Spring 2012

Caught in Cultural Limbo?: A College Student's Perspective on Growing Up with Immigrant Parents

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A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

2012

Abstract

Much recent scholarship of immigrants, has found a second-generation disadvantage, or an "immigrant paradox" instead of a "second generation advantage". In contrast to past studies, this study employed qualitative methods to explore mental health and risky behavior variables of the immigrant paradox among college-aged children of immigrants who attend a private, liberal arts institution to gain a more meaningful understanding of this "paradox". No strong evidence suggesting an "immigrant paradox" in terms of these variables was found, but instead participants expressed cultural pride. It was also found that these individuals valued their present support systems and those they had while growing up.

Caught in Cultural Limbo: A College Student's Perspective on Growing Up with Immigrant Parents

Present day immigrants are different than past generations, as they are primarily immigrating from Latin America and Asia (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2011). The arrival of these immigrants from different cultures generates questions. One such question surrounds the idea of the "second generation advantage" that the second generation of European immigrants experienced in the beginning of the 20th century. Traditionally, it was believed that "through assimilation, (the second generation) would become familiar with American culture and access a relatively open opportunity structure" (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008, p. 20). Much recent scholarship, however, has found a second-generation disadvantage, or what has been termed the "immigrant paradox."

The term "immigrant paradox" has its origins in a study about children of immigrants and education by Coll et al. (2009). In this study the researches found that:

> First generation immigrant children often outperform second and third generation children in school, despite linguistic and cultural barriers putting them at an initial disadvantage…[and] first generation immigrant children are less prone to juvenile delinquency and more likely to have a positive attitude toward their schools and teachers (Schott, B., 2010, para. 2).

Although this term was originally applied to education, it can also be applied it to other quality of life areas such as physical health, mental health and risky behaviors. The fact that these individuals are second-generation Americans affects many aspects of their lives. Kasinitz et al. (2008) suggests that due to "native disadvantages of racial minorities" and "immigrant disadvantages, such as lack of English, low human capital, and discordant cultural orientations" (p. 20), these children of immigrants are actually at a disadvantage.

What is causing this paradox to exist, and what can be done to correct it? Although the question has been asked, there is still no answer. Therefore, research must be done to address this question and to get a better understanding of the immigrant paradox. As Rumbaut (2004) explains, "The 'new second generation' is rapidly growing and diversifying through continued immigration, natural increase and intermarriage, complicating its contours and making [the 'new second generation'] increasingly important, for theoretical as well as programmatic and public policy reasons" (p. 1161). Therefore, not only is it important to examine the second generation because of quality of life issues, it is extremely important to look at this second generation as they are American citizens who are struggling in society. Their struggles eventually may become the struggles of the entire nation. That being said, immigration and the adjustment of these immigrants to America is relevant to social work. In general, immigration causes individuals to come in contact with individuals from other cultures. As a result, social workers need to be culturally competent. Being familiar with the issues immigrants may be facing can help social workers be more culturally competent and sympathetic to their situations. Therefore, it is important for social workers to have an understanding of immigration and the challenges immigrants and later generations may be facing.

This study employs qualitative methods to explore mental health and risky behavior variables of the immigrant paradox. Before discussing relevant literature, it is important to define terms pertinent to this study. For the purposes of this study, the second generation refers to "the U.S. born and U.S. socialized children of foreign-born parents…persons who immigrated as children as well as U.S.-born persons with one U.S.-born parent and one foreign-born parent" (Rumbaut, 2004, p. 1165). Within this overall group, differences have been noted between children whose parents were both immigrants in contrast to children who have one American

