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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

**FAITH AND REBELLION: PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND RISK
FACTORS FOR THE ADOLESCENT CHILDREN OF RELIGIOUSLY
OBSERVANT MEXICAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN SUBURBAN
CHICAGO**

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Mexican-Americans comprise a significant minority of the population of Chicago and its surrounding suburbs (U.S. Census, 2000). This paper examines the experience of some recently-immigrated Mexican-Americans in a mid-size Chicago suburb, Addison, Illinois. By sharing five case studies from my clinical experience as a school social worker in Addison, I hope to explore the different ways that Mexican-American immigrant's religious beliefs and practices impact the life experience of their adolescent children. Using a risk and resilience perspective from social work literature (Fraser, 2004; Greene, 2002; Walsh, 2001; Wolin & Wolin, 1993), I will analyze these five case studies to discern how Mexican immigrant's religious practices can act as both protective factors and risk factors for their children as they navigate through adolescence towards adulthood. I will also pay special attention to some of the ideas about segmented assimilation contained in Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and offer my own ideas about how the traditional strengths of Mexican family culture--collectivism, respect for authority, and loyalty--can be harnessed through immigrant religion to help avoid some of the more pernicious aspects of assimilation to American culture (Falicov, 1996).

Addison as a Gateway for New Mexican-American Immigration

Situated in the far western suburbs of Chicago, Addison is an unremarkable mid-size blue-collar suburb in DuPage County of roughly 36,000 people (U.S. Census, 2000). Reflecting the general trend of out-migration from the inner city as well as immigration directly from Mexico, Addison has joined Melrose Park, Berwyn, West Chicago, Hanover Park and Cicero as having one of the largest Latino populations of Chicago's suburbs. Addison is the eighth-largest Latino suburban population in Chicago today (Harvard, 2002). Presently, the U.S. Census and Addison's local government report that almost 30% of Addison's population is Latino--and of that, 25% is Mexican-American (U.S. Census, 2000; Addison, 2004). No data is available on what percentage of those Mexican-Americans in Addison are immigrants directly from Mexico, though in a decade of working there I would estimate that a significant minority of that 25% is composed of parents who emigrated from Mexico and who have school-age children in Addison's schools. The increase in immigration to places like Melrose Park, Hanover Park, West Chicago and Addison can be in part explained by the many blue-collar jobs available to them in the commercial strips and small industrial plants and warehouses that dot the edge cities of the above towns as well as the larger commercial centers of "edge cities" like Naperville, Schaumburg, and Hoffman Estates. Mexican immigrants appear to be skipping the urban immigration process altogether, and bypassing Pilsen and the Back of the Yards neighborhood to settle directly in blue-collar suburbs like Addison (Badillo, 2004).

As Mexican-American parents raise their children in Addison, many are experiencing American culture for the first time. This is a fact not lost on the schools of Addison where I worked for almost ten years. There are three elementary schools (Lincoln, Fullerton, and Army Trail Schools) that are majority-minority schools, with Latinos outnumbering whites. All three schools have large bilingual education programs, and many of the parents of these students speak only Spanish and are recent immigrants from Mexico. This has required the school to hire many bilingual staff including social workers, nurses, and special education personnel. The middle school where I worked, Indian Trail Junior High, had a population of 1,200 students in grades six

through eight, with roughly 30% of the student population being Latino, 65% white, and the remaining 5% a mixture of black and Asian-American (Addison District 4, 2004).

While many Addison Latino parents have achieved some working proficiency with English by the time their children reach early adolescence, it is clear that they were not yet fully comfortable with either the language or the culture of our school. Our school typically had trouble engaging Mexican immigrant parents, even when we had bilingual staff present or translators available (for my part, I had enough Spanish to do a clinical interview with parents, but not enough to talk casually with a Spanish-only parent on the phone). Many of our immigrant parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences, and many preferred to let the school handle problems affecting their children, rarely challenging our authority. These five case studies, then, are significant for their sociological and religious content, but are also in retrospect significant that *they happened at all*: the severity of upset and crisis necessitated that these immigrant parents become involved with the school, and in the process exposed their family and culture to our “Anglo” psychological interventions and our potential judgment. That these families included me in such difficult times to such a degree is no small thing, and even as I modify their identifying information to preserve their confidentiality, I feel that telling their stories here is a way to honor their struggles.

