

THE ROLE OF AN IMMIGRANT MOTHER IN HER ADOLESCENT'S IDENTITY FORMATION: "WHO AM I?"

Mali Mann¹

Immigration is a complex bio-psycho-social process and the immigrant mother has a truly complex task in lending her ego strength to her adolescent offspring. The normal adolescence's decaathesis of the love object and the consequent search for a new object may not happen smoothly for those adolescents whose mothers are immigrants. The immigration experience may cause the immigrant mother, who lost her motherland, deeper disturbance in self-identity as well as disequilibrium in her psychic structure, which in turn impacts adversely her adolescent's development. The adolescent's inadequate early experience with an immigrant mother may result in a deeper disturbance in his separation-individuation process as well as his identification process. An immigrant mother who has not mourned adequately, with a different sociocultural background has to go through a far more complex development of motherhood. The case of an adolescent boy, Jason, demonstrates the impact of immigrant motherhood on his ego development.

KEY WORDS: cultural identity; self identity; mother tongue; loss; mourning separation-individuation process

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Immigration is a complex bio-psycho-social process with the capacity to mobilize the destabilization of the psychic structure, which can profoundly influence identity formation (Akhtar, 1994, 1999). Destabilization is a gradual process and resiliency will be required to restructure the ego and reestablish an optimal psychic equilibrium.

The immigration experience affects identity development throughout the life cycle (Akhtar, 2004), especially during the separation-individuation phases of infancy, adolescence, and adulthood. Immigrant mothers, in particular, carry the shadow of their former lives within their newly found

Mali Mann, M.D., is Training and Supervising Psychoanalyst, child supervisor at San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis. Clinical Professor, Adjunct, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University Medical Center.

Address correspondence to Mali Mann, M.D., 550 Hamilton Avenue, Suite 329, Palo Alto, CA 94301.

identities in their host countries (Mann, 2004). 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, polyglottism² 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 her changing conceptualization of self and other in her individuation process.

Failure to successfully negotiate the distance between these self representations can 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, may intensify the splitting of the self and the object world.

Unlike mature adults, adolescents do not have the inner stability to support appropriate levels of impulse control, 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 to keep their impulses from overwhelming them.

The immigrant mother struggling with her own sense of identity formation is not emotionally available to help her adolescent children with the assistance they need to deal with and be able to create a sense of mastery over their anxiety.

Adolescence is a massive upheaval, characterized by fluctuations between regression and progression, dependency and self-reliance, gender issues related to being male or female, passivity and activity, as well as control and submission. The organizations of the ego, id, and superego lessen, and when this is accompanied by changes of immigration to a new host country, it could potentially create sets of new outcomes for the adolescent (Mehta, 1998).

The immigrant mother, on the other hand, shaped by the influences of her child's transformation into adolescence, loss of power at home, as well as

in her new social world outside her family life, faces a sense of incompetency on many levels, especially the acquisition and use of a new language. 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 mother tongue. Thus, her adult individuation process becomes affected or even delayed. This can lead to an intense awareness of her loss of parental authority. This mandates the enlisting of defenses and coping mechanisms, in order to help her adapt to the two co-existing, contradicting and contrasting 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 may be more prominently expressed.

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. Constant navigation between these two worlds adds to the splitting of self-representation. The fear of losing 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 feelings, 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 can disrupt 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 being replaced by 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 in 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, a 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 processes impact their mother's individuation. Through a mourning process, the mother would let go of youthful aspects of the self and replace them with the realization that a mid life self can 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 also been applied to the physical migration. The adolescent may attempt to disengage from his or her mother due to the threat of merging with her. Thus, the adolescent alternates between approaching and moving away from the mother, as well as idealizing and devaluing her. This back and forth can pose a greater threat to the immigrant mother's intrapsychic 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 be 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. Searles' (1986) view supports this notion that a healthy identity does not possess a monolithic solidity.

LOSS AND MOURNING

The maternal immigrant faces cultural shock, numerous 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 intra-psychic turmoil is a vestige of the second individuation process of adolescence (Blos, 1967). Survivor guilt over having left family members and fellow countrymen behind, the anxiety over the anticipated loss of her long-held value system, and the fear that 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, the mother becomes emotionally available to make a 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 to 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 must be aware of the profound significance that linguistic differences play in the therapeutic and psychoanalytic setting. These differences play an important role in the psychological outcome of the analytical process with immigrant populations. Lack of sensitivity to them can cause mis-attunement, lack of understanding, or misunderstanding of

cultural nuances in the therapeutic dyad, and can further traumatize immigrants.

The analyst, working with an immigrant population, also faces complex identity transformation issues in the therapeutic dyad. It means that in doing analytical work with immigrant populations, the analyst inevitably goes through a re-working of his or her identity structure. This has important counter-transference implications, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

The case of Jason, an adolescent, indicates how the shadow of an immigrant mother's past maternal identity and her multiple cultural identities influence her son's self-identity formation. Different challenges arose during the various developmental stages in the case of an adolescent, Jason, whose mother's immigration issues had an impact on his psychic development.

