

Acculturation and the Educational Aspirations of the Children of Immigrants

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Abstract

America has often been referred to as a melting pot, a nation comprised of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds whose differences are reduced over time, particularly across generations. Although the melting pot image has only modest empirical support, there was remarkable assimilation of the children and grandchildren of disadvantaged European immigrants who came to the United States in the early 20th Century. The descendants of these immigrants have adopted – and also changed – American culture as they gradually obtained economic success and become part of the mainstream middle-class. In recent decades, new sociological theories have risen to try to explain the much slower process of assimilation experienced by recent immigrants. A key issue is the relationship between cultural and socioeconomic assimilation. Classical Assimilation Theory argues that cultural assimilation, or acculturation, is generally a prerequisite for positive economic assimilation. The Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis suggests that immigrants usually have a stronger will to succeed than natives and that this advantage can be lost with too much cultural assimilation. Segmented Assimilation theorists take this argument further and argue that in the spatially-segregated nature of the American class structure, most immigrants have more contact with underclass than middle-class culture. Thus, acculturation can have a negative impact on socioeconomic assimilation, perhaps leading to joining the underclass. In my research, I draw upon these theories to examine the effects of acculturation on the higher educational aspirations and attainment of the children of immigrants relative to comparable youth of native born parents. Using data from the Beyond High School study, conducted by the University of Washington, Department of Sociology, I also examine the effects of peer and parent expectations on the development of college aspirations. The goal of this research is to gain a clearer understanding of the role of community factors on immigrant assimilation.

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America has often been referred to as a melting pot, a nation comprised of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds whose differences are reduced over time to become a cohesive whole.

America is a nation created by immigrants and brought to prominence by them. In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, a great wave of immigrants provided the labor that fueled America's own industrial revolution. Because of complex interactions caused by the variety of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds entering the United States and meeting the rest of the native society, immigration has always had a place in American sociology.

1.1 – Classical Assimilation Theory

The concept that developed to explain the process by which immigrants are integrated into the host society is called assimilation. In his 1964 work, Gordon sought to summarize the theoretical perspectives on assimilation at the time, and described how assimilation can be more accurately understood as several different types of processes rather than a single one. He identified cultural assimilation, otherwise known as acculturation, as well as structural, marital, and identificational assimilation, among a few others.

The definitions of these various terms have remained fairly constant over the years. Acculturation is the adoption of cultural patterns, behaviors, and values to that of the host society. Structural assimilation, according to Gordon, occurs when immigrant groups are accepted into the same social groups and social network as the native population. Marital assimilation, also known as amalgamation, occurs when immigrant and native groups begin to intermarry. Identificational assimilation refers to the process by which immigrants begin to consider themselves a member of the same ethnicity as the native group (Gordon 1964: 60-75).

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The type of assimilation that most people refer to when they use the term is cultural assimilation.

Acculturation is often viewed in classical assimilation literature in a positive light. For example, Warner and Stole, in their work describing the ethnic relations between various groups in a northeastern American city, characterized assimilation as a process by which immigrants can remove or diminish traits which the host society has judged to be inferior. In fact, it was thought that only through this process that immigrants can hope to obtain the same place in society that members of the native population enjoy (Warner and Stole: 284-6). This viewpoint has come to be termed Anglo-Conformity Theory.

Other classical assimilation theorists were not as dismissive of the role or continuity of immigrants' own culture. Proponents of the Melting Pot Theory argue that American culture is a constantly evolving entity with changes brought on by integrating aspects from America's diverse and numerous immigrants. And while some theorists argued that such a process may not lead to full integration, as ethnic identity and culture often experiences upswings in popularity and has a surprisingly long-term viability, this process nevertheless transforms both immigrant and native culture, bringing the two closer together while producing benefits for both (Glazer 1963: 12-14, 288-291).

Despite their differences on their views of the role immigrant culture, both the Anglo-Conformity and the Melting Pot Theories believed that cultural assimilation was a positive experience for the immigrant. Immigrants benefited by adopting cultural traits from the native group. Furthermore, many scholars from both theories viewed that this process was inevitable (Duncan and Duncan 1968, Park 1950). While acculturation may be slowed by spatial segregation and immigrant groups' lack of contact with natives, it does eventually occur (Gordon 1964: 78-79).

Many classical assimilation theorists also believed that there was a natural chronological ordering to the different assimilation processes. In this view, cultural assimilation is likely to be the first type of assimilation that an immigrant group undergoes upon arrival in the host society. While other types of

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assimilation, whether structural, identificational or otherwise, may occur simultaneously with acculturation, no other types of assimilation can occur before it (Gordon 1964: 77-78). This suggests that for immigrants to hope to obtain equivalent income and social resources as the native group, they must undergo at least some amount of cultural assimilation (Gordon 1964, Marston and Valey 1979).

Assimilation literature up to this time had been based on the large wave of immigrants that had arrived prior to the World Wars. However, a new wave of immigrants would challenge the existing theories. These new immigrants appeared to spearhead a revival of ethnic identity, often approaching American ways with skepticism and appearing to assimilate to American society slower. Furthermore, during this time, assimilation literature itself was undergoing changes, with a trend towards further focus on the role of socioeconomics during the process of assimilation.

1.2 – Segmented Assimilation Theory

During the United States' involvement in the two World Wars, immigration was largely restricted, and thus most classical assimilation literature had focused on studying the impact of the earlier wave of immigration which ended around 1921. However, with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which removed the previous immigration quotas based on nation of origin, the borders of the United States were more open than they had ever been before. With the subsequent expansion of the American economy and the corresponding demand for labor, the United States has experienced a second large wave of immigration.

The post-1965 influx of immigrants caused a revived interest in the dynamics surrounding immigration and their assimilation into the host society. While older theories of assimilation predicted that acculturation would lead to positive structural assimilation into mainstream America, new research

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began to contradict these models and suggest that the process of assimilation is not as simple or definitive.

Much of this newer research focused on the concept of socioeconomic assimilation. As Alba and Nee (1997) note, this form of assimilation is missing from Gordon's account, but its meaning is fairly obvious. Socioeconomic assimilation occurs when an immigrant group obtains economic parity with the native group. That is, members of the immigrant group have the same economic opportunities and are paid equivalent wages for the same job with equivalent amounts of education and experience. Furthermore, immigrants should be able to participate in equal levels in economic and educational institutions as natives who have the same educational and academic resources (1997: 835-846). This definition of socioeconomic assimilation is certainly related to Gordon's structural assimilation. Some scholars have argued that socioeconomic assimilation is inextricably tied to structural assimilation. Thus in order for the latter to truly occur in anything other than a token fashion, the first must occur, and vice versa (Marston and Valey 1979: 17-18).