Addison Stories

Beatriz and her 15th Birthday

Beatriz was an old eighth grader, having repeated a grade early on when she didn’t speak enough English for a regular class, and didn’t speak enough Spanish to be in a purely bilingual environment. Now she was six months away from her fifteenth birthday, and she was a mess. She wanted to run away, she wanted to elope with her boyfriend, she wanted anything but to turn 15.

Like many Mexican girls, she was expected to celebrate her “Quinceanera,” or 15th birthday, with all of extended family and friends. The family had been planning this event for years, having a dress made back in Mexico, and booking the banquet hall and church two years

in advance. Uncles and aunts, kin and distant relatives Beatriz didn't even know were coming in from Mexico for the big day. It was all her mother and her friends talked about, and her father was proudly inviting all of his friends at the nearby tool-and-die factory to come see his daughter.

There was just one problem: Beatriz wasn't going to be there. She had told her parents that she didn't want to have a Quinceanera, because they had stopped her from seeing her 25-year old boyfriend, who she was sexually active with, and who had tried in vain to get her parent's approval. She told her father, who had already beaten her once over this boyfriend, that she would run away and leave the whole family in the lurch if they didn't let her see her boyfriend again. Her father told her she was an impure girl now and maybe even a whore, and told her that they would go to see their parish priest to sort this out, "once and for all."

The parish priest, a white man who had recently moved to their mixed-race parish community, spoke enough Spanish to hear out Beatriz' father. To the surprise of father and daughter, he didn't rebuke Beatriz, but instead counseled the family to allow Beatriz to express her feelings and to have some say in how her Quincenera was to be celebrated. He even spoke to Beatriz about the risks of pre-marital sex and encouraged her to not see her boyfriend until she was a little older and until her parents had met his parents. Driving home from the meeting, Beatriz' dad resolved to work together with his daughter to make her "coming out" party a special day for her and for everyone, even if it meant that he had a daughter who wasn't a virgin anymore.

Jose and the Currandera

Jose Valdez was a good boy, liked by everybody at our school, friendly if a bit quiet. Until he started hearing the voices.

Having already been placed in a special education class for low reading scores, he was absent three days in a row when his mother called the school, wailing in Spanish that "some devil had taken her son." With the help of a translator, I traveled to the house and learned that Jose had been talking for weeks at home about how voices were telling him to hurt people,

especially his family. He had taken a knife to his sister, and his mother was afraid to go to work, worried that he might run away or might hurt somebody in the neighborhood. Jose's father was gone, having left several years earlier, and Mrs. Valdez said that she had seen some of the same behavior at times from her ex-husband. When we encouraged her to take her son to a local emergency room to be evaluated, she politely refused, saying that "there's nothing that they can do for him there. He needs to go back to our village in Mexico."

Interviewing Jose, it was clear that he met the criteria for a psychotic disorder, possibly the beginning stages of schizophrenia. He appeared to have some family history (there was an older brother who had "gone back to Mexico" and stayed for similar symptoms as well as the father's rages), and was in desperate need of some evaluation and maybe medication. But how could we get Mrs. Valdez to take him in? We considered overriding her altogether and calling 911 right then, but then Mrs. Valdez gave us an idea. She told us of a *currandera* (a Mexican folk healer, specializing in fortune telling and folk remedies for physical and mental problems) that had helped her older son a few years ago, until she had finally sent him back to Mexico.

I produced a release of information form, Mrs. Valdez signed it, and within 20 minutes I was talking to the *currandera*, who operated out of a strip mall space nearby. She listened intently to my clinical description, and in her own broken English (and my broken Spanish) we brokered a deal where she would encourage Mrs. Valdez to get Jose evaluated at the local ER, with the proviso that if he wasn't better in a few weeks, she would tell Mrs. Valdez to send him back home. A week later, when Jose was back from the hospital psych unit and on some serious anti-psychotic medication, he was stable enough to come back to school and finish his school year successfully. The next time he went to his village in Mexico was for his regular summer trip.

Carlos and his Two Ghosts

Carlos acted pretty tough outside of my office. He talked back to teachers sometimes, and his portly sixth-grade body gave a lot more abuse to other boys than it took. His raw edginess contrasted sharply with the Carlos I saw in my office for his weekly counseling

sessions: with me alone Carlos cried and read me poetry, and raged at the many people that didn't understand how sad he felt all the time. And always Carlos wore his t-shirt with his dead twin sister on the front, and the late singer Selena on the back. They were his two spirits, the two people that he wrote his poetry for and who he missed everyday.

