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Promoting Positive Human Development (PHD) Across the Life Span: Relational Developmental Systems-Based Models, Individual ⇔ Context Relations, and Relative Plasticity



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THE FOCUS OF DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE

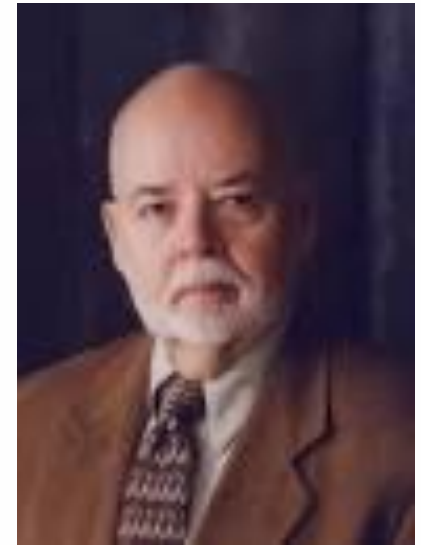
Developmental science involves the description, explanation, and optimization of intraindividual change and of interindividual differences in intraindividual change across the life span:

- **Today, the cutting-edge of theory in developmental science involves the use of the relational developmental systems (RDS) metatheory to frame all theoretical models of human development;**
- **These models constitute the frame for all current models of positive (healthy, adaptive) human development (PHD) across the life span (e.g., Brandtstädter, 1998, 2006; Freund, et al., 2013; Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015).**

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RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL SYSTEMS (RDS) THEORIES

- **The contributions of
Willis F. Overton**
- **The sun has set on split,
reductionist accounts
stressing nature or nurture**
- **RDS theories provides the frame for the other
dimensions of scholarly advances that mark
the status of developmental science in 2016**





Relational Developmental Systems Models

- **All levels of organization within the ecology of human development, from biology/physiology through culture, the physical ecology, and history, are integrated and coact**
- **Development across life involves mutually influential individual ⇔ context relations**
- **Integrated individual ⇔ context relations are the basic unit of analysis within human development**
- **Time (historical change, either normative or non-normative) contributes to systematic change (“plasticity”) in human development**
- **Because of plasticity, scientists and practitioners can be optimistic that sound applications of developmental research can promote positive human development, for example, character virtues or contributions to civil society.**



THE SAMPLE CASE OF THE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD) PERSPECTIVE

The PYD Perspective: Six Core Concepts



1. **Because of the potential to change, all youth have strengths.**
2. **All contexts have strengths as well. These strengths are resources that may be used to promote positive youth development.**
3. **These resources are termed “developmental assets”. They are the “social nutrients” needed for healthy development.**

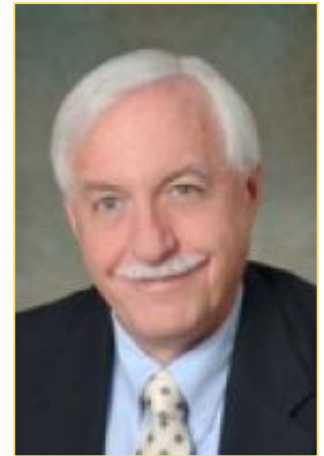
The PYD Perspective: Six Core Concepts

4. These assets are found in families, schools, faith institutions, youth serving organizations, and the community more generally.
5. If the strengths of youth are combined with ecological developmental assets, then positive, healthy development may occur.
6. We should be optimistic that it is in our power to promote positive development among ALL youth and to create more asset-rich settings supporting such development among ALL youth.

