# GROWING UP AMERICAN: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants

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## ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, immigrant children and children of immigrant parentage have become the fastest growing and the most extraordinarily diverse segment of America's child population. Until the recent past, however, scholarly attention has focused on adult immigrants to the neglect of their offspring, creating a profound gap between the strategic importance of the new second generation and the knowledge about its socioeconomic circumstances. The purpose of this article is to pull together existing studies that bear directly or indirectly on children's immigrant experiences and adaptational outcomes and to place these studies into a general framework that can facilitate a better understanding of the new second generation. The article first describes the changing trends in the contexts of the reception the new second generation has encountered. The article then discusses the ways in which conventional theoretical perspectives about immigrant adaptation are being challenged and alternative frameworks are being developed. Thirdly, it examines empirical findings from recent research and evaluates their contribution to the sociology of immigration. Finally, it highlights the main conclusions from prior research and their theoretical and practical implications for future studies.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenal increase in contemporary immigration to the United States has given rise to a record number of children who, regardless of place of birth, are raised in immigrant families. Since the 1980s, a new generation of immigrant children and children of immigrants has become the fastest growing and the most

ethnically diverse segment of America's child population. The 1990 US Census has revealed that about 15% of all children in the United States are immigrant children or children of immigrant parentage, and that 59% of Latino-American children and 90% of Asian American children are members of the first or second generation, compared to 6% of non-Latino African-American children and 5% of non-Latino European-American children (Landale & Oropesa 1995).

Differing from their immigrant parents, immigrant children and children of immigrants lack meaningful connections to their "old" world. They are thus unlikely to consider a foreign country as a place to return to or as a point of reference. They instead are prone to evaluate themselves or to be evaluated by others by the standards of their new country (Gans 1992, Portes 1995). Given the fact that children of contemporary immigrants will represent a crucial component of future American society, how are we to understand these children's adaptation to their role as citizens and full participants in American society? How do migration processes, contexts of reception, and biculturalism impact the process of becoming American? Has assimilation continued to lead to upward social mobility? Has the younger generation of today's immigrants been able to assimilate into American society, following the path taken by the "old" second generation arriving at the turn of the century and advancing beyond their parents' generation?

Until the recent past, scholarly attention has focused on adult immigrants to the neglect of child immigrants and immigrant offspring, creating a profound gap between the strategic importance of these children and the knowledge about their conditions. The purpose of this article is to pull together existing studies that bear directly or indirectly on immigrant experiences and adaptational outcomes of the children of contemporary immigrants and to place these studies into a general framework that can facilitate a better understanding of these children's socioeconomic circumstances and life chances. In so doing, I first describe the changing trends in the contexts of the reception that the new second generation has encountered; I then discuss the ways in which conventional theoretical perspectives about immigrant adaptation are being challenged and alternative frameworks are being developed. Thirdly, I examine empirical findings from recent research and evaluate their contribution to the sociology of immigration. Finally, I highlight the main conclusions from prior research and their theoretical and practical implications for future studies.

## THE RISE OF THE NEW SECOND GENERATION

### Who Makes Up the New Second Generation?

The new second generation technically refers to the children of contemporary immigrants. The emerging literature on the new second generation, however,

has discussed not only US-born children—the true second generation—but also contemporary immigrant children who have arrived in the United States before they reach adulthood (Gans 1992, Portes 1996). The latter group is also known as the "one-and-a-half generation," a term coined by Rubén Rumbaut to characterize the children who straddle the old and the new worlds but are fully part of neither (Pérez Firmat 1994, Rumbaut 1991). Usage of these generational terms has not been consistent (Oropesa & Landale, forthcoming). Depending on social and historical processes of immigration and particular nationality groups under study, the second generation is sometimes broadened to include foreign-born children arriving at pre-school age (0-4 years) because they share many linguistic, cultural, and developmental experiences similar to those of immigrant offspring (Zhou & Bankston, forthcoming). The one-and-a-half generation, on the other hand, is sometimes broken down into two distinct cohorts: children between 6 and 13 years of age as 1.5-generation children and those arriving as adolescents (aged 13 to 17) who are similar to first-generation children. Although scholars may vary in their ways of defining the new second generation, they have generally agreed that there are important differences between children of different cohorts of the one-and-a-half and second generation, particularly in their physical and psychological developmental stages, in their socialization processes in the family, the school, and the society at large, as well as in their orientation toward their homeland.

The main characteristics of the new second generation mirror those of contemporary immigrants, which are extraordinarily diverse in national origins, socioeconomic circumstances, and settlement patterns. Always the defining character of America, however, the composition and meaning of diversity today have changed significantly since the turn of the century. Most notably, contemporary immigrants have been predominantly non-Europeans. According to the Immigration and Nationalization Service, of the 7.3 million immigrants admitted to the United States during the 1980s (not counting undocumented immigrants), 87% came from Asia and the Americas, compared to the 8.8 million admitted during the 1910s who were predominantly from Europe. In the past decade, Mexico, the Philippines, China/Taiwan, South Korea, and Vietnam were the top five sending countries, followed by the Dominican Republic, India, El Salvador, and Jamaica. Immigrants from Mexico alone accounted for more than one fifth of total legal admissions as well as half of illegal immigrants.

The diversity in national origin has, accordingly, become a salient feature of the new second generation. The 1990 Census has shown that the foreign-born child population under 18 years of age is made up of 52% Latinos (53% of whom are Mexicans) and 27% Asians, and that the US-born cohort with at least one immigrant parent is made up of 48% Latinos and 24% Asians (Oropesa & Landale, forthcoming). More strikingly, about one out of

three foreign-born children has at least one Mexican-born parent (Perlmann & Waldinger 1996).

Also different from the turn-of-the-century inflows, contemporary immigrants have come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The 1990 Census has attested to the vast differences in levels of education, occupation, and income by national origins. For example, over 60% of immigrants (aged 25 years or older) from India and Taiwan report having attained college degrees, three times the proportion of average Americans, but less than 5% of those from Cambodia, Laos, El Salvador, and Mexico so report. Among the employed workers (aged 16 years or older), over 45% of immigrants from India and Taiwan have managerial or professional occupations, more than twice the proportion of average American workers, but less than 7% of those from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico so report. Further, immigrants from India report a median household income of $53,000, compared to $30,000 for average American households; those from Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Laos, and Mexico report a median household income below $22,000.

The socioeconomic diversity suggests that the pathways to social mobility will not be a straight line nor unidirectional. While many immigrants continue to follow the traditional bottom-up route, significant numbers of new arrivals have bypassed the bottom starting line and moved directly into mainstream labor markets while dispersing into suburban middle-class communities. The implications for the new second generation are profound, since the current state and future prospects of immigrant children are related to the advantages or disadvantages that accrue to the socioeconomic status of their parents.

A third salient feature of contemporary immigrants is their geographic concentration. Unlike earlier European immigrants whose destinations were in the Northeast, contemporary immigrants have been disproportionately concentrated in the West. California accounted for over a third of the total arrivals of legal immigrants in the 1980s, while New York, the traditional largest receiving state, accounted for only 14% (Portes & Zhou 1995). The impact of geographic concentration is also felt in public schools in high immigration states. Again, California alone accounted for some 45% of the nation's immigrant student population, more than one out of ten school-aged children in the state were foreign born, and over a third of the state's school-aged children spoke a language other than English at home (Cornelius 1995).

## The Changing Contexts of Reception

Differences in national origins, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic patterns of settlement are important factors for immigrant adaptation. However, adaptational outcomes are also determined by structural conditions in the host society (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). The context of the reception that has greeted

contemporary immigrants and their children has changed dramatically over the past three decades to create additional obstacles to "melt" the diverse body of immigrants and their offspring into a single mainstream.

Unlike earlier European immigrants, contemporary immigrants have been received in a peculiar circumstance: an emerging "hourglass" economy in which opportunities for social mobility shrink even among native-born Americans and a welfare state that is highly contested by the general public. Several major trends are especially unfavorable for the adaptation of the nation's newcomers and their children.