parent and one immigrant parent (Rumbaut, 2004; Montazer & Wheaton, 2011). Therefore, these two groups of second generation Americans will be considered in this study. The concept of acculturation is also important in this discussion. The term acculturation can be defined as "the process of cultural change and adaptation that occurs when individuals from different cultures come into contact" (Gibson, 2001, as cited in Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2011, p. 19). Finally, as this study specifically targets the mental health and risky behavior variables of the immigrant paradox, self and cultural identity are important concepts. In general, there are three different types of identity. Self-identity is the first, which is defined as individual's morals, attitudes, and goals. The second is social identity, which is the individual's view of himself in relation to the group with which he identifies. The last is the cultural identity, which "refers to the sense of solidarity with the ideas, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the members of a particular cultural group" (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2005, as cited in Rothe, Pumariega, Sabagh, 2011, p. 74). These terms will be important in understanding the immigrant paradox and in examining the mental health and risky behavior aspects of the theory. Now, for a fuller understanding of the immigrant paradox theory and the different aspects, let us turn to the previous research and literature.

Review of Literature

History of Immigration

For the past four centuries immigrants have been flooding into the United States. It began with the Mayflower, then the Irish coming over due to the potato famine, and the Chinese coming because of the California gold rush, which led to the eventual opening of Ellis Island and the processing of 12 million immigrants over 30 years (Digital History). Immigration slowed after the arrival of many European immigrants in the beginning of the 20th century, but since

1965 there has been an increase primarily among Asian and Latin American groups. According to Massey (1995 as cited in Rumbaut, 1997), the new immigration is "'part of an ongoing flow that can be expected to be sustained indefinitely, making the United States a country of perpetual immigration…[it] will create complex ethnic groups fragmented along the lines of generation, class, ancestry, and, ultimately, identity" (p. 334). The "complex ethnic groups" are already visible in the United States, and as Rumbaut (1997b) suggests:

> The diversity of contemporary immigration is such that, among all ethnic groups in America today, native and foreign-born, different immigrant nationalities account at once for the *highest* and *lowest* rates of education, self-employment, homeownership, poverty, welfare dependency, and fertility, as well as the lowest rates of divorce and female-headed single-parent families, and the highest proportions of children under 18 residing with both natural parents (p. 19).

Therefore the current immigration is more complex than it was in the past, as the groups arriving are culturally different than the present-day American culture.

Along these lines, it is important to restate that in contrast to many of the European immigrants that came in the beginning of the 20th century, many of today's immigrants are from Latin America and Asia (Rumbaut, 1997b, p. 19). The difference between this current wave of immigrants and the past immigrants is extremely significant. As Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010) suggest, "the children of [the first] waves of immigrants…looked and sounded like other Americans—so ethnicity largely tended to disappear after the first generation…in the 'new' wave of international migration, ethnicity continues to matter beyond the first generation" (242). In sum, the new wave of immigrants and their children are facing difficulties, as they are not able to pass as easily as Americans.

Acculturation

Because there are great differences among the nationalities and the immigrants are not able to assimilate as easily to the American mainstream, it is logical to question how each

assimilates into the American culture. As Rumbaut (1997b) suggests, this diversity creates a couple of different types of acculturation patterns:

> One path may follow the relatively 'straight-line- theory…of assimilation into the white middle class majority; an opposite type of adaptation may lead to downward mobility and assimilation into the inner-city underclass; yet another may combine upward mobility and heightened ethnic awareness with solidary immigrant communities (p. 19).

These different acculturation patterns are not only observed between different ethnic groups, but individuals from the same ethnic group have also reported following different acculturation patterns. According to Rumbaut (1994), "such segmented adaptations have been observed for the same ethnic group, in the same ethnic neighborhood, the same school, and even the same family" (p. 754). It is even more curious that, even in the same family, different acculturation patterns have been observed (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995, as cited in Rumbaut, 1994). Therefore, as the acculturation pattern varies for each individual, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what causes which pattern each will follow.

Although it is difficult to determine exactly what causes the different acculturation patterns, possible contributing factors have been identified. Some of these factors that have been identified include the country of origin and the financial stability of this country. As suggested by Montazer and Wheaton, "there are fundamentally different issues in adaption for children from lower versus higher GNP [gross national product per capita] backgrounds" (p. 37). Rumbaut (1997a) further suggests, "[The] incorporation [of the children] varies, often in surprising ways, by gender, generation, class, culture, history, migration selectivity, internal ethnicity and ethnic identity, vocabularies of motive, health, mental health and so on" (p. 337).