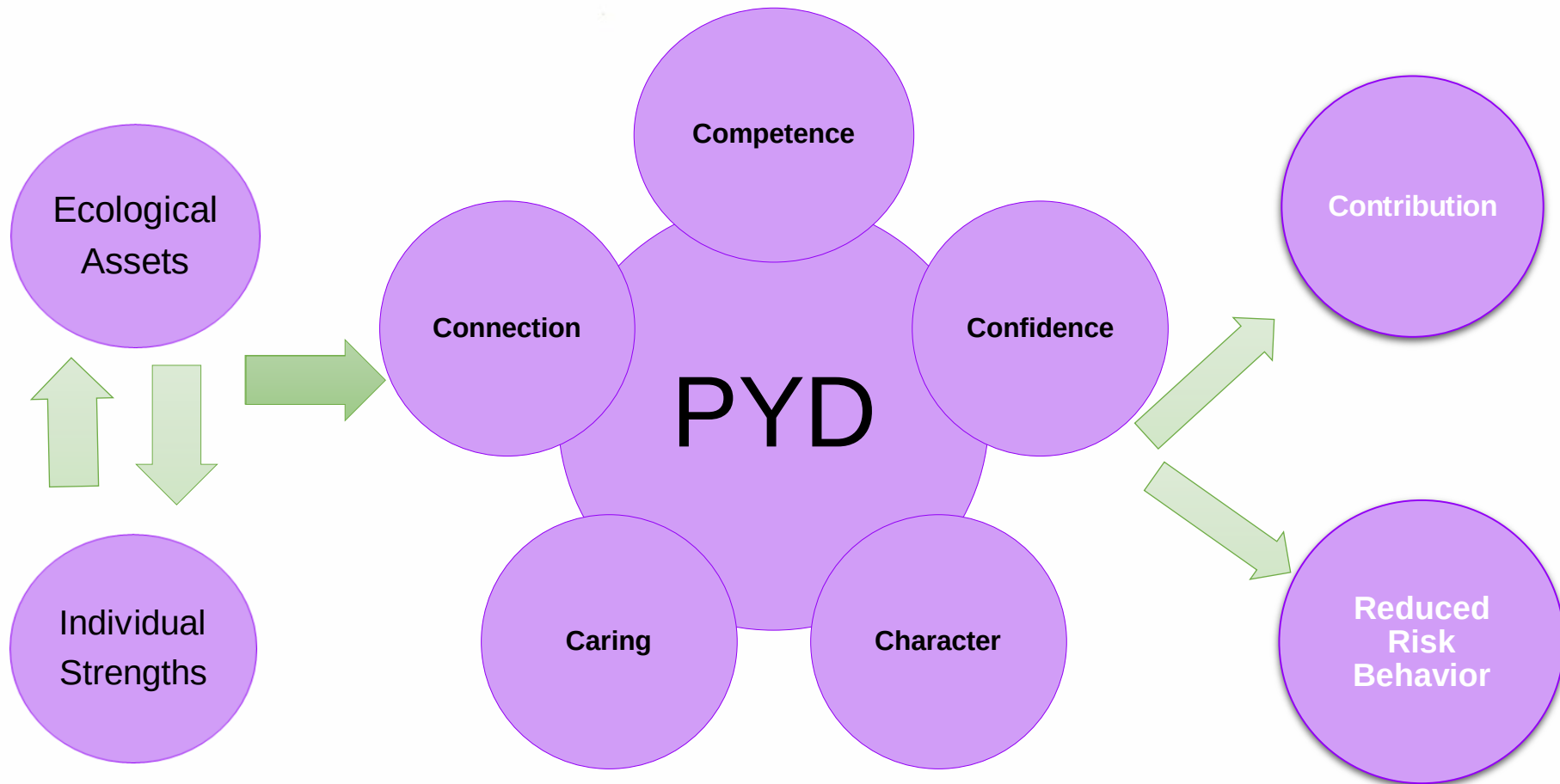


THE LERNER AND LERNER MODEL OF THE PYD PROCESS

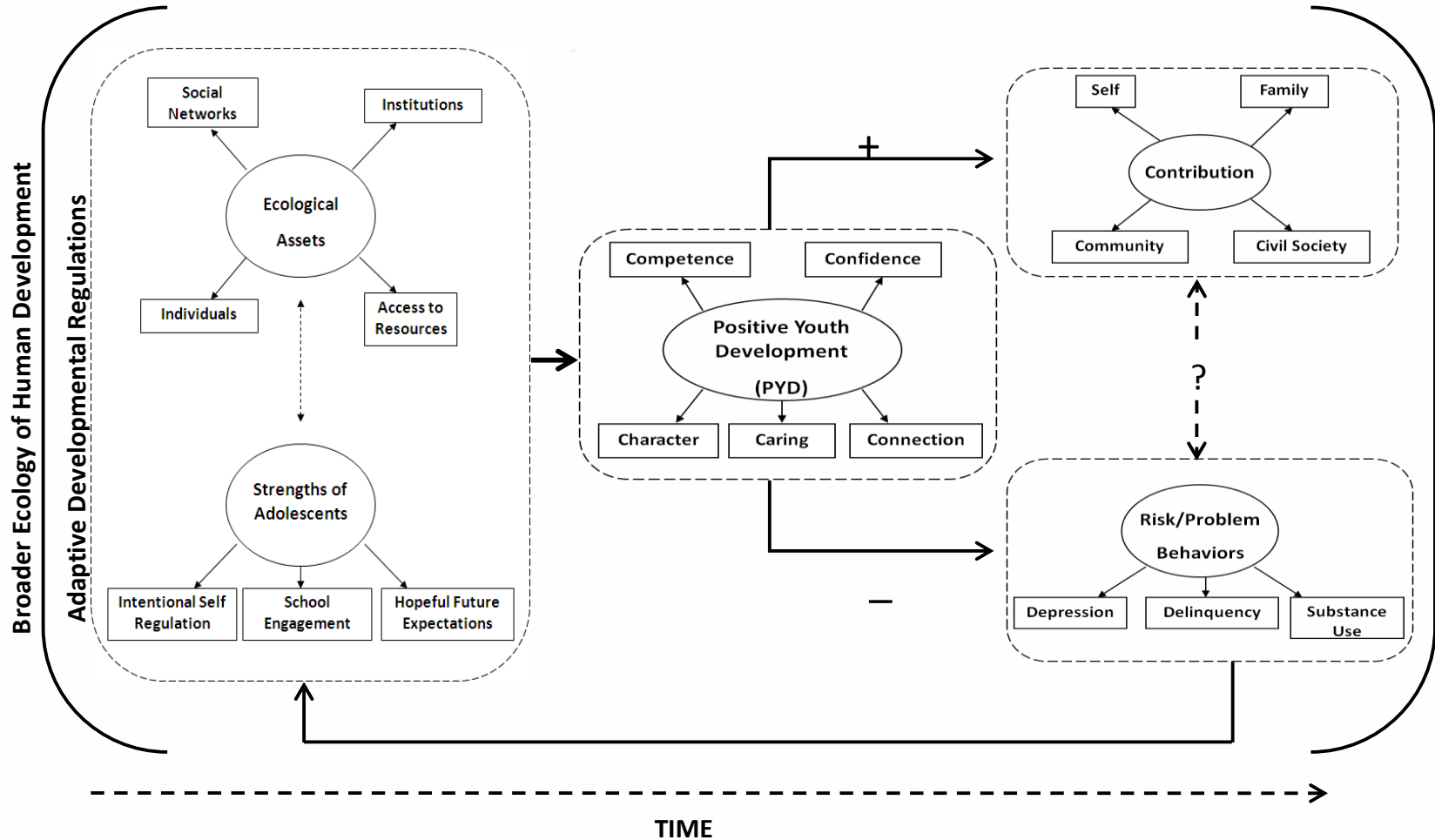
- PYD is optimized when youth strengths are aligned with ecological resources (developmental assets)
- Intentional Self Regulation and Hope are key strengths of youth
- Individuals, institutions, collective activity, and access are key ecological developmental assets
- “Five C’s” of PYD are the outcomes of youth ↔ context relations
- Thriving youth contribute to their context
 - Contribution is the 6th C of PYD



