

**The Prospects for the Integration of Immigrant
Children and the Children of Immigrants (Second
Generation) in America**

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Overview: Summary of Objectives and Findings

The paper “When White Is Just Alright: How Immigrants Redefine Achievement and Reconfigure the Ethnoracial Hierarchy” by Jimenez and Horowitz explores fieldwork conducted regarding ethnoracial encoding of academic achievement. Research on immigration, education and ethnoraciality often focuses solely on the immigrant group and forgoes analysis of the effect on the third plus generation, and white individuals in particular (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). This paper takes a different approach, by centering the white third generation students as the main focus and studying their response to the standards set by the immigrant student population. Cupertino is a region highly populated with Asian immigrants, and these high achieving students set the standard for what constitutes a strong academic performance (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). This consistently high level of achievement has evolved into an expectation placed on Asian students to live up to a golden standard, a level of academic excellence that everyone aspires towards. This has been normalized to the point where people associate intelligence, strong work ethic and success in academics with Asians, and vice versa (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). While there are clear ramifications because of this mindset, such as undue pressure and the perpetuation of unhealthy stereotypes, another crucial consequence is the development of ‘whiteness’ being viewed as academically inferior and stereotyped as lazy and unfocused (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). That is what this paper is emphasizing, this stereotyping progresses to a point where white is interchangeable with these words in the context of academics. This paper challenges how there is a default understanding that white third generation students set the criteria, or the baseline requirement for what constitutes a strong academic performance, and other groups are compared to this standard (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). It suggests that the opposite is true. Asian immigrant students in this region set the standards, and

have the influence to reduce the correlation between academic achievement and whiteness (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). In this way, immigrants represent a foil against which the definition of an ethnoracial category is reworked, which overturns the way existing ethnoracial categories are executed (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013).

Tran and Valdez's paper "Second-Generation Decline or Advantage? Latino Assimilation in the Aftermath of the Great Recession" studies the advantages and decline in second generation Latinos in the post great recession era. This paper delivers three major findings, that while Latinos are able to achieve at the same level as their peers, second generation Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are at a disadvantage. Second generation Latinos demonstrate considerable progress compared to their parents and show no trends of second generation decline (Tran and Valdez, 2017). Finally, outcomes are consistent between second generation Mexican immigrants in different immigrant destinations (Tran and Valdez, 2017). The conclusion reached by this research was that second generation development and progress is substantial, especially for Latinos, with potential stagnation being found in third generation Mexicans and a disadvantage among Mexican and Puerto Rican groups (Tran and Valdez, 2017). Something interesting this paper details is how the great recession had a massive and disproportionate impact on the Latino population. It also highlights the unfortunate stigmatization immigrant groups had to endure during this time, as tensions were high due to the fact that many people were unemployed and struggling (Tran and Valdez, 2017). Many individuals want to limit immigration based on limited jobs in the workforce, as introducing immigrants only generates more competition and lowers employment chances for current citizens. This also bled into deportation rates being higher and more conversations around undocumented immigrants (Tran and Valdez, 2017).

A drastic change in population composition has increased conversations around how immigrants are adjusting, with criticism that not enough effort is being made from immigrants to fit in, and that is on top of the burden this influx will place on existing resources. Others argue that they are fitting in and performing exceptionally well (Zhou and Lee, 2007). The paper “Becoming Ethnic or Becoming American? Reflecting on the Divergent Pathways to Social Mobility and Assimilation among the New Second Generation” by Zhou and Lee study this concept using a three part evaluation, seeking to determine how well immigrants are incorporating into their new country. The paper examines immigrant incorporation and focuses on the mobility patterns of the second generation. It also conducts an assessment of assumptions regarding success and assimilation, really analyzing the definitions of these words and the pathways to achieving them (Zhou and Lee, 2007). They explored the credibility of essential aspects of social mobility. In addition, they examined the disparity between objective measures used in research for the social sciences field and subjective measures demonstrated by the new second generation (Zhou and Lee, 2007). Finally, they studied how the second generation individuals decide to identify themselves, and the inner workings that play a part in their identity (Zhou and Lee, 2007). Their conclusion showed that the kids of immigrants from the post 1965 immigration era are making a substantial impact in the country. Research shows that children of immigrants are pursuing success through different and varying avenues. In fact, they are following diversified paths to success and mobility in a similar manner as their peers (Zhou and Lee, 2007). The idea and definition of identity is also explored, the paper discusses how having a more ethnic identity, an American identity or a mixture of the two does not speak to how well an immigrant has integrated into another country. Often, it is actually less of a deliberate choice on

the part of the immigrant to remain “un American” and more of an external unacceptance and messaging from their surroundings that they are not fully American (Zhou and Lee, 2007).

