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Using Attachment and Relational Perspectives to Understand Adaptation and Resilience
among Immigrant and Refugee Youth

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Abstract

Migration is a critical issue for child development in the 21st century. We expand on García Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model of minority child development by drawing from principles of attachment theory and interpersonal relationships research to offer new insights into how youth manage and respond to migration experiences. Immigrant and refugee youth should experience better outcomes to the extent that they: (1) maintain strong relationships with caregivers and peers that provide a sense of closeness, safety, and confidence during the process of adjusting to this life transition, and (2) find ways to establish a sense of connection and belonging to the new people, places, communities, and social networks within which they now live. Strong bonds to people and connection to places (both familiar and new) can counter the social stratification consequences to minority youth development that are well articulated in García Coll et al.'s integrative model. The need for new and better strategies that promote the positive development of immigrant and refugee youth within their families, schools, work places, and communities is crucial, not only for individuals and families, but for society as a whole.

KEYWORDS: attachment theory; relationships; immigrant and refugee youth; resilience; connection to place

Migration is a critical issue for youth development in the 21st century. Migrants (and immigrants) are individuals who are moving (or have moved) across or within borders away from their home residence (International Organization of Migration, 2015). Globally, there are 244 million migrants (United Nations, 2015). During the past few years, an unprecedented number have experienced forced migration and of these, 51% are under age 18 (UNHCR, 2016). Although migration can afford individuals opportunities to thrive and develop new competencies, there remain significant risks of marginalization and oppression that pose challenges for many immigrant youth (for a definition of marginalization, see Causadias & Umaña-Taylor, in this issue). For instance, disparities in socioeconomic status, education, and health between youth with and without an immigrant or refugee background persist around the world (OECD, 2012). By expanding on García Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model using both attachment and relational perspectives, this paper extends our understanding of youths' social and emotional development in the context of migration.

García Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model provided a much-needed shift toward understanding the development of minority youth at risk for being marginalized. The model highlighted how social group hierarchies in socially stratified and inequitable societies translate into differential access to resources, representation, and power. These hierarchies instigate and sustain racism, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression—mechanisms central to understanding minority youth development. Rather than viewing minority youth through a deficit-oriented lens, however, the integrative model proposed a strength-based approach, outlining how protective factors and promotive environments can support the development of youth resilience and competencies, in spite of inhibiting conditions and systems.

In this paper, we adopt a relational perspective informed by attachment theory and interpersonal relationship research to better understand the developmental implications of immigrant and refugee status, a social position variable not highlighted in García Coll and

colleagues' original model. Social stratification that devalues and disadvantages immigrant and refugee youth, especially those who are racial or ethnic minorities, occurs throughout the world. These youth experience stigmatization (Baysu, Celeste, Brown, Verschueren, & Phalet, 2016), racism and discrimination (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), and grapple with poorer health conditions and fewer socioeconomic resources (OECD, 2012) than both nonimmigrant and nonrefugee youth. Despite these challenges, many immigrant and refugee youth are valued, do well, and feel well (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017). Thus, our aim is to describe variations in how youth respond to migration-related stressors, depending on their attachment patterns and the quality of their close relationships along with their developmental age, age of migration, and stage of migration. We also describe uplifts that may promote secure attachment patterns and closer relationships, after which we discuss some future directions.

Because this special issue addresses “youth,” we focus on development between the ages of approximately 10 and 18. We acknowledge that migration experiences are diverse and that immigrant and refugee youth are not a homogeneous “at-risk” group. Some youth arrive in new locations with their families, motivated by opportunities for better education; some are fleeing war or persecution; some arrive alone without any family members; some are undocumented; and some have experienced family deportation. These unique experiences, coupled with specific stressors (e.g., experiencing trauma, adjusting with or without a parent) and the resources available to facilitate coping (e.g., availability of other family members, time to prepare for migration), can all contribute to variations in immigrant and refugee youth adaptation (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003; Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, Bang, Pakes, O’Connor, & Rhodes, 2010).