The Theory of the Immigrant Paradox

Physical Health. Although physical health is not the main focus of this study, its inclusion is important to provide a comprehensive understanding of the immigrant paradox. The

physical health of the first generation immigrants appears to be better than the later generations. For example, Singh and Yu (1996 as cited in Coll et al., 2009) indicated, "that foreign-born mothers enjoy a 20% lower risk of infant mortality" (9). Furthermore, these immigrants have a lower risk of mortality in comparison to Americans. Singh and Siahpush (2001 as cited in Coll et al., 2009) claim, "Immigrants are at significantly lower risk of death from cardiovascular diseases, lung and prostrate cancer, COPD, cirrhosis, pneumonia and influenza, and unintentional injuries" (11). In their study in the Southwestern part of the United States, Markides and Coreil (1986) observed that, despite their low socioeconomic status and other high risk factors, Latinos had a longer life expectancy, lower infant mortality, lower mortality from major forms of cancer and cardiovascular diseases and better measures of functional health (Markides & Coreil, 1986). While immigrants seem to have fewer health risks, the later generations seem to experience more physical health problems. North (2009) asserts, "When socioeconomic standing is taken out of the equation, the health of children in most immigrant groups gets worse from the first to the third generation" (1). It is logical to assume that if immigrants start out with good health, their children should be relatively healthy as well; unfortunately, this is not always the case.

In fact, a number of studies have found that children of immigrants have a poorer physical health status, especially when compared to their American counter-parts. Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, and Passel (2004) noted that for children of immigrants ages six to seventeen, eleven percent reported to be in poor health, which is approximately three times the rate for children born to native parents. Another aspect of physical health that is a concern for researchers is the increase in obesity for the later generations. Popkin and Udry (1998), in their study of adolescent obesity of immigrants and children of immigrants, found that "for both the

Hispanic and Asian groups, children born outside the U.S…showed less obesity than those born in the U.S. of immigrant parents. This acculturation effect was especially strong for Asians" (705). Therefore, the second-generation has poorer physical health than immigrants and children born to native parents. Although this study does not focus specifically on the physical health of the second-generation, physical health issues may cause problems in families if children or parents become sick. While the stress of physical illness can cause mental health issues, such as depression, it is important to have a general understanding of the physical health aspect of the immigrant paradox. Similarly to physical health, the education aspect of the immigrant paradox is not the main focus of this paper. Despite this fact, it is still important to address.

Education. While education is not the primary focus of this study, children struggling within the educational system may experience stressors, which could contribute to mental health issues. Therefore it is important to understand how second-generation Americans are faring in terms of education. Although language for first generation immigrants may be an issue, it was found that many first generation immigrant children are scoring better in Math and English than peers from native families. This finding is confirmed in a number of studies. According to North (2009), "Success in the education system declines from the first to the third generation, although knowledge of English rises sharply over the generations" (1). A study conducted by Palcios, Guttmannova, and Chase-Lasdale (2008) found that reading achievement decreased from the first to third generations for children of immigrants. Furthermore, with the later generations, it has been found that there is a lower high school graduation rate. Finally, Telles and Ortiz (2008) state, "Mexican Americans, three or four generations removed from their immigrant ancestors, are less likely than the Mexican American second generation of similar characteristics to have completed either high school or college" (265). In sum, whereas the children of immigrants

should be performing better in school than the first generation of immigrants, they are actually performing worse. Although this study does not directly investigate the education variable of the immigrant paradox, it is possible that education difficulties would have affected the mental health of the second-generation Americans.

Mental Health. As suggested previously, the second generation of immigrants, or children of immigrants, should have better mental health than the previous generation. Recently, some studies have found the opposite to be true, that in fact the second generation is struggling more than the first with mental health issues (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011). First generation immigrants are at a significantly lower risk of suicide than subsequent generations (Singh & Siahpush, 2001 as cited in Coll et al., 2009). Furthermore, first generation immigrant children, while twice as likely to be poor, show fewer emotional and behavioral problems (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 2002, as cited in Coll et al., 2009).