First, the gap between rich and poor, which progressively narrowed for most of the twentieth century, has been widening in recent years as it has been affected by globalization and economic restructuring. Only a portion of the American work force has seen its economic advantages steadily increase as information technology and management become more critical to the economy; most have experienced worsening conditions. During the 1980s, 80% of American workers saw their real hourly wages go down by an average of about 5% (Mishel & Bernstein 1992). Blue collar jobs, the kinds of jobs generally available to newly arrived immigrants, not only pay less than in previous years, but they are also disappearing at a particularly rapid rate, resulting in expanding classes of poor and rich and a shrinking middle class. In such an economic structure, even US-born Americans find their chances for economic mobility lessening. The situation for many immigrants is bleaker, except for the unusually fortunate, the highly educated, and the highly skilled (Waldinger 1996).

Contemporary economic hardships are different from the hardships of the Great Depression and hardships in many Third World countries. Although there is a growing class of poor Americans, there are relatively few deaths from starvation in the United States. Until the early 1990s, the welfare state had made access to public assistance relatively easy (Rumbaut 1994a, Tienda & Liang 1994). While opportunities for stable jobs with good incomes were rare for low-income individuals, food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children were readily available. Public assistance did not provide a comfortable way of life, for welfare payments averaged less than half the amount defined as poverty level income (Sancton 1992:45); it did, nonetheless, provide a means of existence for the chronically poor, unemployed or underemployed. Yet, members of this expanding class of poor were not being offered chances for socioeconomic improvement; they were, for the most part, being fed and housed and maintained in their social and economic limbo. Such unfortunate circumstances were exacerbated just prior to the 1996 presidential election when President Bill Clinton signed a Republican welfare reform bill. The bill, which limits public assistance to two continuous years and mandates a five-year lifetime maximum, with neither public jobs nor childcare for recipients who exceed the

limit and nothing for their children. This has changed the nature of the welfare state in new and significant ways: It cuts off the lifeline of the poor, especially children, driving them into deeper poverty; it also excludes legal immigrants from much access to basic forms of assistance, forcing poor immigrant families to swim or sink. Long-term effects of the welfare bill remain to be seen, but certainly millions of children will be thrown into poverty, and chances for the truly disadvantaged to get out of poverty will be even bleaker.

Second, poverty has been highly concentrated. The poor are not, of course, being housed evenly across the American landscape. Even before new information technologies and the globalization of production, the contraction of American manufacturing and the suburbanization first of the middle class population and later of middle class jobs have displaced the American working class. The disappearance of industrial jobs in urban areas where racial minorities concentrate has detached the middle class from the working poor, causing a high concentration of poverty in the most disadvantaged segments of the minority population in inner-city ghettos (Wilson 1987).

The problem of poverty concentration has worsened under large-scale economic restructuring, which has reduced the demand for low-skilled and semi-skilled immigrants and trapped them in unemployment and social isolation similar to that commonly facing native-born minorities in the most impoverished stratum of the society. The implication for members of younger generations is profound. Immigrant children from middle-class backgrounds benefit from financially secure families, good schools, safe neighborhoods, and other supportive formal and informal organizations, which ensure better life chances for them. Children with poorly educated and unskilled parents, in contrast, often find themselves growing up in underprivileged neighborhoods subject to poverty, poor schools, violence and drugs, and a generally disruptive social environment. Many immigrant children attend public schools in their neighborhood with a clear numerical majority of minority students. In Los Angeles County, for example, 57 unified school districts out of a total of 83 contain over half of nonwhite students, and 34 have more than three quarters of US-born minority and other immigrant students. In major immigrant-receiving cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Miami, at least a third of the students in the entire school system speak a language other than English at home.

Third, there has been a drastic increase in the proportion of American children in one-parent families. Hernandez (1993) observed that between 1939 and 1988 the proportion of the officially poor children who lived in mother-only families increased from 10% to 57%, and that such an increase was counterbalanced by a virtually identical decline in the proportion living in two-parent families. The rise of single-parent families has aggravated the overall poverty trends for

children. Relative to children living in intact families, the children living in one-parent or even blended families tend to be disadvantaged with regard to socioeconomic circumstances, psychological function, behavioral problems, education, and health and these conditions severely limit their life chances (Hernandez 1993).

Unfortunately, such disadvantages in family situations have worsened for poor immigrant families who have lived a longer time in the United States. Landale & Oropesa (1995) found significant increases of children living in single-parent families across generations of US residence and across many Asian and Latin American nationality groups. By the third generation, in particular, the prevalence of female headship among all nationality groups of Latin American children (ranging from 40% of Mexicans, 50% of Cubans, to 70% of Dominicans) and Filipino children (40%) constituted a serious disadvantage. This situation implies that even if the parental generation is able to work hard to achieve higher positions and higher incomes, their children's access to these gains may be seriously circumvented by family disruption (Landale & Oropesa 1995).

Fourth, there has been a growing "oppositional culture" among young Americans, especially among those who have felt oppressed and excluded from the American mainstream and who have been frustrated by the widening gap between a culture that highly values freedom and materialism and the reality of a dwindling economic future. Many of these American children have responded to their social isolation and their constrained opportunities with resentment toward middle-class America, rebellion against all forms of authority, and rejection of the goals of achievement and upward mobility. Because students in schools shape one another's attitudes and expectations, such an oppositional culture negatively affects educational outcomes. School achievement is seen as unlikely to lead to upward mobility, and high achievers are seen as sell-outs to oppressive authority. Matute-Bianchi (1986, 1991) found that the relationship between scholastic achievement and ethnicity did not hold for native-born Chicanos and Cholos, who had been uprooted from their Mexican heritage and were trapped in a caste-like minority status. They reacted to their exclusion and subordination with resentment, regarded efforts toward academic achievement as "acting white," and constructed an identity in resistance to the dominant majority white society. Suárez-Orozco (1991) reached similar conclusions about native-born Mexican Americans, who perceived the effect of the educational system as continued exploitation.

While there is a strong antiintellectual streak in American youth culture at all socioeconomic levels, the rejection of academic pursuits is especially intense among members of minority groups, who are more likely than members of the majority to identify school administrations with oppressive authority, to

perceive their entry into the middle class as almost impossible, and to be in schools where learning is strongly discouraged by peers. It would be wise to avoid passing judgment on the children in these schools and to avoid blaming them for their responses to the world around them. Merton long ago (1938) described rebellion as an adaptive response to a gap between socially approved goals and available means of achieving those goals. Lowered chances for mobility create frustration and pessimism for all American young people, but these emotions are most strongly felt by those at the bottom. When those at the bottom are also members of historically oppressed minority groups, the frustration is mixed with the need to maintain self-esteem, so that rejection of middle class mores and opposition to authority become important strategies for psychological survival.

In underprivileged neighborhoods, in particular, immigrant children meet in their schools native-born peers with little hope for the future and are thus likely to be pressured by their peers to resist assimilation into the middle class as expected by their parents. These trends pose a challenge to all parents, but the challenge is especially daunting for immigrant parents with limited educational backgrounds, frequently limited English skills, and few resources.

## THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RESEARCH ON IMMIGRANT ADAPTATION

### The Assimilation Perspective Revisited

In the literature on immigrant adaptation, the assimilation perspective has dominated much of the sociological thinking on the subject for the most part of this century. Central to this perspective is the assumption that there is a natural process by which diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture and to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society; that this process consists of gradually deserting old cultural and behavioral patterns in favor of new ones; and that, once set in motion, this process moves inevitably and irreversibly toward assimilation (Park 1928, Warner & Srole 1945, Wirth [1925] 1956).

