

Changing Familial Roles for Immigrant Adolescents From the Former Soviet Union to Israel

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Abstract

This article examines how young immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union during their adolescence perceive and cope with the resulting changes in their family roles. Data collected via interviews and focus groups from adolescents and young adults ($N = 34$) revealed six distinct roles: language broker, family navigator, breadwinner, cultural broker, self-caretaker, and counselor. These roles were reported to generate negative effects (e.g., lost childhood, distress) and simultaneously positive effects (e.g., gaining independence, life-experience). Various mechanisms facilitated coping, including help from friends and family, self-strength, and a sense of meaning. The findings challenge traditional views of role reversal and broaden the perspective on role change in immigration. This article discusses the importance of cultural context as well as implications of the findings for theory, research, and practice.

Keywords

immigration, adolescents, role change, family dynamics

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Immigration is a multifaceted process that challenges individuals and families and affects the stability and continuity of family roles (Foner, 1997). Immigration literature suggests that the loss of resources and support systems along with general adaptation difficulties may increase family reliance on adolescent children, who play a dominant role in immigrant families (Mirsky & Peretz, 2006; Remennick, 2007). It is also commonly claimed that children acquire a new language more rapidly than adults and are more open to new norms and values. Therefore, they often become language brokers for their parents, translating the new language when needed (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). This translation usually includes “cultural brokering,” defined as the interpretation and mediation of cultural norms and practices (e.g., Jurkovic et al., 2004; Orellana, 2009). While scholars investigated changes in the roles of immigrant parents in various cultural contexts, only few studies examine how children and adolescents from different cultural groups are affected and cope with these changes. Existing studies that pertain to the issue tend to focus mainly on brokering roles, disregarding other role changes.

This article addresses this gap by giving voice and agency to adolescents and young adults as they reflect on their experiences following immigration. The article expands on the literature regarding immigrant children’s roles as cultural and language brokers. It also explores the contexts of immigration in Israel and former Soviet Union (FSU) and illustrates the importance of a context informed perspective of role changes. In addition, the article contributes to the literature by bringing to light the participants’ perspectives on the simultaneous advantages and disadvantages of acquiring new roles following immigration, as well as their views on the factors that helped them cope. Moreover, the retrospective views of young adults on role change and family dynamics can offer further insights regarding this phenomenon.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two main theoretical frameworks guide this study. The first is the meaning of role change in immigration as different from classical *parentification*. The second relates to the importance of a context-informed perspective to the study of role change in immigration.

Parent-Child Role Reversal Versus Role Change in Immigration

The traditional concepts of *role reversal* or *parental children* describe a situation in which children adopt parental roles while their parents behave as if they are helpless (Lopez, 1986). Minuchin (1974) proposed the concept of

parental-child, referring to social and economic circumstances that lead children to assume parental roles. This definition later extended to include cases in which children and adolescents assumed adult roles before they were physically or emotionally ready to handle these roles successfully (Lopez, 1986). Most studies in the area of role reversal and parental-children are influenced by the deficit perspective and focus on situations in which disease, substance abuse, divorce, death, marital problems, and/or poverty hindered parental performance (Jacobvitz & Bush, 1996; Jurkovic, 1998). Scholars have reported various negative effects on such children, including depression, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, narcissism, self-handicapping tendencies, shame, loss of trust in others and social isolation (Jacobvitz & Bush, 1996; Jurkovic, 1998; Lopez, 1986). Nevertheless, some studies suggest that adopting parental roles is not always problematic for children (Barnett & Parker, 1998). The positive attributes found among parental-children include faster individuation and higher self-esteem (Walker & Lee, 1998), as well as empowerment (Fenchel, 1998) and high levels of empathy and responsibility (Herer & Mayseless, 2000).

In immigration, language brokering is presented as a stressor (Jones & Trickett, 2005; Kam, 2011) and as contributing to feelings of exposure and distress (Kaur & Mills, 1993). Yet scholars report a variety of positive outcomes of brokering roles in the cognitive domain (Dorner, Orellana, & Li-Grining, 2007), in school motivation, academic self-efficacy (Buriel, Perez, De-Ment, Chavez, & Moran, 1998; Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Morales & Hanson, 2005), and in the emotional and social domains, including enhancement of interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and social self-efficacy (Jurkovic et al., 2004; Kaur & Mills, 1993). Other studies related to immigration display the same dichotomy. Negative results of role change in immigration include higher levels of psychological distress (Roer-Strier & Kurman, 2009); meanwhile, positive results include better relationships with parents (Dorner, Orellana, & Jimenez, 2008; Orellana, 2009; Walsh, Shulman, Bar-On, & Tsur, 2006), a greater sense of purpose (Jurkovic et al., 2004; Kiang, 2012), and an increasing cultural awareness related to sense of family commitment (Wu & Kim, 2009).

