

# EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANT YOUTH

*NEW FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL DATA*

*VANESSA CRUZ, DEPAUL UNIVERSITY*

*RESEARCH GUIDED BY:*

*RANDOLPH CAPPS, TRACY VERICKER, AND DANIEL KUEHN*

## OVERVIEW

At the current pace, by the year 2040 one in three children will grow up in a household with at least one foreign-born parent (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). Due to growing disparities in educational achievement among first, second and third generation students, scholars have attempted to explain the success of those first and second generation immigrant students who excel. Perreira et al. (2006) found that first generation immigrant students are more likely to drop out of high school (at 13 percent) than their U.S.-born peers with foreign-born parents. This study focused on educational attainment of immigrant youth by generation using a sample of 4,384 twelve to fourteen year old participants from the National Longitudinal Survey of Immigrant youth 1997 (NLSY97), controlling for race, gender, family structure, parental citizenship, use of English in the home, and parenting style. This study specifically asks: how strongly associated is immigrant youth educational attainment with parental socioeconomic

status, English spoken in the home, and parental classroom involvement. This study also asks whether educational attainment differs based on distance from the immigration experience. In particular, I challenge immigrant optimism-defeatist theories as potential explanations of the differences between first, second, and third generation immigrant youth's educational attainment.

## BACKGROUND

### INCREASING POPULATION OF IMMIGRANTS' CHILDREN

The growth of immigration over the past three decades represents the second-largest flow of international migrants to the United States following the massive European migration of the 20th century. These recent arrivals come from diverse backgrounds representing multiple countries, linguistic differences, and ethnic diversity (Glick and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Nowhere is the impact of these traits more apparent than among the immigrant youth in the U.S.

*School is the first major formal organization the child encounters and serves as a major conduit in the U.S. stratification system. Thus, one of the most revealing settings in which to view the relative success or failure of newcomers and their children is the school (Entwisle and Alexander, 1993).*

Today one in five children in primary and secondary school have at least one foreign-born parent (Jamieson, Curry, and Martinez, 2001). If the current rate of immigration continues, one in three children will be raised in a household with at least one foreign-born parent in the year 2040 (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008).

For purposes of this study, immigrant generation definitions are:

1. First generation immigrant – immigrant youth who migrated to the U.S.
2. Second generation immigrant – U.S.-born children of at least one foreign-born parent.
3. Third generation immigrant – U.S.-born children of two U.S.-born parents, where at least one grandparent is foreign-born.

#### IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOLING FOR INTEGRATION AND SUCCESS OF IMMIGRANTS' CHILDREN

Looking at the dropout rates of immigrant youth in each generation relative to their parents, first-generation Hispanic and Asian immigrant youth make tremendous strides in educational attainment relative to their parents. But this trend in upward mobility reverses by the third generation (Perreira, Harris, et al. 2007). Furthermore, the second generation is not graduating from college at the same rate as their native non-Hispanic White peers (Fry, 2007). Educational attainment of children of immigrants is important because

*[...] in economies where information and skills count, education serves as the ticket of admission to better jobs and political clout. Of equal if not greater importance, public schools can provide a*

*powerful integrative force because they promise to lessen initial differences among groups of different social backgrounds (Lowell and Kemper, 2004).*

The promise of public schools is intergenerational because while most immigrant parents arrive as adults, their children are raised in the U.S. education system from a young age and thus have opportunities to excel in ways unavailable to their parents (Lowell and Kemper 2004).

#### OPTIMIST VS. DEFEATIST THEORIES

Fuligni and other sociologists in his field explain the widening gap between first, second and third generation peers by attributing it to work ethic and perseverance. For instance, the optimist theory states that recent immigrants may have greater faith in the use of education to achieve upward mobility than their more established racial or ethnic minority peers in the second or third generation (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991). This theory simply expresses that immigrant youth have higher educational aspirations and stronger beliefs in the importance and usefulness of education than their pessimistic U.S.-born peers with foreign-born parents who are more disenchanted about the idealism of the American Dream (Fuligni et al. 1999). The defeatist theory states native-born peers have fallen into a fatalistic perspective where academic success is not an option (Fuligni et al. 1999). Their discouragement at seeing the many obstacles to upward mobility in their lives, as well as in their peers' and parents' lives, disillusion them from obtaining promising opportunities. However, these theories do not fully explain the disparities among immigrant generation groups and their educational attainment (Perreira et al. 2006).

