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The Role of an Immigrant Mother in her Adolescent's Identity Formation:

“Who Am I?”

Immigration is a complex bio-psycho-social process with the capacity to mobilize the destabilization of psychic structure and could profoundly influence the identity formation. Destabilization is a gradual process that requires resiliency in order to restructure the ego and reestablish an optimal psychic equilibrium.

The experience of immigration affects identity development throughout the life cycle, especially in the separation – individuation phases of infancy, adolescence, and adulthood. Immigrant mothers, in particular, carry the shadow of their former lives within their newly found identity in the host country. The nature of a mother's past life in her homeland, combined with the slow but steady change in identity as an immigrant, creates a complexity of experience that involves language acquisition, polyglottism¹ and other cultural variants—factors that significantly influence identity formation among all immigrants, but particularly among immigrant mothers. These influences, in turn, affect the separation–individuation processes of their children in the new country. The immigrant mother's secure base is lost, and if the cultural assimilation becomes complete, a newly found secure base is reborn and reconstructed.

On an internal level, the immigrant mother fluctuates between extremes of distance from her native self-representation and her newly emerging self-representation as a resident of the adopted country. The struggle in self-identity formation becomes a complex process since the immigrant mother has to negotiate her own physical and psychological separation from her infantile object to stabilize her adult experience of parenthood and adapt to a new culture and language. This in turn influences the changing conceptualization of self and other in her individuation process.

1. Amati-Mahler and colleagues (1993) describes polylinguism as acquisition of various languages in childhood.

Polyglottism is learning a language later in life, based on translation.

Failure to negotiate the distance between these self representations result in two problematic outcomes of identity (Teja and Akhtar, 1981): ethnocentric withdrawal and counter phobic assimilation. As Winnicott (1965) described, “false” and “true” selves alternating phases of closeness and distance from one or the other culture challenge the splitting of the self and the object world.

Unlike mature adults, adolescents do not have the inner stability that allows them to control their impulses, because they are in the process of integrating their standard of conduct. Adolescents normally look to parents to prevent them from letting their impulses get out of control. They look to their parents in an effort to keep their impulses from overwhelming them.

The immigrant mother struggling with their own sense of identity formation is not emotionally available for their adolescent children to offer them the assistance they need to deal and master their anxiety.

The massive upheaval of adolescence is characterized by fluctuation between regression and progression, dependency and self-reliance, male versus female, passivity versus activity, and control versus submission. The organizations of the ego, id, and superego lessen, and when this is accomplished by changes of immigration to a new host country, it could potentially create sets of new outcomes.

On the other hand, the immigrant mother shaped by the influences of her child’s transformation into adolescence and the loss of power at home and her outer world of social life, faces a sense of incompetency on many levels especially the acquisition and use of a new language. Thus, her adult individuation process becomes affected and even delayed. This latter factor leads to an intense awareness of loss of her parental authority. A lack of competency in the newly acquired language, and fear of having to replace their culture of origin with an unfamiliar

new culture bring about mourning for the loss of her symbolic, original motherland. This mandates the enlisting of defenses and coping mechanisms in order to adapt to the co-existing, contradicting and contrasting two worlds of languages, customs, mores and landscapes. Having to give up part of one's sense of individuality creates intra- psychic tension, which taxes the mother's ego structure.

Language

The immigrant's native language is the most trustworthy link to the maternal attachment figure and the culture in which she was nourished and raised. The mother tongue is a link to the earliest maternal imago. The new language may not be valued and is possibly marred with ambivalent feeling depending on the circumstances of migration. If migration is forced, as in the case of an exile, the ambivalent conflict gets expressed more prominently.

The immigrant moves in and out of two linguistic worlds; an obliged distancing from the mother tongue and in a parallel way, an obliged entry into a foreign land of new and unfamiliar sounding words. The back and forth entrance to and exit from these two worlds adds to the splitting of self-representation. The fear of the loss of one's familiar linguistic world and the fear of not being able to take ownership of the new acquired language because of one's ambivalent feeling makes the reconciliation of these two worlds more challenging.