Ecological Theory and the Case of Role Change

According to ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), a network of interactions with their environments and cultural contexts influence developing individuals. This theory describes several layers of interactions: the *micro-system* includes the interactions between the immigrant adolescent and his or her caregivers and others with whom there is face-to-face interaction; the

mesosystem represents interactions between the microsystems, such as the family's connections with different institutions in the society. An important mesosystemic dynamic, which Bronfenbrenner refers to as "ecological transition," involves shifts in roles and settings that occur in the child's life and those responsible for his or her care as a result of life events, such as immigration (Jurkovic et al., 2004). *Exosystem* refers to interactions with the surrounding community that indirectly affect the immigrant adolescent, such as peers or support systems. The *macrosystem* is the global cultural norms and institutions that influence all the other systems. In the case of immigration, these systems include influences from the culture of origin and receiving country; sometimes, it even includes the culture of immigrant diaspora, which is a new hybrid mixture of these cultures. Another component, the *chronosystem*, refers to time and applies to historical developments that influence the individual, his or her family, and his or her communities. In this study, the interactions within families and the chronosystem represented by two age groups will be taken into account. It will also consider the process of immigration and cultural context, including children's expectations, family dynamics, and gender roles. The main characteristics of the cultural context are described below.

Families Immigrating to Israel From the FSU

Israeli society has been enriched by a constant influx of immigrants from Jewish communities all over the world. This migration embodies a central theme in the Israeli national ethos, that of the re-unification of the Jewish nation (Leshem, 2003). The Law of Return, which offers Israeli citizenship to Jews, regulates immigration to Israel (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008) and provides initial government support for rent and language studies.

A large wave of immigration began in 1989, bringing to Israel over a million immigrants from the FSU, who currently represent more than one-fifth of the total Jewish population in Israel. The majority of FSU immigrants are professional, highly educated, and secular individuals who have formed small, multigenerational families (Remennick, 2007). Though they lived in different regions of the FSU, most of the Jewish immigrants came from urban areas where they lived within a *private culture* that stressed the importance of fostering intelligence and achievement (Herz & Rosen, 1982). Consequently, parents encouraged their children to devote most of their time to their academic studies. Children were not encouraged to take part in family decisions, to be autonomous, or to assume family duties (Mirsky & Prawer, 2003). Parents made all the important decisions regarding the lives of the family

members and the children. Although the communist regime valued work and Jews were educated to believe that all types of work are equally important and equally accessible to women and men, in their private culture, they were reported to maintain a conservative and highly gendered perception of family roles. Men were expected to be the main providers in family (Buckley, 1997; Lipovskaya, 1994).

Upon arrival to Israel, many of the immigrants from the FSU sought work immediately and did not have the time or the means to attend schools to learn Hebrew (Leshem, 2003). Divorce rates increased after immigration and some men returned to the FSU, resulting in a large number of single-parent households. Many families lost the support of grandparents who had been sharing the household expenses and tasks in the FSU (Roer-Strier & Strier, 2005). Against this background of children's limited family responsibilities in the FSU and the challenges to the FSU family following immigration, this article explores role change and its implications from the perspective of the children.

This article addresses the following research questions: (a) How did adolescents from FSU experience role change after they immigrated to Israel? (b) What were the effects of their new roles on their lives? (c) What helped them cope with the challenges of these role changes?

Method

A qualitative paradigm was employed to explore and document young people's perceptions and experiences of role change following immigration along with the consequences of this change. Such a paradigm aims at a holistic understanding of phenomena by examining perceptions, world views, and meanings that are influenced by the environmental context and the participants' subjective interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Participants

Two age groups were chosen to investigate current and retrospective experiences of role reversal: adolescents who currently experience role change and young adults who were asked to provide a retrospective view (according to Bronfenbrenner's *chrono lens*) of their role change experiences. It was argued that retrospective reports can be more reflective and contain fewer psychological defenses (e.g., denial) than reports on current status given by children or adolescents (Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993). However, the adolescents' reports were utilized to ensure that memory biases are not too strong.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Studied Groups.

