the experience of and response to such structured disadvantage.”

Taylor (2002, p. 3)

In order to conduct reliable and valid research on REM youth in America, researchers need to consider a variety of factors that define and affect their research population. To begin, researchers should be aware that a simple designation of REM group status is never truly simple. Clear definitions of each component—race, ethnicity, and minority—need to be discussed, defined, and agreed upon by researchers from multiple disciplines interested in understanding the factors that affect REM youth in America and how REM youth affect those factors in return. We do not attempt a comprehensive review here of the literature on these three
factors; however, we briefly discuss why it is crucial for researchers to develop a common or shared understanding about the key definitions in order to create results that may be compared across studies and disciplines and over time.

Researchers working in this area need an understanding of the differences and similarities that exist among ethnic minority groups and across heterogeneous racial groups, as well as the need for REM youth to be studied in their own right and not always in comparison to majority youth (for a detailed discussion, see Fuller & García Coll, 2010). In most studies that include race as a factor, the majority group (i.e., White American) is often used as the reference group for minority group comparisons; this is a problematic method because it obscures the incredible diversity between ethnic groups that, for the purposes of the study, have been aggregated into racial group categories. In particular, researchers (and reviewers) need to acknowledge that truly representative research is challenging due to the vast number of ethnic minority groups in the United States as well as the potential intragroup differences within any ethnic minority group designation, which are often left unexplored (see García Coll et al., 1996). For example, it is estimated that, in 2014, there are about 54 million Hispanic/Latino individuals in the United States; for ease of reading, the term Latino will be used throughout for individuals of Spanish cultural heritage (Carlo, 2014). Of those 54 million, Mexican origin individuals comprised 34 million (66.6 %) of the total. The next largest group at 5 million (9.3 %) were of Puerto Rican origin; the remaining 25 % comprised 21 different groups (Brown, 2014). This illustrates the potential for finding significant intragroup differences within the fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the United States, namely, Latinos. Similar diversity is seen within the Asian American population; they make up about 5 % of the US population and are comprised of more than 14 different REM groups such as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Cambodian, Asian Indian, and Korean (Le, 2014). Over half of the Asian American population lives in metropolitan areas, but some groups with agricultural roots (such as Cambodians and Hmong) may be more likely to live in rural areas. There are also strong historical ties to the land among African Americans in the South and Latinos in the Southwest; these ties underlie some of the continuing involvement in agriculture and food production among these groups in rural America (Irwin & O’Brien, 1998; Mohl, 2003). Thus, identifying the heterogeneity of ethnic minority children and families is a complex undertaking and may present particular challenges for researchers interested in REM youth in rural settings (see Brown & Swanson, 2003). For example, some REM youth and families may be reluctant to disclose ethnic group membership in fear of consequences related to immigration status. Researchers will need to carefully define their sampling frame and obtain unambiguous information from study participants as to their ethnic identity in order to interpret their results with confidence and clarity (see methodology discussion by Quintana et al., 2006).

Furthermore, researchers are starting to acknowledge that studying REM youth in America, regardless of context, requires that we explicitly acknowledge and thoughtfully measure race or racial identity. Although most acknowledge that racial group membership does not have a solid basis in biology or genetics (see American Sociological Association, 2003; Smedley & Smedley, 2005), Taylor (2002) and
many others (e.g., Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Brody et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003) conclude that racial group membership (categorizing individuals by physical characteristics, especially skin color) has influenced social relations and economic opportunities for youth and families throughout the history of the United States. Simply put, race is a social and cultural address which affects the attitudes, expectations, and experiences of minority and majority youth alike, and concepts such as racial identity, racial privilege, and racial discrimination must be considered in order to understand the ongoing dynamics and consequences of race and racial identity for youth development (e.g., Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Crocker, Blaine, & Luhtanen, 1993; Pahl & Way, 2006). Indeed, an examination of news stories in 2014 reveals the ongoing issue of black, brown, and white relations in the United States. Examples include (1) the racial animus toward Barack Obama, the first black President of the United States (see Segura & Valenzuela, 2010), (2) the public reactions to and media coverage of the death of young black youth at the hands of white police officers (such as the 2014 case of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri), and (3) ongoing efforts to disenfranchise African Americans and Latinos (i.e., people of color) from participation in the political process (e.g., Cobb et al., 2012).