An Attachment and Relational Perspective on Immigrant and Refugee Youth Development

Key principles of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) can offer valuable insights into youths' closest and most important relationships. Attachment theory provides a particularly useful lens for understanding variability in the social and emotional development of youth in the context of migration and adaptation. Bowlby developed attachment theory after observing the damaging effects that long-term caregiver/child separations had on adolescents. He hypothesized that the need to form attachment bonds with stronger, older, and/or wiser caregivers early in life is an evolved predisposition that increased the likelihood of survival during childhood. This innate tendency for children to seek physical and psychological proximity to their attachment figures, especially when they feel distressed, threatened, or overwhelmed, is a basic tenet of attachment theory. Bowlby further hypothesized, and considerable research has confirmed (see, for example, Marvin, Britner, & Russell, 2016), that the attachment system is activated when children feel threatened, distressed, or overly challenged. Threatening events increase the accessibility of *internal working models* (i.e., representations of the world and significant others, based on prior interpersonal experiences; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008), which trigger attachment-relevant behaviors (e.g., seeking comfort from attachment figures; Fearon & Belsky, 2016) that eliminate the source of distress and reduce negative affect. Attachment theory, therefore, explains how children relate to their attachment figures under stressful, upsetting conditions, which can affect the development and functioning of other relationships later in life. Because most migration experiences are stressful and challenging, it is important to understand how the attachment system contributes to youth adaptation and adjustment.

When attachment figures provide sensitive care and support across time, they fulfill three critical needs that typically promote better developmental outcomes in children (Bowlby, 1973): (1) *proximity maintenance* (i.e., providing the child with a sense of protection from threatening events by remaining in close contact), (2) *safe haven* (i.e.,

providing the child with a sense of refuge, safety, and comfort from threatening events), and (3) *secure base* (i.e., instilling a sense of confidence/efficacy in the child so s/he can explore and engage in other life tasks). By facilitating a sense of closeness, safety, and confidence, caregivers help children navigate stressful situations and promote their social and emotional development, which in turn affect children's later development and subsequent relationships throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

Not all children, however, have attachment figures who provide sufficient proximity maintenance, safe haven, and/or secure base experiences. This variability in quality of caregiving is partly responsible for the development of the four attachment patterns seen in children across many cultures (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990; Mesmer, van IJzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016): (1) *secure*, (2) *anxious-avoidant*, (3) *anxious-resistant*, and (4) *disorganized*. The latter three are insecure forms of attachment.

When distressed, young children who have a secure relationship with their caregivers are comforted by their caregiver's presence and actively turn to them to regulate and dissipate negative affect (Marvin et al., 2016). Securely attached children, therefore, directly seek closeness and emotional connection with their attachment figures when distressed, which strengthens emotional bonds in their relationships and allows them to obtain what they need emotionally. Children who have anxious-avoidant attachments with their caregivers, in contrast, do not express their need for proximity by seeking contact when distressed. Instead, they typically turn away from or ignore their caregivers and use deactivating coping strategies to control and dissipate their negative affect, such as distancing or distracting themselves from the source of threat (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Doing so allows anxious-avoidant children to maintain some contact with their caregivers without over-burdening them, even though they often remain distressed. Children who have anxious-resistant attachment relationships cannot always count on their caregivers for comfort when distressed.

Rather, they cling to their caregivers, remain distressed even after contact is reestablished, and often fail to resume normal activities. Anxious-resistant children display hypervigilant coping strategies by monitoring their attachment figures very closely and attempting to maintain close contact with them continually (Marvin et al., 2016). Children who have disorganized attachment relationships may have been maltreated (but not always; see Granqvist et al., 2017) or repeatedly exposed to frightening events or behaviors enacted by their caregivers. When distressed, disorganized children display odd or atypical behaviors (such as disoriented wandering or freezing), revealing that they have no coherent strategy to regulate and reduce their negative emotions (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2016).

Each of these attachment patterns are also defined by some additional organizational properties (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). For instance, although secure and anxious-resistant children both engage in proximity maintenance when upset, the way they do so—the specific behaviors they enact and the intentions, meanings, and strategies behind engaging in them—differs. It is not how *much* proximity a child seeks that marks attachment security, but *when* and *how* proximity seeking takes place within the child-caregiver relationship in specific situations. In addition, children who are more effective at using their attachment figures as a secure base to alleviate and regulate their emotional distress are often more prepared for and open to re-engaging and exploring the world around them.

Children with different attachment patterns also have different internal working models, which guide how they think, feel, and behave in different interpersonal contexts, what they expect in different interpersonal situations, and how they interpret interpersonal events (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Internal working models are formed and continuously shaped in response to interactions with attachment figures, and they can impact the formation and quality of relationships well beyond the caregiver, including those with close friends, non-family members such as teachers, and eventually romantic partners

(Simpson & Rholes, 2012). Attachment patterns in early childhood, therefore, can and often do have important consequences for other relationships later in life (Sroufe, 2005).