As opposed to the conclusions of the optimist-defeatist theories, I hypothesize that second and third generation peers are on average *more* likely to complete higher levels of education than their first generation peers. Thus far there are mixed findings in the field for how well first, second, and third generation immigrant youth perform in the U.S. educational system (*Learning a New Land*, Harvard

University Press 2008; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Fry 2002; Kao, 2003; Zehr, 2004). In fact, research by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and others (Karlin, 2007; Cohen and Haberfeld, 2003) has shown that grade point averages of second generation immigrant youth tend to drop the longer they live in the United States. Furthermore, among all immigrant groups, except for Asian students, greater length of residence in the U.S. is associated with lowered academic motivation (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). However, first generation students are dropping out of high school and not obtaining a GED at a higher rate than their U.S.-born peers with foreign-born parents. A recent national study (Perreira et al., 2006) estimated that first generation immigrants drop out of high school at a rate of 13 percent. The higher dropout rate of first generation immigrant youth over second or third immigrant youth shows that the immigrant optimist and defeatist theories do not hold. In theory, the optimist-defeatist models state that longer time spent in the U.S. has a negative impact on the educational attainment of immigrant youth. Therefore, the first generation immigrant youth educational levels of attainment should outweigh those of their peers who have spent more time in the U.S. In reality, the first generation immigrant youth are being academically left behind by their native-born peers.

In regards to different countries of origin, there is greater variance. Among pan-ethnic groups, Latinos and Asians have a wide range of differences across generations and socioeconomic status (Institute for Latino Studies, 2008; Lowell and Kemper, 2004). For instance, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have lower graduation rates than their peers who are Cuban, non-Hispanic whites, Asians other Hispanics and blacks; however, all foreign born students exhibit lower high school graduation rates than natives (Wojtkiewicz and Donato, 1995). Historically, Vietnamese and Filipino have not obtained as high of math and overall grade point

averages as other South Asian, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students (Chin, 2006).

The reinforcement of these educational theories may have harmful side effects on students' levels of motivation and teachers' resistance to assist students they may already believe are defeated—second and third generation immigrant youth. The consequences of a negative social mirror that currently shapes academic engagement, persistence, aspirations, achievements, and motivation among Latino immigrant youth will become more dominant (Suarez-Orozco and Qin, 2006) if such educational theories are not challenged.

### POVERTY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Overall, academic success is less attainable for children from low-income families and whose immigrant parents lack economic resources. Foreign-born parents' income level partially determines their ability to intervene or provide better resources for their children's academic attainment. For example, some immigrant parents lack transportation to take their sons and daughters to extracurricular and community activities (Perreira et al., 2006). In contrast with their middle-class peers, many low income children of immigrants lack computers and internet access (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). In particular, because many immigrant parents work long hours in inflexible low-wage jobs, they are often unavailable to attend school meetings during the day or help their children after school with homework (Suarez, 2008). According to the Longitudinal Immigration Student Adaptation Study (LISA), the vast majority of immigrant parents—regardless of income, children's gender or regional nativity—would like their children to do well in school and go on to college (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). This dream, however, is a significant challenge for most immigrant parents with lower incomes. The LISA study included approximately 400 first generation middle school immigrants from China, Central America, the Dominican Republic,

Mexico and Haiti who resided in the Boston and San Francisco areas.

More studies have shown that parents of these second generation immigrant youth are not as readily available as their middle-income peers (Lew, 2007; Ngo, 2006). Due to their lack of classroom involvement, parents of lower socioeconomic backgrounds are not perceived by teachers as having the same level of interest or understanding as parents whose backgrounds more closely resemble the teacher's background (Lareau, 2000). For instance, as opposed to their high-achieving and middle-class peers, some Korean high-school dropouts have a very different academic trajectory. Compared to the parents of the magnet high-school students, the parents of the high-school dropouts could not readily afford to send their children to after-school academies or, in many cases, college (Lew, 2007; Glick & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Children who face the limitations of their parents' abilities to be more involved and provide structural resources for their schooling often have lower academic motivation from an early age (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008).

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE AND VARYING PARENTAL SUPPORT AT HOME

Immigrant parents are at times unable to help with their children's homework due to their own limited education and unfamiliarity with English. In fact, only 38 percent of the LISA students could ask someone in their family to help with their homework (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2008).

Because of their limited English skills, knowledge of the U.S. educational system, and access to bilingual institutional support for their children's schooling, some immigrant parents—especially those who are low income—must rely entirely on their children's school boards and teachers to make decisions about what is best in the education of their children. However, when located in poor urban communities, schools are more limited in institutional resources

(Lew, 2007). Alternative resources to compensate for parents with lower levels of English, such as tutoring or after school programs, are less available to students with low-income families (Lew, 2007). For example, one student's parent was not told about the year-long consequences of being enrolled in a bilingual education program during her first year of high school. Her parents were not provided with information on the long-term consequences of their decision (Perreira et al., 2006). Consequently, their daughter repeated an entire year of high school because the bilingual program did not count towards her high school graduation credits.

#### PARENTAL CLASSROOM INVOLVEMENT

Literature indicates that more parental classroom involvement develops a stronger parental presence before the school teacher (Suarez-Orozco, 2007). In return, teachers are more willing to expect higher levels of success and effort in that pupil's academic homework. As a result, teachers are more willing to work with students whose parents have a greater classroom presence, because the teachers perceive these students as trying harder. These two observations—teacher perceptions and student effort—appear to be correlated with, and may explain, the increased likelihood of attaining higher levels of education for third generation peers. Unfortunately, some immigrant parents' lack trust in U.S. public school system and exhibit lower levels of classroom involvement (Kao & Thompson, 2003), thus potentially decreasing the motivation of their children and negatively affecting teachers' perceptions of their efforts.