While the first generation immigrants do not appear to be struggling with mental health, their children seem to have a harder time when it comes to mental health issues. The second generation is more at risk for mental health issues as they struggle with creating a self and cultural identity. It is important to reiterate that unlike cultural identity, ethnicity "refers to the subjective meaning of one's ethnicity (and is) contained within the broader concept of cultural identity" (Rothe, Pumariega, Sabagh, 2011, p. 74). In other words, it is one component of cultural identity. To some, ethnic identity might seem easy to define, as it implies the country in which one was born, or the birthplace of his or her parents. According to Rumbaut (1994):

> Reflecting the fluidity of ethnicity and the increasing patterns of intermarriage noted, only three-fourths (76.9%) of the children in the sample had parents who were co-nationals…in 12.6 percent of the cases, one parent was U.S. born; sometimes these involved co-ethnic marriages…but often they did not (p. 762).

Thus, it was found children have many options when deciding which ethnicity to identify with, as children have the choice between identifying as American or the country in which their parents were born. Making this decision even more difficult is the fact that some children have parents who each has a different ethnic background. Part of the difficulty comes in balancing these choices. Furthermore, as stated by Haller, Portes, and Lynch (2011):

> Procrustean, one-size-fits-all pan-ethnic labels-such as Asian, Hispanic, Black, are imposed willy-nilly by the society at large to lump ethnic groups together who may hail variously from Vietnam or Korea, India or China, Guatemala or Cuba, Haiti or Jamaica, and who differ widely in national and class origins, phenotypes, languages, cultures, generations, migration histories, and modes of incorporation in the United States. Their children, especially adolescents in the process of constructing and crystallizing a social identity, are challenged to incorporate what is 'out there' into what is 'in here,' often in dissonant social contexts (p. 749).

In short, American culture tends not to support the differences between and within the various ethnic groups, thus making it more difficult to define this identity. As Haller, Portes, and Lynch (2011) continue to explain, while creating this cultural identity, because youth are constantly comparing themselves to others, children of immigrants may have an especially hard time when they realize that they are different than their reference groups.

Ethnic self-identification is not the only variable in determining a cultural identity. It is also important to realize there are other factors, such as language and surnames, the relationship a child has with his parent, gender, and the generation of immigrant. If the individual speaks English, he is more likely to assume an American cultural identification. In addition, if the child has a good relationship with his parent, he is more likely to identify with the parent's culture. On the contrary, if he does not have a good relationship with his parent or the parent has embarrassed him, he is likely to identify as being more American (Rumbaut, 1994).

Furthermore, according to Rumbaut (1994):

> Gender was a significant predictor of virtually every type of ethnic self-identity chose, suggesting that issues of gender and ethnic identity may be connected. Girls were much more likely to choose additive or hyphenated identities, as well as a Hispanic pan-ethnic self-label; boys were more likely to choose an unhyphenated national identity [whether American or national origin] (p. 788-789).

Finally, if an individual is born in the United States, he is more likely to assimilate into the American culture. In contrast, if an individual immigrates to the United States as a child, he is more likely to assume a different ethnic identity (Rumbaut, 1994). In addition to these factors, discrimination has an effect. Children of immigrants that experience some form of discrimination are less likely to identify with the American culture (Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2011).

The shaping of cultural and self identity directly relates to mental health in the sense that the more difficult it is to shape this identity, the higher the risks are of mental health issues (Bhui et al., p. 2004). As Rothe, Pumariega, and Sabagh (2011) find, "lower levels of ethnic identity have been correlated with substance abuse risk, acculturative stress and self-esteem" (p. 78). As these children of immigrants are caught in between the American culture and the culture of their parents, their self-identity is more difficult to establish, therefore putting them at a higher risk for mental health issues (Rothe, Pumariega, & Sabagh, 2011). Research also suggests that they are at a higher risk for self-destructive behavior.