“Though slavery ended nearly 150 years ago, young black men have been treated as second-class citizens by politicians and police ever since. You would think the election and re-election of our first black president would’ve signified that the United States has defeated racism and prejudice. On the contrary, President Barack Obama’s election has brought racism to the forefront, as many refuse to acknowledge, respect or work with him as commander in chief, as if a black man couldn’t possibly be worthy to lead our nation.” (Sistrunk, August 30, 2014)

Given the racialization of many ethnic minorities in the United States, researchers will want to design studies to obtain both the ethnic identity and racial identity of study participants and their family members; this information will assist in the investigation of issues such as racial discrimination and economic stratification (Dressler, Oths, & Gravlee, 2005). This approach is in keeping with the policies and practices of the US government which added and allowed respondents to identify membership in multiple racial and ethnic identity categories, including mixed race, on the US Census in the year 2000. The same approach is explicitly acknowledged by many researchers who have worked to include these considerations in their research (see Quintana et al., 2006; Weisner & Duncan, 2014 for detailed discussions). By disentangling ethnic identity and racial identity, researchers will be in a better situation to advance the understanding of the etiology of health disparities among diverse populations.

Finally, researchers need to convey a clear message regarding the use of the term “minority.” Often confused with a numerical count, the terms minority and majority, as used by social scientists in studies of youth and families in the United States, refer to status based on the relative access to power, prestige, and resources within society. Minority status, or social standing, is also used within social stratification theory to represent the experiences of less privileged groups relative to more privileged groups (for a discussion, see García Coll et al., 1996). Baca Zinn (1983) states
that, “Racial–ethnic families are distinctive not only because of their ethnic heritage but also because they reside in a society where racial stratification shapes family resources and structures in important ways” (p. 20). Thus, there needs to be a clear understanding that minority youth and families have had a long history of discrimination and unequal status in the United States (e.g., Harris & Worthen, 2003; Taylor, 2002), and social scientists need to address this fact in studies of REM youth and families. Furthermore, social scientists also need to keep in mind that “minority” status is not necessarily static but may shift as some racial–ethnic groups obtain more power, prestige, and resources and that this may change perceptions of and expectations for members of particular groups. For example, the “model minority” designation of Asian American (such as Japanese, Chinese, and Asian Indian) students’ educational achievements puts pressure on all students identified as members of this group (e.g., Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean) even though the histories and experiences of various Asian American groups may vary widely (e.g., Chao, 2001; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Chou & Feagin, 2008; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2006).

Theoretical Perspectives

In preparing this chapter, we consulted a number of theoretical perspectives that have been used to study family processes and individual development in context, with a specific focus on research on REM youth and families. Based on our review of the literature and relevant theoretical frameworks, we propose a conceptual model that represents the reciprocal nature of the transactions between individuals and the multiple contextual elements and environments in which they are embedded over the life course. Individual characteristics, social and family processes, and contexts are represented not in a linear, time-ordered fashion, or causal model, but in a continuous feedback loop that illustrates the interconnected nature of—and dynamic interaction between—individuals and contexts. Figure 2.1 presents the overarching conceptual model of REM Youth in Context (REMYC), and Table 2.1 presents specific variables and concepts relevant to understanding REM youth in rural American today. As shown in Fig. 2.1, the four principal constructs in the REMYC model are (1) racial–ethnic minority status (i.e., youth characteristics, experiences, and social location), (2) economic and social contexts (i.e., ecological micro-/meso-/macro-contexts of youth and family including the specific rural settings as discussed in this chapter), (3) transactional relations of youth (i.e., interpersonal relations over the life course), and (4) youth development (i.e., individual developmental outcomes).