Young adults group (n = 17)			Adolescents group (n = 17)	
Age	M	25.70	M	16.00
	Range	23-31	Range	15-18
Gender	Female	11	Female	11
	Male	6	Male	6
Country of origin	Russia	8	Russia	9
	Ukraine	6	Ukraine	2
	Belorussia	3	Belorussia	2
			Kazakhstan	1
			Moldova	1
		Uzbekistan	2	
Age at immigration	M	12.59	M	10.38
	Range	11-16	Range	10-16
Years in Israel	M	13.19	M	5.56
	Range	10-17	Range	2-7
Family composition	Two parents	14	Two parents	8
Birth order	Single	8	Single	4
	Oldest	3	Oldest	7
	Other	6	Other	6

The study included a total of 34 participants, 17 adolescents (aged 15-18) and 17 young adults (aged 23-31). In Israel, age 23 is regarded as the beginning of adulthood. It is the age when young adults complete their compulsory army service and are expected to study a profession or find a job (Kulik, 2004). Each age group comprised of 10 semistructured interviews and one focus group with seven participants. The characteristics of the two subsamples are reported in Table 1. Participants in both age groups are immigrants who came from the FSU between the ages of 10 and 16 with their own parents. In former studies, FSU immigrants were found to perform new roles in their families from age 10 and up. These roles include but are not limited to helping parents by taking paid jobs such as cleaning stairs, and translating for parents. The upper limit of 16 was chosen as we wanted to focus on role change during adolescence.

Sampling

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a combination of purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling methods were used to identify participants. Purposive sampling aims at selecting participants according to theoretical guidelines and criteria chosen for the researched population. Convenience sampling relies on populations available to the researcher, while in snowball sampling

participants help researchers find more participants, using informants from the community and referrals from various social services (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Research Tools

Two qualitative research tools, semistructured interviews and focus groups, were utilized in this study. Interviews are primary tools in qualitative research aimed at understanding the experiences of other people and the meanings they attribute to these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study included 20 interviews with prepared questions. The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's language of choice—either Hebrew or Russian (half the interviews were held in Russian and half in Hebrew). The interviews ranged from 1 to 2 hours, and were held at a time and place according to participants' preferences.

To enhance the rigor of this study, the interview data were triangulated with data gathered via two focus groups (Morgan, 1997; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2006). Focus groups are based on a group interview that includes a dialogue between the researcher and the participants (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). The group interaction in a focus group format allows a range of perspectives and themes to emerge. The discussions are less dependent on interviewer-interviewee interaction and encourage participants to address issues provoked by other group members. Therefore, group discussion may add important information to individual interviews. We conducted two focus groups (one of young adolescents and one of young adults). Each group included seven participants with diverse characteristics to increase the variety of the reported experiences (see Table 1). Focus groups were held in Russian at the request of the participants, and lasted up to 3 hours. Participants were very cooperative and eager to share their experiences on a topic they rarely discussed in a group.

In both the interviews and the focus groups, participants were asked whether they experienced any change in their role in the family following immigration. If they did, they were asked how they experienced the changes and under what circumstances they assumed the roles. They were then asked about the effects of the roles, how they coped with them, and what helped them cope.

The Research Team

In qualitative research, the researcher is an integral part of the examination (Shkedi, 2003). The principal investigator in this study is a bi-lingual scholar who immigrated to Israel from the FSU in 1997 as part of a youth program. At the time of the study, she was working as a social worker in an educational residential youth village that houses mainly adolescents who emigrated from

the FSU. Through her work place, her social contacts, and the help of the participants, she was able to recruit participants from both age groups. To date, she specializes in immigration studies and qualitative research.

Both of the co-authors are experts in cross-cultural psychology and immigration studies. They are familiar with the immigration from FSU and are studying role change in immigration in diverse cultural groups in Israel.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Hebrew University ethics committee and the Ministry of Education. Parents of participants under the age of 18 were approached and the study was explained to them. Parents and all the participants signed informed consent forms. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all interviewees.

Data Analysis

All interviews and focus group discussions were tape recorded, translated, and transcribed by the interviewer, while a second bi-lingual investigator listened to the tapes and verified the accuracy of the translation and transcription. The transcribed protocols of the interviews and focus group meetings were then coded by two independent bi-lingual coders (graduate students who immigrated to Israel from the FSU) who identified and defined key categories and themes that emerged from the data. Coding sheets (including quotations) were developed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Entries with transcript page references were made so the researchers could identify and refer back to the context in which each statement was made. After all sections of the protocols were entered into the coding sheets, the two coders independently identified and ordered the different categories and themes (Creswell, 2007). The coders compared their definitions of the codes, categories, themes, and ratings, and in cases of discrepancies in their definitions, ordering, or rating, they discussed the differences until reaching a consensus.

For the focus group analysis, we utilized a technique we term "category count." After all group members finished responding to a question, the researcher outlined the different points of view (codes) identified during the discussion and asked the participants "Who agrees?" The researcher counted the hands raised and recorded the initials of the specific participants who agreed with each response. This technique enabled the qualitative researcher to document the views of all the participants. It was then possible to utilize focus group data in the same way as interview data so that the final analysis reported the number of participants providing each response (see example in Table 2).