While earlier assimilation theorists emphasized forces such as time, industrialization, and acculturation, Gordon (1964) conceptualized several types of assimilation: cultural or behavioral, structural, identificational, attitude-receptional, behavior-receptional, and civic assimilation. In Gordon's view, immigrants began their adaptation to the new country through cultural assimilation, or acculturation. Since cultural assimilation was for Gordon a necessary first step, it was considered the top priority on the agenda of immigrant adjustment. Gordon implied that acculturation would take place and continue indefinitely even when no other type of assimilation occurred (1964, p. 77).

But he argued that acculturation did not necessarily lead to other forms of integration into the host society (i.e. large-scale entrance into the institutions of the host society or intermarriage). Ethnic groups would remain distinguished from one another depending largely on the degree to which groups gained the acceptance of the dominant population (p. 159). Gordon anticipated, nevertheless, that ethnic minorities would eventually lose all their distinctive characteristics and cease to exist as ethnic groups as they pass through the stages of assimilation, eventually intermarrying with the majority population and entering its institutions on a primary-group level (pp. 70–71).

From the point of view of assimilation theorists, distinctive ethnic traits such as old cultural ways, native languages, or ethnic enclaves are sources of disadvantages that negatively affect assimilation (Child 1943, Warner & Srole 1945). Although complete acculturation to the dominant American culture may not ensure all immigrants full social participation in the host society, immigrants must free themselves from their old cultures in order to begin rising up from marginal positions. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, America seemed to have absorbed the great waves of immigrants, who arrived primarily from Europe. Sociological studies have indicated progressive trends of social mobility across generations of immigrants and increasing rates of intermarriages, as determined by educational attainment, job skills, length of stay since immigration, English proficiency, and levels of exposure to American cultures (Alba 1985, Chiswick 1977, Greeley 1976, Sandberg 1974, Wytrwal 1961).

## Observed Anomalies

Beginning in the 1960s, the conventional assimilation perspective with its application to the more recently arrived non-European immigrant groups has been met with challenges. Instead of eventual convergence in the outcomes of immigrant adaptation, several anomalies have been observed in recent research. The first anomaly concerns the persistent ethnic differences across generations. Studies on intergenerational mobility have found divergent rather than convergent outcomes, revealing that early and insignificant differentials in advantage result in substantial differences in educational and occupational mobility in later years (Becker 1963, Goffman 1963). In their study of educational attainment of 25 religio-ethnic groups in the United States, Hirschman & Falcon (1985) have found that neither generation nor length of US residence significantly influences educational outcomes. Specifically, children of highly educated immigrants consistently fare much better in school than do fourth- or fifth-generation descendants of poorly educated ancestors regardless of religio-ethnic backgrounds. In a study of the Irish, Italian, Jewish, and African Americans in Providence, Rhode Island, Perlmann (1988) found that, even with family background factors held constant, ethnic differences in levels of schooling and

economic attainment persisted in the second and later generations and that schooling did not equally commensurate with occupational advancement for African Americans as for other European-Americans across generations.

Another anomaly is what Gans (1992) describes as the "the second generation decline." Gans notes three possible scenarios for today's new second generation: education-driven mobility, succession-driven mobility, and niche improvement. He observes that immigrant children from less fortunate socioeconomic backgrounds have a much harder time than other middle-class children to succeed in school, and that a significant number of the children of poor, especially dark-skinned, immigrants can be trapped in permanent poverty in the era of stagnant economic growth and in the process of Americanization because these immigrant children "will either not be asked, or will be reluctant, to work at immigrant wages and hours as their parents did but will lack job opportunities, skills and connections to do better" (pp. 173–74). Gans predicts that the prospects facing children of the less fortunate may be high rates of unemployment, crime, alcoholism, drug use, and other pathologies associated with poverty and the frustration of rising expectation (p. 183). Perlmann & Waldinger (1996) call this phenomenon "the second generation revolt." They argue that such revolt is not merely caused by exogenous factors, such as racial discrimination, declining economic opportunities, and the exposure to the adversarial outlooks of native-born youths, but also by endogenous factors inherent in the immigration process, including pre-immigration class standing and the size and the nature of immigrant inflows.

Still another anomaly is the peculiar outcomes of immigrant adaptation. Today, neither valedictorians nor delinquents are atypical among immigrant children regardless of timing and racial or socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, in the past 15 years, the list of top-ten award winners of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search, one of the country's most prestigious high school academic contests, has been dominated by the 1.5- or second-generation immigrants. Many of these immigrant children are "FOBs" (fresh off the boat) and from families of moderate socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhou 1997). While immigrant children are overrepresented on lists of award-winners or on academic fast tracks, many others are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors, school failure, street gangs, and youth crime. Even Asian Americans, the so-called "model minority," have seen a steady rise of youth gang memberships. Some of the Asian gang members are from suburban middle-class families, attend magnet schools, and are exceptionally good students. These anomalies immediately question the applicability of straight-line assimilation.

## Alternative Theoretical Frameworks

A major alternative framework is the pluralist perspective, which perceives American society as composed of a collection of ethnic and racial minority

groups, as well as the dominant majority group of European Americans. It is concerned with a fundamental question of how the world would look different were the experiences of the excluded placed at the center of our thinking and with the ways in which immigrants actively shape their own lives rather than exist passively as beneficiaries or victims of "ineluctable modernizing and Americanizing forces" (Conzen 1991, p. 10). A central idea is that ethnicity can serve as an asset rather than a liability. This idea provides a means of understanding how ethnicity may be utilized as a distinct form of social capital (including such cultural endowments as obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms) that contributes to adaptation (Glazer & Moynihan 1970, Handlin 1973).

From a pluralist point of view, preimmigration cultural attributes inherent to ethnicity are not necessarily absorbed by the core culture of the host society, but they constantly interact with it. Greeley contended that "ethnicity is not a way of looking back to the old world . . . [but] rather a way of being American, a way of defining yourself into the pluralist culture which existed before you arrived" (1976, p. 32). Conzen and her associates conceptualized ethnicity as "a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories," grounded in real-life context and social experience (Conzen et al 1992, pp. 4–5). According to these scholars, preimmigration cultural attributes cannot be equated with homeland cultures, because immigrants tend to select carefully not only what to pack in their trunks to bring to America, but also what to unpack once settled. Also, homeland cultural norms and values may not be entirely inconsistent with those of the host country. Just as some aspects of immigrant cultural patterns may continue in a state of uneasy coexistence with the requirements of the host country, other aspects of immigrant cultural patterns may "fit" the requirements of life there or may even be prerequisites for "making it in America" (Fukuyama 1993). Still others are modified, changed, adapted, transformed, reformed, and negotiated in the course of immigrant adjustments (Garcia 1996).

The pluralist perspective offers an alternative way of viewing the host society, treating members of ethnic minority groups as a part of the American population rather than as foreigners or outsiders and presenting ethnic or immigrant cultures as integral segments of American society. However, the questions of "second-generation decline" and "second-generation revolt" have been unanswered within this theoretical framework. While how people construct or invent their own ethnicity has been emphasized, how they also construct their own acculturation and assimilation has been understudied. Gans (1992) points out that pressures of both formal acculturation (through schooling) and informal acculturation (through American peers and the media) will impinge on the second generation. He reasons that immigrant children may be so overwhelmed by a

youth culture and the freedoms (particularly personal choices in dress, dating, sexual practices) unavailable in their old country that, because of the sheer attractiveness of American culture, they may not be willing to accept immigrant parental work norms or to work in "un-American" conditions as many of their parents do, and that they may be unwilling to endure their parents' painstaking efforts toward upward social mobility. Perlmann & Waldinger (1996), however, caution that the deteriorating prospect in the new second generation is not simply a matter of exposure or Americanization but also a result of structural, group, or individual disadvantages associated with pre- and post-immigration experiences.