The pivotal relationship in recent assimilation literature has been that between cultural and socioeconomic assimilation, and many works have provided evidence that, contrary to the classical theories, in some cases immigrants may be more likely to obtain favorable socioeconomic assimilation outcomes by avoiding acculturation rather than embracing it. For example, in her work studying the educational achievement of Sikh immigrants in a community in California, Gibson (1988) found that that these immigrants performed better than the native group and credited their achievements to a strategy of accommodation rather than assimilation. Members of this immigrant community chose to pursue a strategy of accepting and complying with certain aspects of American culture with which they were in contact with while maintaining their separate ethnic and cultural identity. Because of this, the Sikh

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second generation was able to draw on resources from their ethnic identity to perform better in school (Gibson 1988: 28-29, 167-170).

The term “Segmented Assimilation” was coined by Portes and Zhou (1993) to describe how different portions of the immigrant population may assimilate socioeconomically to different portions of American society. In particular, some immigrants may become permanent members of the underclass rather than joining the middle class. To explain why this might be, Portes and Zhou list several of the obstacles that immigrants – particularly those of the more recent wave – face. Many newer immigrants cannot pass, physically, as Caucasian, and thus are treated more frequently to a host of barriers stemming from discrimination. Furthermore, the economic structure of the United States has changed since the 1920s, where de-industrialization and the rise of both the service and high-tech economies has seen the loss of intermediate employment opportunities that would allow immigrants to more easily climb the socioeconomic ladder. According to Portes and Zhou, these new challenges and the diverse structure of American society reveal multiple paths to assimilation whereas previous, Classical Assimilation Theory posits only one (1993: 76-77).

To illustrate an alternative path to assimilation, Portes and Zhou describe the interaction of Haitian immigrants living in a large enclave in Miami with lower class blacks in neighboring Liberty City. Second generation immigrants from Little Haiti interact on a daily basis with native-born blacks of the same age. These immigrants are caught between the educational and assimilation ideals of their parents and the realities of Haitian poverty along with an alternative culture that native blacks-born provide. Many of the Haitian immigrant children that adopt this counter-culture defeat whatever benefits that an immigrant community provides and are assimilated into the underclass of American society. Thus, for many immigrant communities, acculturation does not necessarily lead to assimilation into the American mainstream but often into the lower class minority group (1993: 81-82). Full cultural assimilation into

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this mainstream may in fact be impossible given the barriers that immigrants face. Instead, the best option that many immigrants have is to selectively acculturate to particular aspects of American society in conjunction with maintaining a separate ethnic identity (1993: 90, 96).

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) described groups such as the Haiti immigrants as “at-risk” populations. While some immigrants come to the United States with enough wealth and socioeconomic status to successfully join the American middle class immediately, other immigrants face barriers that make it difficult to do so. For such groups, other factors weigh in on how well a particular immigrant family assimilates into American society. One such class of factors is intergenerational, how parents and children approach the assimilation process together, which can have a positive or negative effect on the later generation’s assimilation (Xie and Greenman 2005) . External factors from the host society such as racism and prejudice, the availability of economic opportunities, and the receptiveness of the host government also plays an important role (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 47-54). The last class of factors deals with whether immigrants have the community support necessary to overcome these barriers. Dense co-ethnic communities can provide increased economic opportunities as well as enforcing martial stability and parental authority (2001: 64-65). By combining background, intergeneration, external, and community factors, one can determine the outcome of assimilation into American society.

A more concrete example of the positive effect of selective assimilation is presented by Portes and Hao in their 2002 article focusing on bilingualism in immigrant children. The authors reference a strong body of research in linguistics, psychology, and sociology has consistently shown that fluency in a second language has cognitive and developmental benefits. However, the authors also note that immigrants who assimilate culturally to American society are quick to lose their grasp of the language of their motherland. Portes and Hao compare the relative success of bilingual and monolingual immigrant students on outcomes such as self-esteem and educational aspiration. In doing so, they find that fluent

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bilinguals are able to develop relationships with family, a sense of personal identity, and psychological health that are stronger than monolinguals and limited bilinguals. Combined with the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, these intergenerational benefits tend to encourage greater educational aspirations and attainment for fluent bilingual immigrants than immigrant children who have lost their grasp on their parent's native language (Portes and Hao: 2002).

1.3 – Expanded Classical Assimilation Theory

Despite the emergence of segmented assimilation theory, some evidence suggests that the classical theory is not entirely inaccurate. In another article in 2002, Bankston and Zhou present evidence that cultural assimilation provides some very tangible benefits that later translate to socioeconomic gains for immigrants. In their research, Bankston and Zhou examine the relationship between self esteem and school performance in the context of students' racial group and immigrant status. They find that immigrant students tend to have lower self esteem despite better academic performance. Despite this, academic performance was consistently positively correlated with higher self esteem regardless of immigrant and racial status, suggesting that immigrant children would perform even better academically with higher levels of self-esteem (Bankston and Zhou 2002).

Greenman and Xie also defend classical assimilation theory in their 2008 research based on The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health). They argue that scholars of segmented assimilation have misinterpreted the classical theory and applied it beyond its originally intended scope. Greenman and Xie state that this "stylized" version of the classical theory referenced by segmented assimilation theorists is a poor adaptation of the classical theory to the contemporary situation and thus unsurprisingly makes a poor model (2008: 111-112).

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Instead, Greenman and Xie argue for an "expanded" version of classical theory based off the theory's basic tenant that, as immigrants become more assimilated, the immigrant population takes on traits more similar to that of the native population. The corollary of this expanded theory is that assimilation may have positive or negative effect depending on the starting characteristics of the particular immigrant population and the particular outcome being examined (2008: 112-113).

Greenman and Xie present evidence for this "expanded" classical theory from their own research. They examine the effect of a wide variety of assimilation indicators on several different outcomes in different racial groups. Greenman and Xie find that most groups follow a pattern of convergence on about half of their measured outcomes with the control population of native-born whites. For some groups, this means that they receive a positive effect from assimilation, while others receive a negative effect. Overall, assimilation is positively associated with educational outcomes and self-esteem but also increases risky behavior such as controlled substance use and earlier ages of sexual intercourse. For the other half of their outcome measures, Greenman and Xie did not find a convergence effect, but instead found a unidirectional pattern or no pattern though they argue that a convergence pattern may appear if a different control population is used (2008: 120-131).

1.4 – Immigrant Optimism and Self-Selectivity Theory

Segmented assimilation theory notes the challenges that immigrants must face to assimilated upwardly, and classical theories of assimilation describe the process by which immigrants become part of the mainstream of the host society. However, proponents of immigrant optimism theory and the immigrant self-selectivity theory attempt to explain why immigrants are at the position they are upon entering their host country. The phenomenon that this theory tries to address in particular is the fact that in many cases immigrants are actually are more likely to succeed than their native counterparts.

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For example, research by Goyette and Xie on the educational aspirations of Asian Americans found that immigrant status contributed positively to higher aspirations regardless of the student's ethnicity and actual recorded academic aptitude on standardized tests. Native-born Asian Americans to native-born parents have educational expectations closer to those of white natives with other factors held constant. In general, Goyette and Xie attribute higher Asian American aspirations to the strong effect of parent expectations, but also note that immigrant Asians receive a benefit that is independent of their racial status (1999).