Adopting a new language in a new land can present a threat to self-identity and disrupts the inner maternal representation of the mother tongue. Inner maternal conflict regarding language acquisition in the new country brings about a loyalty conflict both in mothers and their adolescent children, which in turn, impacts their relationship. If the immigrant mother perceives the new language as a threat to her maternal bonding with her adolescent child, she might

unconsciously reject it or make a hostile attack to lacerate the new language. She might feel as if she is replaced with a new imaginary step- mother for her child.

Constantly being spoken to in a language other than one's mother tongue can be burdensome to the immigrant mother, especially when there is lack of emotional refueling. Some adolescent children, who do understand their mother's native tongue, yet cannot converse in that language, respond in English. This may widen the gap between the mother-child dyad. The resolution of splitting the self and the object world requires a robust affect regulation, a good enough capacity for mentalization, holding on to social affiliation and a reasonable passage of time for healing.

Self-identity and cultural identity

The strength of an immigrant mother's self identity and cultural identity before migration has a great impact on her resiliency and capacity for adaptation within the new culture. Mothers with an unstable pre-immigration personality structure are at greater risk for transgressing and regressing into identity dissolution in the face of life's challenges. They have more difficulty tolerating their loneliness in the new land without extended family and social support.

Furthermore, mothers who themselves have not achieved the psychic capacity for their mid life separation-individuation process have a greater difficulty when their adolescents reach their own need to emancipate psychologically. The transformation of children into adolescents and young adults and their separation-individuation impacts their mother's individuation. Mother through mourning process would let go of youthful aspects of the self and replace them with the realization that mid life self bring about greater autonomy and competency.

The term Separation-individuation by (Blos, 1967) refers to adolescent transition, moving from close ties to the parent to the newly more autonomous self. It has been also applied to the physical migration.

The adolescent may attempt to disengage from his or her mother due to the threat of merging. Thus, there is an alternation between approaching and distancing from the mother and between idealization and devaluation. This alteration can pose a bigger threat to the immigrant mother's intra-psychic separateness.

The new identity in an immigrant mother who does not have pre-immigration character structure problems becomes consolidated into a reconstructed ego identity involving unconscious identification with the new culture. These newly borrowed identifications become integrated with the old, inherited culture of country of origin.

The immigrant mother with fragile, pre-existing, pre-immigration ego identity is prone to fragmented, partial and multiple identities leading to identity diffusion. There seems to be elasticity in the emerging expression of hybrid identity in certain psychosocial settings, where one or the other self-identity appears to be prominent. Searle's (1986) view supports this notion that a healthy identity does not possess a monolithic solidity.

Loss and mourning

The maternal immigrant faces cultural shock, multitude of losses and mourns for what was left behind. She mourns the loss of familiar surroundings, the presence of loved ones, familiar food, customs, and perhaps most importantly, the familiar cadence of her mother tongue. Feelings of guilt, anxiety, and fear are mixed with her mourning. The mourning process causes a serious disequilibrium in the individual's identity. The intrapsychic turmoil is a vestige of "Second Individuation process of adolescence" (Blos 1967). Survivor guilt over having left family

members and other fellow countrymen behind; the anxiety over the anticipated loss of her long-held value system; and the fear she will be viewed as a misfit within the new culture are dominant.

Once the mourning process moves toward liberation with the help of therapeutic intervention and social support, mother becomes emotionally available to make the progressive move toward autonomy and identity consolidation.

The mourning-liberation process of immigration results in a reconsolidated hybrid identity in individuals who are resilient and have good enough adaptive self and object representations.

There are many questions one can ask: What does the new culture offer to immigrant mothers, and at what cost does it demand on their cultural identity? How do they adapt to the American cultural myth and individuality of the American character, so foreign to their own?