Zhou’s paper, “Segmented assimilation and socio-economic integration of Chinese immigrant children in the USA” highlights the abundance of research on the second generation of immigrants and the segmented assimilation theory, specifically the downward natured assimilation into America’s underclass, and lack of research on other possibilities (Zhou 2014). Ethnic assimilation is also a possible outcome. In this paper, Zhou looks at a case study on Chinese immigrant children in the US to understand assimilation through the ethnic community. His research shows that Chinese immigrant students have made progress in assimilating into America through their strong educational performance, which is encouraged by their parents but more importantly, substantiated by resources provided by the ethnic community (Zhou 2014). This proposes that immigrant parents utilize an ethnic approach to encourage their children to reach social mobility and achievement. Interestingly, immigrant children who are assimilated into the US also rely on these same principles and ideas rooted in their ethnicity to find emboldenment within themselves and push back against unfavorable stereotyping (Zhou 2014).

The paper “Second Generation Decline? Children of Immigrants, Past and Present-A Reconsideration” by Perlmann and Waldinger, explores how the recent wave of immigration compares to an earlier wave of immigration. Two major differences are the class and agency, and an important point is that immigrants will modify and shape the US. An important point in this paper is the role Mexican immigrants play, so a key aspect is learning about the impact that holding legal status has on immigrant children, as studied in Bean et al’s “The Implications of Unauthorized Migration for the Educational Incorporation of Mexican Americans.” A common argument against immigration is that it will impact existing jobs and wages, but the paper “The

National Research Council on the Fiscal Consequences of US Immigration” by the Population Council studies this argument and states that the negative effects on the economy are minimal. Finally, racism is a tremendous factor in the experience of every immigrant, and the racial nativism that drives racism against immigrants is a telling topic that is analyzed in the paper “Face the Nation: Race, Immigration, and the Rise of Nativism in Late Twentieth Century America” by Sanchez.

Social, Economic and other Trajectories of First and Second Generation Immigrants

Assimilation is the practice of immigrants becoming integrated in all aspects, such as economically, culturally and socially, into a more dominant community. Historically, immigrant groups from all over the world who settled in the US abandoned their roots to assimilate into their new surroundings. This is the classical assimilationist perspective, which states that adopting the same lifestyle and completely enveloping themselves, to the point where they are becoming the same as their peers, is the approach for immigrants in a new country (Zhou 2014). These immigrant groups, such as the Jews, Irish and Italians, were once considered “inferior” and have evolved into the mainstream population in the US that undoubtedly belongs (Zhou 2014). This suggests that recent immigrants will follow the same path, essentially molding themselves into members of the preexisting community by sacrificing their old traditions. However, assimilation for today’s immigrants is not as straightforward as this theory states. Certain groups, second and third generation immigrants in particular, have either surpassed the native population or faced a stationary outcome or decline, and the common factor is that they have not completely converged with the dominant population (Zhou 2014).

An alternate approach to explain assimilation in immigrants is the segmented assimilation theory. This is more likely, it claims that there are a multitude of different paths leading to

potential outcomes for second and third generation immigrants. Developing into the white population like previous immigrant groups did by erasing their identity is not the only potential outcome. Immigrant groups may also rise above standards set by the dominant population, or perform at a level below (Zhou 2014). According to this theory, the deciding factor for whether an immigrant and their children will assimilate and reach success is the state of their exit from their country, and the circumstances around their entrance into the new country. This may include the resources, knowledge and tools an immigrant brings with them, in conjunction with their welcome into a new country, job market conditions, waves of racism and anti immigration notions, and existing ethnic communities (Zhou 2014).

A second generation immigrant's social experience will be influenced largely by their parents. This can strain the relationship between second generation immigrants and their immigrant parents. Instead, immigrant children have the pressure of assimilating into a new country while still adhering to the expectations of their parents. On the flip side, they exert effort into managing their relationship with their family while complying to the norms that their white peers set. Immigrants face more challenges socially because the lines are blurred between the way their American peers are behaving and the way their parents expect them to behave. What constitutes as correct or normal in one culture may seem wildly confusing from the American lens. This is especially true when immigrants are confined to segregated ethnoburbs or ethnic enclaves (Zhou 2014). However, as immigrants branch out and start building their homes in urban neighborhoods or white suburbs, it allows immigrant children to walk their own path and behave more like their peers (Zhou 2014). The extent to which this growth can happen depends on their parents. However, a move of this nature comes at the cost of the safety that they feel from being surrounded by similar individuals. They lose that instantaneous network of

immigrants. In other residential areas, there is more diversity and immigrant mindsets and values may not align. There is also a role reversal at times between parents and children. The immigrant parent may have to rely on their child to translate something or help with language barriers (Zhou 2014). Another important aspect of immigrant parenting is that often, immigrants see their child's education or career success as a success for the family, and if the child fails it is a reflection on their parenting abilities. Part of this expectation may stem from the fact that immigrants understand that education is their only way to progress. They lack the connections and network that Americans have access to, so they place a heavier emphasis on their child's education. Education is key to immigrants finding success (Zhou 2014). Americans also value education, however this type of mindset is not common in American parents and they don't view it as the only way to become successful. Second generation students tend to carry these extra burdens that American students are free from. This can lead to tension between immigrant parents and children, even when the child is almost always on the same page as them in terms of wanting to be educated and successful (Zhou 2014). If this strenuous relationship develops, the child will have trouble succeeding socially and emotionally, and be more susceptible to downward assimilation (Zhou 2014). Contention between the immigrant parents and children is due to their children wanting to live "normally" like their peers and make their own choices, following the American ideology of pursuing dreams and being independent, and immigrant parents usually have the opposite mindset, where they have specific and unrealistic expectations of their children, and believe their kids have a responsibility to follow them and do things the way their own parents made them. This disregards the fact that immigrant children are pushed to act in compliance with standards from their parents' old country, but the way the country functioned 10 years in the past. Even that country will have changed and adapted in the 10 years