There are other means for parents to be more involved beyond the classroom. For instance, some studies have shown that extended family support and monitoring of immigrant youth relationships (i.e., cultural capital) protect Hispanic and Asian first-generation immigrant youth from the risk of dropping out, even when the parents have limited social capital (Perreira, Harris et al., 2006). Individual reports of how much perceived support is

available to immigrant youth are more consistently related with positive academic outcomes than support actually received (Kessler & McLeod, 1985). Either way, increases in actual or perceived support are accompanied by increases in educational engagement, while decreases in support correspond with educational disengagement (Green, 2008).

## PARENTING STYLE

Studies have identified individual differences in parenting behaviors which are related to behavior problems, language ability, and social competence in young children (Fish et al., 2002). All of these factors affect immigrant youths' academic performance in later years. The literature indicates that immigrant parents tend to be more authoritarian and authoritative than native-born parents (Min, 2006). Authoritarian parents are very strict, and often times exercise complete control over their immigrant youth. Authoritative parents set firm boundaries and moderate their use of parental authority, they are still supportive. On the other hand, permissive parents are habitually tolerant at times when they should exercise more authority. Finally, uninvolved parents are low in response to their immigrant youth as well as less demanding, to a point where they are almost not present. In essence, to be authoritative or authoritarian takes more time than to be permissive or uninvolved.

Immigrant parents are also known for passing on more traditional and cultural values to their children. In fact, Gonzalez et al. (2008) finds that Mexican parents develop more closely-knit families than their Anglo-American counterparts. Furthermore, their study indicates that adolescents of Mexican origin adhere to more traditional beliefs, exhibit less externalizing behavior and increased academic engagement when they have stronger ties and can operate more effectively within dual Mexican and Anglo cultural contexts (Gonzalez et al., 2008). Meanwhile, when immigrant youth perceive that their parents are more involved in their school progress they try harder in school—in other words, it

often is not just a matter of teacher perception (Gonzalez et al., 2008). Although more involved parenting styles are significantly correlated with the likelihood of reaching higher levels of educational attainment, some parents may be too busy with work or other aspects of daily life to practice authoritative or authoritarian parenting styles. Lack of parental time to engage in positive parenting could help explain the lower levels of educational attainment found in the first generation immigrant youth by Perreira et al. (2006), Suarez-Orozco (2008) and the current study. Future studies are needed to test whether or not parenting style and involvement are more statistically significant for some ethnic groups than others.

## QUESTION & HYPOTHESIS

The overarching question addressed in this paper is, “How does educational attainment of immigrant youth differ based on generation status?” In particular, how strongly do family poverty, English use in the home, and parental classroom involvement influence immigrant youths' educational attainment? As opposed to optimist-defeatist theories which emphasize that more recent immigrant youth will achieve higher levels of education than their native-born peers with defeated attitudes towards upward mobility and the American Dream, I hypothesize that second and third generation peers are more likely to complete higher grades on average than their first generation peers ( $H_1$ ).

Furthermore, I hypothesize that first and second generation immigrant youth in households with higher poverty levels, less English use in home and less parental classroom involvement are more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment ( $H_2$ ). These immigrant youth are more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment due to limitations in their family's social capital; language and consequential cultural barriers in the household; and low expectations because their parents are less likely to be involved in the classroom.

Third, immigrant youth with foreign-born parents are more likely to experience higher income-to-poverty ratios, less English use in their home, and less parental classroom involvement than their third generation peers ( $H_3$ ).

## DATA AND METHODS

### DATA

This quantitative and longitudinal study used the National Longitudinal Survey of Immigrant youth 1997 (NLSY97) data from 1997 through 2005. The current study includes 4,384 first, second and third generation immigrant youth between 12 to 14 years of age (as of December 1996). The first generation immigrant youth group is the primary independent variable of interest. The author asks what generation group achieves the *highest educational attainment based on generation status* by age 21 to 23 (as of the 2005 survey wave). Furthermore, to what extent do English proficiency levels, poverty levels and parental classroom involvement impact the immigrant youths' educational attainment?

This study focuses on the younger NLSY97 cohorts (age 12 to 14 in 1996), and not the older cohorts (age 15 to 16) because more parent-to-immigrant youth relationship data are available for the younger participants. Furthermore, the younger cohorts were at a stage in their education in 1997 when their parents still had the ability to play a defining role in developing the immigrant youths' study skills. At this age, educators are also more highly dependent on parental involvement in the home and classroom than during the later high school years.