Risky Behaviors. As there is an increased risk of mental health issues, there is also an increased risk for dangerous behaviors among the children of immigrants. The term risky behaviors can be classified as behaviors that may be harmful to an individual's physical or mental health. These behaviors could be anything from alcohol and drug usage to sexual activity. When referring to second-generation immigrants, North (2009) states, "Violence and

drug abuse rises among later generations. Risky sexual behavior increases from the first to the third generation" (p. 1). Furthermore, according to Szapocnik et al. (1979 as cited in Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005), "Second generation children (American-born offspring of immigrants) have been found to be at higher risk of more behavioral conditions, such as substance abuse, conduct disturbance, and eating disorders, than the first generation of immigrant youth" (p. 588). Specifically in relation to substance abuse, Maldonado-Molina, Reingle, Jennings, and Prado (2011) found that US-born Hispanic youth were more likely to report higher frequency in alcohol and marijuana usage. Furthermore, the first generation immigrants were found to have the lowest rates of driving under the influence (DUI) compared to the DUI rates of the second and even higher rates of the third generation immigrants (Maldonado-Molina et al., 2011). Rothe, Pumariega, and Sabagh (2011) claim this high risk behavior is caused because "the adolescent who feels marginalized and discriminated, lacking opportunities for upward mobility and who belongs to a racially unmeltable minority group, will tend to seek validation by peers who are dealing with similar conflicts" (p. 78). In sum, instead of seeking help, they turn to peers who are participating in risky behaviors. Alegria et al. (2008), who also observed the immigrant paradox in their study of substance abuse and mental illness in U.S. Latino groups, suggested that "the protective impact of foreign nativity on lifetime prevalence of substance disorders for most immigrants, particularly Latino immigrants, could be related to strong social control against alcohol and drug use in their countries of origin" (365). They are thus prone to participate in more risky behavior. Some of the other reasoning behind the increased risky behaviors include: "chronic stresses created by poverty, margination, and discrimination without the secure identity and traditional values of their parents, while not yet having a secure bicultural identity and skills" (Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005, p. 78).

Therefore, these researchers suggest that because they do not have a secure identity and are in fact caught in between two cultures, these risky behaviors are more prevalent.

As evidenced by the literature, there is much research that supports the theory of the immigrant paradox, specifically as it relates to mental health, physical health, education and risky behaviors. Although there is evidence supporting the theory, there is another group of researchers who contend that it does not exist. Although there are not as many researchers in this camp, they do raise compelling arguments, which shed doubt on the existence of the immigrant paradox.

The Opposing View of the Immigrant Paradox

Recent studies suggest that there is debate about whether or not the immigrant paradox in fact exists (Coll et al., 2009). In fact, some researchers are suggesting that second-generation immigrants are following the trajectory of the first wave, going so far as to argue that the second and third generations are doing better than the initial immigrant generation (Alba, Kasinitz, & Waters, 2011). Other researchers believe that the immigrant paradox does not exist, not because the later generations continually perform better, but because they see no downward spiral. As Montazer and Wheaton (2011) explain, "the second-generation children in our sample are not significantly different from the third generation or later generations" (p. 37). Not only is there not a great difference from the second to third and later generations, as the paradox would suggest, but Alba, Kasinitz, and Waters (2011) argue that the second generation of the new wave of immigrants is actually performing similarly to the second generation of the first group of immigrants coming from Europe. They believe only a small number of individuals in the second-generation struggle with the transition from childhood to adulthood and either dropout of school or are unemployed. Furthermore, among this generation, only a small percentage is

involved with drugs and is active with gangs. Not only is the number small, but it is also argued that this same pattern was experienced by members of the second generation in the first wave of immigration during the early decades of the 20th century (Alba, Kasinitz, & Waters, 2011). Therefore, they argue that there would appear to be some struggles with the second generation, but they view these challenges to be natural, as they were also experienced by the second generation of immigrants that came to the United States in the beginning of the 20th century. Even though some of these immigrants do experience downward mobility, most have been moving upwards (Alba, Kasinitz, & Waters, 2011).