In a paper in 2005, Kao and Tienda attempt to examine three alternative hypothesis regarding the assimilation and educational success of the second generation. The three hypotheses drew upon models based on the classical assimilation theory, which predicted a positive correlation between acculturation and socioeconomic assimilation, on segmented assimilation theory, which predicts that, in some cases, acculturation would have a negative effect on socioeconomic assimilation, and lastly on immigrant optimism theory, which holds that immigrant status, as well as language acquisition, is positively correlated.

In their research, Kao and Tienda measured the effects of immigrant generation, cultural solidarity of the second generation with their immigrant parents, and compared these and other variables to a student's standardized scores of math and language academic performance. Kao and Tienda found that immigrants did tend to perform better than their native counterparts even within their own race. For example, immigrant Asians performed better than native whites, though Kao notes that native Asians only performed as well as. Similarly, immigrant Hispanics were more likely to express an aspiration to graduate from college than their non-immigrant complements (2005: 9-12).

In her research on West Indian immigrants, Model presents data showing that black immigrants have advantages over their native counterparts in two areas. First, the immigrants often arrive with higher

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educational attainment in terms of more years of schooling than natives. Secondly, even for similarly qualified natives, immigrant West Indians are more likely to succeed economically than blacks, suggesting that immigrants are more motivated to do so. Model argues that the self-selective nature of immigrants to the United States is the main casual driver of the subsequent socioeconomic success of these West Indian immigrants (2008).

2 – Hypotheses and Theoretical Motivation

As previous research by immigrant optimism theorists has shown, immigrant students do not always do poorly in school. In fact, many immigrants, particularly those of the second generation, have higher educational aspirations and immediate plans to attend college after graduation in greater proportions than their native counterparts. By examining what happens to this immigrant advantage with increased acculturation to the host society, we can gain a perspective on how assimilation affects the educational aspirations of immigrant children and thus their later socioeconomic assimilation. The research presented in this paper attempts to look at the effects of immigrant generational status, as a stand-in for cultural assimilation, on a student's educational aspirations and college enrollment in the light of three different hypotheses drawn from the various theories from past literature.

The first hypothesis is drawn from Classical Assimilation Theory. Classical Theory has a generally positive assessment of the benefits that acculturation can provide. This hypothesis argues that cultural assimilation is procedurally prior to structural or socioeconomic assimilation. In order for immigrants to perform well economical and educationally, they must first adopt the culture of their host society. Thus, according to the first hypothesis, children who are better socialized in the culture of the host society are more likely to have higher educational aspirations and more likely to become enrolled in college or university after they graduate from high school.

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The second hypothesis argues that the opposite may be true. Immigrant children are more likely to become enrolled in college or university and have higher aspirations if they are less assimilated culturally. This may be particularly true for the children of immigrant parents who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or of a minority race and face additional prejudices for their phenotypical differences. These children are “at-risk” for downward assimilation. This hypothesis is drawn from Segmented Assimilation Theory and predicts that greater socialization in the culture of the host society, particularly for children belonging to low SES families or racial minorities, lowers educational aspirations and college enrollment as compared to those less socialized.

Immigrant Optimism Theory is the basis for our third hypothesis and combines aspects of the first two. It holds that immigrant students have parents with higher educational expectations and peers with greater educational plans than natives, and these stronger influences drive educational aspirations for immigrant children. However, immigrants often do not have the social resources, such as the mastery of the native language or an understanding of the workings of native institutions, that native students have and are thus disadvantaged. Thus, limited cultural assimilation, to allow immigrant students to obtain these resources while retaining their immigrant “optimism,” is where we would expect to see students with the highest educational aspirations.

The fourth and last hypothesis is drawn from the Expanded Classical Assimilation Theory proposed by Greenman and Xie. In this model, the Neo-Classical Convergence Hypothesis, immigrant students may arrive advantaged or disadvantaged as compared to native-born students with regards to educational aspirations, but with each successive generation immigrants are more likely to have the same proportion of high aspirations and college enrollment as the majority population of native-born whites. Thus, depending on the racial group, greater socialization results in higher or lower educational aspirations and college enrollment rates closer to the convergence rate.

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In summary, the Classical Assimilation Hypothesis predicts more positive socioeconomic assimilation results with greater acculturation, while the Segmented Assimilation Hypothesis predicts the opposite, worsening socioeconomic assimilation with great acculturation especially amongst at-risk groups such as racial minorities. The Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis predicts that the best socioeconomic outcomes would appear amongst students with a medium amount of acculturation. Our last model, the Neo-Classical Convergence Hypothesis predicts that different groups will experience improving or worsening socioeconomic assimilation outcomes depending on where that group starts initially in relation to a convergence value.

Regardless of which of the above hypotheses is best supported by the data, another goal of this paper is to try to operationalize the influence of immigrant advantage or disadvantage versus comparable native groups by looking at two possible mediating variables: peer influences and family expectations. Peers are often responsible for enforcing a student's own aspirations while parents' educational expectations provide a measure of how, as found in previous research, immigrant families often push a child towards higher academic goals than their native counterparts. By controlling for these two variables, it is possible to see how much of difference in the educational aspirations and college enrollment of immigrant children can be explained by the interaction of these family and friend influences.

3.1 – Data and Variables

Data used in this study was provided by the University of Washington's Beyond High School (UW-BHS) study which surveyed high school seniors on their educational aspirations. Financed in part by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the UW-BHS sought to examine the effects of race, SES, and other variables on college plans and enrollment. Other goals included studying the impact of the

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Washington State Achiever's Program, a scholarship program aimed at improving college enrollment amongst financially disadvantaged students, as well as the effects of multiple racial and ethnic identities on students' health and their educational aspirations past high school.

The UW-BHS study sample included a variety of public and private schools from several districts in and around the area of Tacoma, Washington. Students that were registered as seniors from these schools were asked complete a survey in the spring of their fourth year of high school. The survey was conducted over a span of five years from 2000 to 2005 providing a total N of over 9,600 students. Students were asked to conduct a follow-up interview one year after their initial survey and around 90 percent of the original sample was retained. The data presented this paper uses the retained sample and contains the responses of over 8,500 students.

The UW-BHS dataset provides information on the immigrant generation of each respondent, and in this paper, this variable is taken to represent the immigrant status of the subject as well as an indicator of acculturation. While generational status is not a direct measure of cultural assimilation, it is a reasonable assumption that families that have been in the United States for a greater number of generations will be more likely to adopt cultural traits similar to their host society and less likely to retain aspects of their culture of origin. In a few cases, students were immigrants from one of the United States' territories, such as Puerto Rico or American Samoa. Students from these regions are actually American citizens by birth. However, American territories are usually self-governing and far removed from the states in not only distance but also political status and cultural identity. Thus, students from these territories can be expected to experience similar processes as other immigrants when relocating to the states.

Three categories were created to describe a student's immigrant status. First generation students described children with immigrant parents who were themselves born outside of the American states.

