

Facilitating Positive Development in Immigrant Youth:
The Role of Mentors and Community Organizations
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Today, one in five children in the United States is a child of immigrants; by 2040, it is projected that one in three will be the child of an immigrant (Rong & Preissle, 1998). These youth bring with them remarkable strengths — strong family ties, a deep-seated belief in education, and optimism about the future. However, their journey presents a number of challenges. Many are settling in highly segregated neighborhoods of deep poverty (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Immigrant parents often must work long hours leaving their children relatively unsupervised. The family system is placed under stress by the social and cultural dislocations inherent in migration (Sluzki 1979; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). Immigrant parents, many of whom have limited English skills, often find it difficult to monitor their children’s academic progress, keep track of their children’s after-school activities, and understand their children’s experiences (Cooper, Denner & Lopez, 1999; Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1993; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). As a result, many immigrant youth are vulnerable to emotional difficulties as well as the lure of the street.

Immigrants come from a variety of circumstances and contexts. Some come for economic reasons while others are fleeing political, religious, or ethnic persecution. Nearly 80 percent of present-day immigrants to the United States come from Latin America, Asia, and the Afro-Caribbean basin (Rumbaut, 1997). Latino immigrants, coming from Central and South America, make up the largest group and the bulk of the research on immigration and the challenges facing immigrant youth has focused on this group. Immigrants from Asia, especially the countries of Southeast Asia, constitute the second-largest group, comprising almost 30% of the foreign-born population of the

United States, and Caribbean immigrants make up the third-largest group, comprising just over 10% of the U.S. foreign-born population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). Naturally, youth from each of these three regions of origin face different types of challenges, further complicated by the fact that there is as much variation within each group as between them. Nonetheless, members of all three groups share the stress associated with migration to a new country, as well as often-intense discrimination and related challenges to achieving high levels of education and employment as they and their families become settled in the United States.

This chapter examines issues associated with immigration that may impact the development of immigrant youth from all three groups. A treatment of each specific group of origin's experience is beyond its scope. Further, while the chapter necessarily deals with the experiences of parents as well as youth, our primary focus is issues affecting the development of the children of immigration. These issues impact both first and second-generation youth who share the experience of growing up with immigrant parents.¹

For immigrant youth, mentors and non-parental adults in community agencies may prove to be invaluable for optimal development. Volunteer mentors and community youth workers can support children and adolescents growing up in challenging environments by providing structure and supervision during out-of-school hours. They can be a source of explicit information about the rules of engagement in the new society. They may also serve as a valuable source of emotional support acting as attachment figures in a new context where they are often socially isolated. The guidance provided by volunteer mentors or adult staff members at community youth organizations represents an important resource to foster the healthy development of immigrant children.

As noted in the introduction to this volume such external support systems can be essential to families and to youth development (Perkins, this volume). Research on non-parental adult support figures interacting with youth through volunteer mentoring programs, community sports programs, or neighborhood activity centers indicates that these relationships can contribute to positive outcomes for youth by improving academic performance, behavior,

¹ For detailed exploration of the different issues faced by first and second-generation youth, please see C. Suárez-Orozco and M. Suárez-Orozco (in press).

socioemotional development, and family relationships (Freedman, 1993; McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994; Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, in press; Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995). In the present chapter, we examine the contributions made by mentors and community youth workers to the lives of immigrant children and adolescents. We do this by first exploring the challenges faced by many immigrant youth, which make their experiences with mentors and community youth workers particularly salient to their development. We then examine the processes involved in mentoring and in participating in community youth programs that have the potential to positively impact youth development. Finally, we discuss implications for policy concerning mentoring, community youth programs, and the healthy development of immigrant adolescents.

Challenges Facing Immigrant Youth

Stress related to exclusion. Immigrants typically face a number of institutional barriers to acceptance and inclusion in the culture and the economy of the nation. In recent years, widespread concern about the influx of new immigrants has led to several anti-immigrant initiatives designed to prevent immigrants from receiving benefits or public services (M. Suárez-Orozco, 1998). These practices generate a pattern of intense exclusion and segregation among large numbers of immigrants and the larger society in several contexts, including the work force (Smith, Tarallo & Kagiwada, 1991; Waldinger & Bozogmehr, 1996), schools (Orfield, Chew, Green, Liddell, Ramirez & Stephens, 1999; Waters, 1997), and housing (Bangston & Zhou, 1997; M. Suárez-Orozco, 1998). The result is a dramatic growth in the numbers of recent immigrant families struggling in segregated communities with inadequate services, substandard schools or insufficient bilingual education services, and limited access to gainful employment (Orfield & Yun, 1999; Silka & Tip, 1994; Tienda, 1995), despite the fact that many of these immigrants may be highly educated and skilled (Rumbaut, 1997).

