Examining Spiritual Capital and Acculturation across Ecological Systems: Developmental Implications for Children and Adolescents in Diverse Immigrant Families

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Abstract
Religion and spirituality encompass vibrant and critical contexts for developing children, and have played an integral role in American immigration history. However, a scholarly attention to the role of faiths, spirituality, and religious institutions in the lives of immigrants is a relatively new endeavor. Jasso and colleagues report that Christianity constituted approximately two thirds of the New Immigrant Survey-Pilot immigrants, and over 41% reported attending religious services weekly or more often. Notwithstanding the importance of faith traditions and religious communities to the lives of many immigrant families, spiritual capital has not been applied to understanding the unique experiences and trajectories of immigrant children and youth. This chapter explores the developmental significance of spiritual capital at three levels of social contexts: (1) family settings, (2) social networks, and (3) organizations and institutions. In addition to an interdisciplinary review of the literature, we draw from the MetroBaby Qualitative Studies of the Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education, to ground our synthesis in longitudinal qualitative data – field notes and parent in-depth interview transcripts drawn from predominantly low-income, Chinese, Dominican and Mexican, first-generation immigrant mothers raising young children. We draw on empirical evidence to theorize how spiritual capital might shape developmental goals and experiences of children of immigrants from infancy to adolescence across proximal settings. To highlight the links between particular settings and specific outcomes, we further identify moderators and developmental mechanisms that add complex layers to our portrayal of spiritual capital in the lives of immigrant families.

Economic and demographic trends have long attested to the importance of immigrants for the American economy. In forthcoming decades, immigrants will be critical for ensuring the welfare of aging baby boomers in the US [Myers, 2007]. The long-term health of American democracy likewise rests on the bedrock of immigrants and their children. In this chapter, we assess how the spiritual capital – religious beliefs, behaviors, practices, and networks – facilitates the production, accumulation, and utilization of other forms of capital among immigrant families. More specifically, we ask how might spiritual and religious
attitudes, beliefs, practices, and contexts influence children's daily experiences in immigrant homes? What variations in and possible mechanisms for such effects exist within and across social settings? Through an interdisciplinary review, we synthesize current evidence to illustrate how religious organizations and faith communities operate as critical contexts for shaping immigrant families' daily routines, socialization processes as well as children's ethnic identity development.

While social capital theorists have documented how child development is powerfully shaped by social capital [Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000], the developmental significance of spiritual capital has not been applied to investigating the trajectories of immigrant children. In our inquiry of how this important yet understudied dimension of immigrant life shapes child development, we present a conceptual model that highlights multiple dimensions of spiritual capital, predictors of spiritual capital, and links between spiritual capital and various developmental outcomes during childhood and adolescence.

Demographic and Policy Contexts: Immigration, Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality encompass vibrant and critical contexts for developing children, and have played an integral role in American immigration history – providing institutional resources for social adaptation, personal meaning for interpreting immigration experiences, and continuous force for expanding the national ideal of pluralism [Alba, Raboteau & DeWind, 2008]. Faith-based organizations, in particular, have historically served as key organizations extensively involved in the education and healthcare sectors, with many focused on social inclusion, advocacy, and service provision for newly arriving immigrants in the US and abroad.

Recent national data on newly authorized US immigrants show that approximately two thirds of this group identified themselves as Christian, lower than the 86% of the native-born surveyed in the General Social Survey of 2002. However, the proportion of Catholics among legal immigrants is 42%, almost twice as large as among the native-born, and over 41% reported attending religious services weekly or more [Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig & Smith, 2005]. Eight percent of the new immigrants identified themselves as Muslim, and 15% reported no religious affiliation.

Immigrants to the US from most parts of the world become more actively involved in faith-based institutions and religious communities after migration than they were in their home countries [Foley & Hoge, 2007]. Scholars have observed increased religious practice and conversion upon arrival among multiple immigrant groups [Smith, 1999; Williams, 1988]. Over 75% of the Korean population in the US is involved with a Christian church, for example, while only 30% profess Christian faith in Korea [Kim & Min, 2002]. Notwithstanding the importance of faith, religious traditions, and spirituality in the lives of many children and adolescents in immigrant families, recent syntheses and overviews of the immigration literature do not document the importance of spirituality or religion at all [Stepick, 2005]. This is a major oversight, given Putnam's [2000] finding that nearly half of all associational memberships, personal philanthropy, and volunteering in the US are faith related [Alba et al., 2008; Iannoccone & Klick, 2003; Ley, 2008].

This chapter explores the developmental significance of spiritual capital at three levels of social contexts: (1) family settings, (2) social networks, and (3) organizations and institutions (fig. 1). In addition to review of relevant literatures, we draw from the MetroBaby Qualitative Studies (MQS) of the Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education, to ground our synthesis in longitudinal qualitative data – field notes and parent in-depth interview transcripts drawn from predominantly low-income, Chinese, Dominican and Mexican, first-generation immigrant mothers.
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raising young children. This study was conducted in New York City, and aimed to examine the roles of home culture, child care, employment, and policy contexts in shaping development in the first years of life. The qualitative data were collected in a sample of 25 families randomly drawn from a larger sample of 374, with each family visited between 6 and 12 times across child ages 9–30 months (for more details on methods, see Hagelskamp, Hughes, Yoshikawa, and Chaudry [in press] and Yoshikawa [2011]). We draw on both the literature review and this empirical evidence to theorize how spiritual capital might shape developmental goals and experiences of infants and toddlers from immigrant families across proximal settings. To highlight the links between particular settings and specific outcomes, we further identify moderators and developmental mechanisms that add complex layers to our portrayal of spiritual capital in the lives of immigrant families.

What Is Spiritual Capital?

Bourdieu [1986] broadly defines capital as accumulated human labor transferred through time in either material or embodied states that can potentially produce different forms of profits for the individual. Capital therefore implies investment strategies and assets both at the individual and group level [Svensen & Svensen, 2003]. Bourdieu’s reformulation of Marx’s concept of

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**Fig. 1.** Developmental contexts of spiritual capital for children and youth in immigrant families.
capital suggests that capital exists in both material (physical, economic) and non-material (cultural, symbolic, social) forms. For Bourdieu, one form of capital can be converted into another, and all forms of capital can be converted into economic capital.