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Second generation students were native-born but had at least one immigrant parent. The last group serves as the reference category and includes students born in the United States of also native-born parentage from the third generation onward. The Beyond High School study was not designed to oversample the immigrant population. Nevertheless, first and second generation students comprise a large portion of our sample, about fifteen and seventeen percent respectively. Thus, nearly a third of our sample contains immigrant children of either the first or second generation.

Table 1 – Frequencies of Examined Variables within the Sample

	Number	Percent
Total Sample	8501	100%
By Immigrant Generation		
1 st Generation	1257	14.8%
2 nd Generation	1460	17.2%
3 rd or Greater Generation	5784	68.0%
By Race and Ethnicity		
Hispanic	752	8.8%
Black	1126	13.2%
East Asian	641	7.5%
Cambodian	167	2.0%
Vietnamese	223	2.6%
Other Asian	359	4.2%
Pacific Islander or American Indian	374	4.4%
White and Other	4859	57.2%
Home Owners	5796	68.2%
High Friends' Educational Plans	3366	39.6%
High Family Educational Expectations	4281	50.4%
High Educational Plans	4138	48.7%
College Enrollment	3284	38.6%

Because the majority of immigrants belong to a racial minority group, race and ethnicity were also taken into account as control variables. Race was coded as a categorical variable such that each category was mutually exclusive. People of Hispanic ethnicity are contained in one category which included all subjects who self-identified as Hispanic regardless of their race. The black category contains all non-

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Hispanic blacks and is the largest minority group in our categorization. Students of Pacific Islander and Native American descent together comprised another category.

As a significant portion of minorities in the Seattle and Tacoma region covered by the UW-BHS study are of Asian descent, four categories are used to distinguish between these people who often have racially distinct experiences. The East Asian category, while only the third-largest category total, is the largest minority group amongst first and second generation immigrants, and contains those students of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese descent. Cambodians and Vietnamese, two groups which came to the United States under very different circumstances, comprise two additional categories. The remaining Asian category contains people who identified themselves as another Asian ethnicity.

The last category contains mostly whites, but also contains those who responded as some other race, refused to respond, or provided a nonsensical response. As expected, it is the largest category, comprising over 57 percent of the total population. This group makes up nearly three fourths amongst the native population, while at the same time only comprising only one fourth of the combined first and second generation. This is the category we use as our reference group in all analyses pertaining to race. Consequently, white and third or higher generation students serve as our reference category for models which contained both race and immigrant status.

Another important causal variable is the socioeconomic status of each child's parents. Because UW-BHS is based on data gathered through student surveys, it is difficult to obtain a fine-grained view of a parent's social and economic standing. The variable used in this study, whether a student believes their home to be owned or rented, is a rough but good standing for more complex measures. The question of home ownership was phrased to include cases where a house was mortgaged or still not fully paid off. A binary variable was created where "1" represented the case where a student said their home was owned by his or her parents and "0" if the student believed their home was rented or did not know.

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Two independent variables were central to our analysis of the mechanisms behind immigrant advantage: peer and family influences. For peer influences, students were asked to estimate the proportion of his or her friends who planned to attend a four-year institution after graduation. Interviewees were given six choices: “None or Some,” “Less than Half,” “About Half,” “Most or All,” or “Don’t Know.” A simple dichotomous variable was constructed to represent when more than half of a student’s friends planned to attend a four-year university by coding both “About Half” and “Most or All” as “1,” while all other cases were coded as “0.” Supplementary analyses again confirmed similar results compared to coding only “Most or All” as “1” or using the values as a nominal scale.

To measure family influences, interviewees were given the statement “My family has always expected me to go to college” and were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement. From the four possible responses – “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree” – a dichotomous variable was constructed by coding “Strongly Agree” as “1” and all other cases as “0.” Not surprisingly, a very large majority, about 85 percent, of the correspondents indicated some type of agreement suggesting that most families expect their child to pursue additional educational opportunities beyond high school. A subset of these students, about half of the total sample, strongly agreed to the statement. Compared to any form of agreement, limiting the “1” category to only strongly agreeing correspondents did not change the results but did provide the largest coefficients and most robust significances in our correlations. One possible reason for this is that by limiting our “1” category to those with the strongest agreement may have helped differentiate between the parents actively encouraging a participation in higher education and families who would simply approve if their child decided to attend college.

For our study’s dependent variables, we tried to measure both a student’s aspirations and plans for further education as well as actual attainment in the form of enrollment in a university. For aspirations,

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a simple measure of the student's self-reported college plans was used. High school students were asked in the spring of their senior year to list up to four colleges which they planned to attend the autumn immediately following graduation, ordering them from first to fourth choice. The results were then categorized in a binary fashion, "1" if a college was a four-year institution as listed in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education or "0" if the school named was a two-year college, technical or vocational school, or an unlisted or blank school. For simplicity, only the first choice, if given, was used in our model and supplementary analyses concluded that regression results remained similar compared to an average or maximum of a student's listed choices. Thus, a student was considered to have high educational plans if they were preparing to attend a four-year college or university the autumn after graduation. This was true for about half of our sample.

A year later, in a follow-up survey, students were asked if they were currently enrolled in an institution of higher learning. If they were, the school was categorized using the Carnegie classification and a dichotomous value was again obtained by classifying four-year schools as "1" and two-year, other schools, or no school as "0." While not a direct measure of educational attainment, as many students enrolled in college drop out and do not obtain their degree, enrollment does provide a measure of educational achievement by a student's acceptance into a four-year institution. By serving as a second dependent variable, this measure also allows us to confirm how realistic student aspirations are. Not surprisingly, many students whom originally planned on attending a four year college do not actually do so a year later.

3.2 – Descriptive Results

Table 2 – Independent and Dependent Variables as Percent of Total by Generation

	Foreign Born or 1 st Generation	2 nd Generation	Native Born, 3 rd or Higher Generation	Total
Total Number	1257	1460	5784	8501
By Race and Ethnicity				
Hispanic	15.2%	16.7%	5.5%	8.8%
Black	7.2%	9.0%	15.6%	13.2%
East Asian	19.6%	20.8%	1.6%	7.5%
Cambodian	4.9%	6.7%	0.1%	2.0%
Vietnamese	13.3%	3.5%	0.1%	2.6%
Other Asian	11.5%	11.2%	0.9%	4.2%
Pacific Islander or American Indian	4.5%	5.5%	4.1%	4.4%
White and Other	23.6%	26.6%	72.1%	57.2%
Home Owners	50.4%	72.0%	71.1%	68.2%
High Friends’ Educational Plans	36.4%	44.5%	39.1%	39.6%
High Family Educational Expectations	55.8%	59.8%	46.8%	50.4%
High Educational Plans	42.0%	56.2%	48.2%	48.7%
College Enrollment	32.0%	43.4%	38.9%	38.6%

In Table 2, we present the frequencies of our independent and dependent variables, as they appear in our sample as arranged by immigrant generation. Of note, while characterizing our sample, is the fact that Hispanic and Asian-Americans both comprise a larger proportion of immigrants or children of immigrants than the native-born. While whites and blacks do make up a significant portion of our immigrants, they comprise a much larger-yet proportion of our native group. This data collaborates well with other studies that have shown that the current wave of immigration consists mostly of peoples from East and South-East Asia and Latin America as opposed to Europe (Hirschman 2001).