The attachment system and internal working models developed during infancy and childhood lay a foundation for the emotional regulation and coping tendencies of youth, which can operate as a vulnerability (for insecurely attached youth) or as an inner-resource (for securely attached youth). The way in which youth perceive and regulate their emotions in different stress-inducing contexts should have implications for how a given situation is perceived and experienced and, therefore, the degree to which stress ultimately affects their psychological health and well-being (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Youth with secure attachment histories "...have a solid foundation for emotion regulation and self-management in later years. They believe that self-regulation in the face of challenge and recovery from periods of dysregulation are possible, and they have brain excitatory and inhibitory systems that are properly tuned for achieving both." (Sroufe, 2016, pp. 1001). Indeed, a recent review concluded that securely attached youth display better emotional regulation and coping skills than both anxiously or avoidantly attached youth (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2017).

The attachment system also affects how youth view the social world. Avoidantly attached adolescents, for example, view interpersonal interactions more negatively, typically with a hostile attribution bias (Dykas, Woodhouse, Ehrlich & Cassidy, 2012). The attachment system also impacts social motivation, with securely attached adolescents displaying greater social competence (Allen & Manning, 2007; Dykas, Ziv, & Cassidy, 2008) and being more open to socializing and interacting with others (DeKlyen & Greenberg, 2016). In contrast, avoidantly attached adolescents have weaker or less developed communication skills with friends (Shoemaker & Furman, 2009).

In summary, different emotion regulation strategies, attentional biases, support-seeking tendencies, and communication behaviors all explain why attachment patterns are

related to the social and emotional adjustment of youth. Importantly, youth with secure attachment patterns should be better prepared to cope with stressful or adverse situations because their prior experiences with responsive attachment figures have helped them learn how to regulate their emotions, elicit support from others, and communicate with others more effectively. Attachment patterns, therefore, may explain why some immigrant and refugee youth fare better than others.

Relationships in the Context of Migration-Related Stresses and Losses

Migration is a chronic form of physical and emotional separation from familiar people and/or places that frequently involves stress and/or traumatic loss. The stresses and challenges associated with migration occur at multiple levels, including the individual, family, school, and community. We now draw upon research in the interpersonal relationships field to extend our understanding of how attachment principles might apply to stresses and losses associated with migration.

Individual stress and loss. Numerous stressors associated with newly arrived migrant youth occur at the individual level. Before, during, and after migration, youth may be exposed to wars, violence, poverty, and other harsh conditions. Youth carry such traumas and loss with them during and after the migration experience. Once settled, they then must learn a new language, adapt to different ways of living, and deal with acculturative stress and hassles, all of which may affect their mental and physical health (Lustig et al., 2004; Sirin & Sirin, 2015; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014).

Family stress and loss. Stressors are also experienced by the entire family. When a family migrates together, family members must adjust to new roles and changing family dynamics that sometimes generate even more family conflict (Juang, Syed, & Takagi, 2007; Titzmann, Silbereisen, Mesch, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2011). Because they usually learn the new local language faster than their parents, youth in some families may also assume

responsibilities such as translating and engaging in cultural brokering (Titzmann, 2012). In other immigrant families, the migration process is marked by temporary and sometimes long-term or permanent separations from family members (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). In some families, youth may not know the status of family members left behind, resulting in feelings of guilt or ambiguous loss (Boss, 2000). Regardless of the specific circumstances, separation is typically challenging and painful for both parents and their children. Compared to migrant children and adolescents who have not experienced separation, those who have report higher anxiety and more depressive symptoms (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). They may also feel abandoned and lose trust in their parents. Longer separations put children and adolescents at greater risk of feeling less connected to their parents, which can result in reduced family cohesion (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Thus, the longer the separation, the greater the likely toll on the quality of the attachment relationship with parents.

Some youth may also experience the disappearance or death of attachment figures, such as parents, in war-torn communities. For these youth, violently ruptured attachment relationships are often the key traumatic issue (Kobak, Zajac, & Madsen, 2016).

Unaccompanied refugee minors (e.g., those under 18 migrating alone) are among the most vulnerable (Seglem, Oppedal, & Raeder, 2011). Unaccompanied refugee minors are leaving their primary attachment figures and, thus, losing their basic sources of closeness and safety. In undocumented families, many youth live in daily fear that they, their parents, or other close family members could be deported at any moment (Suárez-Orozco & Yoshikawa, 2013). Violently ruptured attachments due to war, fleeing war, or deportation can and often do cause intense distress (Kobak et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco & Yoshikawa, 2013).

School stress and loss. For immigrant and refugee children and youth, there also are several migration-specific stressors in the school context. In some cases, youth have not had an opportunity to receive formal education in their native country, so post-migration entry

into school becomes a major acculturative adjustment (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016). Other youth have experienced interrupted schooling and may face challenges in learning a new language or being over-age in new classrooms, making it more difficult to relate to new classmates and find new friends. Newcomer youth may also face ethnic discrimination from their peers or teachers (Oxman et al., 2012). Finally, some refugee youth have experienced considerable trauma, which may adversely affect their adjustment and, ultimately, their learning at school (Birman & Tran, 2015; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012, McBrien, 2005).