Building a theoretical foundation and related set of constructs that will enable researchers to conduct basic and applied research on the linkages between youth, important individuals in their lives, and economic and social conditions will further the understanding of REM youth development and factors associated with better or worse outcomes. Quintana et al. (2006) stated the issue concisely, “The need for a
Fig. 2.1  Racial–ethnic minority youth development in context (REMYC) conceptual model. See Table 2.1 for a detailed list of concepts based on existing research and recommendations for future directions

Table 2.1  Concepts related to the racial–ethnic minority youth in context (REMYC) model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Youth characteristics, experiences, and social location</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial–ethnic minority group membership</td>
<td>Race; ethnicity; minority status; legal status of youth; legal status of parents; siblings; and extended family members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Personality and temperament of youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generational status</td>
<td>Generational status of youth and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family structure</td>
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<td>Racial–ethnic identity</td>
<td>Racial–ethnic identity formation in youth; negative stereotypes; salience of identity</td>
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<td>Bicultural identity formation; acculturation; enculturation; assimilation; marginalization</td>
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<td>English proficiency; bilingual capability; preferred language; language barriers in parent–child communications; language spoken at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural considerations</td>
<td>Importance of family, respeto, collectivistic orientation, filial piety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiences of discrimination</td>
<td>Racial–ethnic discrimination experienced by youth and parents; racial–ethnic socialization practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Family income; family assets; parent education and occupation status</td>
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(continued)
Table 2.1 (continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migration history</td>
<td>Timing of arrival in current rural location</td>
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<td><strong>Economic and social contexts</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural setting type</td>
<td>Amenity rich; declining resource dependent; chronically poor; amenity poor</td>
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<td>Rural/urban classification</td>
<td>US Census classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locality concerns</td>
<td>Local economy: political climate</td>
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<td>Racial history in regional area</td>
<td>Historical patterns of race relations in regional area; neighborhood violence; racial segregation; racial–ethnic composition</td>
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<td>Education system</td>
<td>Type of school system (public or private); quality of education; funding structure of educational institutions; racial–ethnic composition of students</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
<td>Churches; relief programs run by religious organizations</td>
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<td>Social services/community resources</td>
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<td>Family economic status</td>
<td>Parent employment history; employment opportunities; migration patterns based on employment (voluntary or involuntary); support and resources shared with extended family members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family health care</td>
<td>Access to health care; service utilization</td>
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<td>Cultural considerations</td>
<td>Institutional racial–ethnic discrimination; historical patterns of migration in regional area</td>
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<td><strong>Transactional relations and processes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Socialization agents during childhood and adolescence</td>
<td>Parents; siblings; extended family; mentors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions with parents and siblings</td>
<td>Parent–child interactional processes; siblings interactional processes; quality of parents’ mental and physical health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction outside of family</td>
<td>Peers/schoolmates; teachers; coaches; authority figures including religious leaders, police, community leaders; parent–teacher interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of youth in family</td>
<td>Youth as caregiver to siblings or other family members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural considerations</td>
<td>Parent–child racial–ethnic socialization; parent–child emotion socialization; youth and parents’ cultural attitudes and beliefs; youth as cultural broker and interpreter for siblings and parents; racial–ethnic and cultural expectations of normative development</td>
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<td><strong>Individual developmental outcomes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-concept and self-schema</td>
<td>Individualistic vs. collective; racial identity; ethnic identity</td>
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<td>Emotion and motivation</td>
<td>Self-regulation and control; social–emotional development</td>
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<td>Personality</td>
<td>Psychological mastery; problem-solving skills; locus of control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>Physical health status; cognitive development; risky behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Psychological well-being; cultural adaptation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational outcomes</td>
<td>Academic motivation, achievement, and attainment</td>
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stronger theoretical foundation seems particularly acute for investigations of complex interactions involving context and development. . . we need to have a theory of context that predicts the ways development is influenced by contextual factor.” (p. 1138). A relevant and comprehensive theoretical framework also needs to acknowledge the ongoing changes of the contextual factors themselves, such as the changing demographics and rural economy discussed previously. The following sections focus on the individual characteristics, family processes, and other social and community contexts relevant to understanding the complex processes influencing REM youth development.

Social and Economic Contexts

One theoretical framework frequently used in research on REM youth is the ecological approach to studying development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Marks et al., 2014). Consistent with Quintana et al. (2006), we believe that understanding REM development requires identifying and examining the transactional nature of associations between context and development over time. Toward that end, we propose that the interconnectedness of individuals proposed by ecological systems theory could be complemented by incorporating theoretical linkages between economic factors, family relations, and youth outcomes presented in the Family Stress Model (FSM) (Conger et al., 2012; Conger & Conger, 2002).