In support of the Classical Assimilation Hypothesis, we see that the third or greater generation student is more likely to have high educational plans and enroll in a four-year institution than the first generation student. However first generation students are also more likely to be economically disadvantaged, as

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indicated by the lower proportion home-owners, and so this relationship may not hold if economic factors are controlled for.

Surprisingly, the economic disadvantage of the first generation seems to have mostly disappeared in the span of a single generation, as approximately equal proportions of the second and first generations own their homes. While this is a very rough measure of socioeconomic status and may mask the fact that immigrants still earn substantially less income than the native-born, it still provides very strong evidence in support of the Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis as this economic “parity” in our data coincides with second generation’s higher educational plans and college enrollment than either the first generation or the native group. Immigrant students also have much higher parent expectations and, for the second generation, have similarly higher peer educational plans than native-born students, which may be factors that lead to the success of these children.

The Segmented Assimilation Hypothesis is also not without basis, as Table 2 does show a drop in educational aspirations and achievement from the second to third and greater generation. Controlling for effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on the first generation may reveal a more linear trans-generational trend. It’s also important to note that the Segmented Assimilation Hypothesis has a racial component, and distinguishing between white immigrants and non-white immigrants may reveal some of the racial barriers to upward assimilation that minorities may face.

The Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis is perhaps the best supported by the evidence at first glance. This is most evident in Figure 1, below, in which the middle, second generation bars are shown to be larger than the first and third generation proportions in almost every group. This second generation advantage is particularly prominent for groups which have lower educational aspirations in the first and third generations, suggesting that the effect of second generational status is relatively constant and that

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the amount of economic assimilation benefits attributable this optimism is the same regardless of the race of the immigrant and the economic performance of that racial group in the host society.

Figure 1 – High Educational Plans versus Immigrant Generation as Grouped by Race or Ethnicity

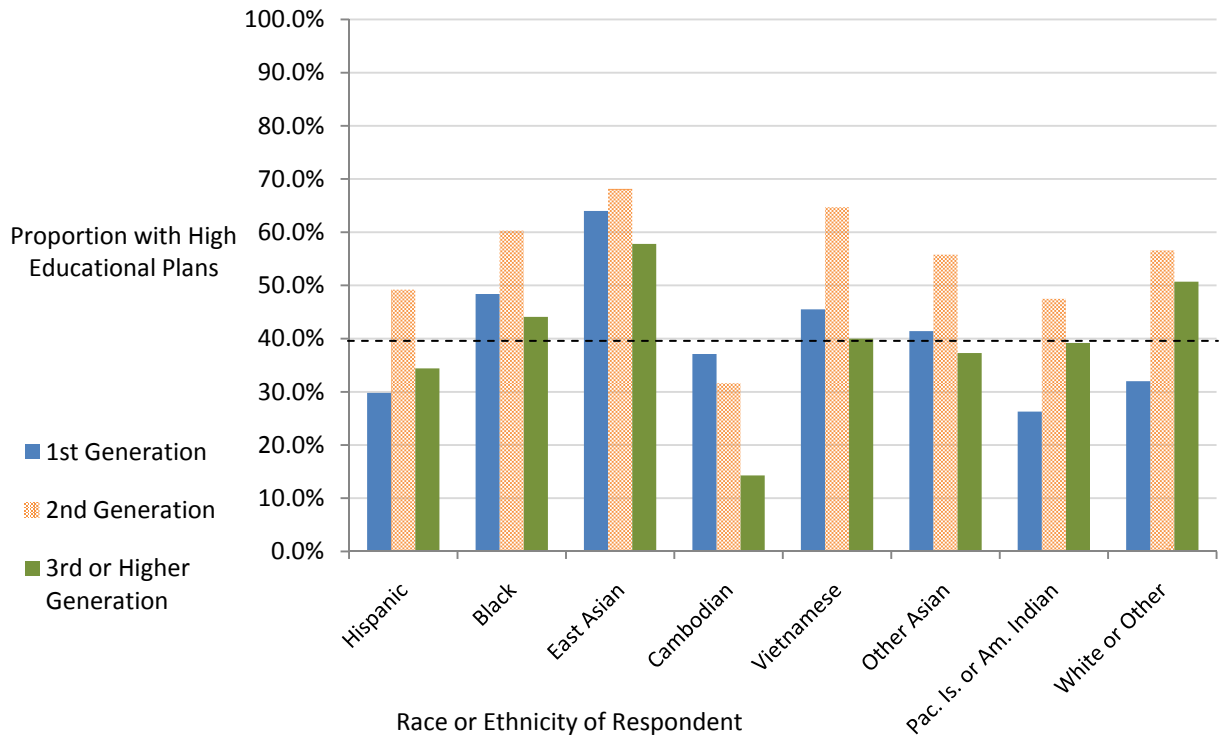


Figure 1 also provides some insight into the Neo-Classical Convergence Hypothesis. While the second generation proportions are almost always greater than other generation proportions regardless, the third generation proportion is not always greater or smaller than the first generation proportion. The change in proportion between the first and third generation thus indicates a socioeconomic assimilation trend that is independent of the constant second-generation Immigrant Optimism effect. From the Figure 1, some groups which begin with a low initial first generation proportion seem to have a higher third generation proportion, while those with a higher first generation proportion seem to decrease by the third generation. This describes a possible convergence effect. The dotted line in Figure 1 indicates a possible population convergence value, defined in this case as the proportion of the non-white, third

generation sample with high educational plans. To test the likelihood that this convergence effect – as well as those trends described earlier – truly exists in the population, a deeper statistical analysis is necessary.

4.1 – Multivariate Analyses for Monotonic Hypotheses

The Classical Assimilation Hypothesis, which predicts greater educational success with increased acculturation, and the Segmented Assimilation Hypothesis, which predicts worse educational aspirations and enrollment with increased acculturation, particularly amongst “at-risk” groups, both envision a monotonic effect on the dependent variable with change in the independent variable. To test these hypotheses, we employ a multivariate logistic regression model. This model allows the effect of any number of independent variables to be measured concurrently and assumes that the independent variables have a generally linear relationship with the singular dependent variable. A logistic regression fits the relationship to a logistic curve such that no combination of values in the independent variables can cause a likelihood of greater than a hundred percent or less than zero percent in the dependent variable.

Table 3 presents coefficients of the relative likelihood of first and second generation children to plan to attend a four-year college after graduation. Taking the natural logarithm of the coefficients in Table 3 gives the odds ratio of likelihood compared to the reference group. In supplementary analyses not presented here, using college enrollment instead of college plans presents similar results. In the third and fourth models, home ownership is introduced as a control variable to help isolate the effect of socioeconomic status. In the second and fourth models, race of the respondent is also controlled for.