Table 2. Roles following immigration by age and gender.

Roles change following immigration	F1 (n = 7)		I1 (n = 10)		F2 (n = 7)		I2 (n = 10)	
	M (n = 2) F (n = 5)		M (n = 4) F (n = 6)		M (n = 3) F (n = 4)		M (n = 3) F (n = 7)	
	I	3	3	5	3	3	I	4
Roles								
Language broker	I	2	4	3	2	4	3	5
Family navigator								
Partner in family management	2	2	2	4	I	2	I	4
The family administrator	I	2	2	3	I	I	I	4
The family leader	—	—	I	—	—	2	—	2
Breadwinner								
Breadwinner	I	I	2	3	2	3	—	2
On-the-job help	—	I	I	—	2	—	I	—
Cultural broker	—	—	I	2	I	2	2	4
Self-caretaker	—	—	2	4	I	2	I	I
Counselor and emotional supporter for parents	—	I	I	2	I	—	I	2
Disadvantages of role change								
Lost childhood	—	4	—	4	—	5	—	5
New roles consumed time and energy	—	3	I	—	—	—	I	2
Emotional distress								
Anger	—	I	I	I	I	—	I	2
Loneliness	—	I	—	2	—	2	—	2
Overwhelmed			—	I			—	3
Advantages of role change								
Contribution to self-development								
Maturity and independence	—	4	I	I	—	I	3	—
Life experience	I	I	I	—	I	I	2	—
Sense of satisfaction	—	I	I	I	—	—	I	2
Contribution to family relations								
Family cohesion	—	—	—	I	—	—	—	2
Positive feedback from parents	I	I	—	2	I	—	I	2
Coping with the new roles								
Peer support	I	4	3	3	3	I	I	I
Family support	—	5	—	6	—	2	I	4
Inner strength	I	—	3	—	—	2	—	—
Sense of meaning	I	—	I	I	—	—	—	—

Note. (I) and (F) represent information from the interviews and focus groups, respectively.

Finally, in qualitative studies, rigor is based mainly on accurate reporting and transparency of the research process (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). To enhance rigor, each protocol transcription was read and analyzed by at least two readers. The dyads compared their analyses and reached a consensus

regarding differences. Quotations were translated into English by two of the authors and then back-translated to Russian and Hebrew to assure accuracy. Member-checking processes (Shkedi, 2003) included discussing the findings with participants to ensure accuracy of the analysis. Validity was ascertained by examining seven stages of the investigation: thematizing, designing, conducting, transcribing, analyzing, validating, and reporting (for explanations and elaborations, see Kvale 1996).

Findings

The following section describes the participants' roles in the family before and after immigration. The new roles are listed and exemplified. Next, the subjective advantages and disadvantages of the roles assumed after immigration are outlined. Finally, the participants' reports of what they perceived as helpful in coping with the new roles are listed. In the quotations that follow, (I) and (F) represent information from the interviews and focus groups, respectively, and (1) and (2) represent the adolescent and adult groups, respectively. All the names are pseudonyms. Table 2 presents the frequencies of the responses described in the following categories/themes by the group.

Adolescents' Roles Before and After Immigration

When referring to their lives before immigration, many of the participants (23) described a protected childhood and adolescence in which studying was central. Tamara (I,2) noted that "Studying was mostly what I did, this was the most important role." Many participants realized that before immigration their role in the family was "to be children" and that their parents took care of everything and made all important decisions. Ella (F,2) talked about her older sister: "She was a child until we immigrated, our parents took care of everything and made sure we were having a good childhood." Natalia (I,2) concluded: "In the FSU I did not have to think about any family problems."

After immigration, all 34 participants identified a variety of new roles that were not common in family life in the FSU and assumed following immigration. The roles were grouped into six categories: language broker, family navigator, breadwinner, cultural broker, self-caretaker, counselor, and emotional supporter for parents.

Language broker. Many participants (24) noted serving as "the family translator." The language broker role includes accompanying parents to appointments,

translating letters, filling in forms, and other similar duties. Natasha (I,2) stated: "I had to translate everything, water bills . . . when we bought an apartment, I translated everything."

Dona (I,2) said, "I would take my mother to the health clinic and translate back and forth, then I would take her to the supermarket, then to the bank, I would write for her." In some families, even after many years in the country, the parents still ask their children to accompany them to their appointments. German (I,1) stated that even today, although his mother can now read Hebrew, "she asks me to translate because it is easier." Lina (I,1) said, "I always helped my mother in translations and I continue to do it now. I translate letters and everything."

