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## THE ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF LATINO YOUTH

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The United States is undergoing a dramatic transformation of its youth population. According to figures from the 2000 census, Latino youths under age 18 make up 35% of the Latino population in the United States (currently estimated at 12.5%). By 2020, it is projected that 17% of the U.S. population will be of Latino origin, reaching 33.3% by 2100 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Although some of this growth is due to birth rates, it is also related to Latino immigrants arriving in unprecedented numbers, reshaping urban, suburban, and rural settings throughout the nation. The Latino presence is now being felt not only in the traditional immigrant regions of the Eastern seaboard and the Southwest but also throughout the South and Midwest—areas of the country that in the past rarely have encountered Latinos in large numbers. Nevada, for example, has had a 123% increase in Latino population since 1990. Likewise, since that time, Arkansas has had a 148% increase, North Carolina a 110% increase, and Nebraska has experienced a growth of 96% (U.S. Census Bureau).

Latino youth are extraordinarily diverse, and their experiences resist facile generalizations. The ancestors of some were established on what is now U.S. territory long before the current borders were set through conquest and land purchases. Today, large numbers of Latinos are immigrants coming from dozens of countries, with a rich range of cultural traditions. Some are the children of highly educated professionals, while others have parents who are illiterate, low-skilled, and struggling in the lowest-paid sectors of the service economy (M. Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

Some Latino families are escaping political, religious, or ethnic persecution; others are lured by the promise of better jobs and the hope for better educational opportunities. Some are documented, and others are not. Some immigrant origin youth come to settle permanently, over time losing their ties to their homelands; others follow their parents from one migrant work camp to another. Some Latinos engage in transnational strategies, living both “here and there”—that is, shuttling between their country of birth and their country of choice (Levitt, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

An estimated two-thirds of Latinos are either immigrants or the children of immigrants (M. Suárez-Orozco & Paez, 2002). When we refer to “immigrant children” we mean foreign-born children who have migrated—not the U.S.-born second generation. “Children of immigrants,” however, refers to both U.S.-born and foreign-born children. Although the experience of U.S.-born and foreign-born youth differ in many respects (the U.S.-born are citizens, for example), they nonetheless share important common denominators, including immigrant parents.

Much of the recent scholarship on Latino youth well-being has focused on schooling adaptations, as schooling processes and outcomes are a powerful barometer of current as well as future psychosocial functioning (Mandel & Marcus, 1988; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). Findings from a number of recent studies suggest that although some are successfully navigating the American educational system, many others struggle academically, leaving school without acquiring the tools that will enable

them to manage in the highly competitive knowledge-intensive economy. Nationwide, nearly a third of all Latino youths drop out of school (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic American Education, 1996). Immigrant youth who are unschooled or unskilled will encounter dim odds in today's economy. Many will be facing a life below the poverty line, on the lower rungs of the service sector of the economy. Some will gravitate toward gangs and face the danger of incarceration in the new country—a country that today has the largest prison population in the postindustrial world (Kennedy, 2001; Zimbardo & Haney, 1998). Some of these gang-involved youths will be deported to their "home" countries, with potentially catastrophic outcomes (Vigil, 2002). Many of the youths who are deported no longer speak the language of their country of origin, and they lack the skills and ties to make viable contributions, whether economic or social.

#### ACADEMIC OUTCOMES AMONG LATINO YOUTH

There is much to be concerned about as we consider a variety of indicators of Latino academic outcomes. The National Center for Education Statistics (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001) reports that among young people age 16 to 24, 44.2% of "Hispanics" born outside the United States are high school dropouts. Those born in the United States were less likely to drop out, but at 30.5% the proportion was still higher than that among young adults from other ethnic groups. (These figures include all young people in the 16-to-24 age range who had dropped out of school or did not have high school credentials as of October 2000.) The needs of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are rarely met in schools, which also contributes to school dropout rates. In 1995, children of Hispanic origin (with U.S.-born parents) classified as LEP had a dropout rate of 66.4%, compared to 41.8% of their non-LEP counterparts (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000).

The high-stakes testing movement currently sweeping the United States also has implications for dropout patterns (Bracey, 2000). The introduction of statewide tests in Texas in the late 1980s was accompanied by a sharp increase in dropout rates for Black and Latino students, and these rates have not returned to previous levels since (Bracey, 2000). Close to 83% of Latino students graduating from Texas high schools in 1998 had passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) required for a high school diploma at some point between their 10th and 12th grade years, compared to 94% of White students (Natriello & Pallas, 1998). In 1997, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund filed a suit against the Texas Education Agency in a federal district court, pointing out that "over half of Texas' minority students in the

sophomore year do not pass one or more parts of the TAAS test, and approximately 85% of the students who do not pass the TAAS in May before graduation are Mexican American or African American" (as cited in Natriello & Pallas, 1998).

Massachusetts recently joined Texas in the growing number of states requiring test scores for high school graduation. The class of 2003 is the first to be required to pass all components of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) at some point between 10th and 12th grade in order to be awarded a high school diploma. In 2001, as 10th graders, these students showed alarming disparities in failure rates. Although 12% of White students failed the English language arts component of the exam, 48% of Latino students did so. For the mathematics component, 18% of White students failed, compared to 58% of Latino students. For LEP students, the disparities are even more astounding—84% did not pass the English language arts test, and 74% did not pass the mathematics test. Overall, in 2001, 77% of White students earned a "competency determination," while only 29% of Latino students did so. According to a study by the Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy (2001) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, Latino students are significantly underrepresented in higher-level math and science courses that will prepare them for the MCAS exam, thus barring them from the knowledge and skills necessary for high school graduation in Massachusetts.

These findings have implications not only for the short-term outcomes of Latino students in American schools but for long-term outcomes as well. As Natriello and Pallas (1998) pointed out, Claude Steele's work on stereotype threat suggests that the academic performance of racial and ethnic minorities is impaired by negative stereotypes about their competency in school settings (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although we certainly do not argue that measures of competency for students and accountability for schools are unnecessary, we concur with Robert Linn (2000) that "the unintended negative effects of the high-stakes accountability uses often outweigh the intended positive effects" (p. 15).