It is of clinical interest to observe these mothers who navigate their identity dissolution and the building of a new cultural identity. Insulation and loneliness are inevitable outcomes when immigrant mothers strive to preserve the culture and language of their motherland in the new host country. These important issues lend themselves to other possible psychoanalytic technical dimensions relevant to our work as psychotherapists and psychoanalysts.

Sense of belonging

Immigration challenges one's sense of belonging in the host country. The sense of isolation and loneliness is interrelated with the sense of belonging. Living in hope of some day returning to one's country of origin impedes the mourning process and the newcomer's

assimilation into the foreign culture. The immigrant deals with his or her perspective of the past—alive in the present—without a clear boundary formation.

The clinician's awareness of profound significance of linguistic differences in the therapeutic and psychoanalytic setting plays an important role in the psychological outcome of the analytical process with immigrant populations. Without sensitivity to these variables, misattunement, lack of understanding, or misunderstanding of cultural nuances in the therapeutic dyad can further influence the traumatic experience of immigrants.

The case of Robert, an adolescent indicates how the shadow of past maternal identity of an immigrant mother with her multiple cultural identities influences her son's self-identity formation. The analyst also faces the complexity of one's identity transformation as a result of analytical work with an immigrant population in the therapeutic dyad. This has presented important counter-transference implications, which will not be explicated in this paper, since the focus is the immigrant mother's identity formation on her adolescent child. An exploration of different challenges during various developmental stages of the case reflects the impact of his mother's immigration issues on Robert's development.

Case of Robert, an Assyrian/Iraqi/American Adolescent

His family doctor for depression and performance anxiety referred Robert, a 17-year-old adolescent to me for treatment. In our first session, he said, "I feel I am smothered by my parents, especially my mother. When I am around them, I feel down, short-tempered, miserable, and terrible. My whole life should be focused on school only. That is what they expect of me." Robert's parents initially contacted me through their family physician because they knew I was Persian and spoke Farsi, the language of their childhood. They also knew I could not speak

Arabic, a language that they spoke as their mother tongue. They believed I would understand their cultural expectations and their Assyrian/Iraqi background far better than other doctors.

Background

Both of Robert's parents were friends since childhood. Robert's grandparents on both sides of his family migrated from Iraq to Northern Iran as young couples. Both Robert's parents were born in Iran. In their initial evaluation sessions, they relayed fond memories of their motherland, and of their tears, confusion, and upset when they had to leave. At the age of eight, Robert's mother and her family suddenly were uprooted from their familiar surroundings. Without giving any explanation they moved to Iraq. There in Iraq, they lived for almost two decades. Robert's father's family also followed their friends' family to Iraq. Robert's parents both finished their engineering degrees and married one another. Their families were very supportive of their union since they had a long history together. The young married couple decided to migrate this time to the United States.

Robert's parents, both professionals in their twenties, left Iraq for the United States, a third migration for both. This time, it was a free choice, not a political or economic necessity. They settled in Texas, where Robert and his two younger sisters were born, and then moved to the Bay Area in northern California. This move was their fourth migration.

The landscape and climate of northern California reminded them of the coastal region around the Caspian Sea in Iran, the motherland of their early childhood. This move was their fourth migration.

Robert's mother tried hard to maintain what was an unattainable ideal, a perfect mother. She paid a good deal of attention to her children's physical health and social interaction with their peers. She was raised with the help of an extended family and good social support.

However, she had to raise her children without any extended family, by herself in a foreign country.

Robert had two younger sisters, ages 14 and 13. The elder sister was born when Robert was 3 years old. In an early session, he recalled his mother coming home from the hospital with a bundle in her arms, his new sister. The following year, another baby sister was added to the family.

Early Childhood

In his preschool years, Robert felt afraid of the dark and was anxious about his mother's safety. Upon entering kindergarten, he displayed separation anxiety and fear that his mother would forget to pick him up at the end of his school day, behavior his parents believed he would grow out of. His mother also had panic attacks over the thought of losing her children, particularly Robert to kidnappers.