Table 3 – Effects of Immigrant Generation and Home Ownership on High Educational Plans

Model	1	2	3	4
R ² of Fit	0.007	0.024	0.050	0.050
Foreign Born or 1 st Generation	-0.252***	-0.302***	-0.095	-0.178**
2 nd Generation	0.318***	0.329***	0.321***	0.304***
Home Owners	---	---	0.792***	0.762***
Effects of Race and Ethnicity				
Hispanic	---	-0.518***	---	-0.404***
Black	---	-0.153**	---	0.064
East Asian	---	0.609***	---	0.624***
Cambodian	---	-0.801***	---	-0.601***
Vietnamese	---	0.151	---	0.285*
Other Asian	---	-0.129	---	-0.086
Pacific Islander or American Indian	---	-0.467***	---	-0.341***

*Statistical significances: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.5, ***p < 0.01*

In the first and second models, immigrant generation does not seem to have consistent, unidirectional effect either way. First generation immigrants are less likely to have four-year college aspirations than the native reference group, while second generation immigrants are more likely. However, controlling for home ownership, our indicator of socioeconomic status greatly reduces the relative disadvantage of the first generation. In other words, without considering the effects of race, adding home ownership in model three reduces the disadvantaged effect of first generational status to non-significance. As expected, an advantageous economic position is a very strong positive factor towards educational aspirations. However, the negative coefficient of the first generation effect reappears in model four with the introduction of race as a control. Furthermore, in support of the Classical Assimilation Hypothesis, the second generation of immigrant students is more likely to have high educational plans than the first generation, suggesting that immigrants obtain some material or psychological benefit through acculturation that cannot be explained by the economic security of home ownership. On the other hand, contrary to the Classical Hypothesis, the second generation is also more likely to have such plans than the native group as well whom one would assume would experience even more benefits from their greater acculturation.

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The Segmented Assimilation Hypothesis is also incompletely supported by the results. The relative advantage of the second generation over the third generation is compatible with the Segmented Assimilation prediction that acculturation can have hazardous effects on socioeconomic assimilation. However, even with the effect of home ownership controlled for in model three, the first generation group never does better than the native group. When race and ethnicity is added to fourth model as a control variable, we see that the first generation again exhibits a disadvantage as compared to the native white group. This suggests that the fact that most of today's immigrants are minorities actually masks the barriers that the first generation faces. In other words, if immigrants were not comprised primarily of minorities, the evidence of fourth model suggests that the whole of the first generation would perform worse. This is contrary to the Segmented Assimilation argument that minorities are at-risk groups for downward assimilation.

Neither of the unidirectional hypotheses is very well supported by the data. Contrary to the expectations of the Classical Assimilation Theory, immigrants often do better than the native population, with higher educational aspirations in the second generation. While the first generation general does worse than the native group with socioeconomic status and race controlled for, the evidence between the third and fourth models suggests that minority immigrants, whom perhaps would have more cultural distance to cross in the assimilation process, actually perform better than white immigrants in the first generation. The Segmented Assimilation Hypothesis also faces problems. While immigrants do seem to do better than the native population, this is not a monotonic effect. Segmented Assimilation cannot explain the "spike" represented by the extremely high aspirations of the second generation nor is its prediction involving the negative effects of assimilation on "at-risk" groups borne out by the data.

4.2 – Statistical Tests of Non-Monotonic Hypotheses

The Immigrant Optimism and the Neo-Classical Convergence are two hypotheses which do not follow a unidirectional pattern. The first of these, Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis, asserts that immigrants, as a self-selecting group, bring to their new country behavioral traits that improve their chances of obtaining economic success. However, immigrants often also face constraints – such as language mastery and an understanding of the governmental and institutional procedures in their new country – that prevent their success. Cultural assimilation can rectify these problems, but too much acculturation can cause the loss of the immigrant optimism. Thus we would predict from this hypothesis that the second generation, being in the middle and receiving a limited amount of cultural exposure to the native group, would be able to obtain the benefits of both immigrant and native culture.

While our descriptive results showed that, among most groups, the second generation is more likely to plan to attend a four-year college than either the first or the third generation, we must use statistical hypothesis testing to determine whether this effect occurs in the population. In this case, we utilize a single-tailed, two proportion z-test. This test allows us to compare the proportion that plan to attend a four-year college of our second generation sample to the first or third and greater generations. Because the hypothesis states that the second generation should do better than either the first or the third generations, we can combine the first and third generations into a single set and calculate the proportion for this new group. Because how well the second generation does seems to vary depending on the racial or ethnic group, each is tested separately, resulting in eight different tests. Table 4 contains the variables and results of these tests.

The z scores for the tests of the Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis are calculated as follows:

$$z = \frac{\hat{p}_2 - \hat{p}_{13}}{\sqrt{\hat{p}(1 - \hat{p}) \left(\frac{1}{n_2} + \frac{1}{n_{13}} \right)}}$$

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In the above equation, \hat{p}_2 represents the proportion of the second generation with high educational plans. \hat{p}_{13} represents the combined proportion of both the first and third generations. The total number of students in the second generation is represented by the n_2 value, while n_3 is the sum of the first and third generation sample sizes. \hat{p} is the combined proportion of the occurrence of high educational plans across all generations. The z score represents a location in a normal distribution that determines how likely the null hypothesis is true. For these tests, the null hypothesis is that the two population proportions, p_2 and p_{13} , are equal. The alternate hypothesis, which supports Immigrant Optimism Theory, is that p_2 is in fact greater than p_{13} . Because we are only interested in the greater-than relationship, this is a single-tailed test, and to determine the p values of our test, probability that the null hypothesis is possible, we take the integral of the area under the normal distribution from our calculated value of z to positive infinity.

For nearly all of our ethnic or racial groups, with a critical region of p less than ten percent, we can reject the null hypothesis in favor of our Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis. For some groups, particularly Hispanics and blacks, this p value is even smaller. We also find further support for the Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis from the data provided in Table 3 from the previous section. The second generation consistently has a larger and more positive coefficient than either the first or the third-plus generations, even when the economic effects of home ownership, as well as the racial composition of our immigrant population are taken into account. The constancy of this coefficient despite economic and racial effects suggest that the amount of economic assimilation benefits attributable immigrant optimism is the same regardless of the race of the immigrant and the economic performance of that racial group in the host society.