#### RESEARCH ON IMMIGRANT YOUTH

In recent years, a counterintuitive trend has been emerging from a number of studies conducted in a variety of disciplines. We have identified a somewhat paradoxical pattern: compared to second-generation Latino youth, more recent immigrants have more optimistic and positive attitudes about school and school authorities (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). A number of recent studies have verified that, for many immigrants, length of

residence in the United States seems to be disconcertingly associated with *declining* health, attitudinal, and schooling outcomes (Hernández & Charney, 1998; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rumbaut, 1995; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, 2001). A large-scale National Research Council (NRC) study considered a variety of measures of physical health and risk behaviors among children and adolescents from immigrant families, including general health, learning disabilities, obesity, emotional difficulties, and risk behaviors. The NRC researchers found that immigrant youths were healthier than their counterparts from nonimmigrant families. These findings, as the authors reported, are counterintuitive in light of the racial and ethnic minority status, lower overall socioeconomic status, and higher poverty rates that characterize many immigrant children and families. The NRC meta-analysis revealed that the longer immigrant youths are in the United States, the poorer their overall physical and psychological health. Furthermore, the more “Americanized” they become, the more likely they are to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, unprotected sex, and delinquency (Hernández & Charney, 1998). This directly refutes assimilation theories of adaptation that hypothesize that immigrant youth would do better over time and across generations (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

In the area of schooling, an ambitious study of more than 5,000 immigrant and second-generation students in San Diego, California, and Dade County, Florida, by sociologists Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut (2001) found that “U.S. nativity and long term residence among the foreign-born increase English skills but significantly lower grades. . . . These findings strongly suggest that second-generation children gradually lose their achievement drive with increasing acculturation” (p. 239). A similar pattern was established in a large-scale study conducted of Canadian immigrant families: length of residence seemed to be associated with declining well-being and academic engagement (Beiser, Dion, Gotowiec, Hyman, & Vu, 1995). Research by Laurence Steinberg et al. (1996), based on a national study of more than 20,000 teenagers attending nine high schools, uncovered the same alarming trend, that “the longer a student’s family has lived in this country, the worse the youngster’s school performance and mental health” (pp. 97–98). This trend was evident not only among Latino youth but among Asian students as well. The data, coming from many sources, concentrating on a range of immigrant countries of origin, using various methodologies, and crossing disciplines, suggest “that becoming Americanized is detrimental to youngsters’ achievement, and terrible for their overall mental health” (Steinberg et al., pp. 97–98).

A number of social scientists have explored the issues of variability and decline in schooling performance and

social adaptation of immigrant children. As we discuss in this chapter, several factors are implicated. Social scientists have argued that the “capital” immigrant families bring with them—including financial resources, social class and educational background, psychological and physical health, as well as social supports—all shape the immigrant experience. Legal status, race, color, and language also mediate how children adapt to the upheavals of immigration. Economic opportunities and neighborhood characteristics—including the quality of schools where families settle, racial and class segregation, neighborhood decay, and violence—all contribute significantly to the adaptation process. Discriminatory experiences also play a role. These factors combine in ways that lead to very different outcomes (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

In this chapter, we offer a framework for understanding in broad psychosocial terms the diverse adaptations and outcomes of Latino youth. We structure this discussion around several conceptual domains. First, we examine the dynamics that shape opportunity: socioeconomic status, neighborhood characteristics such as poverty and segregation, and the schools Latino youth most often attend. These structural features shape the opportunities and mold the experiences of immigrant youth as they journey to their varied American destinies. Because the human experience is never solely the product of impersonal structural forces, we also examine how agency and changing identities are implicated in the making of today’s immigrant story. We introduce the concept of “social mirroring” to explain the vicissitudes of identity formation among Latino youth. We consider carefully how networks of social relations function to mediate academic outcomes. We argue that, taken together, these psychosocial formations are at the heart of any understanding of the complexities of the academic engagement and academic outcomes among Latino youth.

## STRUCTURING OPPORTUNITY

### *Educational Background*

Latino immigrant youths arrive in American neighborhoods and schools from very different backgrounds. On one end of the spectrum, we find youths from middle-class, upper-status urban backgrounds. These young people are typically highly literate and have well-developed study skills. In sharp contrast are those youngsters arriving from strife-ridden or poverty-stricken countries with little or no schooling. Many of them have missed critical years of classroom experience and often cannot read and write in Spanish (Páez, 2001). Such varied experiences and backgrounds have profound implications for their

transition to the U.S. setting. Others are born in the United States to Latino American-born parents and may either enter middle-class life or become entrenched in the urban underclass, depending in part upon the neighborhoods where they live and are schooled.

Not surprisingly, more-educated parents are better equipped to guide their children in various aspects of life in the new country: how to study; structure an essay; access information for school projects; and provide necessary resources, including additional books, a home computer, and even tutors. These parents are more likely to know to ask the right questions and insist that their children be placed in educational programs that will ensure viable options in the future. They will know that not all courses are the same and indeed that not all schools produce the same outcomes. Children who have parents with limited education are at a clear disadvantage.

### *Poverty*

Poverty has long been recognized as a significant risk factor for youth (Luthar, 1999; Weissbourd, 1996). Children raised in circumstances of socioeconomic deprivation are vulnerable to an array of psychological distresses, among them difficulties concentrating and sleeping, anxiety, and depression as well as a heightened propensity for delinquency and violence. Those living in poverty often experience major life event stress as well as the stress of daily hassles (Luthar, 1999; Weissbourd, 1996). Poverty frequently coexists with a variety of other factors that augment risks, 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; Weissbourd).

Although some Latino youths come from privileged backgrounds, large numbers today suffer from the challenges associated with poverty. Poverty might be a preexisting condition prior to migration, or it may be accentuated as immigrants experience some downward mobility in the process of settlement. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau report on the foreign-born population shows that 21.9% of persons originating in Latin America live below the poverty line—the highest percentage among the foreign-born, and more than twice as high as the portion of the native population living below the poverty line (11.2%). Nationwide, 34.4% of all Latino children live below poverty, and 37% of Latino immigrant families report difficulties affording food. Immigrant children are more than four times as likely as native-born children to live in crowded housing conditions (Capps, 2001). A study by Brown, Wyn, Yu, Valenzuela, and Dong (1998) of access to health insurance and health care among Mexican American families revealed that noncitizen Mexican

American children are twice as likely as citizen children in immigrant families to lack insurance coverage, and three times as likely as native-born children to be uninsured.

### *Neighborhoods, Segregation, and Schools*

Where immigrant families settle shapes the immigrant journey and the experiences and adaptations of children. Now, Latinos are settling in unprecedented numbers in highly segregated, deeply impoverished urban settings (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Orfield and Yun found that Latino-origin students attend the most highly segregated schools of any group in the United States today—in 1996, only 25% of Latino students attended majority White schools. The degree of segregation will have a series of consequences (Massey & Denton, 1993). New immigrants of color who settle in predominantly minority neighborhoods will have virtually no direct, systematic, and intimate contact with middle-class White Americans. This in turn will affect the kinds of languages and dialects encountered by the youths, the quality of schools they will attend, and the networks that are useful to access desirable colleges and jobs (Orfield, 1995; Portes, 1996).