Robert's IQ was tested at the beginning of his Kindergarten year. Due to his superior intelligence, he was able to skip kindergarten and move directly into the first grade. In elementary school, he proved himself a good student, but his parents expected him to be excellent.

He was not allowed to have sleepovers or stay at a friend's house, and this turned into a major source of tension. On Halloween, Robert was not allowed to join his friends in trick or treat for fear of getting poisoned with candies. Mother's paranoia was at its height on this specific holiday.

Adolescent Years

Robert was allowed to play saxophone in the school band, was on the soccer team, and active in basketball. His family supported his athletic abilities by driving him for three hours

each way to another city, so he could play with an Assyrian basketball team. Robert had a few good friends whose parents were also immigrants. His effort in making friends with Anglo children was faced with maternal disapproval. Mother and son had many clashes regarding familial rules and expectations. He wanted to be like other children. He did not want to be reminded by his mother that his ethnic background was superior to others. This notion was confusing for Robert who wanted to blend in with his friends, not stand out among them.

Although Robert had been historically a good student, he failed several courses in his freshman year of high school. He was interested in girls but knew he had to hide his sexual attraction from his family, especially his mother who was not familiar with the concept of dating in this country. She grew up in a culture where dating was non-existent. Young girls and boys would go out as a group to social or sports events, but never would a young man or woman go out as a couple. Marriages were primarily arranged, and dating was a much more serious proposition with an implication that a marriage proposal would soon occur.

In high school, Robert's best friend invited him to sleep over at his house; once again his mother prevented him from doing so. She believed this would be culturally unacceptable. Robert began to rebel against his parents' authority and displayed his anger by neglecting his grades. It was at this juncture with his academic failure that his parents sought my help.

The Initial Therapeutic Process

In our first session, Robert complained angrily about being smothered by his mother. He reported that she monitored him closely and insisted that he should be an obedient son. He told me that his father had finally accepted his son's interest in political science, since he did not want to follow his father's career path as an engineer. This was an important message to me. Robert had his own separate interests and did not want to abide by his father's wishes. He felt

angry with his parents for rejecting his desire to enroll in a summer program at a prestigious university out of state, insisting instead that he live at home and attend a nearby school for the summer.

After four months of twice-weekly psychotherapy and twice-monthly parent counseling sessions, I recommended four-times-weekly psychoanalysis for Robert. His parents' reaction was an enormous shock; they interpreted this recommendation as a sign of their parental failure. However, they were willing to give therapy a try, with the understanding that Robert and I had only one year to work together before he entered college.

Course of Analytic Treatment

Robert's analytical work with me began as a struggle around how he was being transported to my office by his mother for appointments. He found me helpful when he came twice weekly, but at four times a week, he began to see me as someone who was controlling his life, just like his mother. He became angry with me and threatened to stop coming to our sessions. At the same time, however, he was curious about my background and my life in the United States.

Transference

Robert engaged with me in an intense transference relationship that contained both oedipal and pre-oedipal levels of conflict, displaying both aggressive and sexual elements. The consistent interpretation of defense in the context of the supportive parental work I provided his parents, allowed him to be more mature in his use of less primitive defenses and articulate his feelings with insight. He had friends whom he felt were untroubled and high achievers.

I knew Robert's analysis would be interrupted when he moved away to attend college and that our time was limited. I reminded him that it mattered what opinion he expressed in our

decision about continuing our work together as we had done in the past. He had friends whom he felt were untroubled and high achievers. He was happy to excel in high school and hoped he would be admitted into a prestigious university upon graduation.

Robert raised many questions about his parents, and wondered why they could not become more assimilated to American culture, as he imagined that I was. He knew his parents' migration history and noticed their visible comfort and relaxed demeanor, when they spoke with someone of their similar linguistic and cultural background. On one occasion, Robert became furious that I was not sharing my life history; he felt it was not fair that he told me all about his life without knowing much about mine. When I suggested that we needed to figure out what was so upsetting to him, he immediately responded, "You know my mother shows her mixed feelings about having left her country and living here in the States, and I can tell that she is upset, having left her own country that she misses very much. You have not told me what was it like for you when you first arrived. You don't seem to have this trouble like my mom".