Family navigator. This role consists of several subcategories as described below.

Partner in family management. In contrast to the 22 participants who reported that they did not take any part in decision-making before immigration, after immigration 18 participants reported they fully participated in every family decision. Their parents asked for their opinions, and they could take a stand and influence many domains of their lives. Yulia (I,2) reports: "We became partners in all decisions, where to go, which school to attend . . . what should our mother wear"

The family administrator. This subrole was reported by 15 participants who took care of the family's banking, health care, and other bureaucratic matters. Aharon (I,2) reported that he went to the employment agency and took care of his parents' driver's licenses. Rita (F,2) coined the term "the family administrator." She explained, "I took care of things, I made phone calls . . . in general, all the administrative aspects of life here." Nika (F,1) noted that at the age of 14, her mother gave her cell phone number to people from different agencies so they could talk to her about the apartment, bank accounts, medical issues, and other family matters. They called her while she was at school attending classes.

The family leader. Five participants reported assuming the role of family leader. In addition to giving advice to their parents and making decisions, they felt they were in fact leading the family. German (I,1) reported: "I was the leader, my mother asked me what job she should get, what conditions should she ask for." Julia (I,2) stated that she helped her family move to another town. She made the decision about the move, chose the location, and took a major part in preparing for the move.

Breadwinner. Fourteen participants reported that after immigration they began working and shared the money they earned with their family. Robert (F,2) stated: "I started earning money, I did not take money from my parents and in critical situations I played the role of provider." Karina (I,2) and Julia (I,2) started working on weekends or washing dishes at social gatherings at the age of 13. They gave the money to their family. Vassili (F,2) worked in a green-grocer shop from age 15 on. He helped his parents financially and bought toys for his little brother. Alexandra (F,1), who found a job at age 14, shared, "I wanted to support myself, I wanted to leave home so that my mom would be able to rent a smaller apartment for herself, so she would have fewer problems."

On-the-job help. A subcategory of the breadwinning theme is providing parents with on-the-job help. Five participants described this kind of help: "I mean physical work. I went to help my parents clean," said Sergei (I,2), while Vassili (F,2) reported: "I helped my mother clean apartments and stairways."

Cultural broker. Twelve participants who assumed the role of cultural broker tried to explain and mediate the host culture to their parents to help them integrate. Aharon (I,2) told his parents that the norms of communication are different in the host culture. Thus, a person that seems disrespectful may not necessarily be impolite. "I often explained the small nuances of Israeli life to my parents, telling them they cannot change the whole country even if they do not like it . . ." Tamara (I,2), recalled: "It was more than mere translation; I explained to my parents what was happening, how school operated, how they teach." Dona (I,2) explained to her parents what was customary to wear or what presents to give when they were invited to a wedding.

Self-caretaker. Eleven participants reported they had to take care of themselves and be self-reliant so as not to bother their families. Sergei (F,2) said he lowered his needs to a minimum and tried to keep his problems to himself as his mom had her share of her own problems. Inna (I,1) tells how she stopped eating sweets because she wasn't going to ask her parents to spend money on her. Lina (F,1) said: "I buy for myself all I need, even school necessities. I never ask my parents for any things, they have problems of their own."

Counselor and emotional supporter for parents. Eight participants described how they gave advice, emotional support, and encouragement to their parents. Alexandra (F,1) took full responsibility for her mother's emotional state. "When my mother is in a crisis, I get her out of it." Nadia (I,2) recalls,

when we came, my father would say “where did you bring me to? I had work, a car, an apartment and friends, here I have to slave to pay the bills, everything is so expensive . . .” and at such times I would support my father. I would say to him, “everything will be fine, why are you worried? . . . live here a little longer. You will find a good job and maybe with time you will be able to buy an apartment because you need time for everything.” I said this in the hope of empowering him.”

The Effects of the New Roles

The second research question of this study addresses the effects of the new roles on the adolescents’ lives. Participants were asked to describe these effects in an open-ended question, with the answers grouped according to roles’ advantages and disadvantages. All participants (34) addressed the effects of role changes. Twenty-two of them reported perceiving a combination of both advantages and disadvantages of the roles. Twelve mentioned only one or the other. Those who exclusively reported advantages were seven boys and two girls. Three girls and none of the boys exclusively reported disadvantages.

Disadvantages of role change. The disadvantages of the new roles were described as lost childhood and emotional distress.