Community stress and loss. For immigrant and refugee youth and their families, learning and navigating the rules, customs, and regulations in new community institutions, such as school, work, health care, and housing, can be stressful. Additionally, they may experience a loss of status, sense of belonging and connectedness, and “place” associated with having to leave their former neighborhood and community.

The receptivity of the resettlement community plays a critical role in the adaptation of immigrant youth. Discrimination may be experienced in different contexts—in neighborhoods, schools, and public spaces—but also via institutional or structural racism (E. Lee, 2015). For those families settling into lower-income communities where housing tends to be more affordable, lack of resources and opportunities may be more prevalent. Living in a multiracial context is often a new experience for many youth, whose native homelands were more ethnically homogenous. As a result, navigating these new multicultural/multiracial terrains can be confusing, disorienting, and stressful (Zhou, 1997).

A relational perspective on stresses and losses in the context of migration. With migration, familiar people and places are left behind. Leaving behind everything familiar is a ‘natural clue to danger’, which signals a potential loss of safety that often exacerbates stressful experiences (Bowlby, 1973). Thus, all youth—regardless of whether they are

securely or insecurely attached to their caregivers—should attempt to re-establish felt security as they deal with leaving behind the familiar in order to start a new life in the unfamiliar. Moreover, what is unfamiliar can also be stressful. From an attachment perspective, when they feel stressed, most youth should be motivated to interact with the people around them who provide comfort and security. We contend that secure attachment relationships ought to provide a stabilizing sense of felt security when youth encounter migration-related stress, and that developing new close relationships that serve attachment functions in the new environment may facilitate resilience (cf. Masten, 2001). In general, immigrant and refugee youth who have (or have had) secure relationships with prior attachment figures (e.g., parents) ought to adapt better than those with insecure relationships. This is because securely attached youth: (a) have developed more effective coping strategies that allow them to use close others as stable sources of support, (b) their internal working models should lead them to be more optimistic and resilient when dealing with chronic stress, and (c) they have the necessary skills (e.g., knowing how to seek emotional support when it is required; Allen & Tan, 2016) to forge new close relationships with peers and mentors.

Although securely attached youth display a good balance between attachment behaviors and exploratory behaviors (Sroufe, 2005), developmentally appropriate parental support for exploration and autonomy is also critical. This interaction between attachment patterns and parental support explains why secure attachment relationships, in combination with other aspects of supportive parenting and other types of relationships (e.g., supportive friendships, supportive/encouraging teachers and mentors), should predict better adjustment outcomes than attachment security by itself. Sroufe (2005), for example, claims that in order for children to recover well from major challenges and adversities, they need to have either a solid history of supportive attachment figures, a solid supportive network in their current environment that can decrease stressors and challenges, or ideally both.

Even securely attached adolescents, however, may experience difficult adjustment during migration if high migration-related stress impairs the quality of their parents' caregiving or undermines parental support as adolescents are navigating new relationships and in their new environments. Parents who experience acute life stress tend to be more distracted, depressed, and/or absent, which can diminish the quality of their caregiving and may result in more negative parent-adolescent interactions, potentially undermining adolescent adjustment (Benner & Kim, 2010). If secure adolescents perceive their parents are no longer available for emotional support, this could compromise their internal working models and their ability to regulate their emotions effectively.

Generally speaking, however, youth who have secure relationships with long-time attachment figures (e.g., parents) should find these adjustments somewhat easier to navigate, especially if their attachment figures help them resolve major problems that are thwarting their acculturation or adjustment to their new communities. The continued support and availability of attachment figures when navigating new relationships and environments is likely to be very important. Although secure attachment is by no means an inoculation against all negative outcomes, when they do occur, secure youth should be more likely to bounce back (Sroufe, 2005). This, in turn, contributes to our understanding of the basis for their resilience (Masten, Liebkind & Hernandez, 2012).

In sum, immigrant and refugee adolescents who experience hardships can adapt well if ongoing, interpersonally supportive conditions are in place (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). The social and emotional adjustment of youth who possess different attachment patterns, however, may also depend on three additional features associated with time.

Attachment and Adjustment at Different Ages and Stages of Migration

Attachment patterns can and sometimes do change in response to new events and experiences. According to Bowlby (1973, 1988), the internal working models that anchor

different attachment patterns may change when individuals form relationships with new attachment figures or encounter attachment-relevant experiences that strongly contradict their existing internal working models. Empirical evidence has confirmed that internal working models are dynamic, flexible, and constantly being updated (see Crowell, Fraley & Roisman, 2016). For this reason, attachment patterns sometimes change from early childhood to adolescence and into adulthood (Allen & Tan, 2016; Sroufe, 1997). Importantly, youth can develop secure attachment relationships, even those with a history of insecure relationships. The developmental age (age of the adolescent), age of migration, and stage of migration, however, may play significant roles in how youth adjust, given their attachment pattern.