Moreover, the elusiveness of ethnic characteristics creates problems in the use of the pluralist framework as an explanatory tool. Each generation passes cultural patterns, often subtle patterns, to the next, but the mechanisms of this process are unclear, and many assumptions and attitudes of ethnic group members are hard to identify and measure (Archdeacon 1983). Also, the constituents of American diversity are not equal; maintaining a distinctive ethnicity can both help and hinder the social mobility of ethnic group members. For example, first-generation members of some immigrant minority groups, such as the Mexicans, have seldom been able to motivate their children to excel in school and move upward in the host society, while other groups, such as the Asians, have far more often succeeded in pushing younger people toward upward social mobility (Perlmann & Waldinger 1996).

Another major theoretical stance is the structural perspective, which offers a framework for understanding the differences in social adaptation of ethnic minority groups in terms of advantages and disadvantages inherent to social structures rather than in the process of acculturation or selective Americanization. This perspective presents American society as a stratified system of social inequality, in which different social categories—whether birth-ascribed or not—have unequal access to wealth, power, and privilege (Barth & Noel 1972). The ethnic hierarchy systematically limits access to social resources, such as opportunities for jobs, housing, and education, resulting in persistent racial/ethnic disparities in levels of income, educational attainment, and occupational achievement (Wilson 1987). Consequently, the benefits of "becoming American" depend largely on what stratum of American society absorbs the new immigrants.

Overall, the structural perspective raises skepticism about eventual assimilation and interethnic accommodation suggested by the assimilation perspective and implied by the pluralist perspective, because of inherent conflicts between the dominant and subordinate groups in the hierarchy. On the issue of immigrant adaptation, this perspective maintains that the process of becoming American may not lead uniformly to middle-class status, but rather to the occupation of different rungs on the ethnic hierarchy.

The segmented assimilation thesis provides another framework for examining the divergent outcomes of today's new second generation. Portes & Zhou (1993) observe that assimilation has continued to serve as a norm of immigrant adaptation, but that its outcomes have become segmented: Either confinement to permanent underclass memberships or rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and solidarity is equally possible for the new second generation. This segmented assimilation thesis recognizes the fact that today's immigrants are received in various segments of American society ranging from affluent middle-class suburbs to impoverished inner-city ghettos. Such contextual differences mean that paths to social mobility may lead to upward as well as downward outcomes. In the case of those who start from the very bottom, of course, the outcome is not so much assimilating downward as staying where they are.

The question is what makes some immigrant groups susceptible to the downward path, or to the permanent trap, and what allows others to avoid it? Major determinants can include factors external to a particular immigrant group, such as racial stratification, economic opportunities, and spatial segregation, and factors intrinsic to the group, such as financial and human capital upon arrival, family structure, community organization, and cultural patterns of social relations. These two sets of factors affect the life chances of immigrant children not only additively but also interactively. Particular patterns of social relations in the family or the ethnic community may sometimes counter the trend of negative adaptation even in unfavorable situations. When immigrant children are under pressure to assimilate but are unsure which direction of assimilation is more desirable, the family or the ethnic community can make a difference if it is able to mobilize resources to prevent downward assimilation. The focus on the interaction between structural factors and sociocultural factors in recent research has shed new light on the understanding of the complex process of assimilation in the second generation.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS FROM CURRENT RESEARCH

Unlike adult immigrants whose levels of adaptation are often indicated by occupational attainment and income, levels of adaptation among young immigrants are generally measured by educational attainment—academic orientation, aspiration, and performance. Attending school—attaining knowledge and skills that may be capitalized upon in future labor markets—is a crucial first step toward successful adaptation to American society for immigrant children and children of immigrants. In the United States where public education is readily available to all children and where education is traditionally accepted as the main means of socioeconomic mobility, schooling often comes to occupy a

central place in immigrant aspirations (Ogbu 1974). Studies on the new second generation have generally concerned a central question: How do various aspects of class, race/ethnicity, social capital derived from particular patterns of social relations within the immigrant family and the ethnic community, intergenerational relations, language skills, and ethnic identity affect the process of educational attainment of the children of contemporary immigrants? In this section, I review how these issues are addressed in recent research and show how new concepts are derived from empirical findings.

## Class and Race/Ethnicity

The socioeconomic circumstances of today's predominantly non-European-American second generation vary by race and ethnicity. Although many of them may have never experienced prejudice associated with a particular skin color or racial type in their homelands, immigrant children have confronted a reality in their host society where their ascribed physical features may become a handicap (Waters 1994, Portes 1995). Using the 1990 Census data, Oropesa & Landale (forthcoming) showed that poverty rates for immigrant children ranged from 21% among non-Latino European Americans, 24% for non-Latino African Americans, 27% for Asian Americans, and 41% for Latino-Americans. Among the second generation (US-born with at least one foreign-born parent), there was a substantial drop in poverty rates for all racial groups, but the magnitude of the decline varied by race: while poverty rates between the first- (or the 1.5-) and second generation dropped more than half among non-Latino European-American and Asian-American children, they dropped less than a third among non-Latino African-American and Latino-American children. The conditions for third-generation children (US-born children with US-born parents) were most disturbing: Except for Asian Americans, there was no appreciable socioeconomic improvement between second- and third-generation non-Latino European Americans and Latino Americans, but there was a significant deterioration among third-generation non-Latino African Americans whose poverty rate jumped up to 40%, a 26 percentage-point increase from that of their first-generation counterparts. These statistics reveal an obvious effect of race, implying a severe handicap associated with skin colors.

Why has the class status changed for the better among children of certain racial minority groups and for the worse among others with generation? Some researchers contend that the inequalities of class and race that plague American society are carried into the American educational system. Schools have thus become "arenas of injustice" (Keniston et al 1977) that provide unequal opportunities on the basis of class and race. Coleman and his associates (1966) found that social capital in the form of parental educational attainment and class status significantly affect academic performance of children in school and that children

did better if they attended schools where classmates were predominantly from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Davis (1993) found that poor African-American and Latino-American families who moved from inner-city neighborhoods did better in school and in labor markets than those left behind. The pattern generally held true for immigrant children who attended suburban schools.

Moreover, differences in outcomes of schooling have historically been linked to residential segregation on the basis of class and race. Minority children have suffered from unequal distribution of economic and educational resources that seriously curtail their chances in life and trap them in isolated ghettos. Ghettoization, in turn, produces a political atmosphere and a mentality that preserve class divisions along racial lines, leading to the greater alienation of minority children from American institutions and further diminishing their chances for upward mobility (Fainstein 1995).

But how would one account for the fact that immigrant children tend to do better than their US-born peers of similar socioeconomic background and attending public schools in the same neighborhood? Ogbu (1974) attributed different outcomes to a group's social status in the receiving society. He distinguished between immigrant/voluntary minorities and castelike/involuntary minorities. In his line of reasoning, either group members of racial minorities could accept an inferior caste status and a sense of basic inferiority as part of their collective self-definition, or they could create a positive view of their heritage on the basis of cultural and racial distinction, thereby establishing a sense of collective dignity (also see De Vos 1975).

While this was true for both immigrant minorities and caste-like minorities, the difference lay in the advantageous or disadvantageous aspects of racial or group identity. Ogbu (1989) showed from his research on Chinese-American students in Oakland, California, that in spite of cultural and language differences and relatively low economic status, these students had grade point averages that ranged from 3.0 to 4.0. He attributed their academic success to the integration of these students into the family and the community, which placed high values on education and held positive attitudes toward public schools.

The benefits of deliberate cultivation of ethnicity also appeared in the work of Gibson (1989), who found that the outstanding performance of Punjabi children in a relatively poor rural area of Northern California was a result of parental pressure put on children to adhere to their own immigrant families and to avoid excessive Americanization. Similarly, Caplan and his associates (1989) found that Indochinese refugee children (not including Cambodians and Hmongs) excelled in the American school system, despite the disadvantaged location of their schools and their parents' lack of education and facility with English. Caplan and his associates attributed academic achievement to cultural values and practices unique to Indochinese families. Even among Indochinese refugees, the

ethnic effect was significant. Rumbaut & Ima (1988) found that Vietnamese high school students did much better in both GPAs and test scores than their Cambodian and Laotian peers, and that, overall, the strongest predictor of GPA was the measure of ethnic resilience.