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Table 4 – Statistical Tests of Immigrant Optimism and Neo-Classical Convergence Hypotheses and Relevant Statistics

Race	Hispanic	Black	East Asian	Cambodian	Vietnamese	Other Asian	Pac. Is. or Am. Indian	White or Other
Proportion with High Educational Plans								
Foreign Born or 1 st Generation	29.8%	48.4%	64.0%	37.1%	45.5%	41.4%	26.3%	32.0%
2 nd Generation	49.2%	60.3%	68.4%	31.6%	64.7%	55.8%	47.5%	56.6%
3 rd or Higher Generation	34.4%	44.1%	57.8%	14.3%	40.0%	37.3%	39.2%	50.7%
Combined 1 st or 3 rd or Higher Generations	32.7%	44.5%	62.3%	34.8%	45.3%	40.3%	36.7%	49.4%
Combined All Generations	38.0%	46.4%	65.2%	32.9%	49.8%	47.4%	39.0%	50.0%
Total Size of Sample by Race and Generation								
Total 1 st Generation	191	91	247	62	167	145	57	297
Total 2 nd Generation	244	131	304	98	51	163	80	389
Total 3 rd Generation	317	904	90	7	5	51	237	4173
Total 1 st or 3 rd or Higher Generations	508	995	337	69	172	196	294	4470
Total All Generations	752	1126	641	167	223	359	374	4859
Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis Test								
z Score	4.364	3.409	1.619	-0.433	2.434	2.928	1.756	2.724
p(Z > z) Value	0.000***	0.000***	0.053*	0.668	0.007***	0.002***	0.040**	0.003***
Neo-Classical Convergence Hypothesis Test								
Δ(1 st Generation, Native Whites)	20.9%	2.3%	13.3%	13.6%	5.2%	9.3%	24.4%	---
Δ(3 rd Generation, Native Whites)	16.3%	6.6%	7.1%	36.4%	10.7%	13.4%	11.5%	---
z Score	1.071	-0.787	1.039	-1.200	-0.243	-0.513	1.814	---
p(Z > z) Value	0.142	0.784	0.149	0.885	0.596	0.696	0.035**	---
Δ(1 st Generation, Native Minorities)	12.1%	6.5%	22.1%	4.8%	3.6%	0.5%	15.6%	---
Δ(3 rd Generation, Native Minorities)	7.5%	2.2%	15.9%	27.6%	1.9%	4.6%	2.7%	---
z Score	1.071	0.787	1.039	-1.200	0.075	-0.513	1.814	---
p(Z > z) Value	0.142	0.216	0.149	0.885	0.470	0.696	0.035**	---

Statistical significances: * $p < 0.1$,

** $p < 0.5$,

*** $p < 0.01$

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We can use a similar statistical test to examine our other non-monotonic hypothesis. For the Neo-Classical Convergence Hypothesis, we are interested on the differences between the proportion of a group and some convergence proportion. Groups are defined by immigrant generation and race or ethnicity. According to the Convergence Hypothesis, we would expect the proportion of students in a group who have high educational plans to become more similar to the convergence proportion as immigrant generation increases. In other words, assuming that the convergence proportion is defined by the group of native whites, we would expect the absolute value of the difference between other racial groups' proportions and the native white proportion to decrease as immigrant generation increases. Because the second generation, seems to be higher than the first and third generations regardless of other variables in our analysis and thus do not help indicate a trend, it is excluded from this particular analysis. Instead we focus on only two proportion differences: the one between the first generation and the convergence group, and the difference between the third generation and the convergence group. Because the convergence group proportion is essentially an arbitrary value, we can use a two proportion z test for this hypothesis. We again perform this test for each racial group separate, except for the white group, as this is the reference group and is outside of the scope of the Convergence Hypothesis. Results of these tests and relevant statistics are provided in Table 4.

The z scores for the tests of the Neo-Classical Convergence Hypothesis are calculated as follows:

$$z = \frac{|\hat{p}_1 - P| - |\hat{p}_3 - P|}{\sqrt{\hat{p}(1 - \hat{p}) \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_3} \right)}}$$

In the above equation, \hat{p}_1 and \hat{p}_3 are the sample proportions with high educational plans of the first generation and third generation respectively. The value, P , is the arbitrary convergence proportion. Thus, the term, $|\hat{p}_1 - P|$, is the absolute value of the difference between the first generation proportion and the convergence proportion. In a converging relationship, we would expect

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the proportion difference involving the first generation to be greater than that involving the third generation. Therefore, the difference between the two absolute value proportion differences should be greater than zero in support of the Convergence Hypothesis. Notice that in the case where \hat{p}_1 and \hat{p}_3 are either both smaller or both larger than the convergence proportion, this formula for the z value simplifies to the basic two proportion test used in the previous analysis of the Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis. All other variables in this formula are equivalent to those used in a two proportion test. The null hypothesis for this test is that the two proportion differences are equal. The alternate Convergence Hypothesis is that the difference between these two proportion differences is positive.

For the convergence proportion of 50.7% as defined by the native white group, we could not find significant support to reject the null hypothesis across all groups. Because the descriptive results had suggested that a lower convergence proportion is more likely, we also performed the same tests using a convergence proportion defined by the native minorities group, a combination of all other non-white racial and ethnic groups in our data set. This produced a convergence proportion of 41.90%. However, this different convergence proportion did not significantly change our results. With both convergence proportions, we found that we could reject the null hypothesis for only one group, Pacific Islanders and American Indians. While other groups, such as Hispanics and blacks seemed to support the Convergence Hypothesis from the descriptive results, they did not produce p values that fell into our critical region of less than ten percent. In most cases, because the proportion difference between the first and third generations was so small, we did not have a sufficiently large sample size to determine significantly that the convergence effect occurs in the population.

While the Convergence Hypothesis is not conclusively supported, the data does provide very strong evidence that the second generation has higher educational plans than either the first or third generations. For both our non-monotonic hypotheses, results using high educational plans are

mirrored, in supplementary analyses not presented here, which treated four-year college enrollment as the dependent variable.

4.3 – Analysis of Underlying Mechanisms

Though our various hypotheses describe several different overarching trends in relationship between cultural and economic assimilation, they do not delve deeply into the mechanisms by which immigrant status affects the educational aspirations and enrollment of the students in this study. In this section we examine more closely the role of two possible intermediate variables: high family expectations of a student’s educational success and the high educational plans of friends. By adding these variables to our models we hope to gain some perspective on the strength of these effects and how they change our evaluation of the effects of the immigrant status.

Table 5 – Effects of Family Expectations and Friend’s Plans on High Educational Plans

Model	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
R ² of Fit	0.050	0.061	0.145	0.176	0.183	0.189	0.194
1 st Generation	-0.178**	---	---	---	---	-0.234***	-0.212**
2 nd Generation	0.304***	---	---	---	---	0.183***	0.235***
Home Owners	0.762***	---	---	---	---	0.508***	0.506***
High Friends’ Plans		---	1.698***	1.596***	1.577***	1.525***	1.515***
High Family Expectations		1.022***	---	0.845***	0.846***	0.826***	0.817***
Race and Ethnicity							
Hispanic	-0.404***	---	---	---	-0.390***	---	-0.329***
Black	0.064	---	---	---	0.027	---	0.163**
East Asian	0.624***	---	---	---	0.364***	---	0.392***
Cambodian	-0.601***	---	---	---	-0.583***	---	-0.494***
Vietnamese	0.285*	---	---	---	-0.176	---	0.085
Other Asian	-0.086	---	---	---	-0.399***	---	-0.356***
Pac. Is. or Am. Indian	-0.341***	---	---	---	-0.311***	---	-0.238**

*Statistical significances: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.5, ***p < 0.01*

Table 5 contains models which examine high friends’ plans and family expectations. Model four has been copied over from Table 3. The fifth through seventh models attempt to examine the effect of

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family expectations and peers' higher education plans independent of other factors. Model eight checks that these effects remain significant when race is controlled for. Models nine and ten examine how our intermediate variables change the coefficients of immigrant status.