Others argue that the immigrant paradox does not exist because there are various forms of acculturation and too many variables that account for acculturation. They therefore believe that the existence of the immigrant paradox is questionable at best. For example, different studies attribute the aforementioned difference in mental health to different factors. Montazer and Wheaton (2011) further found, "a combination of increasing family conflict, together with a decline in a caring and close family climate, and to some degree declining school involvement, together compromise the mental health of children from less developed countries" (p. 756). Furthermore, some claim the difference in some components of the immigrant paradox, such as mental health, can also be based on the social and economic-status of the children's parents. Montazer and Wheaton (2011) found that the country of origin and economic stability of these countries affect how an immigrant and their children will assimilate into the United States. Additionally, Haller, Portes, and Lynch (2011) found that parents with a higher social status provide more support for their children emotionally and with their schoolwork. Therefore, their experience would be much different than a child whose parents are of low social status. The difference in experience makes these researchers believe that the immigrant paradox does not

exist for all immigrant groups. Along these lines, children with parents with a higher social status may be proud and honored by their culture of origin and therefore not assimilate as much into the American culture (Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2011). On the contrary, some children with parents of low social status may view their parents as a source of embarrassment, for example if they could not understand English and as a result not be able to go to a school function. The child may want to distance himself from the parents to try to avoid the embarrassment and therefore try to assimilate even more into the American mainstream culture (Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2011). Therefore, these researchers would argue that that there are different variables which determine how well an individual will be assimilated and acculturated. Consequently, they question the existence of the immigrant paradox, saying that if there is a difference in the generations, it could have many different causes.

The debate regarding the "immigrant paradox" has created much discussion about whether or not the second generation of immigrants is at an advantage or disadvantage. Studies have addressed whether or not the immigrant paradox exists, but many of these studies are broad and quantitative. They have mainly employed surveys, but have not included personal stories to get a richer understanding of the immigrant paradox specific to mental health and risky behaviors. Unlike the previous research, this study addressed the immigrant paradox and utilized qualitative research to better understand the aspects of mental health and risky behaviors of second-generation immigrants.

Methodology

This is a descriptive, exploratory, qualitative study on the immigrant paradox, specific to mental health and risky behaviors in second generation Americans. This research explored the theory of the immigrant paradox among college-aged children of immigrants who attend a

private, liberal arts institution and determined the struggles, or lack thereof, that these individuals have experienced as a result of having immigrant parents. It focused mainly on the mental health aspect of the immigrant paradox and aimed to investigate the difficulties in the emergence of cultural and self-identity. It also focused on the risky behavior component of the immigrant paradox.

Participants

The participant group was a convenience sample of students who were enrolled at a private college in the southeastern part of New England. In order to be eligible for this study, the student must have been a second-generation American, meaning either one or both of their parents must have immigrated to the United States. The country of origin of their parents, although taken into account, did not determine participation in the study. Students from all majors and all grade years were able to participate.

Data Gathering

In order to gather a sample population, the interviewer identified a key stakeholder in a multi-cultural organization on the college campus. The researcher gave a small presentation to this multi-cultural organization on the college campus asking for participants. Participants self-selected themselves to take part in the study by sending the researcher an email saying they would be willing to participate. In order to gain more participants and to try to decrease participant bias, the researcher contacted a professor of an introductory human service class. The researcher gave the same presentation in the class as had been given to the multi-cultural organization. Again, these participants self-selected themselves to participate in the study by emailing the researcher saying they were willing to be interviewed.

As previously mentioned, interviews were the main method of gathering data. During the interviews, the researcher recorded the conversations using a digital voice recorder and later reviewed the interviews to determine trends in mental health and risky behavior. The researcher provided each of the participants with an informed consent form, which ensured anonymity (See Appendix A for the Informed Consent). Prior to the interviews, the researcher compiled a list of questions aimed at the mental health and risky behaviors variables of the immigrant paradox (See Appendix B for Interview Questions). The initial questions were focused more on gaining demographical information of both the participant and the participant's parents. The following questions were broader, structured in a way that allowed participants to freely tell their stories in hopes of obtaining information that would help illuminate the mental health and risky behavior concepts of the immigrant paradox. If the participant did not address these ideas specifically, the researcher directly asked about them.