Concentrated poverty is all too often associated with an absence of gratifying work opportunities with the promise of mobility to the more appealing sectors of the opportunity structure (Wilson, 1997). Youngsters in such neighborhoods are chronically underemployed or unemployed and must search for work elsewhere. In such neighborhoods with few opportunities in the formal economy, underground or informal activities tend to flourish. Exposure to violence in both neighborhoods and schools is an everyday reality for many immigrant youths today (Collier, 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Sociologists Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have argued that these structural features interact to generate a pattern they have termed “segmented assimilation,” whereby over time large numbers of poor immigrant youths of color will tend to gravitate toward the American underclass rather than approaching middle-class norms.

The neighborhood characteristics outlined here are reflected in the schools attended by a large segment of Latino youth. They enroll in schools that cover the range from well-functioning institutions with a culture of high expectations and a focus on achievement to dysfunctional ones characterized by ever-present fear of violence, distrust, low expectation, and institutional anomie. Unfortunately, poor Latino youths who need the most academic help tend to enroll in inferior schools—many of them characterized by a culture of violence. An ethnographic study of a number of immigrant schools in Miami found that three factors were consistently present in such schools (Collier, 1998). First, administrators tended to deny that the school had problems with violence or drugs.

Second, many of the staff members exhibited “noncaring” behaviors toward the students. Lastly, the schools took lax security measures.

These schools typically have limited and outdated resources and offer an inferior education. Buildings are poorly maintained as a rule, and classrooms are overcrowded. Textbooks and curriculum are outdated; computers are few and obsolete. Many of the teachers may not have credentials in the subjects they teach. Clearly defined tracks limit immigrant students to noncollege destinations. Lacking English skills, Latino immigrant students are often enrolled in the least demanding and competitive classes that eventually exclude them from courses needed for college.

Meier and Stewart (1991) discussed the inherent problems in using already biased placement tests written in English to place Latino students with limited English proficiency in academic groups. These students are often wrongly assigned to classes intended to meet the needs of students with developmental delays (for example, special education classrooms), or they are tracked into academic groups where they receive little or no advanced instruction. Placement in such groups has serious implications for the future educational trajectories these students will follow. As Olsen (1997) poignantly put it, “With insufficient English language development and insufficient access to the curriculum in a language they can understand, most immigrant students are (through the forces of schooling) denied equal access to an education. Some manage to achieve, but many drop out of school or become stuck in the category of ‘ESL lifers’” (p. 241). Latino students also often attend schools that generally offer few advanced placement courses critical for entry to many of the more competitive colleges. Because the settings are so undesirable, teachers and principals routinely transfer out in search of better assignments elsewhere (Orfield, 2002). As a result, in many such schools there is little continuity or sense of community to foster academic engagement.

Conchas (2001) conducted a study of Latino high school students in California, examining how the institutional mechanisms of a school mediate academic engagement. He argued that within a school, school structures and practices form opportunity tracks that can lead to optimism or pessimism among students, as the students become divided along structural lines. Conchas found that Latino students who were enrolled in the general school program were exposed to fewer examples of opportunities for academic success in comparison to their counterparts enrolled in the school’s more prestigious academies (e.g., medical, graphics). There were also variations within the academies, with some offering more support for Latino youth than others. This study counters widely accepted assumptions that the onus is upon students themselves to

achieve by demonstrating variations among Latinos in a single school setting. As Conchas stated, “while schools often replicate existing social and economic inequality present in the larger society and culture, they can also circumvent inequality if students and teachers work in concert towards academic success” (p. 502).

### *Undocumented Status*

Lack of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) documentation presents an additional obstacle to academic success. There are an estimated 8–10 million undocumented immigrants within the foreign-born population of the United States (Deardorff & Blumerman, 2001), and children constitute a significant portion of the undocumented population. Although precise figures are impossible to acquire, since schools do not keep records of this sort, it is estimated, for example, that several hundred thousand undocumented children attend public schools in California. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Plyler v. Doe*, that it was unconstitutional to deny public education to undocumented alien children. The Court stated that denying undocumented children access to public education was, *inter alia*, unfair punishment for their parents’ actions. The ruling specifies that schools cannot deny admission to a student on the basis of undocumented status, treat a student fundamentally differently from others to determine residency, engage in practices to “chill” access to school (“chilling” refers to actions that create fear among undocumented children and their families, such as requirements to provide vaccination records), require students or parents to disclose or document immigration status, make inquiries of students or parents that may expose their undocumented status, or require social security numbers from all students (Morse & Ludovina, 1999).

These measures, meant to provide some protection for undocumented children in schools, do not prevent other threats. Undocumented children often arrive in the United States under traumatic circumstances, and once they are here they continue to experience fear and anxiety about being apprehended, separated from their parents, and deported (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Such psychological and emotional duress can take its toll on the academic experiences of undocumented children. Another obstacle to academic success for these youths comes at the end of the high school years. Every year, thousands of bright and gifted undocumented young adults with dreams of getting a college education are gravely disappointed when they discover that their legal status stands in the way of their access to postsecondary education. Most colleges and universities require a social security number (or some other form of legal documentation) for financial aid. Thus even students who qualify

for academic scholarships may not be able to accept them because of their undocumented status. Our work in various immigrant communities has shown that this issue is of great concern to students, parents, teachers, and community leaders.

### *Seasonal Migrants*

Being a child in a migrant family presents particular challenges. The youngster faces multiple moves, frequent interruptions in schooling, and deep poverty, as well as harsh working and living conditions. Latinos constitute 94% of the migrant worker population, with 80% born in Mexico. (Information cited in this subsection was drawn from a series of papers in the ERIC Digests on migrant families: ERIC, 1991; Huang, 1993; Martin, 1994.) Most migrant workers are men (82%), and 52% are married with children. The primary industries for migrant workers are in agriculture and fishing, and the average migrant worker earns \$5,000 per year. It is estimated that approximately 600,000 children travel with their migrant parents in the United States each year. Of those children, about 40% work with their families; among working children, 40% have worked in fields wet with pesticides, and 40% have been sprayed while they were working in fields. It is thus not surprising that migrant workers are in much poorer health than the rest of the population. Compared with the national life expectancy rate of 75 years, migrant workers live to an average of 49 years. The infant mortality rate among migrant workers is 125% higher than the general population, and 10.9% of migrant children suffer from chronic health problems, compared to the national rate of 3%.

Migrant children are the least likely among other population groups to be enrolled in school. The lack of continuity in their schooling trajectories (because of interruptions during the school year, the difficulty of transferring school records, health problems, and lack of English language skills) contributes both to their low attendance and to the high dropout rate among migrant children. The dropout rate after grade six among these children is twice the national average, and typically they only reach the eighth grade.

### *Late Entry into American Schools*

Data suggest that Latino immigrant youths who arrive during adolescence are at a particular disadvantage in their schooling (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2001). Although many immigrants arrive during their secondary school years, most school-based programs targeting immigrant youth are designed for the needs of primary school students. Many immigrants who arrive in adolescence must overcome several often-insurmountable obstacles.