Carlos was in a special education classroom for "low kids," a bloodless term that essentially meant that they didn't (and maybe couldn't) learn at grade level. Again, I didn't see this in Carlos. His poetry was dense and complicated, and he spoke of all the many ways that he had prayed for his sister since she died when they were six, and the many ways that he had memorialized Selena since her untimely death in 1995. He was also an amateur theologian, lamenting that part of what made him so sad was that his parent's Pentecostal church teachings and their refusal to listen to what "God is telling me."

They belonged to an Assembly of God church in a nearby town, where Carlos had been going since the family came from Mexico when he and his sister were four. Now he was eleven, and his parents were tired of his grieving for his sister. They told him that their pastor had told them that his sister was "better off in heaven now" and that he had to stop feeling so sad and missing her. He hated this and told me that he wished he could tell his parents how he felt, but he worried that they would tell the pastor again and that he would tell him to just give his sister up to the Lord. "God doesn't want me to forget my sister, just like he doesn't want me to forget Selena. My parents are believing a lie about God." As I listened to this, I tried to remember that this was a boy that was supposed to be "slow."

Manny's Redemption

The gun wasn't supposed to go off. It was supposed to be held by Manny in his room, until his gang elders came for it later. Instead, Manny, age 14, showed it to his 11-year old brother Sal and it went off as they played with it. Now Sal was in intensive care, with a bullet wound in his belly that had somehow not pierced his stomach and killed him. Manny was frozen in grief in his room, afraid to leave, feeling that God had judged him as unworthy to live. His father felt the same way, and wept and cursed at himself in my office a day after the shooting.

The family had emigrated from Spain and Mexico, and they were devoutly Catholic. Manny's mom stayed frozen in her own grief; first she had been scared to lose her older son to gangs, and now she had almost lost her younger son.

Interestingly, Sal seemed the least devastated by the whole event. He had almost instantly forgiven his brother, and was eager to talk to him again and get things back to normal when he got home from the hospital. He was healing, but the rest of his family wasn't. Knowing the family's intense religious devotion, I managed to get Sal's father and Manny to talk to me separately about the need to seek some way to be forgiven for this terrible event; both talked to their priest and Manny promised to find a way to leave his gang after he had a dream where he said God told him that this was his "last chance" to get his life back together. While this was going on, we had the issue of how to bring both boys back to our school, with all the rumors and fear that were going around. A deeply cynical and burned out administrator at my school offered a surprise bid at redemption for Manny: he agreed to let Manny join our conflict resolution program to help kids settle conflicts, knowing that Manny had a lot to atone for and that he would be a natural at helping others.

Adriana and "All God's Children"

Like many students in our self-contained special education classrooms, Adriana Ramos was polite, almost passive in her learning style. She didn't make waves, but she also didn't push herself to see how much she could learn. Being a recent immigrant didn't help her language facility either, though it had been three years and she seemed to be able to speak and read at a third grade level. This was still four grades below her chronological age, but her teachers saw progress and invited the parents in for the annual parent-teacher conference.

We were all shocked to see the Ramos family: she was one of seven kids, and was the oldest. She had never talked about her role as caretaker at home, though to judge from how she played with, held, and corrected her siblings, she was a powerful person at home indeed. Her younger siblings sat quietly playing and talking in a corner of the classroom as we talked. With the help of a translator, Mr. and Mrs. Ramos asked us if we could start our meeting with a

prayer. This was the first time I had been asked that, and we must have said yes, because Mr. Ramos proceeded to pray for thanksgiving over all of us, as the keepers of “all God’s children.”

This was not your usual parent-teacher conference. We learned that both of Adriana’s parents had been “saved” at Victory Outreach, a Pentecostal denomination that the parents had joined in Mexico and now attended at a Hispanic congregation in southwestern Chicago. They were grateful to be in the U.S., as Mr. Ramos hoped one day to start his own church for fellow Mexican immigrants. In addition to the witnessing and marketing going on, we heard an extraordinary picture of Adriana: clearly this family saw capacities and strengths in her that we hadn’t yet. They told us about how responsible Adriana is at home for her siblings, and how she hopes to one day sing in the church choir. Adriana’s teacher said excitedly, “so that’s why she’s singing all the time!”