These problems are compounded by the hostile reception often given to poor immigrant youth, which includes intolerance for these young people's native languages and skin colors (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Fear of the cultural dilution of the country's institutions and values feeds an anti-immigrant ethos which includes

intolerance of immigrants who do not speak the language of the new setting and who “look different” from the dominant majority (Espenshade & Belanger, 1998). The negative attributes which are projected onto these immigrants include expectations of sloth, irresponsibility, low intelligence, and even danger. This negative social mirror reflected by other young people, teachers, school administrators, and the media is eventually internalized by immigrant youth (Camino, 1994; Katz, 1999; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). For immigrants from many countries, including those in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, parents may have grown up as part of the ethnic majority, and are therefore unprepared for helping their children deal with being marginalized as part of a minority group (Waters, 1997). The psychological effects of internalizing the negative perceptions of the majority culture, especially when associated with the combined effects of poverty and prejudice, can be devastating (Adams, 1990; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press).

Stress related to poverty. Many immigrant youth suffer from the challenges associated with urban (as well as rural) poverty. Of course, immigrants to the United States come from many different circumstances. Some are among the élite of their countries often escaping political turmoil. Others are solidly middle-class mobilized either by better economic opportunities or by ethnic, religious, or political persecution. Many come from situations of relative poverty (though it is important to note that the very poorest, lacking the resources, do not immigrate). Others may not come from poverty but will suffer (at least an initial) economic decline upon migrating. New immigrants typically first settle in highly segregated areas of deep poverty (Orfield & Yun, 1999) either within urban contexts or in rural farming communities.

Poverty has long been recognized as a significant risk factor for children (Luthar 1999; Weissbourd 1996). Children raised in circumstances of socioeconomic deprivation are vulnerable to an array of psychiatric distress including difficulties concentrating and sleeping, anxiety, and depression as well as a heightened propensity for delinquency and violence (Luthar, 1999). Those living in poverty often experience greater major life events stress as well as the stress of daily hassles (Luthar, 1999). Poverty frequently coexists with a variety of other risk factors that augment the risks of poverty alone such as single-parenthood, residence in neighborhoods plagued with violence,

gang activity, and drug trade as well as school environments that are segregated, overcrowded and poorly funded (Luthar, 1999). However, research has demonstrated that these circumstances can be significantly attenuated by parental supervision in the context of a warm parent-child relationship as well as by the social support provided by extended kin, interested teachers, involved community members, and mentors (Luthar 1999; Rutter 1900; Weissbourd 1996; Zhou, Adefuin, Chung, & Roach 2000).

Separations & cultural dislocations. In addition to the trauma associated with growing up in an atmosphere of pervasive poverty and racism, there are several challenges unique to the immigrant experience that affect the nuclear family unit and the development of youth. Migrations often result in family members being separated from one another for extended periods as individuals are brought across borders separately. In a study of 400 immigrant youth from five regions, it was found that fully 80% had been separated from their parents for between several months and several years (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press).² Children may be sent to live with relatives in the United States, or parents may emigrate ahead of their children in order to establish a home before the arrival of the entire family. Extended family systems are usually involved in these migrations in both countries, and may provide interim care and support for youth whose parents are not available. However, these transitions can be unsettling and disturbing, both as youth grow up without their parents, and as they become attached to extended family members from whom they must later separate to move back with their parents (C. Suárez-Orozco, in press; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press).

Psychologist Pauline Boss (1999) richly describes the experience of “ambiguous loss” that may be engendered when a loved one is *physically absent but psychologically present* (as is the case with those missing in action or in immigrant separations). She also describes the circumstances of ambiguous loss where loved ones are

² The Harvard Immigration Project (directed by Carola Suárez-Orozco with Marcelo Suárez-Orozco) is following longitudinally 400 immigrant children (ages 9 to 14 at the beginning of the study) coming from 5 major regions (China, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico) to the Boston and San Francisco areas for five years. This is an inter-disciplinary project utilizing a variety of methods including structured student and parent interviews; ethnographic observations; projective and objective measures; reviews of school records; teacher questionnaires and interviews. The project was made possible with funding provided by the National Science Foundation, the W.T. Grant Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation.

physically present but psychologically absent (as is the case with Alzheimer victims, or with depressed individuals). Boss (1999) argues that the experience of “ambiguous loss” can have serious emotional and psychological implications for youth. The fluctuation between hope and hopelessness may ultimately result in a deadening of emotion and stagnation of emotional development.

In addition to the extended family separations, immigrant children may suffer from two other forms of “ambiguous loss.” Immigrant parents may be psychologically unavailable to their children as they suffer from depression and other emotional symptoms brought on by the stress associated with migration (Athey & Ahern, 1991; C. Suárez-Orozco, in press). Furthermore, parents may work long hours on multiple jobs causing them to be apart from their children before and after school hours and on weekends. Under these circumstances, immigrant youth may develop into hyper-responsible youth who care for themselves and their younger siblings (Valenzuela, 1999). Conversely, the lack of structure and adult responsiveness makes them susceptible to the lure of alternative family structures such as gangs (Vigil, 1988).