We argue that time, energy, and capital investments directly linked to spiritual beliefs and religious participation encapsulate a related yet theoretically different form of capital than what Bourdieu defines as non-material forms of capital. Similarly, assets, membership benefits, relationships, and networks acquired across religious contexts may constitute elements of capital distinct from other social, cultural, and symbolic capital. For instance, Bourdieu’s concept of social capital as a form of power facilitates trust and informal exchanges that reduce transaction costs and enhance economic growth. We acknowledge that this definition clearly applies to religious communities and institutions – such organizations have resources linked to group membership, institutionalized relationships of reciprocity, as well as collectively owned financial and other forms of capital. However, the formation of relationships and the nature of these transactions in spiritual communities extend beyond Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s [1988] understanding of social capital and cannot be limited to their analyses of religious institutions simply as yet another social enterprise [Verter, 2003]. In addition, definitions of spiritual capital offered by others [e.g. Iannoccone, 1990; Stark & Finke, 2000] rest heavily on personal dispositions, which may also be limited. Existing literature either dismisses or underestimates the potential influences spiritual dimensions of interpersonal interactions, social engagement, and life experiences can have on immigrant parents’ developmental goals, child rearing practices, family routines, self-identity, and worldviews.

We comprehensively define spiritual capital as characterized by the knowledge, beliefs, behavior, and social networks related to one’s religion or spirituality [Iannaccone, 1990; Iannaccone & Klick, 2003; Finke, 2003], with the following characteristics:

- **Multidimensional**: We perceive spiritual capital comprised of multiple dimensions such as religious beliefs, practices, behavior, involvement, participation, knowledge, skills, and networks. We further posit that faith, religiosity, spirituality and religiousness are relevant constructs employed to measure different dimensions of spiritual capital. Such multifaceted conceptualization of spiritual capital can also be understood in terms of its social, cultural, emotional, historical, and intellectual dimensions across diverse religious contexts and social settings.

- **Multi-Leveled**: Spiritual capital operates within and across multiple levels – individual, family, community, and institutional. Though it cannot be separated from the individual [as in human capital; Becker, 1975], it also inheres in the relations among and between members of faith-based communities [as in social capital; Coleman, 1988]. Though spiritual capital does not necessitate formal participation in any level of religious institution, we concentrate our analysis on spiritual capital produced within faith-based organizations due to the limited availability of empirical studies documenting spirituality outside religious communities.

- **Dynamic and Context-Specific**: Multiple dimensions of spiritual capital do not remain static but constantly shift over time. Individuals create and modify spiritual capital based on their evolving understanding of spirituality and religion, and their importance at a particular time in a particular context. Changes and continuities can be observed in spiritual patterns of religious beliefs and behavior over the life cycle, among family and friends, between and across generations [Iannaccone, 1990]. More importantly, spiritual capital operates on a daily, periodic, seasonal, and occasional basis – time scales that are specific to the rhythms, routines and rituals
of communities. In addition, spiritual capital is produced and augmented, diminished and employed across different social settings. Spiritual capital acquired in one context can be transferred to another social setting for further accumulation or utilization [Iannaccone & Klick, 2003; Jaworsky, 2006].

- **Facilitates Economic Productivity:** This idea of spiritual capital-enhancing productivity reflects Weber’s [1930] attribution of the emergence of capitalism to Protestantism (e.g. the Protestant work ethic). We posit that spiritual capital can contribute or limit opportunities for creating human, social, economic, and cultural capital that further affect acculturation and integration of immigrants and their children. To the extent that social ties in religious settings facilitate social and economic mobility, spiritual capital may have a link to human, economic and financial capital. Norms tied to religious identities affect economic outcomes [Benjamin, Choi & Fisher, 2010]. To borrow Putnam’s [2000] term, spiritual capital ‘lubricates’ civic society by generating voluntary provisions of collective goods. According to Verter [2003], spiritual capital like other forms of capital similarly consists of ‘transforming contingent relations, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt’ [p. 152]. In this perspective, spiritual capital can also be subject to the laws of accumulation, inheritance, and exchange that govern other forms of capital.

**Predictors of Spiritual Capital**

**Individual Dispositions**
Children’s developmental characteristics – cognitive, emotional, and personality – can influence the emergence and development of faith. Some early prominent psychologists – William James, and G. Stanley Hall – and many more recent psychologists – Gordon Allport, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, and Abraham Maslow – have argued that religion or spirituality functions as a core developmental domain and can be seen integrated across the lifespan [Hill et al., 2000]. Closely linked to individual's cognitive functioning, Fowler [1989] points out that spiritual beliefs correlate significantly with one's way of knowing and valuing. Hill and colleagues further describe that a quest orientation to religion may entail complexity of thought, whereas religious fundamentalism may be associated with less complex types of thinking. Religious beliefs may also be conceptualized as schema activated only within believers. On a related note, religious conversion or spiritual experience is tied to personal affect and emotion [Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998]. Friendship and social networks also create safe spaces for experiencing belonging and interdependence. Human need for belonging and friendship may motivate spiritually inclined children and adolescents to become religiously involved. More debatable is the idea that proposes religion and spirituality as genetic determinants of personality that may predict one’s acquisition of spiritual capital. Sociobiological theories emphasize genetic and evolutionary factors that might undergird religious and spiritual beliefs about morality [Wenegrat, 1990; Wilson, 1978]. Additionally, D’Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes, and Spilka [1999] posit the heritability of religious behaviors and attitudes.

**Family History and Practice of Religion and Spirituality**
Families critically shape the spiritual development and religious experiences of children and youth in multiple ways. The religious roots of a family and multigenerational spiritual lineages can have powerful influences on children’s exposure to certain doctrines and their early participation in particular religious rituals and communities. The intertwinement of collective history and religious upbringing shared amongst family members, within a child’s most immediate and personal setting, may influence his or her
religious beliefs and behaviors over a course of a lifetime. More than two thirds of the adults who attended a Korean church as children still belong in a Korean American congregation [Min & Kim, 2005]. The presence of grandparents and relatives can reinforce the centrality of religious faith and spiritual life in multiple ways. These adults help children to make meaning out of major life events, learn codes of conduct, and engage in moral reasoning. Some of this family socialization may involve negotiating mainstream rituals in the host country. One Dominican mother in the MQS, for example, explained to the fieldworker her reason for not allowing her son to go trick or treating on Halloween:

As I stood outside of Lorena’s (grandma’s) apartment, I heard the grandma saying goodbye to Alberto (the focus child, 14 months) and telling him ‘dile adios a mama’ (‘say goodbye to mama’). Lorena takes care of the baby most of the time and seems to make decisions about how he should be raised. Claudia [Alberto’s mother] explained that he was not going trick or treating because Lorena was a Christian and did not want Alberto to be part of Halloween that she saw as a pagan festivity.

Young children are also exposed to adults’ discussion about death, funeral rites, afterlife, and religious propriety as another Dominican family observes the Holy Week in anticipation of Easter:

The person whom Nuris [mother] took care of had died and she had been trying to reach the family to give her condolences. While she was on that call, Nuris’s parents, her aunt, and her uncle stopped by to say hi on their way to church for Holy Thursday. They talked about the woman’s death and about the funeral. The woman had asked to be cremated and Altagracia started saying that, as a Catholic, she was against that and that the church condemned that. They also talked about the Holy Week’s religious activities and Altagracia started to lecture the kids on how they had not gone to any of the religious activities that week. They looked at her with a shameful smile and told her that they would go to mass on Sunday.