“Lost childhood.” Eighteen participants, all females, indicated that role changes caused them to lose their childhood and grow up too fast. They felt the new roles were too weighty for them and had a negative effect on their daily functioning. Yulia (I,2) said in her interview: “These role changes made me grow up fast . . . I practically do not remember myself as a child, as an adolescent or passing any life cycle stages as is expected . . . I was a little grownup at an early age.” Aurora (I,1) adds to this description: “You had to think more and worry more . . . there were unpleasant situations that I wish I knew nothing about. I wish they could have coped alone and not involve me.”

New roles consumed time and energy. Seven participants said specifically that the new roles consumed time and energy they could have invested in their studies or other age-appropriate activities. Zina (F,1) declared: “Another disadvantage of helping our parents was that it affected our studies. I studied less well,” and Alexandra (F,1) stated, “I want to go out or go on a date but instead I had to go with mom to my sister’s school to see what is going on there to help my sister, because my mother does not speak the language and cannot go to the school by herself.”

Emotional distress. Three subcategories of emotional distress were identified.

Resulting anger. Seven participants noted that they felt anger as a result of the new roles. Rivka (I,2) got angry with her parents for leaving her no choice but to help them in their everyday life:

In some ways I am angry with my parents: why didn't they study Hebrew? . . . in the end they could have done something for themselves . . . become somebody here . . . today I try not to get overly involved . . . I give them superficial explanations and avoid getting into the deep water . . .

Loneliness. Seven participants said they saw the need to cope by themselves with everyday hassles with no one to lean on as a disadvantage of the role change. Rita (F,2) stated: "In the past you had your parents to rely on and here you are completely alone." Ella (I,2) noted: "You feel like the ground sinks under you. Although your parents continue to support and help, it is not the same strong support it used to be."

Overwhelmed. Four female participants stated the new roles overwhelmed them emotionally and physically. Natalia (I,2) described the load she was carrying. "Half a day here and half a day there is a lot of time to invest in my parents. There [in FSU] I was the master of my time and here I had to take care of myself and of the family problems . . . this was overwhelming."

Advantages of role change. The advantages of the new roles were described as contribution to self-development and to family relations.

Contribution to self-development. Three subcategories were identified.

Maturity and independence. Alexandra (F,1), like 10 other participants, believes that maturing at an early age can be an advantage. "On the bright side," she said, "I gained a new attitude toward life, I grew up, I finally understand what is going on in this life. Otherwise I would still see the world through rose-colored glasses." Several participants described the sense of independence the new role gave them. Dona (I,2) said, "It gave me a sense of independence. If I need money I know I can clean stairs, do any job that gives money. If you need money, you work. This is independence." Lina (I,1) added, "I know I am not one of those spoiled girls that do not do anything and do not care about their parents. I can do things on my own."

Life experience. Seven participants said that the role change provided them the life experience and helped them learn important new things for the

future. Andrei (F,1) said, "The new roles provide life experience that will help you in your future work and problem solving," and Alexandra (F,1) confirmed, "Yes, it really gives you this life experience."

Sense of satisfaction and self-efficacy. Six participants reported feeling satisfied they managed with their new roles. Dona (I,2) said: "It gave me a very good feeling about myself . . . like wow, I am doing my part." Tania (I,2) felt the roles she assumed made her more confident and prepared. "It helps you advance in life, you understand how things operate, what you have to do . . . what strings to pull for advancing economically or socially; it helps you." Yulia (I,2) concluded, "I have more self-confidence . . . I know that under any circumstances I will manage . . . I will survive."

Contribution to family relations

Family cohesion. Three participants felt the new roles contributed to family closeness. Rivka (I,2) said, "The advantages were that I felt more involved in the family . . . closer to my parents . . . knowing what the problems were . . ." Dona (I, 2) said, "It strengthens the family ties . . . makes you a tight unit."

Positive feedback from parents. Eight participants felt their parents' attitudes toward them changed for the better after immigration. Their parents regarded them as more mature and reliable. Nadia (I,1) recalls, "Their attitude changed immediately, they saw me earning money and thought, 'she has grown up.' Their point of view changes when they see you can support yourself and are not dependent on them anymore."

Coping With the New Roles

The third research question pertains to what participants found helpful in coping with the challenges of these role changes. Four main categories emerged from the data: peer support, family support, inner strength, and sense of meaning.

Peer support. When asked what helped them cope with the challenges of the new roles, 17 participants claimed it was the support they received from their friends in dealing with the new roles. Robert (F,1) said,

What helped me cope with the new role . . . I would say friends. I had a very close group of friends. Of course we would not sit and discuss problems openly, but it was there under the surface . . . I knew I was not alone . . .

Alexandra (F,2) also reported, "My girlfriends helped me deal with being stressed and feeling overwhelmed."