Models five through seven show that strong family expectations and peers college plans both play important roles in determining a child's educational career. In model five, with only family expectations to consider, students whose parents high educational expectations are much more likely than all other children to pursue a four-year college immediately following graduation from high school. Peers' college plans are an even stronger predictor of a child's own plans than family expectations. Students who described the majority of their own friends as planning to attend a four-year college were themselves over five times more likely to themselves list a four-year college as their first choice of attendance for the autumn after graduation.

Predictably, the influences of family expectations and friends' college plans are highly correlated with each other. However, when both variables are combined in the seventh regression model, they largely retain their effects on the dependent variable. This suggests that family expectations and friends' college plans have independent effects on a child's own academic aspirations. The coefficients of our intermediate variables are also not changed when race and ethnicity is added as a control variable. Supplementary analyses also confirmed that an interaction effect between the two variables does not exist. Students are not likely to reap an additional benefit or enclave effect from having both high family expectations and academically excelling peers.

The ninth and tenth models contain all of the variables from the previous analysis of monotonic hypotheses with family and friend influences added in. The coefficients of the first and second generation status both drop, suggesting that some of the positive effects of being an immigrant are mediated through family and friend variables. First and second generation students are much more

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likely to have higher family expectations than native-born students. Additionally, while first generation students are slightly less likely to have a majority of friends planning to attend a four-year institution following graduation, second generation students are more likely than native born students to be in such a position.

In the tenth model, several of the racial coefficients are statistically significant. Approximately three-quarters of first and second generation students in our sample are racial minorities or of Hispanic heritage. Many of these racial groups face additional challenges to educational attainment and thus may have lower aspirations than other racial groups. In particular, we can see that Hispanics, Cambodians, and students in the Pacific Islander and American Indian category are far less likely to plan to attend a four-year college immediately following graduation as compared to not only whites but also other racial groups. However, East Asians, which comprise the largest non-white immigrant group, are more likely to plan to attend a four-year institution.

The racial coefficients of the tenth model can also be compared to those from the fourth model. The most notable finding through this comparison is that the adding family and friend variables to the model do not change the racial coefficients in the same manner. For example, the Hispanic, black, Cambodian, and Pacific Islander and American Indian coefficients increase while the East Asian coefficient decreases. This suggests that family and friend influences perform different roles and have different degrees of involvement in education across different racial groups.

Controlling for race in model ten does not change the overall conclusions of the previous models. While race, immigrant status, and SES are obviously related and by adding them to the same model, the magnitude of coefficients decrease all around, the relative strength, significance, and direction of each variable's coefficient remains generally the same. Most importantly, the effect of family expectations and friends' college plans are unaffected by the addition of racial control to the model. This suggests

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that the positive influence of strong parent expectations and high peer aspirations are independent of race and immigrant status.

Another important result to note is that, even after controlling for economic status, race, and family and friend influences, children of the first and second generation are still significantly less and more likely respectively to plan to attend a four-year college. This suggests that other factors suggested in the literature – such as the handicap of lack of language or social skills in an unfamiliar society or the advantage of a self-selected group of highly motivated immigrant individuals – may have an effect on these groups outside of the variables examined here.

5 – Discussion

In our analysis, we tested the relationship between cultural and socioeconomic assimilation as predicted by several hypotheses. While both the Segmented Assimilation and Neo-Classical Hypotheses received some support, the Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis was by far the best supported by our data. Analyses showed a distinctive second generation advantage suggesting that this group has a set of cultural, economic, psychological, or other resources that neither the first generation nor the third generation completely possess.

Part of these advantages can be seen in the intermediate variables that we measured. The parents of immigrant children in general are more likely to have higher educational expectations than the parents of the third or greater generation. This correlates well with research done by Kao and Tienda (1995) that examine in depth the role of the family in the education of immigrant children. Second generation students also have friends who have high educational plans and do not experience the same level of economic disadvantage as the first generation. Other research has suggested that the second generation possesses psychological advantages in the form of fluent bilingualism (Portes and Hao 2002).

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Despite these details, our understanding of the mechanisms by which immigrant optimism is created and perpetuated onto the second generation is minimal. Further research in this area should focus on identifying these mechanisms, as well as defining the traits gained through assimilation that seem to be crucial to the second generation's success.

Other parts of the analysis presented in this paper focused on testing hypotheses put forward by the various theories in assimilation literature. The evidence presented here does not strongly support a monotonic theory, either assuming that acculturation has a unidirectional positive or negative effect on socioeconomic assimilation. Furthermore, many minorities perform better than the native white population, and these minorities make up a majority of our recent immigrant population. This finding is contrary to both the Classical and Segmented Assimilation Hypotheses, as both theories predict minority immigrant groups to perform worse than white immigrants. Further research in assimilation theory should examine why certain groups perform better or worse than others. While this question has been briefly touched upon here in examining how family and friend influences on educational outcomes differs by racial group, additional research is needed to ascertain why that may be.

The non-monotonic hypotheses are better supported by the data. Of particular note is the Immigrant Optimism Hypothesis which correctly predicts the high educational aspirations of the second generation as compared to both the first generation and native groups. However, additional studies should try to more directly measure the self-selectivity effect of immigration and determine in what manner immigrants are selected for success. Further research in this area should try to distinguish between cultural advantages in the immigrant population, such as an immigrant ethic to succeed, versus psychological advantages, such as multilingualism.

The Convergence Theory espoused by the Expanded Classical Assimilation Theorists also receives some limited support in the data presented here. Because of the small size of the differences between the

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first and third generation proportions in the analysis used in this paper, the sample was not sufficiently large to conclusively argue for the statistical significance of such a convergence effect. Further research along this theoretical line will benefit from larger samples and additional data. In addition, Expanded Classical theorists will need to address the questions surrounding the choice of a particular convergence value. In the research presented here, this convergence value did not match the proportion of high educational aspirations as presented by the native white group in our sample. Instead a stronger convergence effect was found around the value of native minorities, which have a smaller proportion of high educational expectations than native whites. While this data is far from conclusive, future development of this theoretical perspective should address this possibility and what it may mean.

Furthermore, in the descriptive analysis of the convergence effect, one group which did not seem to follow the same pattern was the group of Cambodian immigrants. There are several possible explanations for the worsening performance of Cambodian immigrants such as their refugee status and cultural aspects such as a religious belief in predeterminism leading to lower family educational expectations (Smith-Hefner 1999: 7-8, 144-149). Further development of Convergence Theory should examine why some groups do not seem to follow the convergence effect.

There is a strong motivation to continue research in the fields of migration and race relations. Today, of all children under the age of 18 in the United States, over twenty percent are a first or second generation immigrant (Hernandez 1999). The face of the country is rapidly changing as peoples of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds migrate to the United States. As immigrants continue to come to the United States in large numbers and as more of those immigrants are racial minorities, understanding the processes behind assimilation and how different groups and individuals come to find a place in the fabric of American society is more important than ever.

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