Risk and Protective Factors With Adolescence: Resilience Theory Applied to The "Addison Stories"

Resilience theory is a well-established field of study in social work, psychology, and public health research. Resilience theory’s roots came from longitudinal studies of Hawaiian at-risk youth (Wolin & Wolin, 1993) that showed that a significant minority of at-risk young people made it successfully to adulthood despite all the odds being against them. From Wolin & Wolin’s work and Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky’s theoretical work (1999) generated ideas that there are risk factors and protective factors that can be assessed and affected by interventions early in elementary school and adolescence. Among the protective factors listed most often by researchers: a strong relationship with an adult mentor, strong community connections ° to church or social club, and positive relationships with parents factors include poverty, abuse, negative relationships with parents, and exposure to violence and crime in the neighborhood (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999; Fraser, 2004; Greene, 2002). There is a wide range of social work interventions tied to this theory, most prominently those attached to the strengths perspective, which emphasizes that all people have strengths and resilience that can be mobilized to support

clients (Saleebey, 2002). I have used this perspective as a basis for many of my interventions with families and young people through my practice as a school social worker and family therapist for the past 14 years. What's not clear from current resilience theory and longitudinal research is the role of religious practice in helping to form risk factors or protective factors for young people. No major social work resilience researcher has specifically studied religion as the key protective or risk factor in adolescent development (NASW, 2004).

There have been some significant recent studies of religiosity among American adolescents in general (the National Study of Youth and Religion, 2003 is the most recent I found) that have seemed to support the general notion that adolescents whose parents have strong connections to a religious tradition are more likely to have strong relationships with their parents and to possibly enhance overall social and emotional functioning (Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003), but the authors of the National Study are quick to note that religion seems to be more of a social control factor than a resilience-building one, making "adolescents not do something they otherwise might have done. (Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003, p. 44)." This leaves open the obvious question of whether religion might be a temporary social control, essentially postponing the behavior of an adolescent until they are older or perhaps out of the direct supervision of their parents as young adults.

Some research I found seemed to indicate that the key to an adolescent developing with religion as a protective factor rather than a risk factor is the degree to which he/she shares religiosity with his or her parents, specifically his/her mother. The more religious the mother and the less religious the adolescent, the higher the risk of rebellion and of even juvenile delinquency (Pearce & Haynie, 2004).

In the case of Beatriz, the importance of religion and tradition to her parents seemed to be directly related to the degree that she rebelled against her parents. In her case, both parents were steadfast that they wanted her to have her Quinceanera celebration in church, celebrated by their parish priest. While not officially-sanctioned church events, many Chicago-area Quinceanera

celebrations occur in churches that at least choose not to oppose the peagantry, if they don't directly encourage it (Davalos, 1996). The problem for Beatriz wasn't that she didn't want the party or even the overt religious symbolism of praying to the Virgin of Guadalupe at the mass for the Quinceanera; what she objected to was the requirements that she somehow be "pure" and virginal before going through this special ritual. This emphasis on virginity is central to both the ritual itself and a larger Catholic context of limiting female adolescent sexuality (Herrerra, 1998; Villaruel, 1998); that Beatriz could try to flout the rules and still dictate the terms of her party was socially, culturally (and to her parents, religiously) unacceptable.

The most striking feature of Beatriz' story is the eventual influence of the parish priest on the whole family's ordeal. Beatriz' father sought the counsel of his priest assuming that the priest would support the father in his quest to make his daughter submit and obey. Instead, in his priest, he got a quasi-family therapist who, while wanting to emphasize that the girl make good choices and stay safe, was not interested in imposing church authority on her past sexual history. He also clearly wasn't interested, as a white priest, in somehow maintaining a cultural tradition like the Quinceanera at all costs; if Beatriz' dad couldn't live with is daughter being sexually active and have to cancel the event, then oh well. This story complicates the simple protective/risk factor distinction already: in this case, Beatriz' dad clearly wanted the priest as the church to exercise social control, but instead, he got something more like the mentor-figure that the resilience literature says actually helps adolescents form strong relationships into adulthood. This was no given; in fact, given the current tenor of both the local Archdiocese and Rome, it's more likely that Beatriz would've gotten a stern lecture from the priest and another beating at home from her father than what actually wound up happening. Beatriz told me later that she was a little surprised and relieved that the priest didn't automatically side with her dad, but said that this priest had "always seemed kind of cool" and that he "knew what kids really do, and just wanted to help." And given that Beatriz' dad believed in the parish priest reflexively, he was forced to adjust his attitude to incorporate a more negotiated settlement for the upcoming Quinceanera.