Likewise, one adolescent participant, Diego, from Pearce and Denton’s [2011] study articulates how his family has influenced his faith:

My ideas about God come from my parents. Um, that’s where they all originated[d]. Before my grandma passed away, she was a big influence. She was very religious. She kind of taught me how to pray – the right way to pray. And she was the one that really pushed, you know, the whole religion thing. And, being Catholic is something my parents taught me through church [p. 57].

Some immigrant families intricately integrate ethnic socialization of their children and religious education as articulated by Delgado-Bernal [1998] – a Mexican scholar who highlights how her family’s socioeconomic background, history, and Catholic religious ideology simultaneously shape her epistemological lens. Her account further exemplifies how multigenerational family members may support a child to acquire spiritual capital as an intellectual asset in later years. She argues that through the experiences of ancestors and elders, Chicanas and Chicanos impart knowledge of conquest, loss of land, social segregation and resistance, and labor market. Delgado-Bernal [1998] recollects, ‘As a child, my own family experience included learning through my grandmothers’ stories, which were sprinkled with religion and mysticism, and my father’s stories about the urban challenges of his childhood’ [p. 303].

Macrosystemic Forces
Dynamic systems theory suggests that influences of spiritual capital on child and youth development can occur across ecological levels, in directions from macro to micro, micro to macro, or even skipping levels [Yoshikawa & Hsueh, 2001]. For example, policy edicts by major religious denominations could affect child and youth development through intervening community or family mechanisms. Consider the acceptance of ordination of women ministers, priests, imams or rabbis in particular denominations of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. Such a policy shift would be widely publicized within the religious communities, and family conversations about the shifts would influence girls’ and boys’ conceptions of sex roles and what it means to be a leader in a religious community. Such influences might also occur through parents’ socialization and messages...
about the policy, conveyed intentionally or unintentionally to children.

Large-scale economic change can drive the particular religious demographic that predominates in particular waves of migration. Economic factors have largely driven waves of low-income migration from Latin America and China to the US [Yoshikawa, 2011], with consequences for religious membership and participation. For example, large recent Mexican waves of migration have increased the numbers of Catholics in the US, and driven the growth of some denominations (e.g. Pentecostal congregations). In some cases, congregations and denominations have grown as a result of ties to immigrant communities (e.g. the Chinese church). These patterns ultimately affect the development of the second generation, who participate alongside their parents in their early years, and often into adolescence.

Since religion and spirituality are inherently social-psychological phenomena, Hill et al. [2000] theorize that reference groups and cultural norms are rooted in religious perspectives, prescribing an acceptable range of alternatives for normative behavior. For instance, regardless of the level of religiosity or spirituality, most individuals living in the Southern states along the Bible Belt tend to be socioculturally Christian, immigrants and native-borns alike. On a different note, religious persecution experienced by immigrant families prior to migration might affect whether and how they would develop spiritual beliefs or engage in religious practices. In fact, some immigrant families have fled their land in pursuit of religious freedom in the US. On the other hand, immigrant families whose coethnics in contexts of reception have established a wide network for religious organizations providing access to services, resources, and community may feel more incentivized to become religiously involved than they had been in their home country. Using the New Immigrant Survey-Pilot data set, Cadge and Ecklund [2006] systematically considered, for the first time, how demographic, familial, employment, household language, and migration factors influence regular religious service attendance amongst new immigrants from different religious traditions. They argue that immigrants who are less integrated into various facets of American society are more likely to attend religious services regularly, lending further support to how immigrants’ ties to their ethnic communities influence their religious participation. Our analysis corroborates this phenomenon: among three immigrant groups – Mexicans, Dominicans, and Chinese – the Mexicans, the group with the highest proportion undocumented and reporting the lowest levels of overall social support availability, reported the highest levels of church attendance [Yoshikawa, 2011].

**Spiritual Capital across Developmental Periods**

What does the development of religious beliefs and involvement look like across childhood, as children progress from more biologically determined participation in fewer contexts to environmentally and self-driven choice of contexts in adolescence [McCall, 1981]. Fowler [1981, 1989] proposes stages of faith, closely related to Kohlberg’s moral development stages. During infancy to age 2, this stage 0 or the ‘Primal Faith’, is characterized by the development of trust and forming bonds of attachment to primary caregivers, largely shaped by consistency and responsivity of caregivers [Erikson, 1963; Fowler, 1981, 1989]. The ‘Intuitive-Projective Faith’, or stage 1 applies to children from toddlerhood to early childhood. During this critical period of brain development, young children develop their gross motor, fine motor, and cognitive skills. Piaget’s preoperational stage also emerges during this period as the child engages in symbolic representational play. During this phase, young children initially begin benefitting from parents’ acquisition and eventual accumulation of spiritual capital and usually follow the beliefs of their parents. Some parents
influence their children’s religious or spiritual development through verbal communication and indoctrination of beliefs, disciplinary norms, and behavioral modeling [Roehlkepartain, Benson, King & Wagener, 2006]. For example, one of the Dominican mothers in the MQS study has taught her 14-month-old daughter the importance of bedtime prayer. The infant learned early on to adopt the religious behavior of their parents as described below:

Martha reinforces Sophie’s behavior as she adds that Sophie has also learned how to pray her night prayer before she goes to bed. Then Martha starts to say a prayer of ‘a guardian angel’ and Sophie places her hand in front of her chest and follows up with Martha completing the last words of each sentence that Martha says, mumbling the rest of the prayer. We are both smiling back at Sophie as she acknowledges a sense of approval and smiles back at us. Then she continues to play with the wooden pieces of her animal’s puzzle. Since attending mass is part of the family routine, Sophie has learned to say, ‘misa mami’ (mommy mass), when she hears Martha getting ready to go to the church.

Fowler’s stage 2, ‘Mythical-Literal Faith,’ occurs during early and middle childhood, when beliefs in fairness and justice, goodness and reciprocity emerge during children’s play and may be linked to religious or spiritual beliefs and experiences. Children of this period also create anthropomorphic representations of deities and respond to religious stories and rituals in literal, not symbolic, ways. According to Fowler [1989], young children’s spiritual aptitude coupled with spiritual nurturance, discipline, and practice provided by families and religious communities may lead some children to a deeper and more rapid development of spirituality. Many immigrant children spend the majority of their time in extended family networks, primarily with their grandparents [Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008]. Within this family structure more common to the daily experiences of immigrant children, first-generation grandparents can play an influential role in cultivating their grandchildren’s spiritual development while reinforcing religious attitudes and behavior.