Frequently, they are not awarded credits for previous course work completed in their countries of origin. They may enter settings with high-stakes testing that have not been designed with second language learners in mind. Older immigrant youth may have had longer gaps in their previous schooling and enter schools far behind their age levels. Therefore, dropout rates among older Latino immigrant youth have reached disturbingly high levels (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001). As discussed earlier, even when older immigrant adolescents are able to graduate, if they lack documented status they are often unable to have access to higher education (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Clearly, Latino youth face myriad obstacles that all too often severely truncate their academic trajectories. There is no doubt, of course, that structural constraints play a critical role in academic outcomes. Parental education and income is highly predictive of such educational outcomes, as are performance on high-stakes graduation tests, as well as grades and college attendance rates. Focusing entirely on such structural issues, however, overlooks the critical role of agency in the schooling experience.

## ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

Achievement motivation has been viewed by many psychologists to be closely related to academic outcomes and defined as the motive related to performance according to standards of excellence (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele argue that three motivational questions are at the heart of achievement motivation theory. The first question—Does the individual feel capable of doing the task?—considers in particular issues of locus of control (Weiner, 1994) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994; Schunk, 1991). The next question—Is the task motivating, and why?—focuses on the issues of intrinsic motivation (Dewey, 1913), internalization (Ryan, 1992), and interest (Schiefele, 1991). The last question—Does the individual understand what he or she must do to succeed at the task?—is concerned with issues of volition (Corno, 1993; Schiefele, 1991), self-regulation (Borkowski & Thorpe, 1994; Zimmerman, 1989), and help-seeking behaviors (Nelson-Le Gall & Jones, 1990; Newman & Goldin, 1990). In general, the focus on achievement motivation is largely based on a Western model of individualism.

In our view, emphasis on achievement motivation as a lens for understanding academic outcomes for Latino youth has limited value. This model of understanding tends to ignore the harsh implications of structural barriers and blames the victim: if a poor Latino child does not perform well in school, it is because she is not motivated. Emphasizing achievement motivation also ignores the fact

that although many poor high school students of color attending urban schools say they believe a college education is important and they intend to go to college, few will actually attend (Ogbu, 1995).

As part of the data collection for the Harvard Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptations study (a five-year interdisciplinary longitudinal study of 400 immigrant youths ranging in age from 9 to 14 at the beginning of the study, arriving from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Central America, Haiti, and China) we found that 75% indicated a college education is "very important," and close to 75% intended to go on to college or obtain a professional degree in fields such as medicine and law. In the last year of the study, however, it is evident that far fewer are likely to have the grades and credits necessary to go on to college in the immediate future. Valuing education and achievement motivation, without actual academic engagement, may be only loosely linked to tangible academic outcomes.

In order to perform optimally on the educational journey, the student must be engaged in learning. When a student is engaged, she is both intellectually and behaviorally involved in her schooling. She ponders the materials presented, participates in discussions, completes assignments with attention and effort, and optimally applies newfound knowledge in new contexts. Conversely, when academically disengaged, students "simply go through the motions" (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992, p. 15), putting forth minimum effort and, in extreme cases, none.

In recent years, a number of scholars have argued that academic achievement and adjustment are in large part a function of academic engagement (Jordan, 1999; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Steinberg et al., 1992; Wick, 1990, 1990). However, academic engagement is a term that has been defined and used in a variety of ways (Jordan, 1999; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Steinberg et al., 1992; Wick, Zeidner & Schleyer, 1999). Rather than viewing academic engagement as an end product, we conceptualize degrees of academic engagement and disengagement as occurring along a continuum. Highly engaged students are both interested and actively engaged in the process of learning. Their motivation may be intrinsic (a thirst for knowledge and understanding) or extrinsic (pursuit of good grades as an entrée to the academic and career opportunity structure) and may combine both features. Whatever the motivation, the student is meeting his academic potential by engaging in schooling. A moderately engaged student may complete a school's basic requirements (such as attending and completing most assignments) but not work to his full potential and find the content of learning to be only sporadically interesting. The more disengaged student learns significantly less than if he were cognitively or behaviorally engaged and receives lower grades than

that which he is capable of. In its most extreme form, academic disengagement leads to a pattern of multiple failures. In such cases, the student has stopped engaging in his schooling—he is habitually truant, rarely completes assignments, and shows little or no interest in the materials presented.

Conceptually, we separate academic engagement into three dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and relational. A student's reported intellectual or *cognitive engagement* with schoolwork includes the elements of intellectual curiosity about new ideas and domains of learning as well as the pleasure that is derived in the process of mastering new materials. Do the students report that learning is inherently interesting to them? *Behavioral engagement* refers to the degree to which students actually engage in the behaviors necessary to do well in school: attending classes, participating in class, and completing assignments. We consider general academic behaviors as well as subject-specific behaviors from both student and teacher perspectives. *Relational engagement* is the degree to which students report meaningful and supportive relationships in school with adults as well as peers. These relationships can serve emotional as well as tangible functions (Figure 21.1).

Cognitive and behavioral engagements are viewed as manifestations of engagement, while relational engagement is viewed as a mediator of these engagements. Background characteristics, as well as family and contextual risks, have independent effects upon academic outcomes. Background characteristics such as socioeconomic status, a history of trauma, and whether or not the student is documented have a direct effect on academic outcomes not completely mediated by academic engagement. Contextual risks, including neighborhood and school segregation, also have a direct effect on academic outcomes. A student with highly educated parents attending a quality suburban school will be at a distinct advantage over a student with a less-privileged background on achievement test results as well as course grades, independent of effort or engagement. We maintain that family risks, including single-parent structures and lack of parental supervision, are likely to influence such individual student attributes as a sense of self-efficacy, future orientation, or attitude toward school authorities, which in turn affect academic engagement. Relational supports can serve to mediate the effects of family and contextual risks on individual attributes.