### ANALYSIS

SAS (Statistical Analysis System) 9.1 software was used to generate frequencies, a descriptive analysis, and a regression analysis between the key independent variable (generation) and the dependent variable—highest grade completed (HGC). Because the primary independent variable is generation status, this variable was also interacted with other

key variables of interest—poverty, English proficiency and parental classroom involvement—as shown in the following equation:

#### *Regression Analysis:*

$$\text{HGC} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{generation}_i) + \beta_2 (\text{generation}_i * \text{poverty}) + \beta_3 (\text{generation}_i * \text{English proficiency}) + \beta_4 (\text{generation}_i * \text{parental classroom involvement}) + \beta_5 (\text{poverty}) + \beta_6 (\text{English proficiency}) + \beta_7 (\text{family dynamics}) + \beta_8 (\text{race}) + \beta_9 (\text{gender}) + \text{controls}.$$

### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

*Educational attainment* is measured by the highest grade completed (Table 1).<sup>1</sup> Highest grade completed is similarly inferred from other possible degree attainments. The author created highest grade completed variable measures from individual years of educational attainment, with the minimum achievement of eighth grade receiving a score of zero. Because NLSY97 participants were only 21-23 years of age by the time of the ninth wave of data collection, few had completed more than 17 years of schooling. Thus, the highest category represents students with at least a high school degree and completion of their third year in college.

<sup>1</sup> Two NLSY97 variables—highest grade completed, and highest degree obtained—were combined to create this measure. Both of these NLSY variables are necessary because the NLSY's version of the highest grade completed variable is missing in many cases. When this variable is missing, the highest grade completed is inferred using the NLSY's highest degree completed variable. For example, if a respondent is missing information on highest grade completed in the survey, but their highest degree completed is a high school diploma, they are inferred to have completed 13 grades (kindergarten, elementary, junior, and high school).

**Table 1: Variables Of Interest And Control**

Dependent (Y <sub>1</sub> )	Independent	Control
Academic Attainment (Highest Grade Completed)	X <sub>1</sub> = Generation Status X <sub>2</sub> = English Use in Home X <sub>3</sub> = Household Poverty Ratio X <sub>4</sub> = Parental Classroom Involvement	-Race -Gender -Immigrant youths' Behavioral Problems -Family Structure -Parenting Style
Author used participants within the 12-14 years of age (in December of 1996) cohort for the first wave of data. During the ninth wave of the survey this cohort aged to be about 21-23 years old.		

### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

*Generation Status (X1):* These variables reflect first, second, or third generation immigrant status. If nativity information was missing for either parent, then children are assigned to a generation based on the nativity of the parent for which there was information.

*English Use in Home (X2):* Participants were asked in 1997 if their parents spoke a language other than English in their household. The parents' use of another language in the home was important to take into account because it indicates their comfort level in speaking English fluently in the privacy of their home. If parents are not comfortable and confident enough to use English in their homes, then they are probably less likely to communicate with school teachers in English.

*Household Poverty Ratio (X3):* To measure household income, the author included the ratio of the household's total income in 1996 to the federal poverty level (FPL). This was measured according to U.S. Census definitions of poverty level determined by household size. If the household's total income in 1996 is missing, total income in 1997 is used instead.

*Parental Classroom Involvement (X4):* Parental classroom involvement in the NLSY97 was asked in a three-point scale, "Often, Sometimes and Never." This measure was based on parent reports of their involvement.

### CONTROL VARIABLES

*Race/Ethnicity:* Due to sample size limitations after restricting the age cohort, the author only identifies white and other, black, or Hispanic. Other includes multiracial students as well other races. Race/ethnicity was dropped as a control variable in the final analysis because it is too highly correlated with generation status.

*Gender:* This study controlled for gender because women are disproportionately represented in higher levels of education. Women tend to complete higher grade levels than their counterparts on multiple levels. In fact, there are more women than men enrolled in college on a national level (Goldin et al., 2006). Although there has been an increase of males enrolled in college, more men are dropping out of college.

*Immigrant youths' Behavioral Problems:* The author also controlled for immigrant youths' behavioral problems by using a created variable for immigrant youth who personally felt they had a behavioral, emotional or mental problem or were recommended to seek help for a behavioral, emotional or mental problem.

*Family Structure:* Four family structures are identified in the NLSY97: two biological parents, one biological parent with one non-biological spouse, a single biological parent, and "other family structure," which includes foster parents, grandparents, etc.

*Parenting Style:* Finally, it is important to control for parenting style because of its high correlation with academic achievement. This can be seen in studies conducted in the fields of sociology, psychology and education (Ngo, 2006; Glick et al., 2007; Smokowski, 2008; Rosenbaum & Rochford, 2008). The various parenting styles include authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved as previously defined. These four parenting styles are determined based on a immigrant youth-reported scale of parental support and parental strictness.

## FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics (without controls) by immigrant youth generation for the dependent and primary explanatory variables are described first. Then, results from the regression models explaining the influence on educational attainment of immigrant youth generation, family poverty level, use of English in the home, and parenting styles are described.

### DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

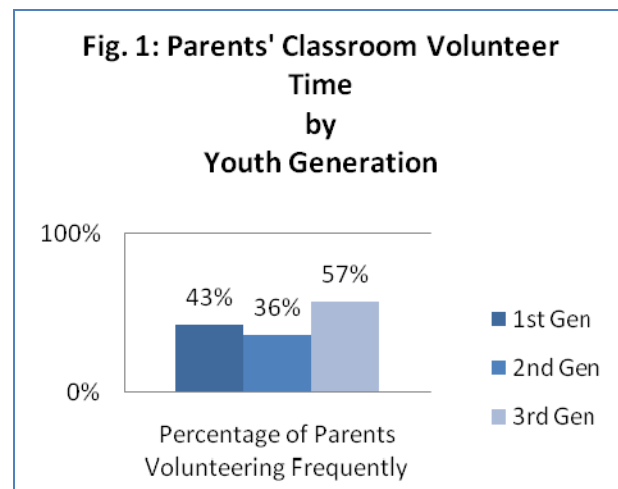
*Generation Status (X1):* All generation groups attain a mean education of 12.7 years, but the second generation surpasses their peers with a *median* level (second column) of 13.0—although this is likely not statistically significantly different from the median of 12.0 years for the first and third generations. In other words, each group in the sample on average attained a high school diploma (Table 2).

*English Use in Household (X2):* As expected, first and second generation immigrant youths’ parents predominantly speak a language other than English in their household. Only 9 percent of third generation immigrant youth’s parents speak a language other than English, whereas first and second generation immigrant youth’s parents spoke another language other than English at a rate of 77 to 80 percent.

**Table 2.** Educational Attainment (in Years) by Generation Status, Immigrant youth Ages 21 to 23, 2005

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	12.7	12.0	2.2	288
2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation	12.7	13.0	2.0	499
3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation	12.7	12.0	2.2	3601
<b>Total</b>				<b>4,384</b>

Source: Author’s calculations from the National Longitudinal Survey of Immigrant youth 1997



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Immigrant youth, 1997

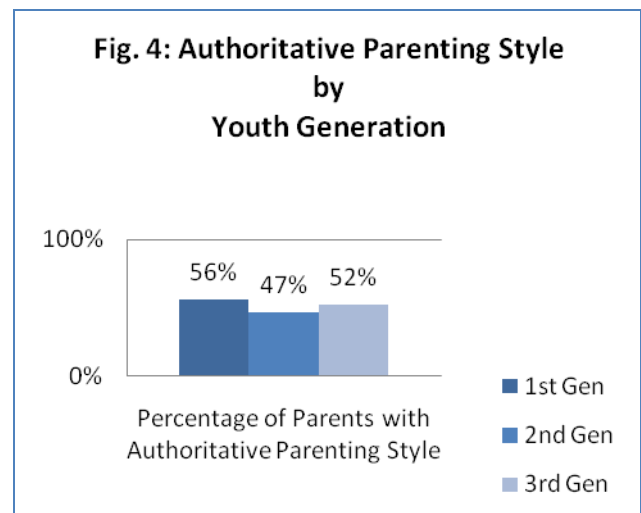
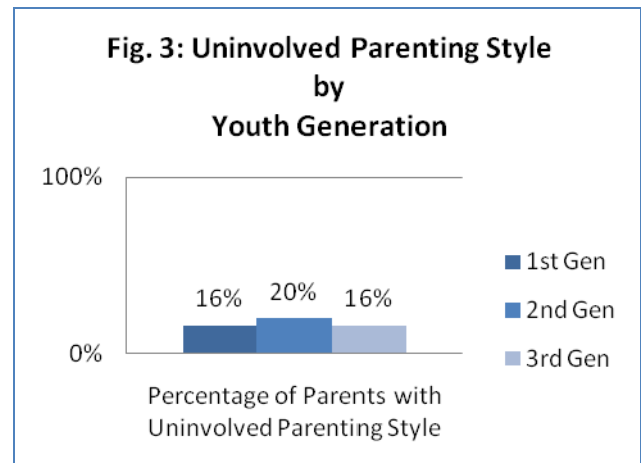
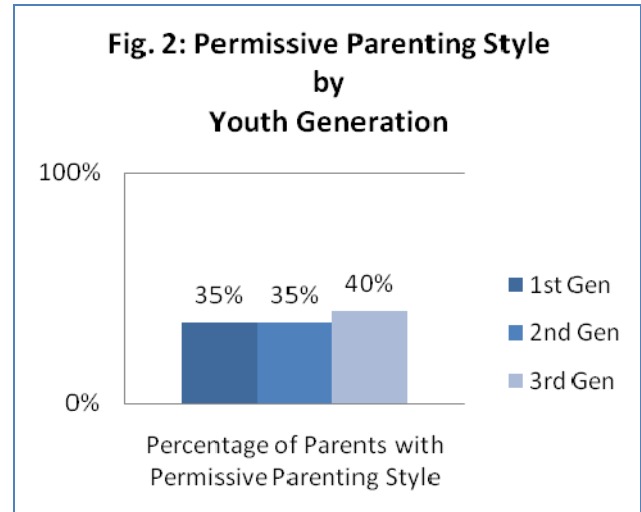
*Income Level (X3):* Third generation immigrant youth were better off than their first and second generation peers in terms of family incomes as measured by poverty ratios. The mean family poverty ratio for first generation immigrant youth was 1.61, versus 1.89 for second and 2.74 for third generation immigrant youth.<sup>2</sup>