Although parents play an important role on religious discipline and spiritual experience of their children initially, adolescents become central agents in choosing to continue their adherence and participation in religious institutions. The positive youth development framework [Lerner, Roeser & Phelps, 2008] has explicitly identified spirituality and religiosity as individual and community-level assets that promote positive developmental features such as healthy identity formation, civic engagement, and purpose [Dowling et al., 2004]. Much recent scholarly attention has focused on the role of spirituality and religiosity on adolescents since this particular period for some adolescents signifies important changes and growth in spiritual and religious domains [Good & Willoughby, 2008]. Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices may change, along with the biological, psychological and social transitions in adolescence: puberty, increased autonomy and independence, sexual interest, self-discovery, identity development, and a concern for the future [Pearce & Denton, 2011]. Adolescents also experience key life transitions such as driving, working, voting, attending college, parenting – each context may influence how adolescents choose to and become religiously active or not during their youth and into their adulthood. With more freedom to determine their own behaviors, adolescents may also follow guidelines from their faiths in making difficult decisions. They might also reject their own family religiosity as they try to establish autonomy and adhere to more North American youth values.

Religion plays a significant role in many adolescents’ lives [Pearce & Denton, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005]. Contrary to dominant perceptions, Pearce and Denton [2011] present evidence that youth in the US surveyed since 2002 have remained or have gotten more religious during their teenage years. Data from the Gallup Youth Survey indicate that adolescents are more religious – in their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior – during their early teen years, with church
or synagogue attendance declining near entry into adulthood [Gallup International Institute, 1999]. In comparison to adolescent boys, adolescent girls report higher levels of religiousness [Donahue & Benson, 1995], religious judgment [Oser & Gmunder, 1991], positive religious coping, and daily spiritual experiences [DesRosiers & Miller, 2007]. For adolescents from non-religious homes, attending college geographically far from home may provide new opportunities to explore spirituality by joining campus-based religious groups where some end up forming positive and negative social relations, reciprocate information and resources, and experience spiritual support from peers and mentors.

Most teenagers follow the religious beliefs and practices of their parents, becoming involved with the religious congregations in which they were raised and professing religion to be an important part of their lives [Pearce & Denton, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005]. Despite the prominence of religion as reported by adolescents, Smith and Denton explain that religion remains an often unfocused and implicit aspect of their lives: Most adolescents have difficulty articulating the meaning, influence, and implications of their beliefs for themselves and the world. Fowler [1981, 1989] would frame their observation in his stage 3, 'Synthetic-Conventional Faith', during which adolescents' experience of the world extends beyond family and faith, may provide a coherent orientation and synthesize values to provide a basis for their emerging identity. Fowler further argues that this stage for many adults becomes a permanent place of equilibrium – a conformist stage that tunes to external expectations and judgments while grappling to construct one's autonomous perspective.

Unlike theoretical presentations of developmental stages as proposed by Kohlberg and Fowler, Pearce and Denton [2011] developed an alternative conceptualization of faith amongst adolescents in the US by presenting five unique profiles of youth religiosity. Their large study explores the religious and spiritual dimensions of middle adolescents by analyzing the first and second waves of the National Study of Youth and Religion telephone surveys amongst youth aged 13–17 in 2002, and conducted in-depth interviews with more than 120 youth aged 16–21 at two time points. By comparatively exploring the nonreligious characteristics of youth in relation to these religious profiles in their study, Pearce and Denton came to understand how adolescents become religious. The five unique profiles of religiosity – Abiders, Adapters, Assenters, Avoiders, and Atheists – conceptually represent adolescents’ different approaches to religion. Predictors of these religious expressions are personal temperament and individual agency, socioeconomic factors, ethnic and gender identity, and family religious background that collectively shape adolescents’ spiritual inclinations and pull them in particular directions. Adapters comprised of 20% of the sample who expressed strong belief in and connection to a personal God believed that religion is inspirational to them, but were not the most regularly involved in churches, temples, or mosques, either by choice or circumstances. Avoiders represented 24% of the sample; these youth profess some belief in God but engage in rare or no religious practice. The authors found no significant difference in self-reported measure of happiness and health between Atheists and other profiles. However, Atheists smoke, drink alcohol, and engage in sexual activity significantly more than other youth [Pearce & Denton, 2011]. Based on these findings, authors argue that it is not simply the presence or absence of religion in one child’s life that leads to happiness and health but rather, a well-articulated system of belief and meaning regardless of religious affiliation. However, these belief systems – religious or not – are heavily informed and constructed through adolescents’ interactions with their parents. Particularly for immigrant parents who may experience linguistic barriers with their American-born children or have long working hours away from home, these parents may feel limited to fully support their
second-generation children to internalize and systematically articulate spiritual beliefs as their own. The question remains as to what extent these five profiles proposed by Pearce and Denton reflect the diverse approaches to religious faiths and spiritual trajectories largely affected by immigrant family life.

The development of spiritual capital among immigrant youth involves intersectionality of ethnic identity, gender, cultural adjustment, and nativity status. Almost half of first-generation immigrant students in one large study reported that most of their friends share their ethnic and immigrant backgrounds [Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008]. According to Suarez-Orozco and colleagues, forming companionship with peers from the same country of origin appears to be particularly important for newly arrived children and youth because they support one another to become acclimated to a new school, a new neighborhood, or a new city. These students find that coethnic immigrant peers in youth groups are often organized by ethnic worship communities. Friendships formed within these religious spaces, forged by shared faith and immigration experience, further allow the more experienced students to serve as important informants on school culture, US education system, citizenship, and mainstream culture. Furthermore, immigrant peers may experience safety by belonging in ethnic religious organizations where their formative experiences, observations of parental struggles, family hardships, and language barriers affirm their social realities.

**Spiritual Capital in Family Settings**

Religious beliefs and socialization reside most centrally within families, as influences on child and youth development in immigrant families.

*Family Religious Beliefs*

The role of religious and spiritual beliefs in family life in child development begins at birth. The conception and birth of a child carry important spiritual meaning commonly portrayed by major religions as a divine miracle or a blessing from God [Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank & Murray-Swank, 2003]. Families in religious communities celebrate the spiritual significance of birth and early life of their child in the presence of these communities (e.g. Catholic Christening ceremonies, Protestant infant baptisms, Jewish circumcisions, Aqueeqah – Islamic birth ritual, or Hindu naming ceremonies). Religious communities further promote rites of passage that signify important developmental transitions such as Catholic Communion, and the Jewish Bar Mitzvah or Catholic Confirmation, when early adolescents publicly profess their faiths and moral responsibility.

In our study, almost all (16 out of 18) the Mexican and Dominican families described the importance of Catholic faith and the significance of planning for the infant baptism. Because baptism celebrations require time and resources, some families mentioned that they planned to have enough saved to afford a baptism ceremony when their babies turn 2 years old. In most cases, the baptism service was held in Spanish at a nearby neighborhood Catholic Church, followed by a small party where relatives and close friends were invited. In other occasions, families saved up to have infant baptisms in Mexico in order to involve a larger family network.