Unsupervised out-of-school time is dangerous for youth as it is during these after-school hours when most youth delinquency occurs (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1994; Grossman & Garry, 1997; see Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel this volume). While extended family networks (when they are available) can sometimes serve to provide necessary monitoring and after-school support, immigrant families often find themselves unable to monitor their children’s behavior and provide the guidance their children need to navigate the waters between childhood and adulthood. Family separations resulting from migration may leave families with fewer adult members to provide supervision. Furthermore, immigrant parents as well as other adult family members often work at more than one job or may be assigned less desirable afternoon and evening shifts. Unsupervised, youth may turn increasingly away from adults in their family to their peers.

The children’s more rapid acculturation can lead to a disconnection between the generations (Sluzki, 1979; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). Children may learn English more quickly than their parents, simultaneously losing fluency in their native languages, resulting in a diminishing effectiveness of communication

between parents and children and an interruption in the traditional balance of power and authority within the family as children must act as interpreters for their parents (Silke & Tip, 1994; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). Children's increasing familiarity with American cultural norms and adolescents' interest in American music, movies, and other cultural artifacts may alienate parents from their experiences, just as parents' adherence to the language and culture of the country of origin may embarrass adolescents. These changes may result in a mutual disappointment and disconnection between parents and children. In addition, youth and adolescents attending middle school and high school may be approaching a level of formal education that surpasses that achieved by their parents, making parents less able to help with schoolwork and perhaps even more uncomfortable with monitoring their children's academic progress. These developments contribute to a premature individuation of children and adolescents from their parents, into a world that demands more difficult choices than they may be capable of making without adult guidance.

Identity formation. Psychologists agree that the central developmental task of adolescence is the formation of an integrated identity or sense of self (Erikson, 1980). During this stage, adolescents advance cognitively, developing skills that will allow them to formulate a more complex understanding of themselves and their relationships with others (Selman, Schultz, Nakkula, Barr, Watts, & Richmond, 1992). They use these new skills to renegotiate their parental relationships to cultivate relationships with peers and other nonfamily individuals from whom they will learn about beliefs and values that differ from those with which they were raised (Hamilton & Darling, 1989). Through the lenses provided by each new relationship, an adolescent begins to make sense of his or her place in the world, and to formulate an identity. This task is challenging and often painful, as adolescents simultaneously need independence from their parents and increasing amounts of nurturing and guidance (Allen, Aber & Leadbeater, 1990).

For immigrant adolescents, the stresses associated with developing a sense of identity are accompanied and aggravated by the challenges of existing and growing up in disparate cultures. Camino (1994) identifies the dual "liminalities", or ways of being "caught between" two realities that exist for immigrant and refugee youth. As

adolescents, these young people are negotiating the stages and tasks of childhood and adulthood. As immigrants, they navigate between the identity of their culture of origin and the identity associated with growing up in the United States. The difficulty experienced by youth in traversing between these identities, none of which fully explains their experiences, can be isolating. The implications of the prejudice that is often experienced by immigrants make the process even more difficult, as youth must attempt to reconcile two cultures that may be in opposition to one another (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Waters, 1997). Pressure is exerted on immigrant youth by the majority culture, the peer culture, the schools, and the media to acculturate completely into an “American” way of life.

This process of acculturation and forging a positive ethnic identity is a challenge for all youth navigating between two or more cultures. For immigrant youth of color, the process is complicated by the context of racial tension and discrimination they encounter in this society. They must negotiate the terrains of their immigrant culture, the “minority” culture, as well as “mainstream” American culture. For these adolescents, the old message of acculturation and assimilation conflicts with the reality that, for them, being “American” may mean being perceived as a member of a disparaged minority group. For example, when Caribbean youth describe their experiences after coming to the United States, many explain that the prejudices they face as nonwhite, non-English-speaking immigrants are less severe than those they encounter when they are perceived by members of the majority as being African-American. By assimilating to the “underclass” they suffer the very real risk of being marginalized in ways that may be even more devastating than those associated with an immigrant identity (Waters, 1996).

The local context that the youth encounters will play a significant role in this process. If an immigrant youth finds herself living in an inner-city area, she may interact largely with other immigrants and native-born peers of color. The models, choices, and opportunities in this case relate to a very different trajectory than if the adolescent lives in a predominantly white suburb (Portes & Zhou 1993). A growing body of literature indicates that the pressure to assimilate to the majority culture is strong and may be associated with several negative outcomes, including risk taking behaviors (such as substance abuse and unprotected sex), academic disengagement, and delinquency (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Bankston & Zhou, 1997; Chen, Unger, Cruz & Johnson, 1999; Ogbu, 1978). Counter-

intuitively, acculturation seems to be associated with declining health and poorer academic performance among immigrants (Hernandez & Cherney 1998). While performance on standardized test scores improves with exposure to English, grades, time spent doing homework, educational aspirations, and the importance of family decrease with the amount of time spent in the United States (Rumbaut, 1997; Steinberg, 1996).

In some cases, immigrant youth embrace total assimilation and complete identification with American culture. Other immigrant youth develop an adversarial stance toward the mainstream culture, not unlike their poor inner-city peers who hold little hope for the future (Ogbu, 1978). These children construct identities around rejecting—after having been rejected—the institutions of the dominant culture (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Ogbu, 1978).