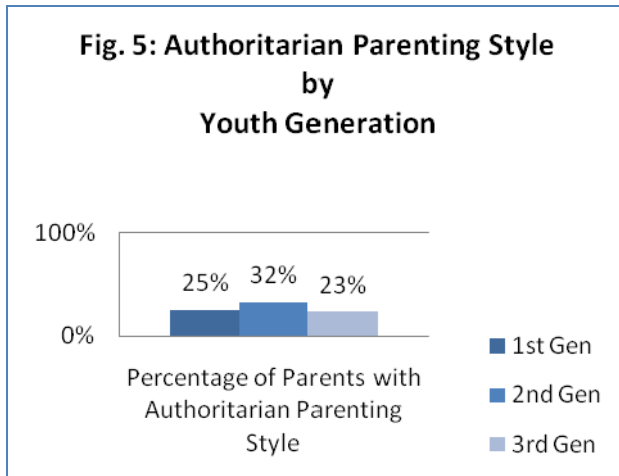
<sup>2</sup> The author did not test for statistical significance of these differences, and the mean ratios of income to poverty for first and second generation immigrant youth are not that far apart. The ratio for the third generation, however, is substantially higher than for the other two generations.

*Parental Classroom Involvement (X4):* Third generation immigrant youths’ parents volunteer more frequently in their immigrant youth’s classroom than parents of first or second generation immigrant youth. Third generation parents volunteer in the classroom frequently at a 57 percent rate; whereas, first generation parents volunteer at a 43 percent rate and second generation immigrant youth’s parents volunteer at a 36 percent rate (see Figure 3).<sup>3</sup>

*Parenting Style:* There are only modest differences in parenting styles by immigrant youth immigrant generation, and these differences were not tested for statistical significance. However, there is a clear overall pattern: first and second generation immigrant youth were more likely to have authoritative or authoritarian parents than the third generation. More specifically, the share of parents with a permissive parent style was higher for third than for first or second generation immigrant youth (Figure 4). Second generation immigrant youth had the highest share of parents who were uninvolved (Figure 5). First generation immigrant youth had the highest share of parents with an authoritative style, followed by third generation parents (Figure 6). Second generation immigrant youth had the highest share with an authoritarian parenting style (Figure 7). Taken together, authoritarian or authoritative parenting was highest among first generation immigrant youth (81 percent), followed by the second generation (79 percent) and then the third generation (75 percent). This analysis suggests, as does the literature, that immigrant parents of both first and second generation immigrant youth are in general stricter than native born parents.

<sup>3</sup> The author did not test for statistical significance for this measure; however, the difference between the second and third generation rates is substantial at 36 versus 57 percent.





Source for Figures 4-7: Author's calculations from the National Longitudinal Survey of Immigrant youth, 1997

**Table 3:** Regression Model for Dependent Variable Highest Grade Completed (Estimates in Years), Immigrant youth Ages 21 to 23

Immigrant Youth Characteristics	Coefficient	P value
First Generation ( $X_1$ )	0.91	<.0001
Second Generation ( $X_1$ )	0.71	.002
Ratio of Family Income to Poverty ( $X_3$ )	0.23	<.0001
Frequency of Parents' Classroom Volunteering Time ( $X_4$ )	0.49	<.0001
Parenting Style Permissive	-0.11	.09
Parenting Style Uninvolved	-0.28	.002
Parenting Style Authoritarian	-.08	.29
Parental Language Not English ( $X_2$ )	-0.27	.02
First Generation * Not English	-0.81	.02
Second Generation * Not English	-0.18	.52
<b>Control Variables:</b> Race, gender, immigrant youths' behavioral problems & family structure.		

## REGRESSION ANALYSIS:

Ordinary least squares regression modeling yielded statistically significant differences in educational attainment by immigrant generation, when controlling for race, gender, immigrant youths' behavioral problems and family structure (Table 3). Both first generation and second generation immigrant youth completed more schooling on average than the third generation group (0.91 and 0.71 years more, respectively). In essence, this would indicate that immigrant optimism and defeatist theories partially hold; all else equal, it predicts higher academic attainment for first generation immigrant youth than their second generation native-born peers. However, these theories are not supported when one continues to analyze subsequent independent variables.

*English Use at Home ( $X_2$ ):* As expected, lack of English spoken in the home is negatively associated with immigrant youth's educational attainment. Immigrant youth in non-English speaking homes completed 0.27 years less of education than immigrant youth in English-speaking homes, when controlling for other factors.

*Interacting Generation Status with Foreign Language in the Home:* When focusing on the implications of parental English use on educational attainment, the first and second immigrant generations are completely different. The absence of English spoken in households is more detrimental for the first generation immigrants in comparison to their second generation immigrant peers. The interaction between parental English and second generation immigrant status is not statistically significant. But the interaction between parental English and first generation immigrant status is - 0.81 and this coefficient almost cancel out the overall positive coefficient of 0.91 for first-generation immigrant youth. In other words, first generation immigrant youth in non-English speaking homes have about the same level of educational attainment as third generation immigrant youth from

English-speaking homes, all else equal. Second generation immigrant youth, however, have *higher* educational attainment than third generation immigrant youth, even when they live in non-English homes.