Developmental age and age of migration. Age of migration makes a difference with regard to the experiences youth have in their new country. Studies of immigrants to Canada indicate that those who immigrated before age 10-12 have experiences that are more similar to youth born in Canada, relative to those who immigrated after age 10-12 (Cheung, Chudek, & Heine, 2011). Developmental age also adds another layer to understanding how age of migration is related to adjustment. Early adolescence can be a challenging time due to the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and contextual transitions that adolescents normally experience (Eccles et al., 1991; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). From a cumulative risk perspective (Evans, Li, & Whipple, 2013), encountering multiple stressors and difficult transitions during adolescence poses an additional challenge to the developing coping skills of youth, which may explain why mental health issues increase at the start of adolescence (Petersen et al., 1993). Immigrating during early adolescence may, therefore, be especially difficult because it coincides with other normative developmental challenges.

Older adolescents who experience more severe migration-related stressors (e.g., escaping violent conflict) may benefit from having a longer period of stable psychosocial development and, in particular, a longer history of secure attachment relationships with their

caregivers. In contrast, younger children who grew up surrounded by violent conflict are likely to have greater cumulative adversity that might have undermined their attachment relationships before they migrated, possibly increasing their likelihood of psychological difficulties as they transition to a new environment (Fazel et al., 2012).

Studies of unaccompanied immigrant minors, however, also indicate that, with increasing age, adolescents report increased posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (Bean et al., 2007). Heightened stress may stem from the threat of deportation at age 18 or, from a developmental perspective, the accompanying changes of later adolescence (e.g., increasing self-reliance, making decisions about work and life opportunities, identity development) may increase stress in young adult-unaccompanied refugees. Younger children accompanied by their parents report fewer posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, perhaps because their primary attachment figures are still available to provide emotional support. They are also more likely to have received refugee status and, therefore, do not have to worry about deportation as their older counterparts do (Bean et al., 2007). Thus, age-related institutional policies and regulations as well as developmental changes highlight how the adjustment of immigrant and refugee youth can differ by both developmental age and age of migration.

As youth continue to grow, developing a broader portfolio of secure attachments and close relationships should provide even more potential “buffers” from the many chronic stressors associated with migration (Howes & Spieker, 2016). Youth who develop new, meaningful relationships that provide a sense of closeness, safety, and security should be more inclined to explore and develop new skills and competencies. During and after migration, and as adolescents grow and move through various social systems and contexts (e.g., through school and into jobs), the source, valence, network, and consequences of attachment and close relationships may change further. Securely attached individuals, however, should remain more capable of adjusting to these changes more adaptively.

Stages of migration. Longitudinal findings highlight the need to consider how adjustment might also differ at each of the four stages of migration: (1) *pre-immigration* (when immigrant youth are preparing to leave their homeland and migrate), (2) *transit* (when they are moving to a new place), (3) *resettlement* (when they are initially trying to settle into their new place), and (4) *long-term adjustment* (once they have settled and are trying to adapt/adjust to their new place) (Perez-Foster, 2001). Certain protective factors may be more important at one stage versus another, and adjustment may also differ depending on whether one adopts a short-term or a long-term perspective.

Pre-immigration and transit. In highly stressful or dangerous situations, such as living in a war-torn country before migration or during transit, youth who have secure attachment relationships should fare better in part because they have sources of comfort and reassurance upon which to rely (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Masten & Narayan, 2012). Attachment security, in other words, may be an asset in unstable, dangerous situations, such as perilous journeys across countries and/or seas when youth are exposed to human traffickers, potentially harmful border crossings, long waiting periods in crowded camps, shortages of food or water, and possibly separation from or loss of family members (UNHCR, 2016). In these extreme conditions, attachment security may protect individuals from experiencing further trauma, at least to some degree.

Resettlement and long-term adjustment. After arriving in the new country, the degree of instability and danger may change as immigrant and refugee youth enter more supportive and stable environments. Given the positive, supportive nature of their prior interactions with attachment figures and the more trusting nature of their internal working models (Bretherton & Mulholland, 2008), securely attached youth should—and do—experience better overall adaptation over time, most likely because of their better regulation of negative emotions, their constructive and problem-focused coping skills, their ability to seek out and maintain new

relationships, and their ability to use their positive internal working models to sustain them through difficult times (Handojo, 2000). Other ongoing supports, however, also matter. Secure youths, for example, should not fare well when the challenges of resettlement are overwhelming or severely disrupt their attachment relationships. If, however, new relationships can be developed that eventually serve functions similar to secure attachment relationships, secure youth are likely to fare better than their insecure counterparts.