I: Would you want for the girls to visit Mexico?
M: Y es, we want to go, but I tell you, just for that, to baptize them over there with the entire family.

Below, we provide an illustrative excerpt from the field notes that describe the infant baptism that integrates religious tradition, family gatherings, and ethnic cultural practices:

We finally got to Miguel’s birthday party. There were a lot of friends and family there and of all ages: babies, teenagers, their parents, and older people. They had balloons, birthday ornaments, and a big cake with the Winnie the Pooh ornament that Miguel had pointed at before. The music in the background was mostly reggaeton, bachata, and merengue. Everyone was dancing to it, including Miguel,
who was dancing with another baby girl... There was a woman, a family's friend, who said a prayer for Miguel and his family. She focused on health and family unity and at the end poured holy water on Miguel's head. They also lit a candle and everyone said the Lord's Prayer.

While parents may welcome parenting as a divine gift or an answered prayer [Mahoney et al., 2003], studies find mixed results regarding the influence of parent religious beliefs on children. On the one hand, Brody and Flor [1998] found in their African-American sample that greater maternal religiosity is significantly associated with more 'no nonsense' parenting, harmonious mother-child relationships, and educational involvement. Mahoney et al. [2003] found that mothers who reported higher levels of spiritual meaning in parenting, on average, used less verbal aggression with their children aged 4–6. In contrast, Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman and Qin [1995] attest to religious motivations for child abuse and neglect. Through their examination of religion-related child abuse cases, authors confirm cases involving parents' withholding of medical care for religious reasons, or abuse perpetrated by religious authority figures. Furthermore, children and youth who experience cognitive dissonance between the actual reality and the ideals of family relationships as professed by their religious traditions may experience exacerbated relational maladjustment, guilt, anger, and helplessness [Mahoney et al., 2003].

**Family Spiritual and Religious Socialization**

The socialization of children and youth in spiritual and religious matters is an underexamined aspect of parenting and family socialization in immigrant families. Yet from the standpoint of the intergenerational transmission of spiritual capital, this is perhaps a primary pathway for intergenerational continuity or discontinuity in spiritual capital. To take one example of socialization, religious and spiritual traditions expose children to norms about relationships, commitment, and marriage. For example, Protestantism proclaims that marital relationship between a man and a woman is reflective of the covenantal love between the Christ and the Church. We observed that several Mexican and Dominican immigrant mothers were taking Confirmation classes so that they can be married by the Church. Similar to infant Baptism, an official acknowledgement of marriage by the Catholic Church appears to be important for these parents and would potentially shape how their children perceive the role of religious membership on marriage and family. Within Judaism, the relationships among family members are reflective of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. We speculate that religious beliefs and traditions may influence how children and adolescents view romance, marriage, and family thereby informing their worldviews and interpersonal relations. Multiple studies support that family religious participation is positively associated with children's marital patterns later as indicated by greater levels of marriage, lower marital infidelity, less domestic violence, and lower divorce probability [Benjamin et al., 2010; Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat & Gore, 2007; Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson & Johnson, 2007; Gruber, 2005].

Many parents' desire to incorporate religion as part of their children's lives draws them back into faith communities but might have stronger significance for immigrant families. Immigrant parents may also reinforce the ethnic identity development of their children by expanding exposure to cultural norms, traditions, and practice inherent in immigrant ethnic faith communities. Further, we note that facilitating children's identification with ethnic cultural attitudes reinforced in these religious communities tends to be easier for families with newly arrived immigrant children than for immigrant households with US-born children. The following example illustrates how religious socialization can serve the function of retaining the culture of the country of origin.

After describing different important Catholic religious days celebrated in Mexico – the Day of
the Dead, the Day of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and the Day of the Semana Santa (Easter) – this mother from our study expressed her desire to install the significance of these religious cultural traditions for her 1-year-old daughter.

For her not to ignore that, I mean, for her to know what that [religious tradition] signifies and to know how to show respect during those holidays. And not because she is far away to forget about them, or not to feel Mexican because she is from here. . . I plan on start talking to her about that, so that she will never forget. Yes, because, if I don’t explain anything to her, then she will never know anything. It’s just like the people from here, they don’t value that. The religion is over there [Mexico], the cultures, all that, it doesn’t signify anything for all those who moved over here! They know about it, but it doesn’t have any value for them. And that is not what I want to happen to her.

Another Mexican mother spoke about how she teaches her children cultural and religious lessons about the Virgin of Guadalupe as a Mexican cultural symbol. The young boy then associates his mother’s motherland, Mexico, and family religious traditions. The desire to return to a homeland that he has never known is accentuated by the Mexican tradition of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

I tell my children, ‘Oh, she is the Virgin of Guadalupe of the Basilica in Mexico.’ Then my children tell me, ‘and where is that?’ and I tell them, ‘in Mexico.’ And they ask, ‘and how, how?’ I mean, they ask me about how the Virgin came to be. ‘The Virgin appeared in Mexico, there in the villa, there is where she appeared, and from there she went to all the countries. ‘How did she do that?’ [Laughs] they ask me. So I say, ‘well, she went everywhere, and anywhere she can and there she stays forever. I tell him ‘Do you want to go to Mexico?’ And he says, ‘Yes, when I grow up I’m going to go.’ He says, ‘I’m going to go where you said the Virgin appeared.’

In accordance with this ethnographic evidence, family religious participation appears related to developmental outcomes in large-scale studies. In examining the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study consisting of over 9,000 kindergarteners and first graders, Bartowski, Xu and Levin [2008] argue that parent religiosity is positively associated with a range of child psychological and social adjustment outcomes in early childhood such as social competence, lower incidence of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, and more advanced cognitive ability. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Wilcox [2001] indicates that residential fathers who report being involved in a religious organization are more likely to have dinner with their children, get involved in youth-related activities (e.g. Boy Scouts, local sports leagues), and this effect is particularly significant amongst low-income families. Analyses of 3,124 low-income fathers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study reveal that the birth of a child is associated with an increase in fathers’ religious participation, and further, their religious participation is significantly associated with positive father engagement even after controlling for religious affiliation, marital status, relationship transition, pro-fathering attitudes, and first-time fatherhood [Petts, 2007]. More interestingly, first-time fathers with high levels of religious participation also report the highest father engagement with their children in early childhood [Petts, 2007; Roggman, Boyce, Cook & Cook, 2002].

However, religious socialization can also exclude certain groups of children and youth growing up in religious families, such as LGBT or gender-nonconforming youth. In part for religious reasons, families can reject gay youth, with severe consequences for their well-being and health. For example, family rejection among gay Latino youth growing up in immigrant families is related to higher rates of depression, suicidality, drug use, and unprotected sex [Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2008]. Latino gay men report hearing consistent family messages growing up about the shame that homosexuality brings on the family [Sandfort, Melendez & Diaz, 2007]. In response to these influences, religious organizations specific to LGBT communities have arisen within Christian and Jewish traditions to integrate spiritual capital with LGBT identity, which can be marginalized in mainstream religious institutions [Brettschneider, 2006; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2002]. In some instances, religion supports the exclusion for the family for youth's following non-
approved self-chosen, life course decisions, such as dressing (body exposure, tattoo, body piercing), cohabitation, marrying members of other religions.