Family support. Fifteen participants (mostly girls) regarded support from their family as a main source of help in coping with the challenges of the new roles. Nika (F,1) described her mother's concern for her: "She gives me good advice . . . she is my number one helper in coping with my new roles." Ella (I,2) stated: "They gave me a feeling my help was so important and needed. They continued to be close and gave me the feeling I can rely on them." Lada (I,2) also emphasized the support of her family in coping with the role: "It was my mom and sister and uncle who helped. My uncle would help me with long talks and advice on how to behave . . . I knew he would never give me a bad advice."

Participants also noted that the strength and coping ability of family members helped them cope with the new roles. Dona (I,2) explains: "If my grandmother at her age is willing to get a job and work, how can I, at age 13, not work? If she can manage, I can certainly manage."

Inner strength. Six participants, mostly males, said that what helped them cope with the new roles was that they had to deal with them on their own. "I helped myself . . . I was strong" said Vlad (F,2). Five other participants referred to their personal characteristics. Rivka (I,2) said, "I helped myself, my sense of responsibility, this is what helped me." Alexandra (F,1) referred to her motivation: "What helped me were my dreams and plans for the future . . . that I want to achieve something in this life . . . that I look to the future."

Sense of meaning. Three participants said that the role they assumed gave meaning to their lives and even prevented them from making mistakes or from getting involved in risky behaviors. Tania (I,2) said: "It helped me make fewer mistakes in my life . . . when my peers between the ages of 15 and 21 made mistakes, I made fewer." German (I,1) noted: "If not for these roles, I would have long ago become an alcoholic under a park bench or a drug addict or something like that."

Gender Differences

It should be noted that despite the fact that gender differences were not studied systematically, differences in the way males and females experienced, interpreted and coped with role changes. While the girls mostly felt that the new roles resulted in a disadvantage of a "lost childhood" and depended more on their families for support and coping with the new role, more boys adopted

the view that the new roles had advantages and led to increased maturity, independence, and sense of responsibility. They depended more on peers and inner strengths for coping.

Discussion

In this study, we sought to investigate the manifestations, implications, and coping of immigrant adolescents with role changes. A major finding of this study is that in addition to the roles of language and cultural broker discussed in immigration literature, our participants described four additional role categories: family navigator, breadwinner, self-caretaker, and counselor. Participants shared that these roles generate both negative and positive effects. Interestingly, most participants reported experiencing both advantages and disadvantages simultaneously. Among the negative effects were the perception of a “lost childhood” and feelings of distress caused by the roles. Positive outcomes included contribution to the self and to family relations. Family and friends helped in coping with the challenges, as did self-reliance and a sense of meaning.

Revisiting Role Change in Immigration

The deficit perspective, utilizing the concepts of *role reversal* or *parental children*, served as the main conceptual framework regarding research on role change in immigration. We believe that role change in immigration should be considered as a different phenomenon than role reversal, which was previously defined as a situation in which a child adopts parental roles while parents behave helplessly and offer limited support to their children (Lopez, 1986). This study discovered that although children assumed new roles to support their parents, they attributed the reason for taking these roles to the restrictive conditions of immigration rather than to parental pathology and weakness. The contribution of assuming these new roles to improved family relationships supports this notion.

Participants' descriptions of coping with their new roles indicate that in many cases the family continues to be seen as a source of support, suggesting that the role change does not automatically result in loss of a sense of family cohesion. Some participants regarded their contribution to family cohesion as one of the positive outcomes of the new roles. The findings suggest that role change advantages were seen when parents appreciated and acknowledged their children's contribution to family cohesion. Moreover, children regarded the motivation of their parents and other family members to integrate and adapt to the new country as reinforcement. It can be concluded that from the

children's perspective, the early individuation process facilitated by role change did not lead to an unhealthy separation from parents.

The findings in this study support previous reports of positive outcomes in the brokering literature, such as family cohesion and connectedness (Dorner et al., 2008; Orellana, 2003; Walsh et al., 2006), enhancement of interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and social self-efficacy (Jurkovic et al., 2004; Kaur & Mills, 1993). They also support the findings of negative outcomes, such as the feelings of distress (Jurkovic et al., 2004; Kaur & Mills, 1993). However, the unique contribution of this study is the finding that both positive and negative effects may be perceived simultaneously. Future quantitative studies of role change in immigration should examine whether certain roles lead to certain outcomes (positive versus negative) or whether the same roles have positive and negative outcomes.

Developing a Context—Informed Perspective of Role Change

Both role changes and children's notions of whether consequences of the changes are positive or negative are influenced by the meaning they attribute to their experiences. This meaning may be influenced by many variables, among them developmental stage, temperament, personality, cultural background, and so on.