When I suggested that perhaps he was worried his mother's ambivalence would turn into his own ambivalence about coming to see me, Robert nodded. Furthermore, he worried that his mixed feelings would make the good trust we had built together go away, and that would make him upset and confused. Perhaps he felt unsure if I would be able to help him with his "scary, big angry feelings" toward his mother, and toward me.

Robert was unconsciously testing maternal object representation with his newly formed developmental object, the analyst. How well he could integrate both of these object representations in the face of maternal ambivalence was my question, and remained to be seen. How Robert would discover his own individuality, sense of self-identity with his natural talents and abilities, in order to better integrate his ego function, was another big question on my mind.

Role Reversal and Translator

During my weekly parental work with the mother, I realized that she carried many conflicting feelings. Her anxiety, guilt, and shame had roots in her cultural imperatives and her deeply held fear that her competency as a mother was sorely deficient in the context of her new environment. Her anxiety was rooted in her inability to communicate with her children in a distant and borrowed language. It produced fear of losing her status as the parental authority over her them. She had to rely on her children, especially Robert, to translate when facing a multitude of social situations in which she could not comprehend what was being communicated. Furthermore, she was ambivalent about learning American English and eventually becoming a polyglot who could easily slip in and out of her triple language worlds.

The role reversal that can occur between teenagers and their parents is an important phenomenon in immigrant families, with root causes partly connected to language and custom acquisition. Robert had mixed feelings about being the translator in his family. He regularly faced situations where his mother was not able to make sense of what she heard while shopping, visiting her children's school, and in a host of other social situations. On the one hand, Robert felt burdened; yet, on the other hand, he felt elevated above his position of an adolescent to what felt more like a parent or a teacher, in comparison to his mother. This change in Robert's status occurred more frequently when he was with his mother, for his father played the traditional role of being a reliable provider who spent most of his time at work with his fellow engineer coworker and friends.

Immigrant Mothers and Identity Formation

Among many interwoven themes that emerged during Robert's therapy, one in particular centered on his cultural and self-identity. This is only one slice of our work that reflects his

struggles pertaining to the role his mother played in his identity formation.

Since their arrival in the United States, Robert's parents have remained ethnocentric and devalued American culture as too independent and "wild." They attributed much of Robert's behavior to the American way of life, and criticized him for this. His desire to connect with his peer group, many of whom belonged to other cultural backgrounds, provoked parental disapproval. His parents' rules and expectations were inconsistent with those of Anglo American teenagers as well as his peers who came from other immigrant households.

Robert felt confused, for he did not know which group of friends would meet his parents' approval. He described many fights with his mother and, particularly his father over this issue. He also argued with his sisters who were beneath him in the family status. His mother believed it was her duty to be a perfect mother and protect her children from "bad American influences." She was unaware of her boundary issues and intrusiveness. She would call Robert every couple of hours, wanting to know where he was and whom he was with.

In his work with me, Robert felt free to express his political ideas and sociological stance in regard to the United States and his parents' country of origin, Iraq. He had heard stories about Iraq and Saddam Hussein's cruelty to his people. Robert knew his parents had immigrated because they were afraid of staying in a war-stricken country, should the regime change hands. They vocalized disdain toward the country's ruler and recalled how they had planned to leave Iraq before living there became impossible.

Robert's family supported the war against Saddam's regime. Initially, Robert had some fear that I would have anti-war sentiments. However, over time, he became confident I would support his ideas. Initially he believed, if he spoke seriously and convincingly with passion, he would be able to influence me and change my mind. This had a familiar ring. I told Robert I

believed he wanted to change my opinion about the war just as he wanted to convince his father of his interest in political science. In fact, he was quite certain his conviction would persuade me.