Yet other youth forge a bicultural (or multicultural) identity. A growing body of literature suggests that crafting an identity that incorporates elements of both cultures may be the most adaptive strategy for immigrant youth (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Camino, 1994; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). These youth must creatively fuse aspects of both cultures — the parental tradition and the new culture — in a process of transculturation. They achieve bicultural and bilingual competencies that become an integral part of their sense of self. The culturally constructed social structures and the authority of their immigrant parents and elders are seen as legitimate, while learning standard English and doing well in school are viewed as competencies that do not compromise their sense of who they are. Youth who successfully develop bicultural identities easily communicate and make friends with their own ethnic group as well as with students and teachers from other backgrounds. However, the development of a bicultural identity is challenging. Since so much of the process of adolescents' identity development depends on the definition of self through relationships with others, immigrant youth must experience relationships with older peers or adults who have successfully integrated two cultures into one identity, and who support this endeavor in members of the next generation. In addition, they must face the frustration and disappointment that their parents may experience as they perceive their children developing cultural identities that they do not completely share.

It is important to note that most immigrant parents have made tremendous sacrifices for the sake of their children's future well-being, often including the decision to emigrate to the United States in the first place, and the need for each parent to work more than one full-time job. Physical and psychological separations between parents and children often result from these concerned parents' belief that their sacrifices will enable their adolescent offspring to obtain a quality education and be well prepared for a successful career in the future. These forms of disconnection between immigrant youth and their parents, as well as the stressors associated with poverty and discrimination, add to the already challenging period of adolescence and its tasks of identity formation. One way in which immigrant youth can be supported as they confront these challenges involves the formation of relationships with caring, non-parental adults from youth-serving programs, school, or elsewhere in the community. Mentors and youth workers can complement the efforts of immigrant parents, helping to guide adolescents through difficult transitions. Some of the ways in which this is accomplished are discussed in the section that follows.

Contributions of Mentors and Community Organizations

With negative stereotypes of immigrants more plentiful than positive bicultural role models, immigrant youth are challenged as they attempt to formulate healthy, bicultural adult identities. The support of non-parental adults, through either volunteer mentoring programs or community youth-serving agencies, can prove invaluable in minimizing the risks associated with the stresses of acculturation as well as in facilitating the identity formation process. Mentors and supportive youth workers can complement the efforts of parents to guide immigrant youth through adolescence. These individuals may be immigrants or descendants of immigrants, and therefore able to relate to the experiences of immigrant youth and serve as positive bicultural role models. They may also be adults from the majority culture who display a sensitivity to specific issues facing immigrants, a willingness to engage in mutual learning with youth from a background that differs from their own, and the ability to act as a cultural interpreter. In either case, rather than supplanting the role of parents who have somehow failed to live up to their

responsibilities, non-parental adults should instead be seen as supporting parents' efforts, as the entire family attempts the difficult task of adapting to life in a new and often hostile country.

There are many examples of programs and individuals working in immigrant communities that foster healthy youth development. These may take the form of volunteer mentoring programs, which provide youth with intensive one-on-one relationships with caring adults, or community-based youth organizations, which provide structured activities and settings in which to interact with peers while under the supervision of adult staff. These organizations represent an important form of social capital at work in immigrant communities, as they represent “the investment that individuals create through involvement in social relationships” (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995, 581). Several theorists, beginning with Coleman (1988), have indicated that the presence of resources in a family, a school or agency, a neighborhood, or even an entire society, engenders positive interactions between individuals and contributes to positive outcomes (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Stevenson, 1998). Youth-serving organizations and individuals, much like ethnic-owned businesses and family networks, enrich immigrant communities and foster healthy development among its youth through the support they provide to parents and families (Nevarez-La Torre, 1997). The key element of both types of programs, from the perspective of meeting the developmental needs of immigrant youth, is the potential for forming caring, meaningful relationships with adults.

Mentoring. Volunteer mentoring programs have gained considerable attention in recent years. An estimated five million American youth are involved in school- and community-based volunteer mentoring programs, ranging from the prototypic Big Brothers Big Sisters program to other, less structured organizations. Many of these mentoring programs represent a recent development in youth-service interventions, with nearly half of the active mentoring programs in the United States having been established between 1994 and 1999, and only 18% having been in operation for more than fifteen years (Rhodes, in press).

Although there is wide variation among the services provided by mentoring programs, mentoring is generally defined as a one-on-one relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé. In these relationships, an adult provides guidance and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and

character of the protégé. Over time a special bond of mutual respect, affection, and loyalty may develop which facilitates the protégé's transition into adulthood (Hamilton & Darling, 1989; Rhodes, in press). As evaluations of mentoring programs begin to be conducted and published, successful mentoring relationships appear to be those that involve greater amounts of contact and involvement between the mentor and the protégé, as well as a positive orientation toward youth ability and potential on the part of the mentor. Long-lasting, successful matches between volunteer mentors and youth in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, for example, tend to involve mentors who approach the relationship with respect for the adolescent's interests, abilities, and needs, involving him or her at all stages of decision-making in the relationship (Morrow & Styles, 1995; Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995).