In the case of Carlos, his family's religious tradition was clearly not a protective factor for his experience of grief. Despite his grief at his loss of his sister and his participating in the larger cultural experience of grieving for Selena, he was unable to express this grief in his parents' religious tradition. The Assemblies of God is a growing denomination in Latino America, and is also making substantial inroads in Mexico itself (Dorsey, 2000; Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2003). While his church certainly emphasizes healing and salvation, it seemed particularly averse to the larger Mexican cultural tradition of memorializing the dead, something that Carlos was desperately trying to do with his sister and even with Selena, through the many t-shirts he wore with both of them pictured on the shirt (Benibo, Meyer, & Villarreal, 1999). He couldn't find an outlet through his organized religious upbringing, so he turned to God on his own, raging at his parents and his pastor for their insensitivity. Given the many academic and physical challenges he had (he was short and not as athletic as most boys his age), it seemed likely that the smoldering grief and anger that he felt towards his situation was only going to increase his risk factors as he grew towards adulthood. (This is in fact what happened; I spoke to my school social work colleague at the high school who told me that he had dropped out after the age of 16 and had started working in a local Wal-Mart.)

And what about Manny and his family? Clearly, a religious sensibility informed the whole family's reaction to this accidental shooting and Manny's gang involvement. The family were all regulars at the local Catholic church, even Manny. The way that the whole incident was immediately framed by both Manny and his father as some larger symbolic message from God about salvation and damnation made me feel more like a pastoral counselor than a school social worker. Like with Beatriz' case, it seems that the family's individual experience with religious leaders, prayer, and in the case of Manny, religious visions, helped make Manny's immigrant religion a protective factor for Manny and his father.

Jose and Adrianna, while having entirely different problems and strengths, show the way that their parents' immigrant religious traditions clearly acted as protective factors when they were engaged by culturally competent educators and social workers. Jose was experiencing

psychotic symptoms according to a white Western psychiatric model; more importantly, he was experiencing a spiritual crisis that made his mother consult a curandera for herbal and spiritual remedies. This approach was consonant with her rural Catholic heritage and helped her feel connected to her native village even as she tried to raise a son on her own. The assistance of this "urban healer" was invaluable, as it helped me to use Western medicine to help stabilize Jose without making his mother feel culturally compromised (Berenzon & Saavedra, 2002).

Adrianna's parents had clearly found some religious basis for their celebration of Adriana and her disabilities; in fact, while not denying that she had deficits, they had found ways to successfully integrate her into their family as both somebody who had needs but who could also be a vital leader and role model to her other siblings. This view that a Pentecostal church could give them both the faith to handle their challenges as parents and the energy to celebrate her is consistent with a recent study of religiosity with Latino families dealing with children who have developmental delays (Skinner, Correa, Skinner, & Bailey, 2001).

Segmented Assimilation and the Families of the Addison Stories

Because these are families that I worked with from 1994-1998, I can report on how these five kids are "doing" now as young adults, and speculate about what impact their parents' religious practices had on their early outcomes as adults. I contacted them directly a few years before this paper (2002), as part of a book project that I'm presently preparing on my clinical experiences: I've already mentioned Carlos: he is presently working in a low-pay, no-benefit Wal-Mart in the area. He still lives at home and told me that he is saving to buy his dream car, a "low-rider." He did not attend his parents' church, though he did tell me that he still believed that God had a plan for him and that he would see his sister again someday.

Beatriz is a part-time college student and is interested in becoming a teacher. She is 21 now and not yet married, a fact that bothers her parents, who want her to "settle down" before much longer. True to her earlier form, she isn't worried too much about her parents' wishes: "I'll get married when I'm good and ready," she told me with a laugh.

Jose is still grappling with mental illness, though he appears to be making a good transition to adulthood, working at a local restaurant and having a busy social life and even a serious girlfriend. He is still taking medication, still being treated from time to time by a curandera, and still lives with his mom. He still sometimes becomes severely depressed and withdrawn, and his mother relies on a combination of Catholic prayer, folk healing, and psychiatric advice to help get his equilibrium back.

Manny did eventually leave his gang, and was successful at getting off of probation and parole supervision by the age of 17. Since then, he graduated high school a year late, took some courses at College of DuPage (the local community college), and worked in his father's warehouse. He told me that he really hopes that his buddy can get him in at the UPS warehouse, where he would be able to gradually move up to being a deliveryman. He has never had a problem with a gun since that accidental shooting.