Robert made multiple attempts to choose a love object in order to separate himself from his close ties with his mother. In particular, he felt that a relationship with a certain young girl, who was used in a developmental way, would create the desired separation. The girl, however, met with his parents' disapproval. They insisted that if Robert were ever to go out with her, or think of marrying her, he would face their disapproval. His parents made it clear that a relationship with a non-Assyrian girl was not an option for him. He knew that his parents would push him toward an Assyrian union in the future. He also realized he needed to examine his ambivalent feelings about his mother and fear of his father's aggression.

Although Robert admired his father, he was afraid of his father's temper. His solution was to spend more time in the company of his mother and avoid talking to his father. This was a familiar theme from his Oedipal period, when he showed a desire to be with his mother and resented the presence of his father and newborn sister. The reemergence of the Oedipal theme in Robert's adolescent phase was significant. The earlier developmental anxieties of the phallic-oedipal phase once again reappeared in this treatment phase.

The Experience of Accent

Robert understood the Assyrian language, but could not speak in an articulate way. He was the translator of her mother's emotional and language worlds. He had never objected to his translator role in his family, even though he often felt burdened by this.

In one of his later sessions, Robert shared his feelings about his parents' accent. He reported that, whenever he invited a friend over to his house, he secretly hoped his mother would be out shopping with her friends. I suggested that he speaks fluent English, and when he hears

his mother's accent, discontinuity is created in his mind, as if he sensed discordance in the flow of their conversational interaction.

Furthermore, Robert expressed concern over the way their mother-and-son conversations might have sounded to his friends. I reminded him that he knew I also have an accent, and earlier he had been curious about the place from where I had emigrated. He replied that when in an early session he had asked about my accent, I made him guess. That same evening, he reported, he had asked his mother where I was from, and she told him. After that, he stopped asking about my accent.

Cultural Differences

Robert enumerated multiple areas of cultural gap between his parents' culture and that of the American families he'd come to know. His sensitivity in identifying differences in the outside world extended in a parallel way to his ability to recognize differences between his thoughts and feelings and those of his mother. In the middle phase of his analysis, Robert expressed a wish that his mother would allow him to be different and not expect him to be the kind of son who has views identical to hers.

I pointed out that he was keen about our differences too, especially now that he was moving closer to the end of our work. I added that he knows he has his own sense of agency and separateness that is different from his mother and me. I have added that he is also worried, that if he becomes too separated from her, he will lose her love and my caring feeling for him as well. At this point, Robert lapsed into silence, thought some more, and then nodded.

As we neared the end of his second half of analysis, Robert, who was a handsome young man, began dyeing his hair even more frequently than before, in order to look Western. His fair skin and altered hair color gave him the illusion of being of "European descent". This change in

his appearance, a result of dyeing his hair, took place around the time of the attack on Iraq and again during his termination period. Robert denied experiencing anxiety over the war in Iraq. He reported that it was his father who would sit glued to the television, obsessed about all the details of the war. This was his defense against identification with his parental socio-political and ethnic identity.

The Search for a Consolidated Ethnic Identity

Robert struggled to find himself and form a better sense of identity. He wished for a more consolidated sense of ethnic identity but was ambivalent about identifying with his mother in this respect, or relying on his newly formed sense of American-ness. Did he have an Assyrian/Iraqi part within, as did his parents, or was his more of an American identity? At home, Robert spoke English to his parents, while his parents answered him in Assyrian. Although he understood most of what they said, he could not speak Assyrian. He felt left out when his parents conversed in their mother tongue.

This linguistic intimacy between his parents excluded Robert from the parental couple and initiated a reemergence of the Oedipal conflict. This old, yet new, version of the conflict presented Robert with a reminder that his parents had their own separate existence and functioned as a unit without him but within their own couple relationship.