Data Analysis

After all of the interviews had been conducted, the researcher listened to the interviews and transcribed them onto a computer. Each recorded interview was first analyzed attending to themes, words and language used which referred to the immigrant paradox, specifically the risky behavior and mental health concepts of the immigrant paradox. The researcher then compared the notes from each of the interviews, drawing connections between the participants and also observing how each participant was different. After reviewing the notes for the mental health and risky behavior concepts of the immigrant paradox, the researcher went back and analyzed the transcriptions to note any other common themes and draw other conclusions from the participants' stories on what it was like growing up with immigrant parents.

Findings

The study intended to explore what it was like for current college students to grow up with immigrant parents. Specifically, it aimed to investigate the mental health and risky behavior aspects of the immigrant paradox among these students. The research involved eight interviews with college students at a small, private college located in New England who are first generation Americans, in other words, have one or both parents that immigrated to the United States.

The interviews each lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The interview began with gathering general demographic information from each of the participants. The population sample consisted of two males and six females. The participants were from varying grade levels, majors, and ethnicity [see Table 1]. As can be seen, none of the participants self-identified their ethnicity as American, but instead more closely associated their ethnic identity with that of their parents.

The interview questions were structured in a way that the participants could freely tell their story of what it was like to grow up in the United States with immigrant parents. The interviews focused on culture, specifically on clashes of the American culture with the culture of each participant's parents. The interviews allowed the participants to explain the struggles each experienced while managing both cultures.

The Parents

The parents of each of the participants also varied by country of origin, age of arrival, reason for coming to the United States and language they use to speak to their children [see Table 2]. These differences have resulted in each of the participants having a different experience growing up with immigrant parents.

Struggles

When asked about struggles they faced growing up or now, individuals did not explicitly say they struggled with risky behavior or mental health issues. Some struggles, were, however, mentioned indirectly. Although these struggles were alluded to, each individual expressed that these struggles did not significantly affect them, and that they are appreciative of their parents and their rules, values and traditions. The struggles they did express seemed to be caused by the pull of the American culture versus the pull of the culture of their parents.

Risky Behavior. Although participants were prompted to explain any struggles that might have contributed to them participating in risky behavior, none of the participants revealed taking part in any significant risky behavior. The worst behavior one participant revealed was his natural curiosity about members of the opposite gender. Participant 1 mentioned that he "rebelled against his parents". When prompted to explain further, he explained:

> In middle school I liked this girl and my friends were like 'oh you should ask her out'[.] I didn't even know what that meant. I went to my mom and was like, 'Mom, I want to ask this girl out. What does that mean?' She was like, 'No dating until you're married,' which is an exaggeration but that's basically what she meant. I rebelled against it and I, like, snuck out and spent time with her.

He continued on to explain that at first he thought some of his parents' rules were stupid, but now that he is "older and more mature," he appreciates them and can understand where they were coming from. He stated, "now I look back and I laugh about it, but back then it was like I was making a stand[.] Now I see it was a stupid thing." In this situation, what one individual views as a "stupid thing" does not fit the definition of risky behavior. Instead, risky behavior refers to behavior that is more dangerous to an individual's health.

Mental Health. Although none of the participants explicitly stated that they experienced any clinical mental health issues, growing up with immigrant parents did cause some to

experience inner conflict. Some of the participants alluded to struggles of allegiance they experienced. One struggle of allegiance that was experienced by the participants was the challenge to balance individuals and friend groups from both cultures. As Participant 1 explained, he had one friend group that was Armenian, but then another friend group that he spent time with at school. He explained that sometimes it was difficult to balance the two groups. "Sometimes my friends think that I only associate with Armenians or I only want to associate with Armenians…I had to struggle with that a lot growing up." He further mentioned that he did not only feel a pull from his friend groups about which one to hang out with, but was internally conflicted about with which group he should spent more time. Again Participant 1 explained:

> I feel closer to my friends [at college] but I feel like I should be closer to my other Armenian friends because we're all Armenian and we stick together and stuff. I haven't figured it out yet…its more complicated than that.