More recently, Portes & Rumbaut reported findings from a large random sample of second-generation high school students in Florida and southern California, showing that parents' socioeconomic status, length of US residence, and homework hours significantly affected academic performance, but that controlling for these factors did not eliminate the effect of ethnicity (Portes & Rumbaut 1996, Rumbaut 1995, 1996). Kao & Tienda (1995) found, based on data from the National Education Longitudinal Studies (known as NELS), that parental nativity and children's birthplace had different effects on children's academic outcomes depending on race and ethnicity. Portes & MacLeod (1996), also using NELS, reported that the negative effect of disadvantaged group memberships among immigrant children was reinforced rather than reduced in suburban schools, but that the positive effect of advantaged group memberships remained significant even in inner-city schools.

In the most recent research on adolescent development, though originally not intending to focus on ethnic differences, Steinberg (1996) revealed a surprisingly prominent and strong role that ethnicity played in structuring adolescents' lives, both in and outside of school. He found that Asian-American students outperformed European-American students who, in turn, outperformed African-American and Latino-American students by significantly large margins, and that the ethnic differences remained marked and consistent across nine different high schools under study and after controlling for social class, family structure, and place of birth of parents. He also found that the ethnic effect persists in important explanatory variables of school success, such as the belief in the payoff of schooling, attributional styles, and peer groups. Steinberg concluded that ethnicity emerged as just as important a factor as social class and gender in defining and shaping the everyday lives of American children.

However, the advantage of ethnicity may be limited for caste-like minorities. If a socially defined racial minority group wishes to assimilate but finds that normal paths of integration are blocked on the basis of race, the group may be forced to take alternative survival strategies that enable them to cope psychologically with racial barriers but that do not necessarily encourage school success. Further, caste-like involuntary minorities may react to racial oppression by constructing resistance both as conformity—"unqualified acceptance of the ideological realm of the larger society"—and, more frequently, as avoidance—"willful rejection of whatever will validate the negative claims of the larger society" (Fordham 1996:39). As a consequence, it is the willful refusal to learn, not the failure to learn, that affects academic outcomes of the children of

caste-like involuntary minorities (Kohl 1994, p. 2). The forced-choice dilemma confronting Chicano and Puerto Rican youth is a case in point. Gibson (1989) and Bourgois (1991) found that Chicano students and Puerto Rican students who did well in school were forcefully excluded by their coethnic peers as "turnovers" acting "white."

Nonetheless, not all immigrant groups can fit into the category of immigrant/voluntary minority. In the case of Dominican immigrants, Pessar (1987) noted that many first-generation members of the group were able to improve their living standards by pooling resources in their households and that they were mostly satisfied with what they had achieved, comparing their lives in America to their lives in the Dominican Republic. However, she cast doubt on whether the struggle of first-generation immigrants would steer the second generation to upholding their parent's aspirations and fulfilling their own expectations of socioeconomic mobility. She speculated that Dominican children were likely to be frustrated and disappointed if they found themselves trapped at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder, because of "blatant discrimination" and "lack of access to prestigious social networks" linking them to higher professions (1987, pp. 124–125). Portes & Stepick (1993) and Waters (1996) also noted such a trend among Haitian youth in Miami and West Indian youth in New York City toward rapid assimilation into ghetto youth subcultures, at the cost of giving up their immigrant parents' pride of culture and hopes for mobility on the basis of ethnic solidarity. This prospect of downward assimilation was also expected to disproportionately affect children of Mexican immigrants (Perlmann & Waldinger 1996).

Consequently, subordinate groups may react to their disadvantaged status with different strategies: Some may rely on social capital available in their own ethnic community to actively fight for acceptance by the larger society; others may consciously reject the ideology and norms of the larger society by reconstructing an ethnicity in resistance to the oppressing structure; still others may give up their struggle and remain trapped in the bottom of the society.

## The Family, the Community, and Networks of Social Relations

In the United States, the family is the most important institutional environment outside of school for socialization, adaptation, and the future social mobility of children. Success in school, one of the most important indications of adapting to society, depends not only on the cognitive ability and motivation of individual children, but also on the economic and social resources available to them through their families.

Socioeconomic status is certainly one of the most important characteristics of the family context because it influences where children live and where they

go to school. While wealthier immigrant families are able to settle directly in suburban middle-class communities, most others are forced to settle in declining urban areas, starting their American life either in poverty or on welfare as in the case of refugees. The low socioeconomic status of those immigrant families just arriving subjects children directly to underprivileged segments of the host society and the associated disadvantages and pathologies.

However, socioeconomic status is not all that counts; just as important are family structures and their embedded family ties. Recent research has shown that immigrant children from intact (especially two-natural-parent) families or from families associated with tightly knit social networks consistently show better psychological conditions, higher levels of academic achievement, and stronger educational aspirations than those in single-parent or socially isolated families. Results from the survey of immigrant children in San Diego and Miami revealed that, regardless of race/ethnicity, immigrant students who retained strong cultural and family identity tended to outpace others in school, including their native-born European-American peers, because their immigrant families reinforced the values of hard work and educational achievement (Rumbaut 1994b, 1996, Portes 1995, Portes & Schauffler 1994). The case study on immigrant youth from troubled Central American countries showed that high-achievement motivation was significantly related to a strong sense of group affiliation, family loyalty, and obligation in helping their less fortunate relatives and folks still trapped in war and misery in their homeland (Suárez-Orozco 1989). The case study of Vietnamese youth in a poor neighborhood in New Orleans found that Vietnamese high school students who reported strong orientations toward traditional family values of obedience, industriousness, and helping others were more likely to do well in school than those who did not. However, the effects of independent thinking and concern with individual social prestige, which were most commonly associated with contemporary American society, were insignificant (Zhou & Bankston 1994). These consistent findings have highlighted the central role the family plays in the lives of immigrants and their children.

If the presence of both parents at home and well-connected family ties are considered sources of social capital, the loss, or truncation, of the family system can reduce the access to social resources available to children (Fernández-Kelly 1995, Rumbaut 1996). Most immigrant households in the United States are nuclear rather than extended families. While migration extends social and familial ties across national borders that facilitate further migratory flows (Landale 1996), it simultaneously disrupts the traditional family system upon arrival both in the immigrant family itself and in the social network to which the family is a part. In some cases, family disruption can cause serious problems for children's upbringing in the American context, when the family is separated by national borders and isolated from the ongoing networks of kinship relations

in the homeland. The so-called "relayed migration" (Sung 1987) or "serial migration" (Waters 1996), a process under which members of an immigrant family arrive (both intentionally and involuntarily) at different times, can strain parent-child and sibling relationships. The truncation of family networks, a situation where routine interactions among kins and former neighbors or friends are broken, can weaken traditional mechanisms of control and support.

In other cases, however, immigrant families are able to mobilize ethnic resources to reconstruct systems of family ties in the United States by shifting and expanding the criteria for inclusion in the family circle. Many Vietnamese refugee families, for example, are broken down in fragments of nuclear or extended families as a common strategy of flight. These smaller units are sometimes further fragmented by leaving grandparents and younger children, or wives and younger children, behind in the hope of bringing them out after the fleeing family is resettled. As a result, some of the families may be extended to contain distantly related or even unrelated members, while other families may have closely related members left behind in Vietnam (Zhou & Bankston, forthcoming). Once resettled, however, families, friends, and distant relatives who were marginal members of the family circle in Vietnam may become part of the active circle of kin relations in the United States (Caplan et al 1989, Kibria 1993). This reconstructed family pattern has often given rise to a sense of collective strength in coping and to new mechanisms in reestablishing social ties and cooperative kin-based economic practices for immigrants to support one another in an alien environment (Kibria 1993, Perez 1994, Zhou & Bankston 1994). Studies on immigrant families of different ethnic groups have revealed similar patterns of family reconstruction (Booth et al 1996).