THE LERNER & LERNER RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL SYSTEMS MODEL OF PYD



THE LERNER & LERNER MODEL OF PYD: AS INSTANTIATED WITHIN THE 4-H STUDY OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



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What We Have Learned About PYD To Date:

**A Brief Overview of Findings
from the
4-H Study of PYD**

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THE 4-H STUDY OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



WITH GRATITUDE TO:

- Don Floyd, President and CEO of the National 4-H Council
- The Altria Corporation

**THEIR VISION, VALUES, LEADERSHIP, AND
SUPPORT CREATED THE FIELD OF PYD**

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DESIGN OF THE 4-H STUDY

Across Grades 5 to 12, we sampled about 7,000 youth and 3,500 parents from 42 states

The 4-H Study uses a form of a cohort-sequential longitudinal design:

- **Youth were first surveyed in 5th Grade**
 - **New students were added each year**
 - **We also studied these new students longitudinally**
 - **Therefore, the sample size increases across the study**
-
- **A subgroup of participants was assessed two years post high school**

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MEASUREMENT IN THE STUDY OF PYD

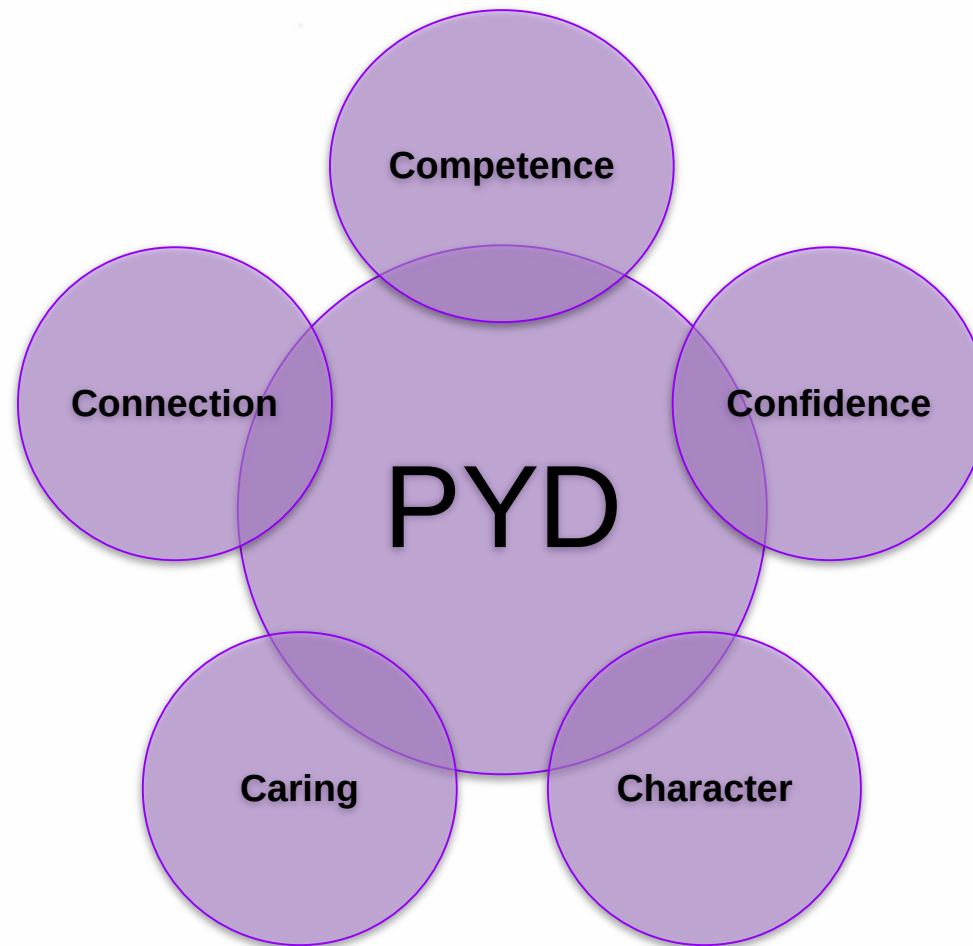
- ▶ **The Five Cs of PYD***
- ▶ **Youth Strengths**
 - **Intentional Self Regulation: The “SOC” Model****
 - **School Engagement***
 - **Hope for a Positive Future***
- ▶ **Ecological Assets**
 - **Individuals, Institutions, Youth-Adult Collaborations, Access***
- ▶ **Contribution: Active and Engaged Citizenship***
- ▶ **Risk/Problem Behaviors**