Specifically, the FSM has identified economic hardship (e.g., can’t make ends meet, work instability) and low income as salient markers of stress that impact marital, sibling, and parent–child relationships, which, in turn, affect the health and well-being of youth and their families.

In addition to the FSM, we utilize ideas from family systems (Cox & Paley, 1997), social stratification (see García Coll et al., 1996), cumulative stress (Vernon-Feagans & Cox, 2013), stage–environment fit (Eccles et al., 1993), and transactional systems theory (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003). In addition, we draw from the interactionist model (Conger & Donnellan, 2007) which incorporates the dynamic relationship between social causation (the role of environmental conditions in predicting parental behaviors and child outcomes) and social selection (the notion that individual characteristics affect both parental behaviors and youth outcomes) as explanations for developmental processes and outcomes over time. Also included are the midrange theories designed to study specific aspects of the REM experience such as biculturalism (e.g., LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Whitesell, Mitchell, Kaufman, Spicer, & The Voices of Indian Teens Project, 2006), racial–ethnic identity (e.g., Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Quintana et al., 2006), and acculturation and adaptation (e.g., Berry, 2003). Taken together, these theoretical approaches provide a framework for a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural processes that link these youth and families to one another and to their economic and social contexts.
Poverty and Economic Hardship

Socioeconomic status (SES), economic stress, and poverty are important factors to consider in research on families living in rural regions of America (Conger, 2011). In general, rural children are more likely to live in poverty than their urban counterparts, and this is especially true for REM rural youth (e.g., Bauer et al., 2012; Conger et al., 2002; Duncan, 1999; Lee, 2011; Walker & Reschke, 2004). The use of large-scale surveys and aggregate data is very useful in quantifying the nature and scale of the socioeconomic problems faced by many rural families. However, the experience of poverty by children and their families is complex and multidimensional. A special issue of Children and Society (Crivello, Camfield, & Porter, 2010) focused on “the daily lives of individual children experiencing economic and other forms of disadvantage, within the context of resource-poor families, communities and countries…” (p. 256). Perspectives from multiple social science disciplines including sociology, human development, psychology, and economics all contribute to the understanding of the social–emotional, physical, and psychological consequences of living with poverty and help us better identify possible causal linkages and points of intervention for researchers, program providers, and policy makers (e.g., Conger et al., 2012; Spicer & Sarche, 2012; Vernon-Feagans, Garrett-Peters, Marco, & Bratsch-Hines, 2012).

Indeed, the literature consistently finds that living in poverty and economic hardship can have immediate as well as long-term effects on the individual health and well-being of children and adults (e.g., Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Conger et al., 2012; Donnellan, Conger, McAdams, & Neppl, 2009; Maholmes, 2012). For example, there is evidence that poverty or economic disadvantage can disrupt parent–child interactions and family relationships, which, in turn, impact both child and adult development (e.g., Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010; Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007; Martin et al., 2010; McLoyd, 1990). Moreover, findings from research on child and adolescent mental and physical health demonstrate clear connections between (1) poverty and mental health (e.g., Ackerman, Brown, & Izard, 2004; Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2001; McLeod & Shanahan, 1996), (2) SES and cognitive development (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2004; Burnett & Farkas, 2009, Hoff, 2003), and (3) social class position and physical health and well-being (e.g., Evans & English, 2002; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002).

While it is important to consider the SES of a family on its own and in comparison to other REM groups, to fully understand the impact of income and social status, SES must also be considered relative to where a family resides within the social structure of a community and within a region of the country. For example, youth growing up in a rural region that is declining will have fewer opportunities than youth living in a region that is resource rich and growing (see Hamilton et al., 2008). Furthermore, residential and social class locations (i.e., social address) may be experienced quite differently by members of different racial–ethnic groups; therefore the social address of REM youth must be carefully defined and validated.
For example, Whitesell et al. (2006) make the case that measures of income and education used in most studies to establish a family’s social and/or economic standing may not be a useful measure when evaluating the standing of American Indian families: “We did not include traditional measures of SES in this study; these measures have a somewhat different meaning in the reservation context and generally demonstrate little variance” (p. 1490). In addition, Spicer and Sarche (2012) discuss the disparate distribution of revenues from gaming, which has largely impacted only a few tribes; “the majority of tribes do not benefit in significant ways from these opportunities” (p. 481). Furthermore, researchers need to keep in mind whether a rural area is growing or declining, as this typically affects adult employment opportunities that, in turn, influence parents’ abilities to pay for fees, equipment, and transportation necessary for youth to engage in school and community activities; a hidden opportunity cost of poverty (Conger et al., 2012; Lichter & Graefe, 2011).