Youth in successful mentoring relationships have been found to benefit in terms of improved academics, healthier family and peer relationships, and reduced incidences of substance abuse and aggressive behavior (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Rhodes, in press). The mechanisms by which mentoring has an impact on youth development, however, are less well-understood. It is likely that several important factors come into play, relating to the attitude and efforts of the mentor, as well as the background and temperament of the youth in question and the encouragement of the youth's parents, family members, and teachers. Although mentoring relationships are quite varied, they usually share the basic element of an emotional connection between the mentor and the protégé, which enables the protégé to trust the mentor's advice, value the mentor's opinion and guidance, and feel valued and cared for by a significant adult in meaningful ways (Rhodes, in press).

These processes have special implications for immigrant youth. During the course of migration, loved ones are often separated from one another and significant attachments are ruptured. Mentoring relationships can give immigrant youth an opportunity to be involved in reparative relationships engendering new significant attachments. Since immigrant adolescents' parents and other adult relatives may be unavailable due to long work hours or emotional distress, the guidance and affection of a mentor may help to fill the void created by parental absence. The mentor, as an adult who has been in the United States longer than the protégé, can also provide information about and exposure to American cultural and educational institutions, and help as the adolescent negotiates developmental

transitions. If the mentor is of the same ethnic background as the protégé, he or she can interpret the rules of engagement of the new culture to parents and hence, help to attenuate cultural rigidities. Furthermore, bicultural mentors can serve as role models in the challenging process of developing a bicultural identity, exemplifying the ways in which elements of the ethnic identity can be preserved and celebrated even as features of the more mainstream culture of the United States are incorporated into youth's lives. Many of the youth who are served by mentoring programs are immigrants or the children of immigrants, and many community programs that provide human services to specific segments of the immigrant population include mentoring for youth as one of their services.

Although there are many benefits associated with mentoring for the development of immigrant youth, there are also ways in which mentoring may not be ideally suited to the needs of some immigrant adolescents. First, an intense one-on-one relationship with another adult may represent a source of discomfort for some immigrant parents, who may feel threatened by the prospect of a non-relative adult usurping parental authority, or who may be mistrustful of the intentions of an adult from outside the family who will be learning intimate family information through his or her relationship with a child (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). Second, many of the volunteers who come into adolescents' lives are from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds than the youth they are mentoring. In the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program, for example, the waiting lists for minority youth requiring a mentor of the same race can be much longer than for those willing to be paired with mentors from the majority culture (Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee in press). Although same-race mentoring matches have not been clearly shown to be superior to cross-race matches (Rhodes et al., in press), these differences can have implications for immigrant youth, who may face language barriers if matched with a mentor who only speaks English, and who may not receive the support they need related to the formation of a bicultural identity from a mentor who identifies too closely with the mainstream culture. Third, mentoring relationships are not suitable for all youth. Adolescents who are experiencing psychological, emotional, or behavioral distress may have difficulty engaging in a mentoring relationship, and older youth, as compared with younger children, may be more peer-oriented and less

amenable to becoming invested in a relationship which requires spending significant amounts of time alone with an adult (Rhodes, in press).

Finally, not all mentoring relationships are successful; an estimated half of all matches dissolve after only a few months (Freedman, 1993; Styles & Morrow, 1992). These premature terminations may occur if a child's emotional needs are too great, if a mentor is not able to spend enough time with the protégé to build up the necessary trust and mutual respect, or if for some other reason the two individuals do not forge a strong connection. When this occurs, the resulting feelings of rejection and loss of another adult support figure can be devastating for the adolescent (Grossman & Rhodes, in press), exacerbating feelings of loss and rejection engendered by previously ruptured attachments. This type of loss may be particularly destructive for an immigrant adolescent, who has likely already experienced the loss of family members and cherished adults during the difficult process of migration (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). For these reasons, immigrant youth are often well-served when they form mentoring relationships with non-parental adults they encounter in programs oriented around activities, thereby eliminating some of the pressures involved in more intensive mentoring programs.

Community-based youth development programs. Many aspects of a successful mentoring relationship can also be found in the bonds that form between youth and staff members at community programs that youth attend. Community youth workers encounter immigrant youth through their involvement in a variety of programs. Some of these organizations have long histories and are chapters of national agencies, such as the YM-YWCA or the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Some are funded by municipal grants designed to provide after-school or summer activities in parks, schools, or other public spaces. Still others are smaller, localized programs designed to meet the needs of a particular segment of the population by providing tutoring, career guidance, or other targeted services.

