

**3. Social address variables, such as race/ethnicity, nationality, sex, and socioeconomic status have been related to an incredible array of developmental outcomes. Some argue that such social address models are devoid of important information about development in that they fail to explicate the processes by which social address variables affect development. Others argue that social address models are an effective research tool that can uncover important effects of context. Choose one area of development and discuss differences in outcomes according to mean differences in social address variables and processes that explain those differences. First, describe direct associations between two social address variables and the outcome of your choice. Second, review research that explicates the processes by which the relationships affect developmental outcomes. Third, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each approach (social address vs. process models) in terms of their ability to demonstrate important developmental trends.**

### *Introduction*

Social address variables are widely used in developmental literature to understand developmental phenomena. While some argue that using labels such as socioeconomic status (SES), gender, or race fail to clarify the processes by which poverty affects development, others suggest that these social address variables are an effective tool that can uncover important “effects” of context. This paper aims to review the associations between SES and race with social development. Specifically, I will highlight the differences in outcomes according to mean differences in SES levels and across different ethnicities/races. Then I will review the research literature that clarifies the actual processes by which the relationships affect social developmental outcomes. Finally I will review the advantages and disadvantages of each approach in terms of their ability to demonstrate important developmental trends. I hope to show that social address variables can be a good starting place when exploring social development, but that process models are a more accurate way to understand how differences in SES and race or ethnicity lead to different developmental outcomes.

### *Socioeconomic Status: Direct Associations and Processes*

There is an overabundance of research and policy publications that illustrate correlations between socioeconomic status (SES) and several important social developmental outcomes for children. These correlations are easy to calculate and are powerful tools for highlighting differences between social classes, especially highlighting the negative effects of poverty.

Brooks-Gunn, J., Yeung, W. J., and Smith, J. (1998) explored the impact of family income on child outcomes. These researchers found that as years of schooling increase, the chances of completing high school also increases and the hazard of non-marital birth decreases. Detrimental developmental effects are particularly profound and predictive for those individuals who are both poor and young. Similarly, in a review chapter (McLloyd, 2006) on the development of children in poverty noted that early studies, McLoyd found a direct relationship between IQ scores and SES in samples of White and Black children (citing Deutsch & Brown, 1964; Dreger & Miller, 1960; Kennedy, Van de Riet, & White, 1963).

Several longitudinal developmental studies today aim to explore the actual processes through which SES level affects developmental outcomes for children. Duncan & Magnuson (in press) state, “The causal impact of economic deprivation on children’s development is overstated by simple comparisons of poor and non-poor children.” These researchers are promoting a process model between SES level and developmental outcomes because they are seeking to determine the mediators and processes by which living in low SES or poverty affects children.

A study by Brody, G., Murry, V. M., Kim, S., and Brown, A. C. (2002) attempted to address the pathways that maternal education and per capita income lead to competence and adjustment in children. They found that maternal education and family income are linked to mothers’ psychological functioning, which mediates the education and income relationship to parenting that promotes competence in children. Children’s self-regulation mediated the

parenting processes' relationship to competence and psychological adjustment. In fact, this study found that a direct relationship between maternal education, per capita income, and maternal psychological functioning was not found with children's competence and adjustment.

Morris, Gennetian, & Duncan (2005) reviewed the effectiveness of welfare policy programs on the development of poor children. Overall, they found programs that supported parental income were somewhat effective but only for younger children (ages 2-5), and only in programs that also provide earning supplements, and yield increased use of center-based child care arrangements. They concluded that even with the benefits of welfare programs, children in low-income families are still at risk for academic failure. Morris et al. suggested that there is not a direct casual path between income or SES status and child development. There are several processes taking place, and welfare programs that recognize these mediators will be more effective.

McLoyd (2006) gives a great review of various programs aimed at improving child outcomes, such as Head Start. The review chapter explains that programs are recognizing that there is not a direct relationship between low SES and child outcomes. Head Start works both ways, trying to treat low SES by providing children with needed cognitive skills to achieve in the classroom, and in return hoping that these children will succeed and end the cycle of poverty. However, after reviewing programs such as these, it appears that there are complex processes at work. McLoyd cites Zigler and Styfco (1994) as recognizing that "early intervention simple cannot overpower the effects of poor living conditions, inadequate nutrition and health care, negative role models, and substandard schools." The summation of current developmental studies suggests an interaction of many variables combining to cause problems for children in low SES environments.

*Race and Ethnicity: Direct Associations and Processes*

Direct associations have also been extensively mentioned in the literature when looking at race/ethnicity and social developmental outcomes. Parke and Buriel (2006) reviewed literature on socialization in the family. In the 1960's, cultural deficit models were commonly used to explain how socialization in ethnic minorities led to child outcome differences. For example, Parke and Buriel cited Demos (1962) and the explanation that Mexican American children's poor achievement in school is due to their culture allegedly discouraging achievement motivation. Likewise, if Mexican Americans live in poverty it is because the culture encourages fatalism (Kuvlesky & Patella, 1971). In these direct association models, outcomes are correlated to two groups, usually European Americans and some ethnic minority group. Direct association models fail to explain the processes that lead to achievement or poverty. No effort was made to explain the processes that lead to achievement or poverty. Therefore past explanations have been limited to cultural differences.