Contextual factors also include a consideration of work opportunities, housing discrimination, and spatial history (i.e., residential patterns) which vary widely across regions of the country such as the Black Belt in the South, mining towns in Appalachia, Latino farmworkers in the Midwest and West, and tribal reservations for American Indians (e.g., Harris & Worthen, 2003; Saenz & Torres, 2003; Spicer & Sarche, 2012). The disciplines of Ethnic Minority Studies and US History provide strong evidence that researchers need to consider both historical context and contemporary trends in work, housing, and residential patterns to understand the experiences and consequences of particular REM groups in different parts of the country (e.g., see Brown & Swanson, 2003; Hart et al., 2005; Lichter & Graefe, 2011; Parke, 2013). For instance, the timing of arrival of a particular racial–ethnic minority group in the United States, and the specific region of the country where they settle, may alter the experiences of adults and their children. One specific example is the varied experiences of Vietnamese immigrants who came to the United States at two distinct historical periods. The first wave were considered Vietnamese “elites” who were welcomed and resettled in the United States in the 1970s after the Vietnam war; the second wave were characterized as “boat people” who were disenfranchised economic and political refugees looking for opportunities in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Kibria, 2002). A similar story can be told by Cubans coming to America in the twentieth century. Although Cubans have resided in the United States since the early 1800s, immigration patterns altered significantly in the 1960s. The first wave of post-revolution Cuban immigrants were more likely to be well educated, mostly white elites who were viewed as political refugees fleeing Communism. However, later waves of immigrants—especially those of the 1980s Mariel boatlift—who were less well educated, less skilled, and often darker skinned, came for economic reasons and were not automatically granted refugee status (Perez, 2002). Thus, information about family migration histories can help explain both residential patterns in and current economic conditions of REM youth and their families (Kibria, 2002; Min, 2002; Smokowski, Evans, Cotter, & Guo, 2014). Investigating the history of residential and economic discrimination in rural areas is, in many ways, subject to the methodological challenges raised by Duncan and Raudenbush (2001) regarding the
linkages between urban neighborhoods and adolescent development. In particular, they highlight the challenge of obtaining “neighborhood-level measures” and of allowing for concurrent and reciprocal influences between youth and their contexts. In the case of studying REM families, the methodological and conceptual challenges are even more complex, as neighborhoods, towns, and entire regions need to be considered.

**Transactional Relations and Processes**

In their review of the evolving bioecological model of human development, Rosa and Tudge (2013) explicitly remind researchers to look at proximal family processes as central to understanding the mutual influences between the developing individual and his or her environments over time. These mutual influences are used by Marks et al. (2014) to structure their integrative model of developmental competencies of immigrant youth. Of particular note is their focus on the resilience and competencies of immigrant youth, as opposed to the more typical focus on deficits and risky behaviors. The authors identify three key competencies that should be included in studies of REM youth in rural (and urban) settings including the following: (1) biculturalism and the positive aspects of learning to operate across two cultures and adopting the positive characteristics of each one (see Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; LaFromboise et al., 1993), (2) developing a healthy ethnic identity and not accepting the negative attributes of your REM group assigned by the larger “majority” culture and media (e.g., Cheung & Sin-Sze, 2012; Taylor, 2002; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006), and (3) bilingualism which represents the challenges as well as positive aspects of learning to operate in two languages in the United States (e.g., Iddings & Katz, 2007; Kempert, Saalbach, & Hardy, 2011). Similarly, from sociology and family studies come concepts such as familism, communalism, filial piety, and school belongingness which should be considered in order to gain an understanding of connections or social bonds between individuals, families, schools, and communities (e.g., Fuligni et al., 2005; Hernandez et al., in press; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Schwartz et al., 2010). Also important to include is socialization by parents, siblings, and other agents regarding family obligations and cultural attitudes (e.g., Cole, Tamang, & Shrestha, 2006; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008). Another factor to consider is racial–ethnic socialization by parents of minority youth regarding salient issues, such as racial discrimination, which may be particularly salient for Latino and African American youth (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006; Schwartz, 2007; Yip et al., 2006).