*Poverty Level (X3):* Findings in the regression model indicate that the higher the income-to-poverty ratio the higher the educational attainment. For each unit increase in the poverty ratio (i.e., from a family income that is 100 percent of FPL to 200 percent of FPL, or from 200 percent to 300 percent), the educational attainment of immigrant youth increases by about 0.23 years. Thus, the lower poverty ratios—between one and two—for first and second generation immigrant youth (figure 2)—are risk factors for their educational attainment levels in comparison to third generation immigrant youth. Interactions between generational status and family poverty did not yield significant results and so were excluded from the final model.

*Parental Classroom Involvement (X4):* Parental classroom involvement is positively associated with educational attainment. Immigrant youth with parents who volunteer in the classroom frequently complete about half a year of schooling more on average than immigrant youth with parents who seldom or never volunteer, when controlling for other factors. Lower parental involvement among first and second generation immigrant youth should also lead to lower educational attainment. Once again other factors must explain the relative higher educational attainment of first and second generation immigrant youth. Interactions between generation status and classroom involvement were also insignificant.

*Parenting Style:* Permissive and uninvolved parenting styles are negatively associated with educational attainment, relative to youth that have parents with authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles. When compared to immigrant youth with authoritative parents, immigrant youth with permissive and uninvolved parents completed

0.11 and 0.25 fewer years of schooling, respectively. There was no significant difference in years of schooling completed between immigrant youth with authoritative and authoritarian parents. Thus, the relatively low shares of first and second generation immigrant youth with permissive or uninvolved parents provide a protective factor that partially explains their higher educational attainment *vis-à-vis* the third generation.

## DISCUSSION

First and second generation immigrant youth have a combination of characteristics related to educational attainment, and some appear to be risk factors for lower completion of schooling, while other factors appear to be protective. To begin with, first and second generation students have a high share of parents who primarily speak a language other than English in the home, and this factor is associated with lower schooling for everyone, but especially detrimental for educational attainment among the first generation. Furthermore, first and second generation immigrant youth have higher income-to-poverty ratios than their third generation peers, and poverty is negatively associated with educational attainment. Finally, first and second generation immigrant youth have parents who are less likely to volunteer in the classroom than their third generation peers, and this is also a risk factor for lower educational attainment.

**Table 4:** Risk and Protective Factors for First and Second Generation Immigrant youths’ Educational Attainment

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Parents not speaking English (more important for 1st generation than 2nd generation)	Family structure (more likely to have 2 biological parents)
Higher poverty levels	Parenting Style (Authoritarian & Authoritative)
Parents are less likely to volunteer in classroom	Unmeasured...

On the protective side, first and second generation immigrant youth also have factors that work in their favor to attain higher levels of education. For example, in terms of family structure (not shown in the previous tables), first and second generation immigrant youth are more likely to live in dual-biological parent households than their peers. First and second generation immigrant youth have parents who are more frequently authoritarian or authoritative, and less frequently permissive or uninvolved. The authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles seem to be most helpful in keeping immigrant youth on a track toward higher grade completion because they insist more of their immigrant youth's "best" instead of their individualism-as native-born American families do (Min, 2006). Finally, first and second generation immigrant youth show higher school completion than the third generation net of the other factors discussed here. Thus, there appear to be other, unmeasured protective factors that explain the successful stories of highly academic achieving first and second generation immigrant youth. These variables may be related to the optimism that immigrant parents come to the United States with, or the availability of bilingual resources in their host country neighborhood. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted to help explain what works for first and generation immigrant youth in terms of educational attainment, and what is missing from the field of research.

In reference to  $H_1$ , second and third generation immigrant youth were not necessarily more likely to attain higher levels of education than their first generation peers (Table 1). Therefore, this hypothesis was not fully supported (Table 3).  $H_2$  stated that immigrant youth in households with less English use in home ( $X_2$ ), lower levels of income ( $X_3$ ) and less parental classroom involvement ( $X_4$ ) are less likely to attain higher levels of education, and all three of these associations were supported by the study's findings. Lastly,  $H_3$ —that immigrant youth with foreign-born parents are more likely to

experience higher poverty ratios, less English use in their home and less parental classroom involvement than their third generation peers—was also supported by the findings.

An interesting note from this study overall was that even though third generation immigrant youths' parents demonstrate the highest level of classroom involvement (Fig. 3), the second generation has higher grade completion overall (Table 1). The regression model (Table 3) suggests that unmeasured factors related to immigrant youth's generation status are equally or more important than parental classroom involvement in explaining educational attainment. Thus while classroom involvement is a key variable in the process of immigrant youth's education, it is by no means the only central one.