Varying levels of academic engagement have clear implications. We view academic engagement as a particularly important dimension of schooling because it would appear to be malleable and hence a promising level for intervention. Our conceptual model recognizes the role of characteristics each student has, such as parental education, poverty, INS documentation, family constellation,

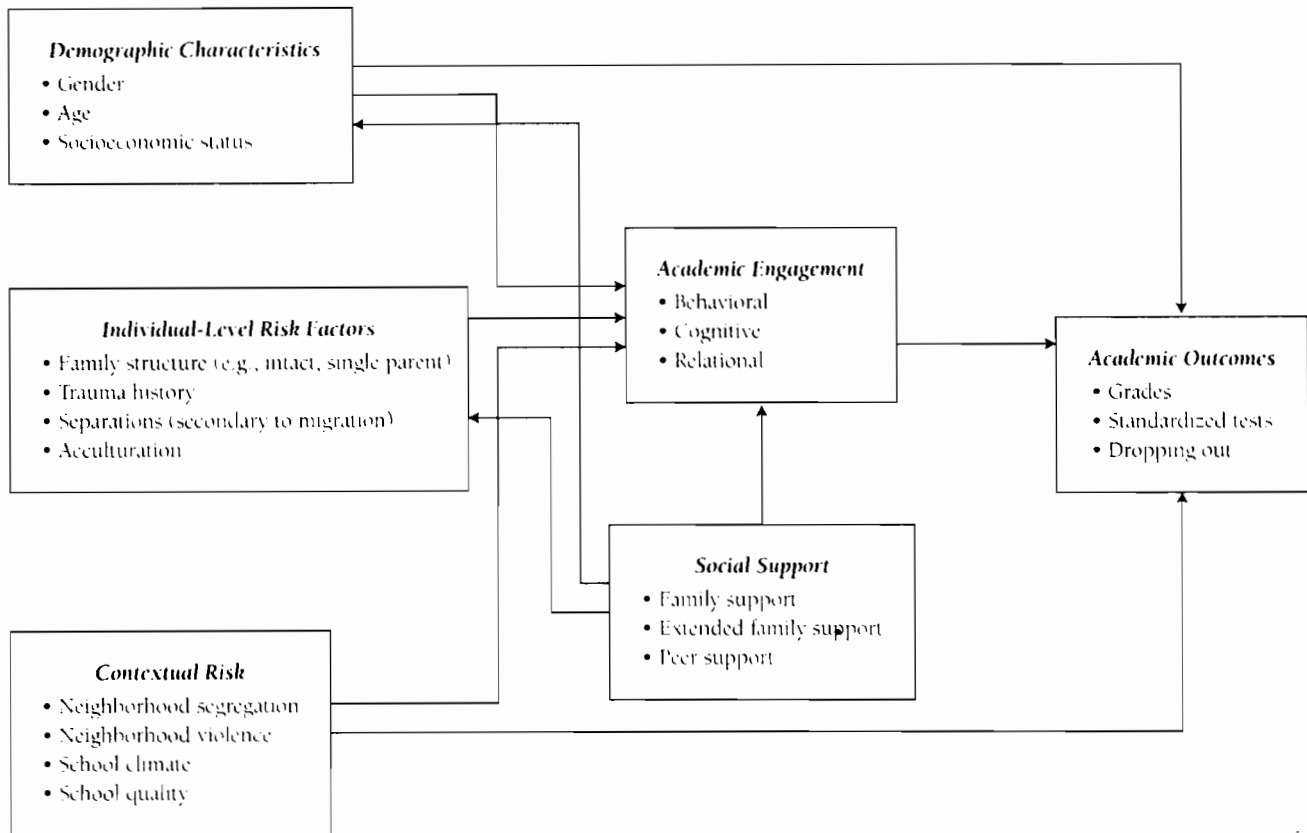


Figure 21.1. Conceptual Model of Academic Engagement.

neighborhood characteristics, and networks of social relations. It also takes into consideration the individual dimensions that can influence academic outcomes: behavioral and cognitive engagement, self-efficacy, motivation, attitude toward school authorities, and future goals, along with ethnic and academic identities. Taken together, a clearer understanding of academic outcomes begins to emerge.

## IDENTITY FORMATION

Any understanding of Latino youth growing up in a diaspora must take into consideration identity. How they come to define themselves, as well as how others define them, has important implications for where they live, with whom they live, where they work, and how they envision their future and mobilize toward that realization. Erik Erikson (1968) argued that at no time in the lifespan is the urge to define oneself vis-à-vis the society at large as great as during adolescence. He claimed that for optimal development, the individual's sense of self and the varied social milieus should complement each other. If there is

too much cultural dissonance, cultural hostility, and role confusion, and if the cultural guides are inadequate, Latino adolescents may find it difficult to develop a flexible and adaptive sense of identity. They may be torn between an attachment to the parental culture of origin, the lure of the often more intriguing adolescent peer culture, and aspirations to join the "mainstream" American culture.

In a society structured by "the color line" (Du Bois, 1986), race and color are significant forces shaping the lives of immigrant youth. Research demonstrates that immigrant youth of color are quickly socialized into America's racial and class regime (Bailey, 2001; Stepick, 1997; Waters, 1999). Indeed, entry into American identities today is via the culture of multiculturalism (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). One experiments, names, and performs American identities by crafting a hyphenated self. Many important questions are relevant to an understanding of the realities new immigrants will face. How do phenotypically (but not culturally) Black new Latino immigrants come to terms, over time and across generations, with the ever-charged folk racial binary in the American urban setting (Bailey)? How does

a Dominican child respond when she suddenly discovers she is Black in the American sense of the term? Will the new immigrants, by sheer force of numbers, finally break the binary logic of American racial regime? How do these transformations in racial and ethnic self-identities affect (if at all) the schooling of children? As Americanization now appears to lead to dystopic adaptations (e.g., obesity, diabetes, drug taking, lower grades), are there protective features in the crafting and performing of hyphenated identities (Hernández & Charney, 1998; Steinberg et al., 1996)? Is an immigrant youth who identifies herself as Mexican more likely to do better in school than one who self-identifies as Chicana? Although a number of scholars have looked at these important questions, more interdisciplinary work is needed in this area (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters 1999).

How others view her is one of the vectors by which the adolescent struggles to sort out a sense of identity and self. Immigrant youths must contend with the fact that they are culturally, ethnically, and racially "Other." Sociologists have documented how immigration generates ambivalence at best, and latent and manifest hostilities at worst (Espenshade, 1998). Hence, immigrant youths must face the usual challenges of adolescence while contending with the winds of xenophobia their presence generates (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Identity has been conceptualized and defined in many ways by diverse social science disciplines as well as by individual researchers (Phinney, 1990). We place ethnic and racial identities in an interdisciplinary framework and define identity as a feeling, intersubjectively shared by individuals in a given group, that is based on a sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, common goals, and a sense of shared destiny. We maintain that ethnic and racial identity development does not occur in a linear sequence of stages, from least to most aware as some psychological theorists have posited (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Rather, we view identities as contextual and contingent upon a variety of circumstances throughout the lifespan (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Implied in this definition is the idea of cultural pluralism, where dominant majorities and ethnic and racial minorities cohabit a national space (De Vos & Suárez-Orozco, 1990). These identities are powerfully shaped by the "social mirror" and by a variety of contextual factors.