**Spiritual Capital across Social Networks**

_Ethnic Social Networks, Fictive Kinship and Peer Influences_

Religious traditions and faith are often shared by most, if not all, of the immediate family members, and can help introduce children in immigrant families to larger social networks of ethnic community members. Immigrant parents use spiritual capital to create social opportunities for children and youth to engage and interact with peers, mentors, and other adults in immigrant worship communities. This can occur for both adults and mentor figures outside the family, as well as peers. In their description of ethnic variations in fictive kinship systems among newly arrived immigrants, Ebaugh and Chafetz [2000] explain that _Compadrazgo_ is a complex system of coparenthood commonly practiced among Latino immigrants. Compadrazgo exists throughout Latin America, and intricately interweaves Catholic custom and ritual requiring spiritual sponsorship at baptism. This baptismal compadrazgo system ensures that the primary sponsor or the godparent(s) fulfills both the spiritual and social obligations by providing for the material welfare and instructing the child on faith and morals, in the event that parents die or neglect their spiritual duty. The compadrazgo network extends beyond the triadic relationship between the baptized child, biological parents, and godparents when different sponsors are selected for the first communion, confirmation, and marriage, thus increasing the number of support network members who are committed to the child across his or her entire development.

One Mexican mother of an 8-month-old infant explained her reasons for choosing their roommate, Adam, as her son’s godfather:

> The godfather is like ‘another dad.’ If we ever need help or support with Eduardo, Adam will help however he can. Since he is unmarried, we could not make his wife a godmother. We did not choose my sister-in-law as a godmother since she is already supportive and helpful with Eduardo. Baptism would not make her any more helpful or give Eduardo any more support because she offers it readily. Since Adam has become a trusted friend of the family, I feel that making Adam the godfather would encourage him to continue or increase support for Eduardo.

Some of the specific benefits for children and youth of multiple godparent figures may include the presence of multiple adult figures modeling spiritual disciplines, availability of emotional support, and provision of material resources. Similarly, Suarez-Orozco et al. [2008] indicate that ‘child fostering,’ a widely accepted cultural practice in the Caribbean, occurs frequently during migration when families in hardship temporarily entrust their children to extended relatives back ‘home’.

The developmental implications of parent networks may vary depending on the presence or absence of children during these network gatherings. One example of institutionally based immigrant parent networks for young children is illustrated in Jaworsky’s [2006] study. To describe how spiritual capital transfers beyond religious contexts, Jaworsky examined a group of Brazilian immigrant parents spiritually driven to ‘use their gifts not only for their immediate family but for others’ who formed a long-lasting parent network for young children. In building and strengthening organizational ties across various government agencies and faith-based institutions, a representative leader attested, ‘We have groups that have been working on early childhood now since the middle ‘90s, arm in arm with like 10 or 15 agencies, that we’re almost like one. . . There is a sort of vertical and horizontal integration in how we’re working together. . . ’ [p. 25]. These parent leadership programs empower parents to learn information on available programs and services, and acquire resources that they can share with other immigrant parents in their communities.
Peer networks of children and youth themselves are a second important dimension of spiritual capital at the social network level on children and youth. Children's time spent with their peers grows over time as their independence from parents might increase. Roehlkepartain et al. [2006] argue that deep sensitivity and connection with friends provide a transcendent experience that may provide the foundation for the spiritual development of children and adolescents. For example, friends have added unique variance over and above that of parental influence in adolescents' experience of the divine and the importance of religion. Schwartz [2006] found that adolescent religious belief and involvement can be explained by engaging in conversations about faith with their peers and being exposed to their friends' faith modeling. Religious participation can give them access to peers that do not engage in risky behaviors.

Religious network exposure may restrict certain kinds of peer characteristics. To the extent that faith-based networks are primarily coethnic, for example, opportunities to meet and interact with peers of different ethnicities and backgrounds may be restricted. Most faith-based networks are restricted to a single faith, and therefore exposure to peers of different faiths may also be limited. The potential for conflict between contexts with different levels of diversity in faith and therefore peer characteristics – e.g. public schools vs. coethnic, faith-based social networks – exists and has been reported in the youth development literature.

**Spiritual Capital in Organizations and Institutions**

**Immigrant Worship Community Characteristics**

Immigrant worship communities provide unique developing contexts for cultivating immigrant children's cultural attitudes and ethnic identification. Religious beliefs and practices play an integral part of ethnic identity in many immigrant communities and constitute an important mechanism for ensuring cultural continuity in the second generation [Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000]. Most often, we find that ethnic socialization and religious practices are intertwined across many social settings in which immigrant families interact with their child(ren). Immigrant faith communities preserve important cultural facets by combining cultural traditions and religious rituals to support ethnic identity development of children growing up in these immigrant communities.

Immigrant worship communities promote ethically bounded socialization goals as well as cultural models that can be contested and adapted by their children and adolescents. More specifically, immigrant children and adolescents actively engaged in their faith communities acquire necessary language, tools, and norms to navigate competing social and religious contexts – developing culturally bounded spiritual capital while converting cognitive and social assets that may predict children's engagement and learning in school. Many second-generation children growing up in Chinese and Korean immigrant families participate in Saturday language schools that also offer classes on ethnic history, cultural celebrations, arts, dance, and sports [Kim & Min, 2002; Min & Kim, 2005]. Recent studies have found positive effects of heritage language proficiency and usage on adolescents' social and mental health outcomes. Heritage language was positively associated with the quality of parent-adolescent relationships and ethnic identity, suggesting that the development of proficiency in the heritage language facilitates successful cultural adjustment among first- and second-generation Asian and Latino adolescents [Oh & Fuligni, 2010]. Additionally, non-English home language use was found to be the only setting-level variable, predicting above and beyond all peer-related characteristics, as a protective factor for first-generation Latino and Asian adolescent risk behavior [Garcia-Coll et al., 2011]. These findings suggest that home language maintenance provides many psychological and social
benefits for immigrant adolescents. Immigrant worship communities that provide heritage language programs provide additional opportunities for children and adolescents to practice the language of their immigrant parents and broaden access to participate in their parents’ primary culture and ethnic communities, thereby contributing to a strong sense of ethnic identity and connection to cultural traditions.