Regardless of the size or scope of these programs, many of the most successful ones at engaging youth and providing them with adult guidance, supervision, and support are those that are oriented around a "youth development" philosophy (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray & Foster, 1998; Larson, 2000; see Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel this volume). In contrast with the "deficit" philosophy of many programs designed to prevent negative

outcomes among youth, a youth development program emphasizes the positive attributes and strengths that children and adolescents possess, and attempts to provide the support and encouragement needed for youth to achieve their goals and reach their potential. The youth development philosophy is embraced by many of the larger, national youth-serving agencies, but has been adopted to differing degrees in smaller programs. Many of the programs that have been designed to target Latino and Caribbean youth, for example, are oriented around more of a deficit approach, seeking to prevent the onset of risky behaviors and negative outcomes such as adolescent pregnancy, substance use, or academic failure (Zhou, Adefuin, Chung, & Roach 2000). On the other hand, many of the programs that target Asian youth are of a more proactive nature, focusing on the development of academic skills and the provision of information regarding college admissions (Zhou, Adefuin, Chung, & Roach 2000).³ In community agencies oriented around a youth development approach, adult volunteers and staff members typically espouse many of the qualities enumerated by Yohalem (this volume) in her description of effective youth workers, as well as many of the qualities of successful volunteer mentors. These include: an understanding of youth's family dynamics and an ability to work with both youth and parents, the ability to create safe, collaborative spaces for learning and exploration in which youth take ownership and responsibility for their activities, a belief in youth potential, and an enthusiasm for and commitment to youth work (Baker, Pollack, & Kohn, 1995; Camino, 1994; Heath, 1994; McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Scales, 1990).

Community organizations working with immigrant youth provide a broad array of services within the framework of youth development. The programs described below exemplify this spectrum.

³ This distinction reflects the erroneous bias held by the majority culture toward perceiving all Latino youth as high-risk, and Asian youth as the "model minority," destined to achieve academically (Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu, 1978). In reality, while Latinos do suffer from dropout rates twice as high as those for black youth and four times as high as white youth (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999), Asian immigrant youth do not perform well in school uniformly across subgroups; their achievement is related to economic factors and levels of acculturation. In cases where Asian immigrant youth do outperform their white American-born peers, these accomplishments may take an emotional toll (Bangston & Zhou, 1997; C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press; Toupin & Son, 1991). In order to promote achievement among youth from various ethnic groups, programs which focus on youth's strengths and potential rather than concentrating on preventing specific negative outcomes have been found to be more successful (Roth et al., 1998).

Combining mentoring and the arts. Bajucol is a community organization that provides Colombian youth living in the Boston area with an opportunity to embrace their roots, culture, and folklore. Under the guidance of Colombian adults, a group of 25 youth meet twice weekly to practice Colombian folkloric dance culminating in an annual performance to an audience of 1000. Their practices and the elaborate preparations for their performances provide a focus in the youth's lives. They develop a sense of connectedness with both adults and peers while focusing on an activity that fosters their ethnic pride. In addition, their mentors act as explicit guides to pathways of success and advocate with schools on the youth's behalf.

Schools that serve both immigrant parents and children. Five years ago in New York, the Children's Aid Society inaugurated a "full service" school. Based in Washington Heights, an area with a large immigrant community, this school provides before and after school care for children. To make parents feel welcome, they hold English as a Second Language classes. Most staff are bilingual and bicultural generating a warm sense of community for its members. Adults and youth work together towards achieving a variety of goals.

Using the arts to cope with the realities of immigrant life. Urban Improv is a Boston area group that uses music, as well as improvisational acting and movement in its work with urban youth. Developed to help youth cope with the harsh realities of growing up in inner city areas, adults meet with youth on a weekly basis. Talented community educators develop vignettes that "set-up" a difficult situation often encountered in urban youth's schools and communities. At a critical moment, the action is 'freeze-framed' and youngsters are invited to enact solutions. Such themes of self-esteem, peer pressure, culture shock, and tensions between old world parents and new world realities are explored. In a supportive atmosphere of safety, children strategize solutions to common problems. Thereafter, rich group discussions take place where youth exchange ideas and experiences. Recently, in connection with two English as a Second Language teachers, Urban Improv has begun two new, successful groups consisting entirely of immigrant youth.

Intergenerational community problem solving. Haitian Teens Confront AIDS (HTCA) is a peer education and leadership program based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. HTCA was initiated to respond to the need for AIDS

preventive education among Haitian youth and to provide them with the tools to confront the discrimination and racism at the heart of stereotypes concerning Haitians and AIDS. The program brings Haitian youths together with adult educators, artists, and activists in weekly six-hour meetings for training in the epidemiology and transmission of HIV/AIDS, in group discussion and performing arts skills, and to strategize about outreach approaches. The program uses skits, plays, music, and video created by HTCA youth to conduct educational sessions at schools, church-based parent and youth group meetings, and in the local Haitian media. These sessions engage young people and adults in cross-generational dialogues about such themes as the transmission patterns of HIV among youth, the shame that keeps AIDS a hidden disease in the community, communication issues between parents and teenagers, differences in Haitian and U.S. cultural values, discrimination against people with AIDS, and the role that racial discrimination, homophobia, and gender inequalities play in increasing young adults' risks for the disease. Since 1989, over 200 Haitian teenagers have graduated from the program, and many have returned as adult advisors in HTCA and other community programs. Parents have become active members of the organization and advocate along with their children for HIV/AIDS prevention and compassion for people with AIDS. Through cross-generational dialogues and peer-led activities, HTCA has helped to change the discourse in the Haitian community about HIV/AIDS from a shameful, hidden disease to a problem that the community can mobilize to solve (Nicoleau 2000).