Racial and ethnic identities are at once achieved and ascribed. Identities are achieved when there is a sense, in Appiah's words, that this "identity is mine. . . . I can choose how central my identification with it will be—choose, that is, how much I will organize my life around that identity" (Appiah & Gutmann, 1998, p. 80). Ascription of group membership has two main sources: those

made by group members ("You are a member of *our* group") and those made by the majority group ("You are a member of *that* group"). In highly stratified plural societies, the process of ascription involves instrumental and expressive considerations. On the instrumental level, it delimits the spaces in the opportunity structure that the minority group is allowed to inhabit as well as their avenues for status mobility. On the expressive level, ascription involves collective perceptions of the minority group that almost always include stereotypic attitudes toward them. Negative distortions of the social mirror have profound implications for the development of identity among members of ethnically and racially marked groups (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

### SOCIAL MIRRORING

Are immigrant youth aware of stereotypic xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigrant hostilities? Data from the Harvard Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study reveal that discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment were recurring concerns discussed by many youths. A 13-year-old Chinese girl reported, "Americans discriminate. They treat you badly because you are Chinese or Black. I hate this most." "They treat immigrants like animals. There are a lot of racist people," said a 13-year-old Mexican girl. All the participants were asked to complete the sentence "Most Americans think [people from my country] are \_\_\_\_\_" (for example, Haitian children were asked, "Most Americans think Haitians are \_\_\_\_\_"; Mexican children were asked, "Most Americans think Mexicans are \_\_\_\_\_"; and so forth). Fully 65% of our respondents had negative associations, such as:

Most Americans think that we are garbage. (14-year-old Dominican boy)

Most Americans think that we are members of gangs. (9-year-old Central American girl)

Most Americans think that we are lazy, gangsters, drug-addicts that only come to take their jobs away. (14-year-old Mexican boy)

Immigrant youth of color indeed perceive that many in the dominant culture do not like them or welcome them. Psychologically, what do adolescents do with this reception? Are these attitudes of the host culture internalized, denied, or resisted?

Winnicott (1958) suggests that the child's sense of self is profoundly shaped by the reflections mirrored back to her by significant others. Indeed, all human beings no matter their age are dependent upon the reflection of themselves mirrored by others. "Others" include not just

the mother (Winnicott's focus) but also nonparental relatives, adult caretakers, siblings, teachers, peers, employers, people on the street, and even the media. If the reflected image is generally positive, the individual (adult or child) will be able to feel that she is worthwhile and competent. If the reflection is generally negative, it is extremely difficult to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth.

At times, the reflection can be a positive distortion. In such a situation, the response to the individual may be out of proportion to his actual contribution or achievements. In the most benign case, positive expectations can be an asset. The classic "Pygmalion in the classroom" study, in which teachers were told that certain students were brighter than others (on the basis of the experimenter randomly assigning some children that designation, unsubstantiated in fact), the teachers treated the children more positively and assigned them higher grades (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). It is possible that some immigrant students, such as Asians, benefit somewhat from positive expectations of their competence as a result of being members of a "model minority" (Takaki, 1989). There is no doubt, however, that this comes at the cost of constantly having to live up to a standard of perfection (Lee, 1990).

We are more concerned, however, with negative distortions. What happens to youths who receive mirroring on the societal level that is predominantly negative and hostile? Du Bois (1986) beautifully articulated this challenge of what he termed "double-consciousness": a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (pp. 364–365). If the expectations are of sloth, irresponsibility, low intelligence, and even danger, the outcome can be toxic. If these reflections are received in a number of mirrors, including the media, the classroom, and the street, the outcome is devastating.

Even when parents provide positive mirroring, it is often insufficient to compensate for the distorted reflections that children encounter in their daily lives. In some cases, the immigrant parent is considered out of touch with the reality in the new culture. Although parents' opinions may be considered valid, they may not be enough to compensate for the intensity and frequency of the distortions of the "house of mirrors" immigrant children of color encounter in their everyday lives.

What meanings do young people construct, and how do they respond? One possible pathway is for youth to become resigned to the negative reflections, leading to hopelessness and self-depreciation that may in turn result in low aspirations and self-defeating behaviors. The general affect associated with this pathway is one of depression and passivity. In this scenario, the child is likely to

respond with self-doubt and shame, setting low aspirations in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: "They're probably right. I'll never be able to do it." Other youths mobilize to resist the mirrors and injustices they encounter. Here we differentiate between two types of resistance. The first is a project infused with hope, a sense of justice, and a faith in a better tomorrow. The other form of resistance occurs when the child is eventually overcome by alienation leading to anomie, hopelessness, and a nihilistic view of the future. In this latter case, young people may actively resist the reflections they encounter but are unable to maintain hope for change or a better future. Without hope, the resulting anger and compensatory self-aggrandizement may lead to acting-out behaviors, including the kinds of dystopic cultural practices typically associated with gang membership. For these youths, the response is one of "If you think I'm bad, let me show you just how bad I can be."

The social trajectories of youth are more promising for those who are actively able to maintain and cultivate a sense of hope for the future. Whether they are resigned, oblivious, or resistant to the reflections in the social mirror, those who are able to maintain hope are in fundamental ways partially inoculated to the toxicity they encounter. These youths are better able to maintain a sense of pride and preserved self-esteem. In these circumstances, their energies are freed and mobilized in the service of day-to-day coping. Some not only become focused on their own advancement but also harness their energies in the service of their communities by volunteering to help others, acting as role models, or actively advocating and mobilizing for social change. In this scenario, youths respond to the negative social mirror by being goaded into "I'll show you I can make it in spite of what you think of me."

Theoretical and empirical research suggest that exposure to a negative social mirror can adversely affect academic engagement. Social psychologist Steele (1997) demonstrated that under the stress of "identity threats," performance goes down on a variety of academic tasks. He maintains that when negative stereotypes about one's group prevail, "members of these groups can fear being reduced to the stereotype" (p. 614). Under such circumstances, self-handicapping goes up. This "threat in the air" has both an immediate effect on the specific situation that evokes the stereotype threat and a cumulative erosive effect as events that evoke the threat continually occur. Steele argues that stereotype threat shapes both intellectual performance and intellectual identity.

Data from a variety of studies demonstrate that immigrant students enter U.S. schools with highly positive attitudes toward education (Fulgini, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995; S. Steinberg et al., 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). But these attitudes cannot be maintained

in a climate of insurmountable obstacles, cultural hostility, identity threats, and psychological disparagement; under such circumstances most youths will not continue to invest in school as an avenue for status mobility. Indeed, facing toxic levels of cultural violence, children will tend to invest significant amounts of their psychic energy to "defend" against these assaults on their sense of self.

A number of studies in recent years have demonstrated a link between racial and ethnic identity pathways and academic outcomes (Gibson, 1988; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Ogbu & Herbert, 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters, 1997). These studies suggest a pattern that implies that those who forge bicultural identities are more successful academically. As our research unfolds, we have come to believe that ethnic identity has in some ways been confounded with academic identity. Methodologically, future research should strive to assess each of these dimensions separately before searching for patterns of covariance.