Adrianna is still deeply involved with her church, and works full-time in a local food store as a cashier. She told me that she likes it, and feels "blessed." She still lives at home with her siblings and parents, and is hoping to meet the "right boy" to marry someday.

With these five updates, it's possible to argue that all of my former clients are headed for downward assimilation, with the exception of Beatriz and her goals of becoming a teacher. None of the five are fully independent financially, or married yet, and again with the exception of Beatriz (and maybe Manny, if he can swing that UPS job), none of them are likely to be earning enough money to be able to own even their parent's modest homes in the foreseeable future. What impact then, can their parents' religious practices as immigrants have had on their future life prospects?

This is where trying to answer questions from a sociological or a social work perspective reveals some differences. Clearly, these aren't easy or even necessarily positive futures ahead for these young people sociologically; Portes and Rumbaut would see these kids as having limited

possibilities ahead, in part due to their educational experiences in special education and their parents' limited educational achievement (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). I view these kids from the sociological angle too, but also there's a mental health/social work prevention perspective that I saw them in as adolescents. From this perspective, these kids are largely successful, in that they navigated adolescence without succumbing to major self-destructive or risky behavior. They also managed, with the exception of Carlos, to form and sustain positive relationships with their parents that were due in part, I would argue, to their parents' religious practices.

Perhaps the bridge from sociology to social work on this topic can be found in the National Study of Youth and Religion, being conducted at the University of North Carolina. Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch (2003) say in their literature review of religion's influence on adolescent mental health and health outcomes varies widely but can be distilled down :

Religion can be an irrelevant activity setting for youth. But it can constitute much, much more than that...An adequate account of religion during adolescence, then, requires attention to inter-generational social bonds, changing family structures, valued practices and groups, community norms and proscriptions and transactional relationships between parents, children and peers...

(Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003, pp. 46-47)

Regnerus et al. (2003) don't focus specifically on Mexican-American immigrant religion, but there are many interesting implications of their literature review for this population. Many of the strengths of Mexican-American immigrant families and religion can actually help Mexican-American adolescents grow up successfully (Franzini & Fernandez-Esquer, 2004; Pearce & Haynie, 2004; Vaughn & Roesch, 2003; Niska, 1999; Falicov, 1996). The key to knowing whether the religion of immigrant Mexican-American parents are more of a protective or risk factor for their adolescent children seems to be the degree

to which the adolescent internalizes their families' religious beliefs or chooses to rebel against them.

Conclusion: Religion as Mediator Between the First and Second Generations

I chose these case studies, but as with all qualitative research projects, it has often seemed like these cases "chose" me. Like most social workers trained in the 1980s and 1990s, and depending on my instructor, I was either actively encouraged not to discuss religion with my clients, or at least discouraged from making too much out of it. There was plenty of emphasis in my coursework on looking at clients as resilient and having capacities to rise above their struggles (Saleebey, 2002). I welcomed this focus, as I was skeptical of the disease/medical model embodied in the psychiatric bible, the DSM, and wanted instead to learn how to apply my own faith in human potential to help my clients. I just wasn't supposed to see my clients' spiritual or religious selves as part of their resilience and strengths, or at least to not directly inquire about their religious practices. These five clients and their families really left me no option but to explore their religious beliefs: they described their circumstances in religious language, and framed their struggles in religious terms. It didn't matter to them that I was a social worker in a public school in America, where we tend to not discuss religious matters in secular settings. If I was going to help them, I had to understand that their religious identities couldn't be separated from their other identities.

This was a shock to my secular mental health training, but would have been no surprise to most sociologists of religion. Based on his fieldwork and a review of the burgeoning literature on immigrant religion, Warner (2000) argues that immigrant religious institutions: ...become vehicles for or venues of intragroup dynamics, places where relations between generations, genders, and immigrant cohorts are worked out. (Warner, 2000, p. 280) These institutions, he says, help immigrant parents maintain their cultural ties to their homeland, while their children get to learn about their parents' values with the assistance and modeling of other adults from the

same ethnicity (Warner, 2004). What's interesting to me about this research is whether or not these kids will ultimately follow or deepen their connections to their parents' religious institutions. Warner asserts that many second-generation children seem to pull away from their parents' religious institutions, though he acknowledges that there has not yet been a serious study of second-generation religion to date (Warner, 2000).