Researchers will also want to include the normative biological, cognitive, and social developmental milestones and transitions of children and adolescents such as becoming a sibling, entering school, attaining puberty, and transitioning from middle childhood to adolescence and, eventually, to adulthood (Steinberg, 2013). In addition, studies need to include individual characteristics such as personality (e.g., Donnellan et al., 2009; Huntsinger & Jose, 2006), identity development
(e.g., Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997), and, specifically, ethnic identity as well as individual and collective self-concept (e.g., Fuligni et al., 2005; Whitesell et al., 2006) which interacts in a reciprocal fashion with family processes and, more broadly, with community and political institutions during the course of development (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000; Schullenberg, Maggs, & Hurrelman, 1997). Researchers also will want to include parenting as a central proximal process in the model. One challenge will be to obtain culturally informed assessments of parenting styles and behaviors that allow for comparisons across studies while taking into account unique elements of parenting within and between REM groups (e.g., Chao, 2001; Crockett, Veed, & Russell, 2010; Lansford, 2012; Parke et al., 2005). Furthermore, researchers will want to take relationships with siblings and extended family members into account when designing studies of REM youth (see Kramer & Conger, 2009).

Addressing the Challenges

Given the breadth of these challenges, it is not surprising that most researchers have focused on a finite set of factors and characteristics and have limited the number of ethnic minority groups being compared when designing and conducting studies. Indeed, a full review of all relevant studies and concepts is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, in order to facilitate future research directions, it may be useful to think about concepts held in common across theoretical perspectives, as well as across REM groups, such as those presented in Table 2.1. In other words, we need to construct a set of shared concepts that can be used by all researchers interested in REM youth development across time and context. For example, racial–ethnic identity is a central concept that has been used by psychologists, educators, sociologists, and ethnic studies scientists in numerous investigations and has been shown to be relevant to academic motivation and achievement, self-concept, and occupational pathways (e.g., Fuligni, 1997; Fuligni et al., 2005; Fuller & García Coll, 2010; Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003; Tseng, 2006). Incorporating shared concepts, such as racial–ethnic identity, in addition to unique, study-specific concepts such as the effect of tribal gaming on American Indian youth, would greatly facilitate future research comparability and enhance the strength of findings that could be relevant for future programs and policies (e.g., Brody, Kogan, & Grange, 2012; Granger, Tseng, & Wilcox, 2014; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

Furthermore, the typical intergroup comparisons found in many studies would be enhanced by understanding more about the within-group variability of each racial–ethnic group. Intragroup variability deserves both acknowledgment and increased research attention; there has been a significant “disregard for the diversity inherent in some of the minority group categories in use” (García Coll et al., 1996, p. 1892). One example of this is the “immigrant paradox” which has recently received increased research attention and furthered our understanding of why more recent
immigrants may (or may not) look better educationally and psychologically, compared to more established, more acculturated immigrant youth, despite the higher likelihood of living in poverty and poor conditions (see discussions by Fuller & García Coll, 2010; García Coll & Marks, 2012; Marks et al., 2014; Parke, 2013). Fuller and García Coll (2010) find that this paradox is more “nuanced” than previously thought and provide a clear illustration of why more research is needed regarding what is happening within REM immigrant groups, as well as how racial–ethnic immigrants are functioning relative to other groups such as the “majority” Caucasian group typically used for comparison. This may be particularly salient in some rural regions of the country as the ratio of ethnic minority families to white majority families begins to change, such as areas in the Midwest which have experienced a recent influx of Mexican origin workers in the agri-food processing industry (Brown & Schafft, 2011; Saenz & Torres, 2003). Indeed, it also would be wise to gain a better understanding of within-group variability among the white rural/nonmetro population, given the wide range of socioeconomic status conditions, cultural heritages, family backgrounds, and contexts in which both majority and minority groups now live (see Lee, 2011; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2012).