Upon arriving in a new country, insecurely attached youth may have more difficulty adjusting well, especially if they limit their engagement with potential sources of support available in the new environment. Moreover, people in their new environment (e.g., teachers who are unfamiliar with refugee populations) may misconstrue the behavior of some insecure refugee youth as overly clingy, unappreciative, or dismissive, and then withdraw their support and guidance, producing even greater psychological distress and maladaptation. Experiencing discrimination after arrival may also trigger major concerns and worries, particularly in insecurely attached youth. Given their deactivating coping tendencies, for example, avoidantly attached youth may appear to adapt better in the short-term (during the early stages of migration), but are likely to adapt more poorly in the long-term as stressors persist and accumulate (Handojo, 2000). This might be partly attributable to avoidantly attached youth not taking full advantage of available opportunities during resettlement. Given their hypervigilant coping tendencies, anxiously attached youth may also experience greater difficulty adapting well, both in the short-term and over time (Handojo, 2000), given that their tendency to ruminate about worse-case outcomes keeps them emotionally dysregulated.

In sum, having secure internal working models should *generally* buffer adolescent immigrants and refugees from some of the stressful events they will inevitably face. However, securely attached adolescents should not fare better than insecurely attached adolescents if: (1) the stress is traumatic and overwhelming, (2) their sense of security with

their primary attachment figure(s) significantly weakens during immigration, negatively impacting interactions with their primary attachment figure(s), and/or (3) they lose their primary attachment figure(s) during migration. Finally, the quality of adjustment during migration may also depend on developmental age, age of migration, and stage of migration.

Attachment to the Family and Beyond

Although only a handful of relationships are bona fide attachment relationships (Sroufe, 2016), most youth develop strong emotional connections to people and places that may fulfill some of the key attachment functions by providing a sense of closeness, safety, and security in stressful situations.

Connection to people. Over time, most children form a diversified set of close relationships with people and places outside the family and home that can support resilience and better adjustment, both during and after migration. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis indicates that having more positive relationships with peers (as indexed by greater trust, more communication, and less alienation) is associated with less anxiety and less depression (Gorrese, 2016). With regard to refugee children and adolescents, those who have close, supportive relationships with peers tend to do better in school (Fazel et al., 2012), and newly arrived immigrant youth who have supportive relationships with teachers show more academic engagement and better academic performance (Suarez-Orozco, Pimental, & Martin, 2009). Mentors may be especially important sources of support during the transition period for newly migrating youth (Crul & Schneider, 2014; Roffman, Suárez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003). Because close friends, teachers, and mentors have the potential to fulfill one or more of the three attachment functions (a sense of closeness/proximity, safety, and confidence/competence), these relationships may compensate for the absence of primary family caregivers, particularly for displaced and unaccompanied minors. This is consistent

with the premise that secure attachments with caregivers early in life set the stage for developing strong, supportive close relationships with others later in life (Sroufe, 2016).

Connection to place. We propose “connection to place” as a novel extension of attachment theory. Especially for immigrant and refugee youth, having a positive connection to some place may contribute to better social and emotional development as well as adjustment. Connection to place is defined as “a long-term affective bond to a particular geographic area and the meaning attributed to that bond” (Morgan, 2010, pp. 12). Humans seek proximity to certain places. These places can be safe havens that engender a sense of security, which then fosters exploration of new environments. Moreover, the loss of certain places (especially when forced) can be extremely distressing (Giuliani, 2003; Morgan, 2010). Bowlby noted that “there is a marked tendency for humans, like animals or other species, to remain in a particular familiar locale” because of the safety a familiar place often affords (Bowlby, 1973, pp. 146). Of course, the kinds of interactive experiences and representations that shape emotional bonds to places are not the same as those that result in the formation of attachment bonds to attachment figures. For this reason, we use the term “connection” rather than “attachment”, and do not make any claims about other attachment principles associated with place (e.g., whether people have different attachment patterns to certain places).

The concept of place can have distinct borders, such as a home, city, or country, or it can have ambiguous borders, such as a neighborhood or region. Findings from environmental psychology suggest that distance from a specific place often makes it more salient (Lewicka, 2011) and triggers positive memories and feelings (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, & Zhou, 2009). For immigrant and refugee children, then, connections to places in their home country are likely to become more salient during and/or after migration.