In all my five cases, it's just too early to tell how the second generation will respond to their religious upbringing; with the exception of Carlos, all the other four are actively participating in their parents' churches, and never stopped attending weekly services throughout their adolescence young adulthood. (Carlos is nominally still connected to his parents' church, but told me that he intends to find his own church soon, possibly one that is not from the Pentecostal tradition. Given that he still is very connected in other ways with his parents and still lives with them, I wonder if he will eventually return to the fold.) In the case of Adrianna, her involvement in her Victory Outreach church is increasing, and really shows no sign of stopping. She has found a home.

In contrast, the three Catholic students I knew appear to be heading for the conventional but still vital Latino Catholic creation of "sacred space" amongst the suburban sprawl (Badillo, 2004). Manny, Beatriz, and Jose are all becoming conventionally-observant Catholics who might resemble other first-generation Catholics of previous eras like the Irish and Italians who also created their own sense of bicultural Catholic identity while slowly ascending the ladder of American achievement (McMahon, 1995).

Interestingly, none of the families I studied seemed to be particularly aware of the "border" between the faith in their family of origin and the new cultural expectations of suburban Chicago religious practices. This was surprising, because after reading some of Elizondo's work (2000, 2003), I was poised to see the "mestizo" influence working its way through the religious practices and lives of these adolescents and their families. Without exception, every one of these families had emigrated to America with their faith tradition already set out, and had pretty much found a similar venue here to practice what they had done in Mexico. All these families had

transnational qualities as well: they all regularly sent money back to family in Mexico and visited every summer and most holiday times. While they clearly had academic, vocational, and mental health challenges, it didn't seem to this white observer that cultural dislocation was one of their main difficulties.

The one example of major cultural tension might be the Catholic churches themselves in Addison, which when I first met these families had not yet "gone Mexican." This could have been both alienating for these immigrant parents, most of whom (with the exception of Manny's parents) were not proficient in English. Still, Jose, Manny, and Beatriz' parents elected to attend the English-only service each week, and later started going to the Spanish service when it was offered. Beatriz' father didn't seek out a Mexican priest; he talked to his parish priest, who happened to be white. None of these families sought out any of the parishes in Cicero and Melrose Park that might have specifically catered to a more mestizo sensibility (Badillo, 2004), or journeyed to an Mexican ethnic enclave like Pilsen; they simply practiced their faith where they lived and worked, and patiently waited for their individual parish institution to "catch up" to them. Beyond their own personalities, perhaps this behavior owes in part to the strong ethnic identity that Mexican-Americans and Catholics have in Chicago generally: the Catholic families I studied didn't express the sense of cultural dislocation or alienation that motivates so many immigrants to seek church as their main cultural and social space (Warner, 2000).

What does the behavior of these families signify then, given that cultural and religious issues permeated all of my work with these kids? If religion wasn't a purely Mexican-immigrant space for these families, and if the kids chose not to reject their parents' religion out of hand as they went through some serious adolescent struggles, what did their parents' immigrant religion do for these parents and their kids? I believe that these case studies show that selective acculturation is real and possible for immigrants and their children, and that religion can be a boon for both parent and child as they try to deal with American cultural norms. Clearly, with the exception of Carlos'

grief and Beatriz' sexual identity, these kids were finding solace and continuity from their parents' religion at the same time that their parents were finding that they could practice their Mexican-based religious beliefs freely in suburban Chicagoland. More than just a set of practices and rituals, their parents' immigrant religion constituted a space where these kids could work out what it meant to be Mexican and American with their parents close by, sometimes encouraging them and sometimes battling with them.

This role of religion as mediator is something that appeared again and again in my work with the families I describe here. I am struck by how much the religion-mediator role paralleled my own work as a family therapist. I had found an ally in these parents' immigrant religions to bolster my secular and psychological efforts to bring these families together, and this was an ally I had never expected to rely on so closely when I finished my master's degree 12 years ago. Now I can't imagine doing my work without making an assessment of the parents' religious background and their kids' view of their parents' faith tradition. I am grateful for the lessons these families taught me, and I hope that others in the fields of sociology, social work, and psychology continue to study the potential protective and risk factors of religion for all young people. If we've learned anything from this last election, it's that moral values are going to be a topic that will be quickly claimed by the right as a divisive political issue, unless liberal academics, practitioners, and theologians begin to articulate the ways that religion can and does help our multicultural nation adapt and thrive.

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