since the immigrant has left, and is no longer stuck in the past or as rigid about certain traditions. It is hard for immigrant parents to see this and empathize with their children. From their perspective, they worked hard to provide for their children, sacrificing everything to give them a promising life, and want them to follow the traditions established in their youth and stay attached to their roots, no matter where they are living physically. This is often due to the fear of being in a new county and wanting safety and familiarity, and the connection to what they perceive as safe, which is now only available in the form of such traditions. Unified immigrant families will compromise and communicate with each other, taking the best out of both perspectives and cultures that they can tap into. The dynamic between immigrant parents and their children is an important factor in their children's social trajectory.

Economic trajectories of immigrants depend on the specific group. For example, Chinese immigrants are extremely successful academically and career wise, even when their family is not upper class (Zhou 2014). Latinos perform at the same level as their American peers, while Mexicans and Puerto Ricans seem to face a disadvantage (Tran and Valdez, 2017). Legal status is one prominent reason certain immigrant groups have more success in mobility. Parental citizenship status plays a huge role in a child's education and career opportunities (Zhou and Lee 2017). Many Mexicans, among other groups, may be incorporating into the dominant community while being uneducated and unauthorized. Research shows that it is essential for immigrants to pursue legal status for their kids to be successful (Bean et al, 2013). Having this disadvantage makes it more difficult for immigrants who are unauthorized and unable to access resources reserved for people who are citizens. It is important to note that many studies do show that there is significant progress being made in this direction, however, closing the gap that exists between immigrant groups struggling with this issue and immigrant groups who are able to meet the level

that Americans are at is a long process. Asian immigrants also seem to have an advantage that other groups don't have because of a "racial triangulation" that took place, which led to Asian immigrants receiving a model minority status. This occurred because historically, the white population deemed Asian immigrants as acceptable in comparison to other groups (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). The model minority is a stereotype that states how Asians have a work ethic and cultural mindset that is better than what white people possess and differentiates them from other immigrants (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). In terms of economic trajectory, while there is some variation between the extent to which certain immigrant groups are more successful, because some ethnic groups have more disadvantages stacked against them that are pushing them backwards in the process, most second generation immigrants are either already performing well or playing a part in a process which will propel third or fourth generation immigrants into performing at the same level as their white peers.

The Future of Second Generation Immigrants and Beyond

Regarding the future of second generation immigrants and their offspring, it is reasonable to have a positive view of the potential for their integration, both social and economic, into the US. Immigrants have the power to shape the country through their assimilation (Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997). There are a few interesting takeaways from these sources. One, that immigrant groups are effective in successfully assimilating into a new country and adapting to their new environment. Certain ethnic groups will be more successful at this, and at a quicker rate, in comparison to other ethnic groups. For example, second generation Chinese immigrants are excelling at this social and economic assimilation process at a higher level than other immigrant groups (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013). The common theme present is that immigrant groups are making progress in this arena, even if there is a variance in the level of progression. This is

evident in the fact that Latinos are performing fairly well in the face of an economic recession, as this points to more future success when the economy is more stable (Tran and Valdez, 2017). This is because a group that is faring well in poor economic conditions will perform even better when the economy has improved and there is the chance to maximize on opportunities.

Emphasizing again how the difference in the degree to which immigrants are socially and economically assimilating and achieving success, the second point is that this assimilation plays a part in a larger process towards that ethnic group's overall progression towards assimilation and future success. For example, while Mexican immigrants are in danger of facing a stagnation or decline, which is largely due to economic disparity, they are still making progress, even if it isn't drastic, that will benefit third and fourth generation immigrant Mexicans (Tran and Valdez, 2017). This speaks to how social and economic assimilation for most immigrant groups is a process that will take place over multiple generations of immigrants to reach the maximum level of success. Even a step towards this larger goal is a sign that points towards future assimilation, growth and success for the immigrant group in question. Finally, immigrants have the potential to bring a lot of positive change with their diversity, and this point is often overlooked (Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997). There is also more research suggesting that the negative effects of immigration are not legitimate fears, as the common fear of immigrants stealing jobs has been disproven by financial professionals (Population Council 2016). Racism is a huge disadvantage that immigrant groups still struggle with to varying degrees (Sanchez 1997). Once it becomes more apparent that immigrants are positive contributors to American society and they no longer feel the burden of unfavorable narratives and traces of racism, but are instead welcomed and normalized, which is a process that will likely span several decades, it is possible that future generation immigrants will prosper at a higher rate than current immigrants.

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