Combining mentoring and academic guidance. Puente in California has been acting as a bridge for Latino youth in making the transition from middle school to high school and then from high school to college. This highly successful program emphasizes several critical components. Fundamentally, an adult mentor is responsible for introducing to students academic opportunities that may not have been envisioned. They provide explicit and intensive instruction in the steps necessary to enter the college system as well as how to be successful once they have entered the system. Students are also provided with instruction in writing and literature. Lastly, they are assigned a peer partner who acts as guide in the initial transition (Gandara 1998).

At the most basic level, participation in a community youth program such as one of those described above translates into out-of-school time that is not spent in isolation, unsupervised, or on the streets with one's peers. These programs are often seen by participants as safe havens from the pressures of the streets or as "second homes"—places where youth feel comfortable expressing themselves and letting down their guard (Hirsch, Roffman, Deutsch, Flynn, Loder & Pagano, 2000; Villaruel & Lerner, 1994). The existence of a setting in which youth can congregate, socialize, and participate in recreational activities during their out-of-school hours represents an important third option as they react to lack of supervision while parents are at work or are emotionally unavailable. Instead of having to stay home to care for younger siblings or seek an alternate family structure in peer groups or street gangs, families can choose for their adolescents to attend a community center or club. This option allows youth to feel supervised by caring adults, while at the same time preserving their freedom to choose activities and interact with peers, an autonomy which becomes more and more important as youth grow older (Beck, 1999; Bryant, 1989). Parents can feel that their children are in a safe setting, without feeling threatened by the intensity of a one-on-one relationship with a volunteer mentor.

As is true with many volunteer mentors, the adults who work in community programs are often equipped to provide tutoring, educational guidance, advice about the college application process, and job search assistance, information which is often inaccessible to immigrant youth whose parents have not navigated the academic system in the U.S. and who attend schools with few guidance counselors. Youth programs such as *Puente* may provide a welcome alternative to the environment in many schools serving disadvantaged communities, where immigrant youth may not feel comfortable or welcome. This is often the case among low-income Latino immigrants, who report feeling discriminated against by their teachers, who are placed disproportionately into lower-track and special needs classes, and who cite a sense of rejection by the school as a main reason for dropping out (García et al., 1995; Katz, 1999). Staff members at community youth-serving agencies often report that they believe an important part of their role is the reversal of inner city schools' and teachers' negative impact on the educational trajectories and academic achievement of minority youth (McLaughlin et al., 1994).

In addition to the provision of safety and the opportunity for tutoring and other forms of direct academic enrichments, many community youth workers can serve as role models for youth embroiled in the difficult process of identity development within a bicultural context. This aspect of *Bajuco*, *the Children's Aid Society*, and *Urban Improv* contributes in important ways to these programs' success. In addition, in the drop-in program described by Camino (1994), staff members (not all of whom were Latino but most of whom spoke Spanish) were able to create an atmosphere in an after-school context where Latino refugee youth felt comfortable exploring the intersections between the parts of their identities that were Latino and the parts that were developing as they grew up in the United States. With supportive staff to guide them, both through role modeling and through simply creating a norm of self-expression, joint ownership and the communal responsibility and fictive kinship that were associated with their Latino background, youth found ways to fuse both parts of their identities, expressing each at different times and for different purposes. Similarly, Cooper, Denner and Lopez (1999) express the difficulties inherent in Mexican immigrant children's transitions from elementary to middle school, describing ways in which community program staff can serve as "culture brokers" for youth. These "culture brokers" act as intermediary figures, able to bridge the often-considerable gaps between the norms in place in children's homes and those in place at school. Support from figures such as these youth workers increases the chances of academic success among Latino youth entering middle school and encountering numerous challenges to their newly forming bicultural identities.

Some researchers have characterized community youth centers as performing a "bridging" function, discussing the link these programs provide between two disparate cultures, that of the inner city and that of the mainstream population. All of the programs described above play this role for the families they serve. In addition, Heath (1994) characterized a youth program as a "border zone" between the streets and the mainstream culture (29). McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman (1994) described the adults working in the "urban sanctuaries" they evaluated as providing bridges between the inner city and the outside world of mainstream employment. Schinke, Orlandi, and Cole (1992), in an evaluation of Boys and Girls Clubs located within housing projects, found that the presence of a

BGC was associated with lower drug and delinquency problems and more effective communication patterns among residents, police, housing authority management personnel, and community groups.

An 18 year old Colombian youth expresses how a community organization working with Colombian immigrant youth helped him navigate his adolescences shortly after migrating:

Before I began participating in Bajucol, ... I was not active. I spent most of my time in my apartment, watching TV and not doing much. I suspect I would still be like that without the group ... A good friend of mine had been involved in the group and she told me about it. At the beginning, I had a "wait and see attitude." I did not know how to dance; I had no idea about folk dancing. Slowly, it grabbed me ...

For our group, the folkloric dance is the most important thing. We practice a great deal—we do it to represent what Colombia's positive traditions. Colombia is going through a difficult time. There are many stereotypes about our land. Our purpose is to put forward the other side of Columbia—the happiness, the beauty, the traditions. Because we are far away from our land...