Even when immigrant families are maintained by two parents or extended kin and by a high level of conformity to traditional values, these families cannot function effectively in isolation, especially under unfavorable socioeconomic situations when the means of attaining family goals of "making it in America" is disrupted by the day-to-day struggle for survival and by the adversarial subcultures of the underprivileged segment of American society surrounding many immigrant families. How is it possible to ensure that immigrants and their offspring maintain their values and work habits and learn the skills for socioeconomic advancement? An answer to this question requires something more than a check-list of socioeconomic characteristics of individual families. The key is to examine the networks of social relations, namely how individual families are related to one another in the ethnic community and how immigrant children are involved in these networks.

The networks of social relations involve shared obligations, social supports, and social controls. When, for example, Korean Americans obtain from other Korean Americans low-interest loans requiring little collateral, or Chinese-American students receive encouragement and approval in after-school Chinese

language classes for their general academic orientations, these are forms of so-
cial support inherent in particular patterns of social relations within the ethnic
community. When, on the other hand, a group member experiences disapproval,
or even ostracism, from co-ethnics for failing to attain a respected occupation,
this is a form of social control. Zhou & Bankston (1994, forthcoming) proposed
a model of ethnic social relations based on their study of Vietnamese adoles-
cents in New Orleans. In the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, they
observed that Vietnamese adolescents were constantly reminded of their duty
to show respect for their elders, to take care of younger siblings, to work hard,
and to make decisions upon approval of parents not simply within a particu-
lar family but in the community where other families practiced similar values.
In this "watchful and ever-vigilant" community, young Vietnamese found little
competition from other desiderata because the social world of their families was
restricted to the closed and highly integrated circles of the ethnic group. Since
what was considered good or bad was clearly specified and closely monitored
by these networks, young people found it hard to "to get away with much."
The researchers concluded that the conformity to traditional family values and
behavioral standards required a high level of family integration into a commu-
nity that reinforced these values and standards. The outcomes of adaptation,
therefore, depend on how immigrant children fit in their own ethnic commu-
nity, or in their local environment if such an ethnic community is absent, and
how their ethnic community or the local environment fit in the larger American
society. In the case of the Vietnamese, being part of a Vietnamese network
appears to offer a better route to upward mobility than being Americanized into
the underprivileged local environment, or for that matter, into the native-born
mainstream youth subcultures.

While family ties function as an important source of support and control,
recent research has found evidence to indicate that the cohesion of family ties
tends to deteriorate with longer duration of US residence, as in the case of
refugees from Central America (Gil & Vega 1996). Researchers have also
cautioned that even strong cultural identities and social ties, which may be con-
sidered as sources of social capital, may sometimes be insufficient because of
racial or class disadvantages. In a study of a ghetto African-American commu-
nity, Stack (1974) showed that African-American families depended on patterns
of co-residence, kinship-based exchange networks for survival. This means of
survival, however, demanded the sacrifice of upward mobility and geographic
movement, and it discouraged marriage, because of structural constraints such
as the inexorable unemployment of African-American women and men. Wel-
fare policies disrupted the support networks and conspired against the ability
of the poor to build up equity. Similarly, Fernández-Kelly (1995) found, in
a study of teenage pregnancies in a Baltimore ghetto, that kinship networks
in ghettos were often graced with strong family and friendship bonds but that

these networks lacked connections to other social networks that controlled access to larger sets of opportunities. Moreover, symbols of ethnic pride and cultural identity that developed in reaction to social isolation and racial domination (e.g. the sparkling mounds of braided hair of young African-American women) became signals that barred access to resources and employment in the larger society. Such truncated networks and reactive ethnicity could severely limit the ability of children to envision alternative paths out of the ghetto and to turn cultural capital into resourceful social capital (Fernández-Kelly 1995, Fordham 1996, Kohl 1994).

## Intergenerational Relations

The clash between two social worlds is the most commonly cited problem of intergenerational relations. In fact, intergenerational conflicts are not simply a unique immigrant phenomenon (Berrol 1995, Child 1943); they are also an American phenomenon rooted in the American tradition of a "moral rejection of authority" (Gorer 1963:53). In a recent study of Latino adolescents, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (1995) found that intergenerational conflicts are more common among European-American adolescents who are more ambivalent toward authority and schooling and are more peer-oriented than among Latino-American adolescents who are more respectful of authority and more family-oriented. They attribute this gap to the impact of changing American youth culture that glorifies contempt for authorities and a peer orientation, implying that assimilating into the American youth culture may cause more harm than good for immigrant adolescents.

In the United States, immigrant children often become Americanized so quickly that their parents cannot keep up with them. There is a fear in the older generation that their children will leave them, become like other American youth, and forget about their roots. This fear, however, has originated not from the process of acculturation but from the migration process itself. Migration disrupts normal parent-child relationships in a number of observable ways, shown in a number of case studies and surveys on immigrant children (Berrol 1995, Kibria 1993, Rumbaut 1994b, Sung 1987, Waters 1996, Zhou 1997). First, many immigrant families suffer lengthy separation from the father or mother or older siblings because of delayed reunification. When all the members are reunited, they have to make an effort to adapt to each other in a new situation. Second, working outside the home has become the norm and an economic necessity for women. This work role gives women some measures of independence but creates difficulty in child-rearing and weakens the status and authority of men. Also, face-to-face interaction between parents and children decreases as both parents are usually out working for long hours. Third, because parents lack proficiency in English, children often act as interpreters and translators for their parents. Such role reversal usually leads to greater

dependence of parents on children and a loss of parental authority. Meanwhile members of the younger generation are anxious that they might never become "American" because of these intrinsic family ties.

Immigrant children and their parents tend to perceive their host society and their relationships with it from different angles. The younger generation tends to focus on current adjustment, paying attention to the external traits of what they have come to define as being "American." They struggle to fit in based on a frame of reference that they have acquired from their American peers and from television and other forms of mass media. They often find themselves confused by such questions as: How do I fit into American culture and my own ethnic culture at the same time? Which side should I stay loyal to, American or my own ethnic culture? Can I ever become American without leaving home? At times, they feel embarrassed by their parents' "old" ways.

Parents, on the other hand, are primarily concerned both with making the best of a new environment and with retaining traditional family life. These parental concerns tend to lead them to focus on the future and to emphasize discipline and scholastic achievement. When children respond to these emphases in an unexpected way, parents puzzle: Why are my children so disrespectful? How can I make my children understand that everything I am doing is for their own good? Can't they understand that I wouldn't have chosen a life here if it hadn't been for them? What should I do to keep my children from losing their cultural roots and from assimilating too much?

The frequent difficulties facing the new second generation arise from the struggles of individuals to balance the demands of American culture with those of tradition-minded parents (Dublin 1996). Portes & Rumbaut (1996, Chapter 7) conceptualize the acculturation gaps between immigrant parents and their children in a typology of "generational consonance versus dissonance." Generational consonance occurs when parents and children both remain unacculturated, or both acculturate at the same rate, or both agree on selective acculturation. Generational dissonance occurs when children neither correspond to levels of parental acculturation nor conform to parental guidance, leading to role reversal and intensified parent-child conflicts. According to Portes & Rumbaut, these acculturation patterns interact with contextual factors—racial discrimination, urban subcultures, and labor market prospects—to affect adaptational outcomes of children. When contextual factors are unfavorable, as is the case confronting the majority of today's second generation, consonant acculturation enables immigrant children to lean on material or moral resources available in the family and the immigrant community; it thus increases the probability of upward assimilation. On the contrary, dissonant acculturation severs ties between children and their adult social world, deprives children of family or community resources, and leads them farther and farther away from

parental expectations. In this situation, immigrant children are likely to rebel against parental educational expectations and to assimilate into an adversarial academic orientation in response to discrimination, subcultural pressures, and blocked mobility, as exemplified by Haitian children in Miami and West Indian children in New York City (Portes & Stepick 1993, Waters 1994, 1996).