CASE OF JASON, AN IRAQI-AMERICAN ADOLESCENT

The family doctor referred Jason, a 17-year-old adolescent, for treatment of depression and performance anxiety. 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." Jason'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 ethnic Kurdish/Iraqi background far better than other doctors.

Background

Jason's grandparents on both sides of his family migrated from Iraq to Northern Iran as young couples. Both of Jason's parents were born in Iran and have been friends since childhood. 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, Jason's mother and her family suddenly were uprooted from their familiar surroundings. Without explanation they moved to Iraq, where they continued to live for almost two decades. Jason's father's family followed their friends' family to Iraq, where Jason's parents both earned degrees in architecture, and ultimately married each other. Their families were very supportive of their union since they had a long history together.

The young married couple decided to migrate a third time, this time to the United States. By this time, both were professionals in their twenties and left

Iraq by choice, not out of political or economic necessity. They settled in Atlanta, Georgia, where Jason and his two younger sisters were born, and then moved to the Bay Area in northern California, 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.

Jason's mother tried hard to be a perfect mother—an unattainable ideal. 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.

Jason had two younger sisters, ages 12 and 11. The elder sister was born when Jason was 4 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, Jason was afraid of the dark and 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 outgrow. His mother also had panic attacks over the thought of losing her children, particularly Jason to kidnapers.

Jason's IQ was tested at the beginning of kindergarten. 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, Jason was not allowed to go trick or treating with his friends for fear of getting poisoned with candies. His mother's paranoia was at its height on this specific holiday.

Adolescent years

Jason was allowed to play clarinet in the school band, and was on the basketball team. His family supported his athletic abilities by driving him for three hours each way to another city, so he could play on the team. Jason had a few good friends whose parents were also immigrants. His effort to make friends with Anglo children was faced with maternal disapproval. Jason had many clashes with his mother over 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 Jason who wanted to blend in with his friends, not stand out among them.

Historically, Jason had been a good student, but 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, Jason'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. Jason began to rebel against his parents' authority and expressed 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, Jason 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 studying international relations since he did not want to follow his father's career path as an architect. This was an important message to me. Jason 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 Jason. 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 Jason and I had only one year to work together before he entered college.

Course of analytic treatment

Jason'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

Jason 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 allowed him to be more mature in his use of less primitive defenses and to articulate his feelings with insight.

I knew Jason'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.

Jason raised many questions about his parents, and wondered why they could not become more assimilated into 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, Jason 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, Jason 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.

Jason 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 Jason 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 role

During my weekly parental work with the mother, I realized that she had many conflicted 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. She feared losing her status as their parental authority. She had to rely on her children, especially Jason, to translate in many 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. Jason 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, Jason felt burdened; yet, on the other hand, he felt elevated to a superior position of a parental authority beyond his actual capability of being an adolescent. He felt more like a parent or a teacher, in comparison to his mother. This change in Jason's status occurred more frequently when he was with his mother, for his father played the traditional role of 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 Jason's therapy, one in particular centered on his cultural and self-identity. This is only one part 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, Jason's parents have remained ethnocentric and devalued American culture as being too independent and "wild." They attributed much of Jason'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.

Jason 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 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 Jason every hour, wanting to know where he was and whom he was with.

In his work with me, Jason 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. Jason 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.

Jason's family supported the war against Saddam's regime. Initially, Jason 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 him I believed he wanted to change my opinion about the war just as he wanted to convince his father of his interest in International relation. In fact, he was quite certain his conviction would persuade me.

Jason 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, whom he used in a developmental way, would create the desired separation. The girl, however, met with his parents' disapproval. They insisted that if Jason 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 girl, not from his Kurdish ethnic group, was not an option for him. He knew that his parents would push him toward a union from his own ethnic group in the future. He also realized he needed to examine his ambivalent feelings about his mother and fear of his father's aggression.

Although Jason 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 later the newborn sister. The reemergence of the Oedipal theme in Jason'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

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

In one of his later sessions, Jason 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 because he speaks fluent English, when he hears his mother's accent, a discontinuity is created in his mind, as if he sensed discordance in the flow of their conversational interaction.

Jason also expressed concern over the way his conversations with his mother may have sounded to his friends. I reminded him that he knew I also have an accent, and earlier he had been curious about the country from where I had emigrated. He replied that when he had asked about my accent in an early session, 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

Jason 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, Jason 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, which 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, Jason lapsed into silence, thought some more, and then nodded.

As we neared the end of his second half of analysis, Jason, 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 military attack on Iraq and again during his termination period. Jason 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

Jason struggled to find his own self, the ability to form a more reliable sense of self identity. In particular, he wished for a more consolidated sense of ethnic identity, but was ambivalent about identifying with his mother. In this respect, having to rely on his newly formed sense of Americanness was tenuous. Did he have a Kurdish/Iraqi part within, as did his parents, or was his identity connected to an Anglo-American identity? At home, Jason spoke English to his parents, while his parents answered him in Kurdish. Although he understood most of what they said, he could not speak Kurdish. He felt left out when his parents conversed in their mother tongue.