*** Developed by IARYD researchers**

****Adapted and developed by IARYD researchers**



KEY FINDINGS: PYD IS CONSTITUTED BY “FIVE Cs”





Key Findings: Individual strengths linked to PYD (within and across grades)

- **Intentional self regulation (ISR) positively predicts PYD and Contribution and negatively predicts Risk/Problem behaviors**
- **Hope for the future is associated with high ISR, PYD, and Contribution and with low risk behaviors and depressive symptoms**
- **School Engagement, which is composed of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components is associated with better self-reported grades, higher ISR, and lower involvement in delinquency and substance use**

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Key Findings: Ecological Assets linked to PYD

- **Key Ecological Assets Promoting PYD are:**
 1. **Individuals in the lives of youth, such as mentors, family members, and teachers**
 2. **Physical and institutional resources, such as schools and community programs**
 3. **Youth engagement, with people and institutions in their environments**
 4. **The accessibility of people and institutions in the environments of youth**
- **Across family, school, and community settings, and within and across grades, INDIVIDUALS are always the most important asset in predicting PYD and Contribution**



Key Findings: Important Outcomes of PYD

- **Contribution is a key outcome of PYD, and involves Active and Engaged Citizenship: Civic duty, Civic skills, Neighborhood social connection, and Civic participation**
- **Within and across grades, Contribution is associated with ISR, Hope, and PYD**
- **ISR, Hope, and PYD are negatively related to Risk/Problem Behaviors within and across grades**

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Key Findings: PYD Pathways and their Moderators

- **There are also diverse combinations of positive and problematic trajectories: Despite a general inverse relation between positive and problematic behaviors, some youth may show very different developmental pathways, for instance, increases in both positive and problematic behaviors**
- **High levels of youth strengths (e.g., ISR) and high levels of ecological assets (e.g., sustained mentoring) place youth on the most favorable trajectories**



IMPLICATIONS OF THE 4-H STUDY OF PYD

- **Relative plasticity exists across adolescence**
- **Optimism about enhancing youth development is warranted**
- **Promotion and prevention should be the focus of programs**
- **A multi-part specificity question (Bornstein, 2006, in press) is therefore needed in evidence-based youth programs. For example:**
 - **What specific characteristics of intraindividual change; in relation to**
 - **What specific contextual characteristics, for**
 - **What specific youth, will lead to**
 - **What specific outcomes, through**
 - **What specific intervention programs, during**
 - **What specific portions of ontogeny?**



CONCLUSIONS

In agreement with Overton (2015):

- **The Cartesian-split-mechanistic scientific paradigm has been progressively failing as a scientific research program**
- **RDS accounts for the findings that are anomalies for the old paradigm and accounts for new findings (e.g., from the 4-H Study of PYD)**
- **RDS points the way to future scientific productivity**

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CONCLUSIONS

- **The need to produce scholarship that matters in the real world makes Kurt Lewin's (1952, p. 169) aphorism, that "There is nothing so practical as a good theory," an empirical reality.**
- **Developmental science will be judged on whether its theory and methods capitalize on the relative plasticity of human development and promote positive human development – *social justice* – across the life span for the diverse people of the world.**

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THANK YOU !

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