Private Religious Schools

Religious private schools can facilitate academic engagement as well as spiritual development of immigrant students who might otherwise feel marginalized in schools where they do not have the opportunities to interact with coethnic peers or other students of immigrant background. First, religious doctrine powerfully undergirds the institutional mission, school culture, and pedagogical approaches to learning across disciplines. School policy on admission, student conduct and discipline, parent involvement, bullying and conflict resolution largely reflect religious values promoted across home and school. Religious schools similar to faith-based organizations reinforce family norms and routines around spiritual and religious socialization. Such consistency in moral expectations and codified rules across social settings may support adaptation of newly arriving immigrant students.

Dominican immigrant parents in our study spoke of their preference for Catholic schools over public education. Some parents were spending a significant portion of family income to afford tuition costs for elder siblings of the focus child. Consistent alignment of behavior norms, expectations, and standards across home and school might also support children’s acculturation process. Second, religious teachings can also shape the nature and quality of student-teacher interactions as well as peer relationships in school context. Particularly for immigrant students who are experiencing family separation, emotional support from teachers as mentor figures who share their faith traditions and life outlook can increase their relational engagement in school [Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008].

More interestingly, immigrant faith communities are actively employing social capital formed within religious spaces to facilitate the formation of spiritual capital for their children. Emerging communities of immigrant parents and religious leaders are joining the charter schools movement in many states to create a learning space that differs greatly from most public schools for their children. Basford [2010] describes how a key group of Muslim immigrant parents and educators collectively envisioned an alternative schooling space for their 1.5 generation East African Muslim high school students who simultaneously navigate racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and religious labels in their acculturation process. Facilitation of spiritual capital among a Somali school board and East African-born teachers allowed for an education institution that promotes holistic development of students who experience multiple forms of marginalization. The school’s explicit focus on nurturing religious identity permeated across all aspects of the school climate where ‘Islam is not seen simply as a religion to practice. Rather, to nearly all of my participants, being a Muslim is a way of life, and often how they primarily identify themselves’ [p. 11]. Basford [2010] further notes that such phenomenon is part of a larger and important trend in the charter school movement where more than 30 out of 138 charter schools in Minnesota are ethnocentric in orientation. These counterspaces represent an immigrant religious community’s collective resistance to preserve rich ethnic, cultural, and religious aspects of their life and empower their children to seamlessly integrate their religious life and spiritual disciplines across contexts. These immigrant school communities extend the original contribution of Coleman’s [1988] seminal study that illustrates the importance of constructing schooling spaces where students are not forced to subtract certain parts of their identity, but to come as their
fullest selves – including their religious beliefs. The Catholic schools in Coleman’s study served as a construction site for bonding social capital amongst parents, teachers, school administrators, and neighbors to positively influence their students’ academic outcomes. African Islamic charter school in Basford’s study and Catholic schools in Coleman’s both exemplify how students in these school communities benefited from possessing greater social capital formed through a network closure among family, friends, and non-relative adults who also know one another, encounter on a regular basis, and share similar values.

Children and Adolescents in Faith-Based Organizations

Faith-based organizations may provide cognitively enriching environments for immigrant children to acquire knowledge and develop academic skills in relation to their religious doctrine, which, in turn, can be converted into other forms of capital in different social settings. Based on parent-reported measures of child religiosity, children who engage in religious activities perform significantly better on a range of cognitive and socioemotional outcomes than children who do not [Dye, 2008]. Also, Marietta [2010] presents a case study of an Appalachian county in Eastern Kentucky where churches play a central role in developing language and literacy amongst low-income children. Regardless of religious beliefs and affiliation, she asserts that church played a nearly inescapable role in children’s lives through exposure to oral messages and texts including ‘prayers being said before lunch at Pizza Hut, religious signs placed along mountain roads, or Bible stories being shared at school’ [p. 12] as well as exposure to sophisticated literacy experiences and academic vocabulary. While Gruber [2005] points out that increased religious participation among youth is associated with later higher educational attainment and less use of social welfare programs, Parke and Buriel [2006] note that religious involvement in 8th grade is predictive of academic and social competence by the 12th grade. Additionally, faith-based organizations offer other supplementary services or low-cost extracurricular programs for immigrant children to attend afterschool or during the summer. Some Vietnamese Catholic and Protestant congregations provide formal ethnic programs, weekend religious training, and summer camps for second-generation children. Moreover, Easton-Waller [2000] further reports that monks from Cambodian Buddhist temples provide mentoring guidance for youth members; these programs and services are positively associated with high educational attainment [Bankston & Zhou, 1996].

Developmental effects of spiritual capital extend beyond cognitive and educational outcomes. Moreover, studies report that spirituality and religiosity of adolescents aged 13–19 year olds are associated with their sympathy and perspective taking [King & Furrow, 2004] and prosocial behavior amongst youth in grades 6–9 [Benson, Scales, Sesma & Roehlkeptartain, 2006]. Studies further demonstrate how youth involvement in faith-based activities may serve as protective factors against behavioral risks. Youth religious participation is associated with lower substance use and heavy drinking for both parents and youth, negatively related to suicide ideation and attempts, premature sexual involvement as well as smoking, drinking, criminal and delinquent behavior [Ball, Armistead & Austin, 2003; Dehejia, DeLeire, Luttmer & Mitchell, 2007; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Gruber & Hungerman, 2006; Johnson, De Li, Larson & McCullough, 2000; Johnson, Jang, Larson & De Li, 2000; Pearce, Jones, Schwab-Stone & Ruchkin, 2003]. However, the magnitude of the relation between religiosity with risk behaviors such as aggression and delinquency appears to be very modest [Good & Willoughby, 2008; Johnson et al., 2000].

Although religious beliefs and participation in immigrant families show positive effects on children’s identity and other aspects of development,
this may not always be true. There is some evidence that for mental health, in particular, associations with religious participation can be just as likely to be positive as well as negative. In some studies, for example, higher rates of participation are linked to higher levels of stress (e.g. higher frequency of prayer [Ellison, Boardman, Williams & Jackson, 2001]). This may be due to the well-known association of social support provision with higher stress. Seeking spiritual support and benevolent religious appraisals were associated with better mental health, while other kinds of coping, such as appraisal of gods or deities as punishing, were associated with worse mental health [Pargament, Tarakeshwar, Ellison & Wulff, 2001].

Associations of immigrant worship community involvement with youth outcomes are not always positive. One study found, for example, that perceived social support from adolescents’ religious community was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms; however, perceived criticism and demands from their religious organization were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms [Pearce, Little & Perez, 2003]. Although religious organizations provide spaces for recreational activities and promote prosocial behavior (e.g. community service, cooperation, empathy, and altruism), they can also in some cases be associated with youth gang activities [Parke & Buriel, 2006]. This can be especially true in the context of unstructured and unsupervised youth activities, a characteristic of youth programs that is generally associated with higher antisocial behavior [National Research Council, 2002]. Activities within a program can differ in their associations with youth outcomes, based on adult/youth ratios, focus of the program and other characteristics [Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008]. For youth in immigrant families, ethnicity-specific schooling such as Chinese shadow schooling programs, many of which have some religious affiliation, can intensify academic pressure in the lives of some youth [Zhou, 2008]. Finally, Dew, Daniel, Goldston and Koenig [2008] confirm that depression among outpatients aged 12–18 was positively related to negative religious experiences.