We are like a family. We have known each other for 5 years by now. The friendship goes to the heart of the dancing. My family supports my work with the group because my work with the group helps my family ...

Now what I do is teach others how to dance. I am giving back to the group what the group gave to me ... When we come here we are all alone and the group gives us support. We do it for each other and we do it for our country.

By focusing on the potential of youth, and operating in a respectful and informal manner, staff at community-based youth programs such as those described above seem to fill many gaps that exist for low-income minority individuals and their children. The benefits of belonging to a caring organization that can perform such a "bridging" function are particularly salient for many immigrant youth, whose most challenging tasks involve the reconciliation of

multiple cultures and value systems, against a backdrop that is often characterized by hostility. Through the provision of activities, instruction, or supervised time to interact with peers, these programs provide an opportunity for youth who might not have access to mentoring programs, or for whom the intensity of a one-on-one mentoring relationship might not be appropriate, to form supportive relationships with caring adults. These relationships, whether they occur with a mentor or a community youth worker, can help immigrant youth to build skills, adapt to a new culture, and develop healthy bicultural identities in ways that are not always accessible to parents or peers. When successful, these relationships help immigrant youth and their families overcome some of the barriers associated with poverty and discrimination that prevent full participation in the new country's economic and cultural life.

In Conclusion

Immigrant youth growing up in the United States face many challenges. The normal tasks of adolescence, involving the development of identity, are exacerbated by the effects of poverty and discrimination, and by parents' frequent absence and inability to provide guidance in dealing with the complexities of growing up in transcultural contexts. The support of a mentor or community youth worker can prove invaluable to many immigrant youth and their families dealing with these issues. Non-parental adults can ease the difficult transitions that immigrant youth face in several ways. They can reduce stress by forming a caring, supportive relationship with youth, by providing adult guidance and supervision when parents are unable to do so, and by serving as lenses through which to see the possibility of a healthy, transcultural adult identity. Of course, mentors and youth workers cannot be seen as the entire solution to the complex constellation of challenges encountered by immigrant families. However, their efforts can provide much-needed support to adolescents and, in turn, their families, contributing to healthy development.

Understanding the issues that impact immigrant youth's development can inform the design of mentoring and community youth service programs seeking to make a difference in these populations. Some adolescents' experiences may leave them better-suited for participation in a mentoring program. Such youth may be hesitant to

approach adults in group settings or have family histories and situations that give rise to the need for more intensive one-on-one relationships. Other youth, by virtue of their developmental needs and family preferences, may be more effectively served by a community youth program. Attention should be devoted to exploring the effects of adolescents' psychological, emotional, and behavioral well-being as well as any preferences for spending time that may be associated with their age, so that youth can be referred to the type of program that might prove most meaningful to them.

In terms of mentoring programs, training for volunteer mentors and staff should be expanded to include elements of cultural sensitivity, particularly relating to the specific immigrant groups that may have settled in a given community. There are great potential benefits of pairing an immigrant adolescent with a mentor of the same ethnic background, especially considering the guidance and role modeling that can be provided by such a mentor as an adolescent explores identity issues within multiple cultural contexts. Consequently, recruitment of volunteer mentors in communities with immigrant populations should target adults who are immigrants themselves or the descendants of immigrants. Careful screening of potential volunteers is a part of all reputable mentoring programs, but a particular understanding of the negative repercussions of a prematurely terminated mentoring relationship for immigrant adolescents should be included in the screening and training process (Rhodes, in press).

Mentoring and community youth service programs should be aware of the complicated parent-child dynamics at work in immigrant families. Immigrant parents tend to bring with them strong cultural values of respect for elders and of familial interdependence. These cultural models are deeply challenged by the American cultural value of independence, by the interruptions of power and authority that occur when youth serve as language and cultural interpreters for their parents, as well as by the separations inherent in immigration. (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, in press). Programs within immigrant populations should be even more focused than usual on gaining parental trust, with the goal of serving the entire family and not just the adolescent participant. Because a community youth program might be better positioned to provide these types of services to entire families than a

volunteer mentoring program, attention and resources should be directed toward these types of initiatives being developed in immigrant communities.

Finally, in addition to volunteer mentoring and community youth service agencies, there are many natural mentoring resources in immigrant communities, including coaches, school personnel, church officials, neighbors, and extended family members. Members of the extended family often serve as resources to both immigrant adolescents and their parents as they confront the many challenges facing them. Other resources may be encountered by youth in a particular setting or context. Churches, for example, are frequent sponsors of mentoring, tutoring, and other small-scale human service programs within immigrant communities, and their efforts should be publicized and supported. Schools are the settings in which adolescents spend the most time, but they are frequently described as hostile, violent, and negative environments in which immigrant adolescents feel unsafe and marginalized by mainstream peers and by teachers and administrators (Katz, 1999). A more complete understanding of the issues facing immigrant youth, and the many strengths that they and their families bring with them to the tasks of development and adjustment can contribute to the generation of positive environments as well as effective utilization of volunteer mentors and community youth workers as valuable resources in the lives of immigrant adolescents.

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