Connection to place also has social and physical dimensions. Within the social sciences, there has been greater emphasis on the social dimension, such as the sense of

belonging to a community or neighborhood because of social ties (Lewicka, 2011). For refugee children and adolescents, a stronger sense of school belonging predicts better academic adjustment (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009; Tyrer & Fazel 2014). Indeed, for U.S. Somali refugee youth, school belonging is a stronger predictor of fewer depressive symptoms and greater self-efficacy than the amount of trauma experienced before migrating (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Beyond social ties, physical space may also be important (Lewicka, 2011). People feel strong emotional bonds to specific physical locations, such as a natural environment (e.g., a park, garden, ocean shore) that has specific smells, sounds, and views, or to broader environments such as a country or continent. In fact, children use certain places to regulate their emotions, such as spending time outside to relieve emotional distress from school (Morgan, 2010). Furthermore, having a positive connection to a place is linked with greater positive well-being in both adults and children (Lewicka, 2011). Accordingly, having positive connections to certain places, such as one's homeland or new neighborhood, could enhance felt security, comfort, and exploration, especially during migration stress and loss. In addition, creating and maintaining connections to *new* places might be important in helping newly arrived immigrant and refugee youth adapt and adjust in their new environment.

The age of migration might also have implications for connection to place. For those who migrate at younger ages, emotional bonds to their heritage country and original home may be weaker than is true of older adolescents, who are likely to have stronger and clearer memories of their heritage country and home. For older adolescents, then, having a positive connection to the heritage place may be an important promotive factor for positive adjustment. Having a positive connection to place in the new country or new home, however, should also be important, regardless of the age of migration, given that post-migration experiences contribute to well-being more than pre-migration ones do (Kia-Keating & Ellis,

2007). We believe that a deeper examination of how and why people and places contribute to emotional security is likely to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of immigrant and refugee youth development and long-term adjustment.

Uplifts Supporting Relationships and Competencies during Migration

Migration is not only about stress and loss; it is also about developing existing and new competencies. Immigrant and refugee youth are continually learning new skills such as becoming bilingual, developing inter-ethnic friendships, acquiring intercultural competence, exercising agency, and building a better life (Titzmann, 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). These competencies are more likely to occur within promotive environments that afford ongoing access to protective factors, including secure attachment relationships with caregivers, strong ties with close others, and strong connections to communities and places.

Besides daily stressors, there are also everyday uplifts and opportunities that promote the development of competencies enroute to better long-term adaptation. We use the term “uplifts” to describe positive occurrences that *directly result* from the migration experience in order to highlight that migration is not merely defined by stress and loss. For example, there may be new opportunities to live in a safer place, new access to education and work opportunities, and the prospect of reuniting with family members. There may also be physical uplifts, such as access to better health care and nutrition, or learning about new activities that promote health (e.g., bike riding: UNHCR, 2016). These new experiences can create further social uplifts, such as opportunities to build new bonds and establish relationships with same-ethnic and/or interethnic friends (Titzmann et al., 2011), thereby helping immigrants become more strongly connected within broader communities. Likewise, connecting to existing immigrant and/or religious organizations and communities may provide important sources of support and identity development for youth (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). There might also be system uplifts, such as volunteer groups or institutions that assist in the settlement of newly

arrived immigrants and refugees. These promotive post-migration experiences are fused with youths' unique pre-migration experiences and histories as well as the collective history of their immigration group to create an adaptive culture (García Coll et al., 1996), which can then support further positive adaptation and adjustment. Thus, with uplifts that create promotive environments, youth—even those who face extremely adverse and traumatic events—should have a better chance of doing well in terms of education, mental health, and social adjustment outcomes (Sirin & Sirin, 2015).

Uplifts associated with migration might also strengthen secure attachment bonds, which should operate as another protective factor, culminating in better adjustment. From an attachment perspective, building or strengthening secure attachment bonds should help regulate fear and wariness, support greater exploration of new environments, and promote better functioning relationships. These different behavioral systems—attachment, fear, exploration, and sociability—are likely to work together. During adolescence, the heightened drive for exploration is counterbalanced by the need for stronger interpersonal connections (Allen & Tan, 2016). Having secure rather than insecure attachments to caregivers, closer instead of more distant emotional ties to friends, and positive rather than negative connections to places within promotive as opposed to inhibiting environments should impact the social and emotional development of youth. In summary, migration involves both separation and loss, but it also affords opportunities to develop new relationships, competencies, and strengths, of which securely attached youth can take better advantage.