Robert's view of his parents' customs, language, dress, and other sociological phenomena permitted him to identify with them; and yet, it made him ambivalent as to how to identify with the new parental mores. His view of his struggles toward identity formation must have caused Robert more inner turmoil and threatened identity diffusion, subsequently giving rise to an overwhelming anxiety.

Dismayed with their apparent lack of parental influence on Robert to maintain continuity of their long-held customs and values, Robert's parents defensively adhered to an ethnocentric mode of existence, insisting that Robert would have to comply. This was evident regarding their idea about clothes and their appearances. The parents' integration into the new host country encountered impediments of many kinds, which resulted in a sense of powerlessness, loss of status and their identity.

Sexual Mores

Robert often felt guilty when he had to keep his attraction toward a female classmate secret. He felt even more guilt when he took the girl to a movie theater and then lied to his parents about where he had been. He told me, "If they knew about it they would have a heart attack!" We discussed the dilemma he was in and listed the pros and cons of revealing and concealing the news from his parents. Robert responded that once he turns eighteen, his parents would no longer be able to do anything about it. Then, he will be able to do what he wants with his life. Until then, however, he will have to wait. His mother's sexual mores were completely different from their American host country. Dating, sexual activity or experimentation with the opposite sex did not belong to her world. It was difficult to discuss with his mother what is considered normal adolescent sexuality. It was necessary to keep Robert's behavior and thoughts confidential.

Vying for Control

During Robert's senior year of high school, after his acceptance into several prestigious universities, his parents decided to make plans for him to live at home and attend a nearby community college. They were convinced Robert would be better off under their supervision, and relayed to me their belief that he would not get into drugs and alcohol if he lived at home.

Robert was furious with his parents' decision. He felt his mother was controlling him and this was her way of feeling empowered and regaining her lost status. After many sessions with Robert's parents, they agreed to support their son's desire to attend a university a few hours away and live in the dorm. Although, my work with Robert was time limited and he had the benefit of four times weekly for one year, he made good, observable developmental gains. It is hard to know what where he would be, had he not entered in treatment. Both Robert and his family were hopeful, open-minded and motivated him.

Conclusion and Discussion

Robert's case presents us with several important aspects of the immigrant mother's identity and cultural values and their influence on Robert's identity formation as he went through various stages of his development and psychic reorganization.

The influences of the language, self-identity, loss and mourning and a sense of not belonging in new host country are among important factors which impacted, in parallel process respective psychic structures of the immigrant mother and her adolescent child's separation-individuation and oedipality. His journey through various phases of his developmental migration, presents a challenge for the necessary, age appropriate adolescent transformative changes.

The adolescent emigrates from the family and moves into a world of freedom, supposedly functioning autonomously at the end of the latency period. The developmental/psychological migration of adolescent is important in order to establish an optimal distance from his mother to achieve a completion of his individuation. At the same time, the psychic equilibrium of the immigrant mother is affected by the new host country's expectation to be able to acculturate with no delay. If the cultural settings of the host country are hostile, they can adversely affect the psychological equilibrium of the mother.

The integration of maternal ambivalent feelings are particularly crucial, since the immigrant mother struggles to resolve her own ambivalence in order to offer her ego strengths to her adolescent child, helping resolve his developmental conflicts. Her ambivalence could be pervasive, but as one example here, can be noted when it applies to a new language acquisition and the usage levels of the mother tongue.

Adolescent progressive and regressive experiences and incorporation of his maternal cultural and ethnic upbringing become more exaggerated. Thus the adolescent has a much more difficult task to reconcile his identification with his immigrant mother. The adolescent's task becomes even more daunting when the mother is struggling to solidify her own sense of multi-cultural identity, having to overcome her ambivalence. The mother may experience the distancing of her child as more of a threat during the second rapprochement phase of adolescence. The threat to her ego integrity would not permit her to be present to help her child's ego strengths and integration of his identity. Thus, both the newly acquired self-representation and the old self-representation of mother and child become more vulnerable and subject to fragmentation during this process.

