



---

## Society for the Study of Human Development

---

*Taking closer look at research and experiences of SSHD members*

### ~Researcher's Window~

*This month we are getting better acquainted with the research of Amy Marks, an associate professor of psychology at Suffolk University.*

#### **1. What drew you to do work in human development?**

I came into this field through a love of science; I was a strong student in biology and physics in my younger years. In college I discovered that studying people was more personally satisfying than studying cells and particles. After college I began my research in community-based settings with families and children, and I was hooked. I had a chance to weave in my social justice spirit and interests (and my own journey being a bicultural individual) with science; what could be better than that?

#### **2. Did you have any mentor or a researcher who had substantial influence in your path or work? Is there a significant moment or story that capsulizes the nature of that influence on your scholarship or professional journey?**

Absolutely. I feel so fortunate to have had several amazing mentors over the years, and I attribute the depth of my learning and successes to my work with them. Right after college I landed a job with Lynne Huffman at Stanford University; she was an amazing mentor and she helped me launch my research career in human development. When I moved on to graduate school, I had the opportunity to work with Cynthia Garcia Coll at Brown University. She is a tremendous scholar and person; it was under her care that I truly found my own footing as a scholar and within my own identity as well. I had so many "ah ha!" moments while working with Cynthia, just too many to recount here. One memory I'll never forget is the first paper I wrote with her. She made me revise it at least a dozen times before she would sign off on it to send it out for peer review. It continued to come back to me with red marks all over it until I finally realized she was trying to get me to "tell my story," not just put the facts on the page. Since graduate school I have learned volumes from Carola Suarez-Orozco about faculty life, writing/editing, and building a career. I still return to these mentors and friends for advice today, and they continue to be generous in their time and spirits with me: I thank each of them!

#### **3. You have a range of important work, select 1-2 findings that you feel are key contributions to human development.**

##### **a. Your current project and/or key projects**

Currently, I am working on several studies centered on immigrant youth and family well-being. Each of them is aimed, in some way, at elucidating the resilience characteristics of young people who may be socially disadvantaged, and focused on ways to support youth and families from underserved communities.

One current project is looking at parent-child relationship stress and resilience, and how these relate to experiences of legal status(es) and deportation threat in mixed legal-status families (i.e., some family members are US Citizens, others may have temporary or no documentation). This is a very important and timely topic to study, as we are seeing high levels of stress, anxiety, and trauma among many members of our immigrant communities.

Another set of studies I have right now are aimed at understanding how discrimination or racism impacts children and adolescents' well-being, and ways we might ameliorate these detrimental effects on their development. This work relates to the first study: in addition to anxiety and stress from mixed-legal statuses and risk of deportation, many immigrant youth and parents are experiencing increasing levels of discrimination and racism in their day-to-day lives. My hope is that through community participatory research we can not only document the experiences of our community members, but also find creative solutions to improving family well-being and community empowerment.

**b. Contributions of your projects/research to the study of human development.**

In my past research, a series of studies showed the power of resilience for promoting the well-being of diverse youth. My colleagues and I have demonstrated that adaptive, positive cultural practices help to explain the "immigrant paradox" in various domains of adolescent development. The immigrant paradox is a phenomenon in which immigrant youth appear to have more problems across several domains of development (physical health, behavioral health, academic outcomes), the longer they reside in the U.S. This phenomenon also can be observed by comparing immigrant "generations" to one another – U.S. born youth oftentimes suffer more challenging developmental outcomes than youth who were born abroad. My research has not only documented the paradox in national samples, but has provided some insights into why the immigrant paradox patterns occur – essentially from young people losing touch with protective cultural practices and beliefs from their parent's cultures of origin. These studies have had strong implications for understanding how some immigrant youth may be at an increasing disadvantage as they acculturate in the U.S.

Another, similar line of research has shown the power of having positive attitudes and strong bicultural identities for promoting the academic and behavioral development of ethnic and racial minority youth. In one study, using a nationally representative data set, I have shown that having a positive attitude toward learning at the start of Kindergarten was equally as powerful as having a parent with a college education for promoting cognitive skill development in both math and language development through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. This finding was particularly true for Native American children and other children of color. These findings support my current work, aimed at identifying positive community-based interventions to promote community empowerment and optimal growth among diverse youth.

**4. Your one wish for the study of human development. If you had just one wish for the study of human development, what would it be?**

At the moment, my wish for my field is that we find new and more powerful ways to come together to apply the vast research base we have to best serve children and families who need support. In a time in which our collective cultural and political experiences are driven by fear and anger, I see many individuals aiming to protect and promote their own well-being at the cost of others around them. My wish for my field is that we can get creative with our science to change minds and fill hearts – to promote compassion and empathy, and to facilitate a shift in consciousness that will allow us to work through biases and anger toward more rewarding and productive ends.

5. **A mentoring statement or quote you find most meaningful or life-changing**

*If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do. (Ghandi)*



**About the researcher**

Amy Marks is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Suffolk University. Her areas of research include immigrant youth development, the effects of discrimination on child & adolescent health and wellbeing, and contextual risk/protective processes among minority youth. Her books include: *Transitions: The Development of Immigrant Children* (NYU Press 2015, 2016 SRA Social Policy Award winner), *The Immigrant Paradox in Children and Adolescents: Is becoming American a developmental risk?* (APA Press, 2012), and *Immigrant stories: Ethnicity and academics in middle childhood* (Oxford University Press, 2009). She was awarded a Jacobs Foundation Young Scholar Award for her research on academics and ethnic identity among immigrant youth, and has lead or co-lead research funded by the WT Grant Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and the NSF.

Edited and launched by Deborah J. Johnson & Yoko Yamamoto  
SSHD Publicity Committee

Visit our website for more information! [www.sshdonline.org](http://www.sshdonline.org)



Like us on [Facebook!](#)



Follow us on [Twitter!](#)