## WEAKNESSES & FUTURE RESEARCH

This project was largely exploratory and therefore should not be considered a final analysis on the educational attainment of first and second generation immigrant youth. Due to the complex nature of the relationships among the variables of interest, an interactive path analysis between all the independent variables and the dependent outcome is warranted, but the time allowed for this project did not make this possible. Additional analysis and regression modeling could also be conducted including other unmeasured outcomes and independent variables of interest (e.g., transportation means, ethnic enclaves, regional location, funding availability, cultural differences, and participants' U.S. home town demographic information). Political participation (civic and electoral) is interesting because of its correlation with political representation and democracy, and so the current study could also be expanded to include these dependent variables.

Furthermore, the original goal of the analysis was to more thoroughly contextualize immigrant youths' socioeconomic status. For instance, the study would have benefited from inclusion of parents'

occupations and immigrant youths' work and other contributions to family incomes. However, the NLSY97 does not include parental occupation information. It is especially important, as stated by Conger et al. (2007), to study immigrant youths' responsibilities in their homes and workplaces. Such responsibilities can lead to lower academic achievements among second and third generation immigrant peers. As a result of their families' economic needs, Smokowski et al. (2003) and Lew (2007) found that children of immigrants are fulfilling more family economic needs than their third-generation immigrant and-higher peers. Further analysis of NLSY97 data on immigrant youth earnings, parental employment, and the immigrant youth's economic roles in the home is therefore warranted.

Finally, it would have been worthwhile to include more data on parental involvement in schools. Parental involvement is a key concept because parents are important socializing agents of immigrant youth's educational trajectories. Of course, there are unmeasured variables in this study such as peer pressure, environment, family dynamics and more. Even though second generation immigrant youth may attain higher median levels of education than their peers, this does not mean that they do not need their teachers' or parents' guidance. Their assimilation to mainstream institutions may compensate for their parents' inexperience, but this is not always the most ideal situation that will foster higher levels of educational attainment. Although immigrant youth are assimilating to their parent's host country culture at a faster rate than their adult parents, such uneven assimilation may lead to family conflict, inconsistent discipline, and less parental mentoring (Smokowski et al., 2003; Lew, 2007).

This paper has laid the foundation for a path analysis for the generations of interest. The follow up study will ask how poverty is associated with English usage in the home, and parental classroom involvement, which may be correlated with

immigrant youths' educational attainment and finally future political participation levels.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, this study did not fully support all three hypotheses. However, the findings indicate that more parental time in the classroom is beneficial for all students regardless of immigrant generation status. Furthermore, English use in the home is important for completion of schooling, especially for first generation immigrant students. Finally, parenting styles play a key role in improving the chances of academic attainment for first and second generation immigrant youth.

One way to address the parental classroom volunteer time is to be aware of the fact that many immigrant parents are low-income workers who often work in inflexible jobs and have difficulty sacrificing work hours. Thus schools may strive to provide better hours of involvement or tasks that are feasible for non-participating parents to volunteer more regularly.

Secondly, English skills could be incorporated in workforce development programs for immigrant parents. This is especially the case for parents who are working several hours per day, and cannot sacrifice a few months to dedicate to a full semester course in English as a Second Language. It would be most cost-effective for both employers and employees to have workplace English literacy programs (Isserlis, 1991). Workplace programs have other benefits such as bringing the education to the employee and the flexibility to be tailored to job-specific literacy needs (Isserlis, 1991). Because of the growing numbers of nonnative English speakers in the U.S. workforce and their educational needs, it is not unheard of for companies to provide training in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills on the job (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

Furthermore, one likely reason why the lack of English spoken in the home is more detrimental for first generation than second generation immigrant youth is that the immigrant youth themselves might be lagging in the English language adoption. One way to improve their educational attainment might be to take a more family-education approach to ESL for first generation immigrant youth. In other words, schools could offer courses at low cost to students and parents together (if they both could possibly attend them), perhaps after school or on the weekends.

Lastly, the influence of parenting styles on educational attainment raises several questions as to the amount of influence that parents actually have on first and second generation immigrant youth. Because of lower incomes, immigrant parents are

less likely to be as readily available to immigrant youth as native-born parents, who are more likely to be middle class. An absent parent is similarly, if not more harmful, than a passive or uninvolved parent for first and second generation immigrant youth. For instance, although parents may strongly support high academic standards for their immigrant youth, if they are absent they cannot provide substantial support. Immigrant youth may either feel alienated from or pushed away from the absent parent (Lowenstein, 2008).

Due to the critical foundation that education sets for future levels of socioeconomic mobility and political involvement, it is vital to address the educational trajectories of children of immigrants in order for them to be successfully incorporated to our political system

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## VANESSA CRUZ

Is currently a senior at DePaul University majoring in political science and economics. Ms. Cruz is a member of the 2008 class of the UI Summer Academy.

## RESEARCH MENTORS

### *RANDOLPH CAPPS*

Dr. Capps is a Demographer and Senior Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Institute.

### *TRACY VERICKER*

Ms. Vericker is a Research Associate in the Urban Institute's Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population.

### *DANIEL KUEHN*

Mr. Kuehn is a Research Associate in the Urban Institute's Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population.

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