What determines intergenerational conflicts? Using a large random sample of over 5000 immigrant children in San Diego and Miami, Rumbaut (1994b) examined the possible effects of a number of objective and subjective predictors that measure children's demographic characteristics, family situations, language use, academic performance, and discrimination. He found that parent-child conflicts were significantly less likely to occur in families with both natural parents at home and with parents or siblings readily available to offer help with homework. But among females, conflicts were significantly more likely to occur in families where the mother was less educated and where economic well-being was perceived as having worsened, where children felt embarrassed by parents and had nobody to help with homework at home. Tensions were also likely to be exacerbated among children who preferred to speak English at home, who had low GPAs and educational aspirations, who spent much time watching television and too little time on homework, and who experienced discrimination or perceived themselves as being discriminated against.

Intergenerational conflicts, in turn, lead to dwindling parental authority and insufficient family communications and have significantly negative effects on children's self-esteem, psychosocial well-being, and academic aspirations (Gil & Vega 1996, Rumbaut 1996, Szapocznik & Hernandez 1988). However, whether the effects on children's adaptation are deleterious also depends on the specific context of exit from countries of origin and the context of reception upon arrival (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). Several studies on immigrant children have reported that intergenerational conflicts within families do not necessarily frustrate successful adaptation to a host society (Schulz 1983). The ethnic social structure can sometimes play an important role in mediating between individual families and the larger social setting. Immigrant children and parents often interact with one another in immigrant communities. If patterns of interaction are contained within a tightly knit ethnic community, these children and parents are likely to share their similar experiences with other children and parents. In this way, the community creates a buffer zone to ease the tension between individual self-fulfillment and family commitment. The community also serves to moderate original cultural patterns, to legitimize reestablished values and norms, and to enforce consistent standards. This situation resembles Sung's description of immigrant children in New York's Chinatown in the mid-1980s. Sung observed:

> For Chinese immigrant children who live in New York's Chinatown or in satellite Chinatowns, these [bi-cultural] conflicts are moderated to a large degree because there are other

Chinese children around to mitigate the dilemmas that they encounter. When they are among their own, the Chinese ways are better known and better accepted. The Chinese customs and traditions are not denigrated to the degree that they would be if the immigrant child were the only one to face the conflict on his or her own (1987, p. 126).

Sung's finding suggests that frequent interactions with co-ethnics within an ethnic community could help young ethnic group members to develop a sense of identity that would ease bicultural conflicts. Similarly, in their case study of the Vietnamese in New Orleans, Zhou & Bankston (forthcoming) found that the bicultural tension did not produce rebellion; on the contrary, being both Vietnamese and American frequently caused children to achieve superior levels of performance. They reasoned that, first, parents did not just bring with them a desire to maintain traditional cultural patterns. The parents also, as a result of the process of migration and their own struggles for survival in a new land, developed a strong orientation toward upward mobility. Beliefs about parent-child relations were combined with this mobility orientation and modified by it. Second, parents were not alone in their efforts to control and guide their children. They maintained relations in closely knit ethnic networks that served to reinforce parental expectations and acted as bridges between Vietnamese family life and the surrounding American society.

Zhou & Bankston also analyzed in depth the pattern of gender role change to show how the immigrant orientation toward upward mobility could perpetuate and modify traditional cultural patterns. They found that in the case of the Vietnamese the older generation was willing to modify the original culture to adjust to life in the host society. Vietnamese Americans still believe that women should be subject to higher levels of social control and parental authority than men are. But the mobility orientation of Vietnamese Americans means that social control is no longer a matter of preventing women from acquiring education but rather it acts to push them toward educational excellence. Paradoxically, the young women who are more controlled by the family and the ethnic community show higher levels of adaptation to the American school environment (Forthcoming, Chapter 8).

These case studies of the Chinese in New York and the Vietnamese in New Orleans highlight the important role the ethnic community can play in channeling frustrations with cultural conflicts away from rebellion and instead turning cultural tensions into pressures for achievement. Whether results from these cases are generalizable across immigrant groups is inconclusive, however.

## Patterns of Language Acquisition and Language Use

Linguistic adaptation is another challenge for the new second generation. Proficiency in English has been regarded as the single most important prerequisite for assimilation into American society and as a strong social force binding the

American people together. Lack of English proficiency, aggravated by the problem of linguistic isolation and disadvantages associated with minority status, has been a severe handicap for new immigrants and their children. Geographically, some immigrant children are concentrated in linguistically distinctive neighborhoods where their native tongue is used more commonly than English by the people around them. This leaves immigrants in direct daily contact only with other immigrants or with members of native minorities rather than with members of the dominant majority, who have moved away from areas of immigrant concentration. At the school level, immigrant children often find themselves in classrooms with other immigrant children speaking a language other than English or with other native minority children with distinct inner-city accents. The Los Angeles Unified School District has recently identified 87% of the district's students as "minority" and 40% as having limited English proficiency (LEP) (Lopez 1996). Meanwhile, immigrant children constantly face the pressure to become proficient in English, from the pervasive pull of American popular culture and the media, from their school teachers, and from their often non-English speaking parents, who at the same time pressure them to preserve their ancestral tongues.

The issue of language, then, is one that must be addressed in any examination of the adaptation of immigrant children. Does the language problem confronting immigrant children hinder their assimilation into American society? Does the maintenance of parents' native tongues necessarily lead to unfavorable outcomes as these children adapt to school and grow into adulthood? The doctrine of "forcible assimilation" insists that English language skills compete with non-English language skills; that bilingualism causes academic failure, anxiety, and mental confusion of immigrant exposed to two languages; and that non-English skills should be wholeheartedly abandoned. Associated with this ideology has been a "sink or swim" linguistic policy in American public schools. Such a policy holds that children from non-English speaking homes should be placed in school environments where only English is tolerated.

In recent years, adherents of "forcible assimilation" have tended to advance a sociological, rather than a psychological, argument for monolingualism in schools. Advocates of the "English Only" movement maintain that bilingualism can inhibit social adaptation in a predominantly English-speaking society, creating a "new apartheid." This position, however, has been supported more often by rhetorical skills than by empirical evidence. One exception was a literature review of research on bilingualism from the US Department of Education (Baker & de Kanter 1981). This report reviewed past studies on bilingual education and evaluated the evidence on the advantages of bilingualism. It concluded that bilingually educated students score below average in both English skills and general academic achievement.

Unlike forcible assimilation, "reluctant bilingualism" is tolerant of bilingualism and supports its use in schools. However, the reluctant bilingualists endorse the use of non-English language only as a strategy for achieving the ultimate goal of linguistic assimilation. Reluctant bilingualists advocate programs of "transitional bilingual education." Transitional bilingualism is established as a stated policy of the US Government by the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. The goal is to help students keep up with reading, math, and other subjects in their native tongues while they are taught enough English to transfer to regular classrooms. The native language, from this view, is also treated as the source of a hindrance rather than as an asset.

The debate over the language issue has largely ignored the fact that language acquisition and language use are constrained by contextual factors as well as individual preferences. Lopez (1996) found that English monolingualism at home increased from one generation to the next, and that the shift was more rapid in the third generation than in the second generation. However, such a shift was more rapid among Asian-Americans than among Latino Americans across generations. Likewise, the shift from bilingualism (proficiency in both English and native language) to English monolingualism in the third generation was more substantial among Asian-Americans than among Latino Americans. He pointed out that the better maintenance of Spanish among Latino Americans, especially in the Southwest, is attributed to the proximity to Mexico, residential isolation from the dominant group, and ethnic concentration in the sense of sheer numbers.