This linguistic intimacy between his parents excluded Jason from the parental couple and initiated a reemergence of the Oedipal conflict. This old, yet new version of the conflict presented Jason with a new reminder that his parents had their own separate existence; and functioned as a unit in their couple relationship while he felt like an outsider.

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

He was dismayed with their relative absence of parental influence and not maintaining more consistently a continuity of their long-held customs and values. His parents defensively adhered to an ethnocentric mode of existence, insisting that Jason would have to comply with their wishes. This was evident regarding their ideas about clothing and appearance. The parents' integration into the new host country encountered impediments of many kinds, which resulted a sense of powerlessness, loss of status and their own identity diffusion.

Sexual mores

Jason 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 had 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. Jason 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 those in their American host country. Dating, sexual activity or experimentation with the opposite sex did not belong to her world. It was difficult for me to discuss with his mother what is considered normal adolescent sexuality in Anglo-American culture, she was unwilling to accept it. On the other hand, it was necessary for Jason to keep his thoughts and behavior to himself and for me to keep it confidential.

Vying for control

During Jason'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 he would be better off under their supervision, and told me they believed that he would avoid getting into drugs and drinking alcohol if he lived at home. Jason 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 Jason'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 Jason was time limited, he had the benefit of four times weekly for one year, and he made good, observable developmental gains. It is hard to know where he would be, had he not entered into treatment. Both Jason and his family were hopeful, open-minded and motivated.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Jason's case presents us with several important aspects of the immigrant mother's identity, cultural values and their influence on her son's identity formation as he goes through various stages of development and psychic reorganization.

The influences of the language, self-identity, loss and mourning and a sense of not belonging in a new host country are important factors which impact, in parallel process, respective the 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 his 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 an 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 that she be able to acculturate without delay. If the cultural settings of the host country are hostile or traumatizing, they can adversely affect the psychological equilibrium of the mother.

The integration of maternal ambivalent feelings are particularly crucial, because the immigrant mother struggles to resolve her own ambivalence in order to offer her ego strengths to her adolescent child. She will have to help him further to resolve his developmental conflicts during this phase of adolescence. Her ambivalence might be pervasive, but as seen here, is particularly noticeable by how often she uses the new language and how frequently she reverts to using 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 could prevent her from being fully present to help her child's ego strengths and identity integration. Thus, both the mother and child's newly acquired self-representations, as well as their old self-representations of mother and child can become more vulnerable and subject to fragmentation during this process.

A mother and her son's respective developmental lines intersect and influence one another. The mother's projections of her self-representation onto the adolescent can increase the internal conflict of an already troubled sense of newly acquired American identity, as well as her previous, yet present and alive, ethnic identity. Establishing a sexual identity, as part of overall self-identity, can 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 can 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) can present difficulty for the adolescent.

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 psychological repercussions. 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 (1967, p. 163) in his paper, called "The second Individuation process of Adolescence," 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 could 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 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 neurosis³ 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 mother's value system within the nuclear family, clashes with her adolescent child's value system, 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 when the immigrant parents present a variety of different social and cultural values that are discordant with contemporary culture. Jason's case suggests that both positive and negative aspects of ethnic identification became 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 Jason with unfinished internal work from his first separation-individuation process.

Because of his mother's many migrations and her own mid life separation-individuation issues, Jason's second, or adolescent separation-individuation process was delayed, too. His oedipal phase was also affected, due to residual unresolved pre-oedipal conflicts and an unfinished first separation-individuation process. His fear of being overpowered and controlled by his mother, his aggressive impulses toward her, and his castration anxiety 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 Jason's eyes.

Jason's analysis and my parent work with his immigrant mother illustrate an important point: working with an immigrant population requires accommodating 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 these types of patients, the analyst can encounter higher degrees of complexity involving a modified analytic technique, special concerns with transference and counter-transference dilemmas, and a more sensitive attunement to cultural and language differences.

NOTES

1. Mali Mann, M.D., is Training and Supervising Psychoanalyst, Child supervisor at San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis. She is Clinical Professor, Adjunct, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University Medical Center as well as North American Co-Chair of Committee of Child and Adolescent Psychoanalysis/ International Psychoanalytic Association and Chair of Inter-Committee on Child Abuse and Prevention/ International Psychoanalytic Association. She is vice chair of the Adjunct Clinical Council and a faculty lecturer at the Department of Psychiatry, Child Psychiatry Division of Stanford University. She gives psychoanalytic courses and talks in the Bay Area. She has authored several psychoanalytic papers, book reviews, book chapters and poetry. Her book on *Psychoanalytic Aspects of Assisted Reproductive Technology* was published by Karnac in 2014. She is a member of Pegasus Physicians writers at Stanford University. Her creative writing is primarily poetry and nonfiction. She is currently working on a collection of her poems. She finds the interconnection between poetry and paintings inspiring. Her artistic creative introspection allows her to be expressed through her painting. A member of Flying Doctors for the last twenty years, she volunteers to help staff at orphanages in Mexico and treat patients in the clinics.
2. Amati-Mahler (1995) describes polylinguism as acquisition of various languages in childhood. Polyglottism is learning a language later in life, based on translation.
3. 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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