Jackson, Antonucci, & Gibson (1990) provided a great discussion on how race and ethnicity should be defined within the larger cultural context. However, the article presented many negative direct effects between racial groups and developmental outcomes without suggesting the developmental or historical situations that cause these outcomes for particular groups. For example, it was stated that minority elderly have greater morbidity. Blacks and Hispanics suffer higher rates of diabetes, pneumonia, influenza, heart disease, and homicide. Asians and Pacific Islanders have lower rates of smoking and alcohol consumption patterns. As it was unfortunately pointed out, "a burden of illness rests upon the shoulders of ethnic and racial minorities in this society from cradle to grave" (Jackson et al., 1990, pg. 109). However, it is

noted that research such as this has unfortunately contributed to the emphasis of minority vs. non-minority group comparisons rather than intra-minority group assessments of factors that contribute to health behaviors and statuses, which suggests that a process model is preferable.

Newer research models are starting to explore the actual processes by which children's race/ethnicity affects developmental outcomes. In a symposium by Eccles (2007) on African American racial and ethnic identity, it was suggested that the reasons Blacks have lower academic achievement in schools are because of inequalities in opportunities, barriers, differential face to face treatment, psychological processes relating to collective social identity, and the daily experiences and racial discrimination. The study found a strong effect of day to day discrimination in the schools on children's value of school. This diminished value of school can then be said to explain lower academic achievement.

Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel (1998) review research on African American and Latin American children and youth showing that minorities are a large portion of the lowest achieving 40% of students in America. However they go on to explain reasons why developmental successes may be slim for African American and Latin American children and describe the processes by which negative outcomes occur. First they discuss job and housing discrimination, which limits parental income and reduces options for school choice and access to important community resources. Then the authors pinpoint re-segregation in the schools, such as the over abundance of minority youth in lower academic tracks, pull out tutoring, special education, punitive punishment, and daily discrimination in the schools. All of these variables have been documented by various researchers and help to explain the processes through which racial and ethnic identity results in particular developmental outcomes.

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Address Models*

Social address variables such as SES and race or ethnicity can be an advantage in that they quickly pinpoint inequalities in our society. For example, the National Center for Children in Poverty (2007) suggests that 28 million children in the United States live in low-income families. If we know that these children are at risk for negative developmental outcomes, despite not knowing the underlying process, we can easily see how childhood poverty is an enormous social issue in the United States. The direct correlations described in this paper can be used to alarm and encourage policy makers or school administrators to implement programs aimed at helping children who may be at risk.

Several researchers have argued that correlations say very little about the true casual connections between address variables and child outcomes (Duncan & Magnuson, in press). One disadvantage of using SES as a factor to look at developmental trends is that income is very unstable; many individuals move in and out of poverty or low SES because of events such as unemployment, marriage, divorce, career gains, and so on (Duncan & Magnuson). These researchers have found that the majority of poverty “spells” are actually less than three years. Using this one label to predict a developmental outcome would be unwise if we ignore the process by which SES can effect development. Likewise, cultural effects of race can change over several generations of immigrants or in different locations. For example, one’s race or ethnicity can play a different role based on whether one is first generation, second generation, and so on. It seems logical to ask, what is it about SES or race/ethnicity that leads to particular outcomes? Another big disadvantage is that these labels have negative connotations if directly associated with negative developmental outcomes. Likewise, social address models fail to pinpoint the actual processes by which negative development is occurring.

### *Advantages and Disadvantages of Process Models*

Process models have many advantages. From a purely statistical standpoint they help to explain more variance by pinpointing more of the constructs that lead to particular developmental outcomes. From a social equality standpoint they help to diminish a discriminatory view towards particular groups. Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel (1998) reviewed deficit-oriented literature that used to dominate the literature. This type of research has commonly led to negative views of ethnic minority development and fails to explore differences within populations as well as the characteristics and values of specific racial and ethnic communities. Process models allow differences in ethnic populations to be celebrated while demonstrating the actual reasons children have detrimental developmental effects. From a policy standpoint these models are the key to developing effective public programs aimed at preventing negative development.

A disadvantage of a process model is the cost and efficiency of accurately exploring all the possible pathways. It takes a lot of time and money to run quality longitudinal studies in order to explore all the possible variables and processes that occur as an individual develops over time. Even when a particular process model is found, it can not be certain that this model will work in the future as historical changes take place, or that it will work for other types of individuals or in different geographical locations. However, it is my hope that researchers strive towards using process models as they promote a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms at work when we begin to note trends by different race or SES levels.

### *Conclusion*

Although social address variables have some advantages in highlighting social groups that have differential outcomes, I think they should be viewed as starting points in social development research. Studies that have used process models have been able to explain the causal pathways between ethnicity or socioeconomic status and negative health, academic, or emotional outcomes. Even though this type of research is more complicated, I think it is imperative in order to discourage negative labeling and to promote effective policy solutions. For example, simply giving low SES individuals some money will probably not be an effective way to end the cycle of poverty. A process model of how low SES causes negative outcomes highlights important variables along the way, such as parenting, education, access to resources, social capital, and so on. Fortunately, it appears that current developmental psychological research is heading towards using more process models to understand the complicated pathways leading to developmental outcomes.