Conclusion and Future Directions

Our review of theories and concepts has highlighted some of the challenges and opportunities that researchers and policy makers have in developing a coherent framework for conducting research regarding racially/ethnically diverse youth in today’s society. However, this complexity should not deter social scientists from conducting studies and developing theory that will contribute to our understanding of REM youth and families in rural America. To recap the central issues, we feel that in order to facilitate comparisons not only across studies but among and within racial–ethnic minority groups living in the United States today, research in this area will benefit from general agreement on certain operational definitions and on some common characteristics and factors that impact REM youth’s lives. This is particularly important, as illustrated in the many conceptual challenges presented in the other chapters in this volume. Furthermore, researchers need to acknowledge the sociodemographic diversity in rural settings (e.g., Hamilton et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2005) and come to some agreement on how to incorporate this variability in meaningful ways (e.g., as a predictor and moderator of social processes and developmental outcomes), not simply as a control. Just as researchers try to account for neighborhood effects on children and families in diverse urban/metropolitan settings (e.g., DeCarlo Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011; Duncan & Raudenbush, 2001; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2002; Sastry, 2012), researchers interested in understanding the effects of rural settings on REM youth need to take the variability of rural contexts into account (e.g., Hamilton et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2005; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2012).
One important concept shared by REM youth across the United States is related to the importance of family or tribe. Throughout our brief overview of the “major” minority groups in the United States, the role of family/tribe/community is central to the socialization and experiences of these REM youth (see Schwartz et al., 2010). This is one concept that needs to be included when studying any group, no matter how small the group or remote the location. Do these youth have family members to turn to? Did they migrate with family or come alone? Do they come to a community where there is already a core group of people from their racial–ethnic group? Timing of their family’s arrival to the region also impacts their experiences and the reception they receive in rural communities. Researchers need to include questions that obtain information regarding historical and contemporary residence patterns of racial–ethnic minority groups in the rural areas of interest. For example, were ethnic minorities always present in a particular rural area, suggesting established patterns of cross-ethnic interaction, or do recent arrivals of REM youth, and their families, happen to coincide with a worsening economy for long-term residents? The changing racial–ethnic composition of rural communities may spark resentment among long-term residents, leading to sentiments such as fear of being taken over, losing one’s place in a community, or no longer feeling “at home” in their home town. And if college-educated white youth move out—aka the brain drain discussed by Carr and Kefalas (2009)—just as ethnic minority youth are moving in, how does that reshape race relations, and even age relations (e.g., older white folk being cared for by younger brown folk)? Furthermore, this shift may present language challenges not only for immigrant families learning English but for long-term residents who must adjust to hearing Spanish, Russian, Cantonese, Portuguese, and other non-English languages spoken on the streets and in the markets of a community that used to be English-language only. As researchers strive to understand the experiences of REM youth in rural settings, they also will want to be mindful of the attitudinal and behavioral impact of increasing racial and ethnic diversity on residents of rural communities that were once racially homogeneous (Andreeva & Unger, 2014).

In addition to the racial and cultural conditions of rural areas, economic conditions are an important consideration for many racial–ethnic minority parents as they look to find stable employment and develop some degree of financial security for their families. For example, an amenity-rich rural setting such as those that currently attract retirees might also be attractive to parents as a stable place to raise children. Alternatively, low-SES families may have little means to leave a rural place where there is economic hardship and declining job opportunities such as in many of the small farming communities in the Southeast and coal-mining towns in Appalachia. Research findings are unequivocal in that poverty and economic hardship can have negative consequences for individuals and families (e.g., Maholmes, 2012). Thus, it is important to understand what factors influence the transmission of hardship or success from one generation to the next and how those factors relate to social position and life course development in various types of rural communities (e.g., Conger et al., 2012; Gonzales et al., 2008). These processes may be particularly important to include in studies of REM youth, who tend to experience higher rates of poverty.
and barriers to upward social mobility. Researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers alike would benefit from a more complete understanding of the individual and social factors that may enable individuals to improve their economic status, and thus their life chances, compared to previous generations in their family. These factors all play a role in predicting the experiences and the consequences of being REM youth living in rural America today.

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