In our extensive fieldwork with the Harvard Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study, we have found a variety of ethnic identities. Some immigrant-origin youth develop ethnic flight identity whereby they embrace the dominant culture while rejecting their own culture and language. Others maintain a co-ethnic focus, remaining largely involved in their group of origin. Many who maintain a co-ethnic focus live in highly segregated neighborhoods and have limited exposure to the dominant culture. Others with a co-ethnic identity actively reject the dominant culture (after being rejected by it), developing an adversarial posture. Still others, who live in segregated neighborhoods in which they have little contact with the dominant culture coupled with sustained negative interactions with African Americans, develop a hyperethnic identity in reaction to African American youth culture. The most adaptive ethnic identity involves forging a transcultural sense of self. In such cases, the individual develops the instrumental competencies of the new culture while maintaining expressive contact with the culture of origin. Such individuals move fluidly between cultures, creatively code-switching according to circumstance. Individuals with transcultural identities may move between two cultures (e.g., Mexican and American) or among three or more (e.g., Dominican, American mainstream, African American) according to circumstances. Here exposure and imposed identities play critical roles.

Turning to academic identities, preliminary analyses of longitudinal data also indicate emerging patterns. At one end of the continuum, we find immigrant students who are highly engaged in the academic enterprise and who view schooling as central to their sense of self. At the other end of the continuum are students who are

completely disengaged from their schooling; such students simply do not view schooling as playing a critical role in their lives and engage in very few of the tasks required in school. Some students fall somewhere on this spectrum across subjects, while others demonstrate subject-specific patterns in which they are highly engaged in some courses and not in others. For some students, engaged schooling identities are sustained across time, while with others there may be significant downward or upward trajectories.

We are systematically assessing these separate dimensions of ethnic identity and academic identity through a combination of responses to structured questionnaires, sentence completion tests, ethnographic observations, behavioral checklists completed by teachers, and evaluations of report cards. In the final stage of analysis, we will systematically search for patterns of covariance between these two dimensions of identity. Emerging findings reveal that a critical mediating variables for identity formation and academic engagement are the networks of relations available to the immigrant student.

## SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF LEARNING

### *Role of Social Relations*

The presence of a healthy social support network has long been regarded to be a key mediator to stress and a predictor of well-being for adults and children alike (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Syme, 1985). Interpersonal relationships perform a number of functions. Social companionship, a basic human need, serves to maintain and enhance self-esteem as well as provide acceptance and approval (Wills, 1985). Instrumental social support gives individuals and their families tangible aid (such as running an errand or making a loan) as well as guidance and advice (including information, job, and housing leads). These instrumental supports are particularly critical for disoriented immigrant newcomers. Quite predictably, a well-functioning social support network is closely linked to better adjustment (Wills, 1985).

### *Affiliative Motivations*

Particularly for Latino students, social relations also play a critical role in initiating and sustaining motivations. This form of motivation stands in sharp contrast with classic conceptualizations of achievement motivation developed on White mainstream populations. McClelland and his associates at Harvard conducted a series of pioneering studies of achievement motivation among White American students in the 1950s (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). Their studies suggested that

achievement motivation flourishes when youngsters are trained to become independent from their families. These studies suggested that for White American students, achievement-oriented individuals were motivated in the context of attempting to gain independence from the family. Hence, according to this model, achievement motivation and individualism are highly correlated. In contrast, we have found in the course of several studies that successful Latino students are typically highly motivated to achieve *for* their families (M. Suárez-Orozco, 1989; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, 2001). Using a variety of methodologies (interviews, ethnographies, projective narrative techniques, and others), we have found that a principal stated motivation for being successful academically is a desire to help family and community. Further, we have found that Latino students (more so than for Chinese or Haitian students) perceive that receiving the help of others is critical to their success (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, in press).

### *The Family*

In all social systems, the family is a basic structural unit. Indeed, the family is the most significant gravitational field in the lives of young people. Family cohesion and the maintenance of a well-functioning system of supervision, authority, and mutuality are perhaps the most powerful factors in shaping the well-being and future outcomes of all children, Latino and non-Latino alike. Although parents play the central role in traditional two-parent nuclear mainstream American family systems, Latino families often involve a larger cast of characters. For Latino immigrant families, extended family members—godparents, aunts, uncles, older cousins, and the like—are often critical sources of tangible instrumental and emotional support.

Families can support children's schooling in a variety of ways. At a minimum, good parenting provides an emotional safe haven for children, fostering the development of a healthy sense of belonging, self-esteem, and emotional well-being. Wentzel (1999) deconstructs the key elements of parental support for academic adjustment. She notes that parents concretely support educational outcomes by maintaining a value of education and establishing a standard of expectations regarding the minimum acceptable standard for grades or for level of educational pursuit. Wentzel also argues that parents are crucial in their ability to make educational opportunities and resources available. Further, parents establish expectations about appropriate behaviors and attitudes vis-à-vis school authorities and peer interactions. Lastly, by actively scaffolding their children as they complete assignments, parents can offer role modeling in how to be successful in school.

Parents with higher educational levels are able to provide a variety of resources to their children that place them at a clear advantage. As noted earlier, there is a direct relationship between parental education and performance on achievement tests, grades, and dropping out (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Jencks et al., 1972; Madaus & Clarke, 1998). Their children tend to enter school with more sophisticated vocabularies, higher literacy levels, and computer skills. Further, better educated parents know firsthand how to play the academic game, allowing them to actively scaffold homework assignments, advocate for their children with teachers, and provide private SAT instruction, as well as access college pathway information and the like (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Latino parents who work long hours and may have limited schooling are at a distinct disadvantage in this regard. Stanton-Salazar (2001) found that although low-income Mexican immigrant parents highly valued educational success for their children, few of them actually understood their children's school experiences or the role they as parents had in facilitating their children's access to postsecondary education. Although Latino parents generally have high educational aspirations for their children's education, they are often unable to tangibly support their children in ways that are congruent with American cultural models and expectations. Many come from traditions that revere school authorities and expect parents to keep a distance from the day-to-day workings of their child's education. This stands in sharp contrast to U.S. expectations of parental involvement, whereby "good" parents are expected to volunteer in the classroom or as fundraisers, actively help with parent-child homework projects, and advocate for their children. Most Latino immigrant parents consider it presumptuous to impose their expectations onto teachers. Unfortunately, teachers often interpret this distance and respect as lack of caring on the parent's part and may judge their children accordingly (Lopez, 2002).

### *Community Relationships*

Because no family is an island, its cohesion and functioning are enhanced when the family is part of a larger community displaying effective forms of what Felton Earls (1997) has termed "community agency." Likewise, cultural psychologist George De Vos (1992) has argued that culturally constituted patterns of community cohesion and supervision can "immunize" immigrant youth from the more toxic elements in their new settings. This line of research suggests that when communities are cohesive and when adults within the community can monitor youngsters' activities, they will tend to do better. Earls

found that children who live in such communities are less likely to be involved with gangs and delinquency and are more focused on their academic pursuits.