Furthermore, spiritual meanings and religious significance defined and reinforced by many organized institutions may privilege those children growing up in families whose experiences fit the traditionally prescribed sacred family structure (e.g. heterosexual marriage), while marginalizing children whose family structure and functioning remain outside the norm as defined by many religious communities (e.g. single-parent households, blended families, children of gay couples). Deloria [1994] impugns how one faction of the Christian community dangerously harms their children. The Jesus movement operated by a charismatic summer camp in North Dakota is infamously noted to have caused psychic injury on young children and youth who were brainwashed to adopt fanatic ideas that further lead to bigotry, intolerance, and distorted perceptions of social realities. Another negative influence of religion can be seen in Hunsberger’s [1995] investigation of the relationships among right-wing authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and prejudice towards racial minority groups. Even after controlling for educational background, he finds that college students who scored high on the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale, on average, also scored significantly high on the Religious Fundamentalism scale, racial prejudice, and the Attitudes toward Homosexuals Scale that reflects condemning and vindictive sentiments towards LGBT individuals. Some adults who align with fundamental religious denominations and profess conservative religious or moral values believe LGBT students – actual or perceived – do not deserves protection and support [Poteat, 2008; Swearer & Cary, 2003]. While religious participation may provide a clear sense of purpose and identity, fundamentalist views can severely narrow children’s definition of morality and negatively affect their perception of others who hold differing views or life choices. Also, young women in many religions encounter conflicting tensions

Examining Spiritual Capital and Acculturation across Ecological Systems
in adolescence when autonomy and deindividuation are more prevalent as gender-related norms and expectations espoused by religious traditions clash with postmodern views regarding femininity and womanhood.

The Study of Spiritual Capital among Immigrant Families: Implications for Research, Practice and Policy

The spiritual and religious life of immigrant communities has rarely been linked to the development of children and youth in those communities. This chapter has aimed to present an ecological model for how spiritual capital may matter for immigrant families. As the US is transformed by the influx of new communities in recent decades, the concomitant transformation of spiritual and religious life has been overlooked. We have described in this chapter a multidimensional model of spiritual capital, encompassing beliefs, practices, and behaviors. In addition, our model has incorporated multiple ecological and dynamic levels of analysis, from the individual to family, peer, organizational, institutional and large-scale demographic and policy contexts. All of these must be considered in a comprehensive model of how spiritual capital can impact children and youth in immigrant families.

The study of immigration and immigrant families can contribute substantially to the literature on religion and spirituality among children and youth. The diversity of practices and organizations, and the relationship between involvement in countries of origin and contexts of reception in the US, can enrich the study of youth involvement in religions. The diversity of youth beliefs and practices among immigrant groups, for example, has rarely been considered in either local or national studies of religious participation. The religious and spiritual experiences of immigrant children and youth, in addition, are inextricable from organizational and neighborhood contexts of reception, and as such bring much-needed foci on influences beyond the individual and family to the broader developmental literature on religiosity.

Conversely, the study of spiritual capital can enrich the literature on immigrant children and youth. Processes of segmented assimilation and acculturation have rarely been studied as they play out in the family and organizational socialization of first, second- and third-generation immigrant youth. For instance, what effect does spiritual capital have on the individual child’s selective assimilation and selective preservation of ethnicity in the process of negotiating multiple identities? The protective processes associated with religious involvement in youth, for example, may be an important and overlooked component of the well-known protective effect of retention of one’s heritage and ethnic identity among the second generation [Portes & Rumbaut, 2001]. Isolating immigrants from mainstream institutions – by self-selection or not – may increase prejudice toward the other groups and limit social opportunities for young people to engage others from diverse backgrounds. Coethnic religious organizations constitute a large and visible portion of the influence of ethnic enclaves on youth – this specific part of the enclave story, similarly, has been missing from the literature on immigrant child development (except by sociologist Portes, Rumbaut and others). Finally, the potential of religious organizations to foster incorporation on other dimensions – political, economic, and social – has been overlooked. In recent ethnographies, faith-based organizations have shown the potential to reach new immigrant communities, providing opportunities for empowerment and advocacy, not just spiritual and social support [Catone, Chung & Oh, 2011; Galvez, 2009; Yoshikawa, 2011; Zolniski, 2006]. In large part, this is because these organizations have gained the trust of immigrant communities in a way that traditional social service organizations, businesses and even schools cannot, even in coethnic contexts.
Research on spiritual capital and its effects on immigrant youth is nascent and requires attention to several dimensions. First and most fundamentally, general studies of child and youth development in immigrant families should as a rule explore the religious and spiritual aspects of these families’ lives. The major studies of immigration and youth development, for example, have only glanced at this important context of immigrant communities and development. This is an enormous gap in our understanding of the contexts of children’s development in immigrant families. Second, examining the longitudinal trajectories of spiritual capital, across developmental periods and across immigrant generations, is vital in order to delineate how spiritual capital enriches processes of acculturation, positive youth development, and ultimately inter-generational mobility among immigrant families. Third, mediators and moderators of the association of spiritual capital with positive outcomes have not been explored for immigrant youth. For whom do positive associations hold most strongly, and for whom are they less positive or even negative? How exactly does religious participation produce positive effects on particular domains of development?

Finally, research on spiritual capital and its development in immigrant families has the potential to inform practice and policy related to immigration. Immigrant worship communities provide unique sites for newly arriving immigrants to acquire spiritual capital that, in turn, can be converted to other forms of capital not readily accessible to them in the mainstream society. First, the practices of faith-based organizations in immigrant communities that enhance youth development could be documented much more extensively, with principles drawn out for the work of community-based organizations. As organizations that immigrant families trust, these settings may incorporate important practices for the development of social capital that could be applied to those serving other types of families, or other types of organizations serving newcomer communities. Second, the role of these organizations in building developmentally responsive immigration policies has been underestimated. Networks of congregations, for example, can serve as effective venues for advocacy and community organizing for ‘hard-to-reach’ newcomer groups, some of which are among the most disadvantaged in the nation [Warren & Mapp, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011]. Finally, the development of leaders in communities cutting across spiritual, political, and economic dimensions is urgent for immigrant groups. Combating institutional discrimination and racism toward immigrant groups, such as the recent wave of violence against Latina/o communities, for example, requires leadership from multiple kinds of organizations, including faith-based ones. As leaders and communities work together across boundaries defined by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, political power, and religion, newcomers across the nation can develop a more powerful and effective voice to broaden pathways for future generations, contributing to strengthening and revitalizing the fabric of American civic life.

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