How do language patterns shift and how does language use affect adaptational outcomes of immigrant children? The negative view of parental native languages has been challenged by studies on immigrant children since the 1960s (Portes & Rumbaut 1996, Chapter 6). A growing body of empirical evidence indicates that both cognitive abilities and scholastic achievement are actually positively associated with bilingualism. Tienda (1984) showed that the retention of Spanish proficiency did not hinder the socioeconomic achievement of Hispanic-American men, and that, at the minimum, bilingual education would not retard lifelong achievement. Fernández & Nielsen (1986) provided evidence from national logitudinal data that, among Hispanic- and European-American high school students, proficiency in both English and parental native languages was positively related to academic achievement. Matute-Bianchi (1986) found in an ethnographic study of Mexican-American children that advanced bilingual skills were related to a strong Mexican identity and that fully bilingual young Mexican-Americans tended to perform better in school than those who lacked proficient bilingual skills. She concluded that proficiency in the native language allows young people to gain greater access to the emotional and normative supports of the ethnic group. In a study of Chinese immigrant children

in New York City's Chinatown, Sung (1987) found that bilingual students had higher student retention rates, more graduates, and higher self-esteem. She suggested that these positive outcomes were associated with the acceptance of distinctive ethnicity. Other researchers have found that language maintenance bilingual programs, as opposed to transitional bilingual programs, helped students learn the language of the dominant society effectively (Cazden & Snow 1990, Cummins 1980, 1981, Bhatnager 1980).

A recent two-period (1986–1987 and 1989–1990) study of the entire high school student cohorts in San Diego Unified School District (the nation's eighth largest) reported that, with the main exception of some Hispanic students who were generally of much lower socioeconomic status, all of the non-English immigrant minorities were outperforming their English-only co-ethnics as well as majority European-American students. This finding applied to both bilinguals (designated by the District as having fluent English proficiency—FEP) and semi-bilinguals (designated as having limited English proficiency—LEP), though FEP students did better than their LEP coethnics. In standardized tests, while English monolinguals tended to have the highest scores in reading comprehension, FEP students showed significantly higher scores in math than English monolinguals, for every nationality. The same study also reported that Vietnamese students, who are mostly members of the one-and-a-half generation, were among the ethnic groups with the highest GPAs, trailing only after Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese. In terms of dropout rates, however, the results were mixed. While FEP, or truly bilingual, students consistently showed much lower dropout rates than English monolingual students across all ethnic groups, LEP students were observed to be at the greatest risk of dropping out (Rumbaut 1995, Rumbaut & Ima 1988). Bankston & Zhou (1995) reported similar findings concerning the effect of literacy in the parental native language from their study of Vietnamese high school students in New Orleans.

Moreover, the ethnic language is intrinsic to ethnicity. Under certain conditions, it allows immigrant children to gain access to some kind of social capital generated from a distinctive ethnic identity, such as support and control from bilingual or non-English-speaking parents and ethnic communities. Bankston & Zhou (1995) found that literacy in the ethnic language was strongly associated with ethnic self-identification, which in turn, contributed to academic excellence. They concluded that advanced ethnic language abilities, such as literacy, were related to achievement because ethnic language skills tied immigrant children more closely to their traditions, their families, and their communities that enforce the values of academic achievement.

However, not all immigrant children can benefit from bilingualism because patterns of language use are affected by class, race/ethnicity, length of US residence, and other contextual factors. In an earlier study, Lopez (1976) found that

the use of Spanish depressed occupational attainment indirectly by lowering educational achievement among Chicanos because Chicanos concentrated in areas and occupations that allow few returns to the knowledge of Spanish. Fernández and Nielsen (1986) also reported that the positive effect of bilingualism tended to diminish with longer duration of US residence, and that the frequent use of Spanish was negatively related to academic achievement after controlling for English and Spanish proficiency. They attributed the contradictory outcomes to a specific handicap associated with Hispanic membership.

The language issue, therefore, is not just an linguistic issue but has deep-rooted sociological implications. Of course, we cannot entirely discount the possibility that the effect of ethnic language on overall academic achievement may be due, in part, to a transference of cognitive development: Skills developed in learning to read the parental language may be transferred to other areas of intellectual endeavor, such as history, geography, or mathematics. Nevertheless, the acquisition of English and the maintenance of parental native languages do not function in isolation from social contexts (also see Bialystok & Hakuta 1994).

## CONCLUSION

For immigrant children and children of immigrants, growing up American can be a matter of smooth acceptance or of traumatic confrontation. Immigrant children are generally eager to embrace American culture and to acquire an American identity by becoming indistinguishable from their American peers. In some cases, however, they may be perceived as "unassimilated" even when they try hard to abandon their own ethnic identities. In other cases, they may be accepted as well-adjusted precisely because they retain strong ethnic identities. In the long journey to becoming American, the progress of today's one-and-a-half and second generation is largely contingent upon human and financial capital that their immigrant parents bring along, the social conditions from which their families exit as well as the context that receives them, and their cultural patterns, including values, family relations, and social ties, reconstructed in the process of adaptation. The host society offers uneven possibilities to different immigrant groups. These unequal possibilities may limit the opportunities of immigrant groups, but they do not necessarily constitute a complete denial of opportunity.

Immigrants are today being absorbed by different segments of American society, but becoming American may not always be an advantage for immigrant children and children of immigrants. When immigrants enter middle-class communities directly, or after a short transition, it may be advantageous for them to acculturate and assimilate. When they enter the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy

of drastic social inequality, the forces of assimilation come mainly from the underprivileged segments of this structure, and this is likely to result in distinct disadvantages, viewed as maladjustment by both mainstream society and the ethnic community. In this case, young immigrants or children of immigrants may benefit by cultivating their ethnic ties in their ethnic communities to develop forms of behavior likely to break the cycle of disadvantage and to lead to upward mobility.

The interest in immigrant children and children of immigrants has recently been growing. However, there is still a big gap between the strategic importance of the new second generation and current knowledge about its conditions (Portes 1996). Data on which the existing body of research is based come mostly from regional survey research and ethnographic studies on selected immigrant groups. Census data sources have been, or are being, scrutinized by some researchers to describe the current state of immigrant children, their geographic distribution and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, school attendance, fertility patterns, labor market opportunities facing entrants to the labor force, and the establishment of independent households (Hirschman 1994, Jensen & Chitose 1994, Mollenkopf et al 1995, Landale & Oropesa 1995, Zhou & Bankston, forthcoming). A major drawback of the census data (1980 and 1990) is that a critical variable—the birthplace of parents—has been dropped from the decennial census since 1980, making it impossible to identify directly the children of immigrants (Hirschman 1994). Researchers have to use the ancestry question as a proxy. This treatment of ethnic origin variable is problematic. Perlmann & Waldinger (1996) note that, because of high rates of intermarriages in the third generation, the respondent's choice of ethnic identity is selective, making it difficult to accurately predict the independent effect of ethnic origin on intergenerational mobility.

Moreover, the census data do not have any direct measures for contextual effects of the family, the school, the neighborhood, and the ethnic community, nor do they have detailed information on school performance. There are a few other national surveys that offer important data that the census lack, such as NELS and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (known as "Add HEALTH"). These data sets have over-sampled some minority and immigrant groups and have detailed information about contextual influences of the family, the school, and the community on adolescent health, behavior, family life, peer relationships, goals, aspirations, academic performance, and related variables. However, they do not contain viable subsamples of the most recently arrived national-origin groups within broader regional categories to conduct comparative analyses.

For further theoretical inquiry, the following questions may offer some stimulus: Will members of a generation born or reared in the United States gradually

be pulled away from a heritage vastly different from those of the Europeans who arrived over the course of this century? Will those who rebel against this heritage be the best-adjusted, socially and economically? Will racial barriers limit the participation of immigrant children in American life? How would being hyphenated Americans influence the ways in which immigrant children become assimilated, and why may some of these ways be more advantageous than others? Will immigrant families and ethnic communities persist in affecting the lives of children of the second generation? Will cultural distinctiveness of hyphenated Americans eventually melt down into a pot of Anglo-American homogeneity? If not, what will ethnic diversity mean for the offspring of today's new second generation? Each of these questions has theoretical as well as practical implications. Given the unique characteristics of and the scanty knowledge about the complex ways in which the second generation of new immigrants are "becoming American," future studies are both urgent and necessary.

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