In line with the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), the impact of cultural context before and after immigration should be considered in evaluating and allocating meaning to role change and its consequences. Participants described relatively protected childhoods in the FSU prior to immigration, where they were not expected to take part in family decisions, family problems, or family needs. Their main role was to focus on their academic studies, which were seen as a path to future advancement (Mirsky & Prawer, 2003). This background may explain their descriptions of the negative impact of role change, expressed in terms of their *lost childhood*. While many FSU participants mentioned their *lost childhood* as a disadvantage, they did not rebel against assuming the new roles. This can be explained by their socialization in the FSU before immigration, where children were encouraged to respect their parents and remain attached and obligated to them until a late age (Walsh et al., 2006).

The term *lost childhood* was not found even once in a parallel study of role change among a group of Ethiopian young adults who in their home culture were socialized to help their parents, take part in family economics, and raise their siblings (Kashy, 2011). Taking responsibility for siblings, which was rarely mentioned among the FSU immigrants, was frequently mentioned in our parallel Israeli groups of immigrants from Ethiopia and South Lebanon,

who emphasized family obligation and interdependence (Dabbagh, in press; Kashy, 2011). Studies with Hispanic population in the United States also demonstrate taking responsibility for siblings (Gomez, 2003; Jurkovic et al., 2004; Valenzuela, 1999).

In a number of studies, Orellana and colleagues also present a similar approach to cultural influence (Dorner et al., 2007; Dorner et al., 2008; Orellana, 2009). Based on interdependent-independent scripts, they argued that language brokering assumptions rely on a Western mentality that considers brokering to be a premature act of independence that is detrimental to youth. Yet in immigrant families from non-Western origins, assuming more responsibilities that benefit the family is perceived as a normal act of interdependence (see also Wu & Kim, 2009).

Contextual influences on coping with role changes following immigration may be also related to gender role expectations (Archer, 1996). In previous research, adolescent gender related to the amount of language brokering. In several studies involving Latino samples (Buriel et al., 1998; Orellana, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002), girls were more likely to assume the translator role. However, Jones and Trickett (2005) did not find such differences in their adolescent sample from the FSU. Similarly, we did not find differences in the reports on translation in this study. However, our findings suggest that girls grieved their *lost childhood* more than boys. In contrast, boys felt stronger and were more inclined to see the advantages of early responsibilities, but they also felt they had to cope by themselves and relied less on family support than the girls. These findings are in line with what is regarded as traditional gender roles (Gilligan, 1982) but also with what was expected from young men and women in the *private culture* of the Jewish community in the FSU (Buckley, 1997; Lipovskaya, 1994).

The importance of the contextual variables raises a question regarding whether the present results can be generalized to other contexts. Would the same roles, implications, and coping venues be found in other contexts? We believe that some of the major findings, such as the separation between brokering roles and other roles, would be replicated, and that both advantages and disadvantages of taking early responsibilities could be experienced. Nevertheless, specific nuances unique to each context are also to be expected, as well as differences in meanings attributed to the roles and their influence on the lives of the adolescents. Thus, it is recommended to qualitatively investigate immigrant youth population prior to quantitative studies and to adapt research and assessment tools with sensitivity to cultural issues.

Limitations of the Study

The study limitations include the fact that the qualitative results could not be generalized without further quantitative inquiry. We are currently attempting to do so in quantitative follow-up studies. Another problem is that the interviewed participants came from the Eastern and the Western parts of the FSU. We assumed that as all came from cities, the urban Jewish subculture would involve similar child socialization patterns. This assumption should be statistically examined in further research. Furthermore, in this study we were able to recruit more girls than boys. Therefore, the gender effects suggested here need to be taken with caution and further explored in future quantitative research.

Practical Implications

In examining the support systems that helped participants cope with role change, it is important to note that participants did not refer to any community support, either from the FSU community or from agencies available to them in the schools or welfare systems. Countries that absorb immigration are therefore encouraged to utilize studies of role change among adolescents and young people to assess the availability of support systems and the need to create outreach venues or provide additional support. In this study, the young people reported specific support systems (peer groups, extended families). Social or educational systems can further utilize these existing venues for those who may be at risk. In our sample, male participants tended to rely more on self-care and self-help. While this type of coping may work for some, other young people may appreciate outreach programs at times of stress. Furthermore, particular attention should be given to single-parent households with less support from extended families.

In conclusion, in this article, we call for a departure from the structural deficit perspective of the family system and its conceptualization of *parental children* and from the all-inclusive deficit view of immigration. We advocate adopting a more complex conceptual framework that takes into account various influences on the roles and their interpretations, among them contexts before and after immigration, the meanings assigned to roles before and after immigration, individual and family differences and gender influences.

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