Future Directions in Developmental Science for Immigrant and Refugee Youth

As immigrant and refugee youth make their way through the different stages of migration, their attachment patterns, close relationships with important people in their lives, and the quality of their connection to places should all be valuable resources that enhance their sense of security, protection, and confidence when dealing with the chronic stress and

loss associated with migration. Given the critical role played by these relationships, future research should focus on identifying strategies that help immigrant and refugee youth develop and maintain secure attachments and close emotional relationships.

Future research could also broaden our view of the importance of emotional bonds to people to include emotional bonds to places. Migration scholars have documented myriad ways in which immigrants and refugees work individually and collectively to establish ethnic communities and enclaves, as well as to imagine their new host country in ways that establish a stronger sense of connection and belonging to it (Cohen, 2008). How do immigrant and refugee youth create new emotional bonds with their new neighborhoods or communities? How does one create inviting, supportive spaces (e.g., in classrooms or schools) that forge positive connections to specific places, which then promote a sense of belonging, safety, and security? How might connections to certain places help contribute to the formation of secure attachments with people, and vice versa? These are all important areas for future research.

Another important future direction is to examine how the traumatic effects of war, displacement, and forced migration affect the formation of attachment relationships as well as the social and emotional well-being of youth. A national prevalence study in the Netherlands found that, among those at the lowest education level (but not at higher education levels), parents with refugee backgrounds were more likely to engage in child maltreatment than labor immigrants and national comparison groups (Euser, van IJzendoorn, Prinzie, Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). Parental trauma, along with post-migration stresses (e.g., unemployment, lengthy asylum procedures, uncertain asylum status, group housing) may heighten risk for adverse parenting and maltreatment among this group (van Ee, Kieber, Jongmans, Mooren, & Out, 2016). Importantly, parental maltreatment often is an antecedent of disorganized attachment in infancy, which is associated with numerous negative outcomes later in life (Granqvist et al., 2017; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2016).

Future research should also focus on the stability of internal working models. For example, if refugee youth leave their country being securely attached to their parents, how long can they retain secure internal working models in the face of major loss and adversity? Immigration policies that make it difficult for families to reunify may undermine the well-being and security of most youth (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009), which could weaken bonds with their community or neighborhood. Policies of deporting family members or separating them during detention are also bound to disrupt attachment relationships and, ultimately, the well-being of most youth.

Intervention studies could be conducted to determine whether strategies designed to remind youth of attachment security at different stages of their lives or the migration process improve their adjustment. Reminding individuals of secure attachments with prior people (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005) or positive connections to significant places (Scannell & Gifford, 2017) can generate a greater sense of safety and meaning. Additionally, family members could be taught how to buffer the dysfunctional behaviors of insecurely attached immigrant youth (Simpson & Overall, 2014). Future work might also build on existing attachment intervention programs, such as the Circle of Security (Berlin, Zeanah, & Lieberman, 2016), modifying them to be culturally responsive to specific immigrant and refugee communities. Another approach would be to improve primary attachment relationships using attachment sensitivity parenting training, particularly to prevent disorganized attachment patterns (Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & IJzendoorn, 2005). It will be important to develop and build upon appropriate interventions and create conditions (namely, “stable, safe, and nurturing relationships”; Granqvist et al., 2017, pp. 3) that promote securely attached relationships.

Finally, attachment relationships are embedded within institutional and societal-level structures and conditions. Even secure attachment relationships with caregivers can be

overwhelmed in certain contexts. If, for instance, youth and their families migrate to locations where schools and communities are marred by instability and violence, having a secure attachment with a caregiver may not be sufficient to counteract the adverse effects of such threatening environments. Syrian refugee children living in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, for example, must deal with limited access to school enrollment, severe economic hardships, and an increasingly unwelcome and hostile environment as the numbers of refugee children rise (Sirin & Sirin, 2015). Attachment to people and connection to places must be understood, therefore, within the broader contexts and systems in which they reside. This perspective can add to our growing understanding of why some immigrant youth adjust better than others.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have borrowed core principles of attachment theory, along with key ideas in relationship science, to build upon García Coll et al.'s (1996) original integrative model. In doing so, we have identified several new avenues through which the healthier development of immigrant and refugee youth could be promoted more globally. From attachment and relational perspectives, immigrant and refugee youth should experience better outcomes to the extent that they: (1) maintain close connections to people and places that provide a sense of safety, comfort, and encouragement when navigating this difficult life transition, and (2) find ways to create a sense of connection and belonging to the new people, places, communities, and social networks in which they now live. These close bonds to people and connection to places (both familiar and new) should counter some of the resource and social stratification challenges that many minority youth experience, as articulated in García Coll et al.'s model. The success and positive social and emotional development of immigrant and refugee youth within their families, schools, work, and society is crucial, not only for them as individuals, but for society as a whole.

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