The developmental line of the adolescent and the developmental line of the mother intersect and influence one another. The mother's projections of her self-representation onto the adolescent would increase the internal conflict of her already troubled sense of newly acquired American identity as well as her previous, yet present and alive ethnic identity. Establishment of sexual identity as part of overall self-identity will present conflicts as well.

If the immigrant mother has conflicts around her child's sense of loyalty to the host country and her own dis-identification with American culture or language, then the individuation process and formation of intimacy outside of the family setting would become even more

problematic. Furthermore, the establishment of mastery and control over libidinal and aggressive drives by means of restructuring the psychic apparatus (including the ego, superego, and the ego ideal) present difficulty for him. Additionally, the final resolution of the Oedipus complex, in both positive and negative aspects, facilitated by temporary regression to an earlier level of conflict in the adolescent phase would not be without significant. The final task of genital primacy for adolescents also becomes complicated if the immigrant mother is unable to deal with her ambivalent feelings about new customs, language, sexual mores and a lack of integration between ethnic identity and newly acquired self-identity.

As Peter Blos suggests, the mandatory part of normal development, in which there is a reworking of the early separation-individuation process of the first three years of life during the adolescent phase, would find a new opportunity to work through a second individuation process, providing the parents have resolved their own conflicts. Parental prohibition prevents the adolescent from forming a peer-object relationship and hinders the individuation process by way of separating from their intra-psychic infantile object ties and dependencies. The process of separating from maternal ties and turning to group affiliation would be problematic.

The regressive and progressive processes accompanied by both depressive affects at the loss of earlier object ties and exhilaration at the development of independent autonomous functioning would be compromised. Adolescents cope with the anxiety and depression created by this process either by withdrawal and inactivity or by motor activity, which may take on frantic proportions in their efforts to escape loneliness and boredom. The ambivalence of early object relations again reappears in this phase. The adolescent ego finds the ambivalence intolerable, and it will lead to defensive operations of negativism, oppositionalism, and indifference.

Some adolescents act out their immigration neurosis² by rebelling against parental social and cultural values. Their rebelliousness has a particular quality of intense forcefulness. It carries with it earlier roots of their unresolved mother-child dyadic conflicts, mis-attunement and possible attachment disruptions. When the value system of a mother within the nuclear family clashes with her adolescent child, the psychological emancipation of the adolescent becomes strained.

Adolescents in their strong fantasy framework strive to belong to their new peer group. Parents do not belong to their world, particularly if the immigrant parents present a variety of different social and cultural values discordant to the contemporary culture. Robert's case suggests that both positive and negative aspects of ethnic identification become diluted during his adolescence, while identification with parental mores must have taken place at the same time. In addition, his mother's mourning process at the start of her migration left Robert with an unfinished internal work of his first separation –individuation process.

His mother's own mid life separation-individuation issues, because of her multiple migrations, again delayed Robert's adolescent's second separation-individuation process. Additionally, his oedipal phase was impacted due to his left over unresolved pre-oedipal conflicts and unfinished first separation-individuation process. His fear of being overpowered and controlled by his mother, aggressive impulses toward her, and castration fear were the central features of his turmoil. His father, who was not his ally, contributed to his low self-esteem and lack of confidence. His father's loss of status and the absence of cultural support weakened him in Robert's eyes.

Robert's analysis and my parent work with his immigrant mother illustrate an important consideration: working with an immigrant population will require accommodation of the

therapeutic framework to cultural differences, assuming the role of a developmental object, and conducting the developmental work to facilitate the individuation process. In working with this kind of patients, the analyst potentially encounters higher degrees of complexity involving a modified analytic technique, special concerns with transference/ counter-transference dilemma, and a more sensitive attunement to cultural and language differences.

2. The author defines “Immigration Neurosis” as an internal conflict associated with being an immigrant, displaced person or refugee, similar to “Traumatic Neurosis” or “War Neurosis”.

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