Our ethnographic data suggest the crucial role of networks of social relations extending beyond the family in the successful adjustment of immigrant youth. In nearly every story of immigrant success, there is a caring adult who took an interest in the child and became actively engaged in her life. Connections with nonparent adults—a community leader, a teacher, a member of the church, a coach—are important in the academic and social adaptation of Latino adolescents (Hamilton & Darling, 1996; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997; Pianta, 1999; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Rhodes, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). These youngsters are often undergoing profound shifts in their sense of self and are struggling to negotiate changing circumstances in relationships with their parents and peers (Rhodes, 2002). Protective relationships with nonparent adults can provide Latino youth with compensatory attachments, safe contexts for learning new cultural norms and practices, and information that is vital to success in school (Roffman, Suarez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003).

The support of nonparental adults, through either volunteer mentoring programs or community youth-serving agencies, can prove invaluable in minimizing the risks associated with the stresses of immigration and transculturation, as well as in facilitating the vicissitudes of identity formation and transformation. Mentors and supportive adults in community organizations and schools can complement the efforts of parents to guide Latino youth through adolescence. Rather than supplanting the role of parents, these nonparental adults can support parents' efforts as the entire family attempts the difficult task of adapting to life in a new and often hostile country (Roffman et al., 2003).

Community-based youth organizations provide structured activities and settings in which to interact with peers while under the supervision of adult staff. These organizations can represent an important form of social capital at work in immigrant communities (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). The presence of social resources in a family, a school, agency, or neighborhood engenders positive interactions between individuals and contributes to positive outcomes (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Stevenson & Shin-Ying, 1990). 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).

At the most basic level, participation in a community youth program 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 a safe haven from the pressures of the street or as a "second home"—a place where youths feel comfortable expressing themselves and letting down their guard (Hirsch et al., 2000; Villaruel & Lerner, 1994). The existence of a setting in which youngsters can congregate and participate in recreational activities during their out-of-school hours represents an important option as they react to the 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 youths to feel supervised by caring adults, while at the same time preserving their freedom to choose activities and interact with peers, an autonomy that becomes more and more important as they 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.

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 often inaccessible to immigrant youth whose parents have not navigated the academic system in the United States and who attend schools with few guidance counselors. Youth programs may be 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 an important reason for dropping out (Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995; Katz, 1999). Valenzuela (1999) exposed the disrespect Mexican and Mexican American high school students experience in schools where their identities are devalued or are ignored, where they are alienated from teachers and one another, and where feelings of not being cared about are rampant. 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, Irby, & Langman, 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 immigrant students embroiled in the difficult process of identity development within a bicultural context. Staff members can create an atmosphere in an after-school context where Latino youth feel comfortable exploring the intersections between their multiple

identities: immigrant, Latino, Latino American, and the like (Camino, 1994). With supportive staff to guide them, through role modeling, and through simply creating a norm of self-expression, joint ownership, and the communal responsibility and fictive kinship that are associated with their Latino background, youths can find ways to fuse various 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 "bridging" the disparate norms that are in place in children's homes and those in place at school (Heath, 1994). 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.

"Urban sanctuaries" focus on the potential of youth and operate in a respectful and informal manner (McLaughlin et al., 1994). The staff at these community-based youth programs fills 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 youths, 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 are an opportunity for young people who might not have access to mentoring programs, or for whom (for reasons discussed below) a one-on-one mentoring relationship might not be appropriate, to form supportive relationships with caring adults.

### *Mentoring Relationships*

Mentoring relationships foster 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, 2002). Youth in successful mentoring relationships have been found to benefit in terms of improved academics, healthier family and peer relationships, and reduced incidence of substance abuse and aggressive behavior (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Rhodes, 2002).

Formal or informal mentoring relationships may have special implications for Latino 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 offer 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 consequently 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 youths' lives.

Although there are many benefits associated with mentoring for the development of Latino youth, there are also ways in which mentoring may not be ideally suited to the needs of some families. First, an intense one-on-one relationship with another adult may represent a source of discomfort for some immigrant parents in particular, who may feel threatened by the prospect of a nonrelative 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 (Roffman et al., 2003). Second, many of the volunteers who come into adolescents' lives are from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds than the youth they are mentoring. Such differences can have implications for immigrant youths, 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 young people. Adolescents who are experiencing psychological, emotional, or behavioral distress may have difficulty engaging in a mentoring relationship. Further, older youths may be more peer-oriented than younger children and hence less amenable to becoming invested in a relationship that requires spending significant amounts of time alone with an adult (Rhodes, 2002).

Finally, not all mentoring relationships are successful; an estimated half of all matches dissolve after only a few months (Freedman, 1993; Roffman et al., 2003; 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 (Rhodes, 2002; Roffman et al., 2003), 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 (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For these reasons, immigrant youth are often better served when they form mentoring relationships with nonparental adults they encounter in programs oriented around activities, thereby eliminating some of the pressures involved in more intensive mentoring programs.

### Peer Relationships

Peers can also provide important emotional sustenance to support the development of significant psychosocial competencies in young people (Selman, Levitt, & Schultz, 1997). In a variety of ways, peers can specifically serve to support or detract from academic engagement (Berndt, 1999). By valuing (or devaluing) certain academic outcomes and by modeling specific academic behaviors, peers establish the "norms" of academic engagement (Berndt, 1999; Ogbu & Herbert, 1998; Steinberg et al., 1996). Peers may further support academic engagements through conversations and discussions where ideas are exchanged (Berndt, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Peers can tangibly support academic engagement by clarifying readings or lectures, helping one another in completing homework assignments, and exchanging information (about SATs,

helpful tutors, volunteer positions, and other college pathway knowledge). Because, however, immigrant youth often attend highly segregated schools in low-income communities (Orfield, 1998), they may have limited access to knowledgeable networks of peers.

Taken together, these networks of relationships can make a significant difference in Latino youths' lives. They can serve to help Latino youth develop healthy bicultural identities, engender motivation, and provide specific information about how to successfully navigate schooling pathways. When successful, these relationships help Latino 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 (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Latinos are now the largest minority group in U.S. schools. The majority of them are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Like other immigrants, Latinos share an optimism and hope for the future that must be cultivated and treasured; they come to see schooling as the key to a better tomorrow. Tragically, over time Latino immigrant youngsters—especially those enrolling in highly impoverished and deeply segregated schools—face negative odds and uncertain prospects. Too many Latino youngsters are leaving our schools without developing and mastering the kinds of higher-order skills needed in today's global economy and society. The future of the United States will in no small measure be tied to the fortunes of all young Americans. Because Latinos, immigrant and U.S.-born, are an increasing part of the American future, harnessing their energy, optimism, and faith in the future is in everyone's interest. Doing so is arguably one of the most important challenges for our country's democratic promise.

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