Figuring out friend group allegiance can be difficult for teenagers and young adults, the added cultural components makes "figuring it out" a little "more complicated".

Another aspect that individuals mentioned they struggled with was the balance of their parents' values and beliefs with the American values. As Participant 1 mentioned, "I always thought my parents were so narrow minded[.] They don't know what they're talking about, they don't understand what its like to be an American teenager." He continued to explain that he did not really understand their viewpoints when he was younger and would often become frustrated with them. Participant 8 also alluded to this struggle of parental values versus American values. He stated:

> I kind of struggled with the difference of cultures[,] like when it came to clothing [my parents] didn't really care, but you know how American kids are[,] like into name brands…but [my parents] just don't see the point of it…and fitting in is a big thing.

While Americans value different clothing, his parents did not understand why he wanted a particular type of clothing and therefore would not buy it. As a result, he struggled with fitting in with other American children. Participant 7 had a similar struggle. She stated, "[My dad and I] definitely clashed a lot…[him] being conservative and me growing up as a teenage girl having to wear outfits that covered everything." Participant 7 expanded more on her struggles with her conservative father. She explained how being conservative and teaching her a strong work ethic made it hard for her to make friends as she viewed herself as being more mature and had different values. She stated, "I kind of really felt like I couldn't connect with a lot of people. Definitely in high school it was kind of a struggle because I wanted to get out and meet people that were more mature." She further explained that had she not been forced to work and pay for everything herself she might have led a more typical teenage life. Thus, like the other participants, although she did not experience any clinical mental illness, there was a significant internal struggle in trying to grow up and make friends.

Another struggle was the embarrassment of their families and culture when they were younger. For example, Participant 3 stated:

> Whenever we had a family thing I [never said] to my friends[,] 'you should come' because when I was younger I thought they would think 'oh this is weird'[.] [I thought] they wouldn't understand and they would feel awkward and left out.

Participant 5 expressed a similar struggle with embarrassment at lunch in elementary school. She stated, "I know it sounds dumb but at first it was like 'Oh I'm that weirdo who brought fish to school'." The fact she viewed herself as a "weirdo" was a source of internal struggles. Therefore, the different traditions and cultural norms were sources of embarrassment.

Some participants also expressed the struggle they were currently facing with losing different aspects of their culture. Some individuals were struggling specifically with losing the

language. As Participant 6 explains, “I hate losing the language now because it was my first language and I can feel it slipping away a tiny bit[.] I still listen to it all the time and I’m work hard to keep it.” It may be that an individual ties their identity to the language they are able to speak. With losing the language, especially an individual’s first language, an individual may feel as though they are losing an important aspect of him- or herself.

Appreciation of Culture

The majority of the participants explained that when they were younger they did not understand why their parents acted in certain ways. They now understand the reason for some of their rules and beliefs. Participant 3 explained, “I just struggled [with cultural differences] when I was younger and I didn’t really appreciate [my Greek culture]. Afterwards [being Greek] became a big part of me… I think the maturing factor caused [me to appreciate my culture].” Furthermore, in reference to her embarrassment caused by her family, she expressed, “Now I embrace [the difference] and I let everyone know [about being Greek] and am like[,] ‘Yea, come on, come see what [my family’s gatherings] are all about.” It seems as though she was able to overcome her struggles and grow to appreciate her culture. When talking about her embarrassment, in regards to bringing food to school for lunch, Participant 3 mentioned, “[When I was older] I realized everyone would be like[,] ‘Oh that [fish] smells good, I want to try it.” Participant 1 seemed to have a similar experience. In reference to rebelling against his parents he stated, “As much as I rebelled against [my parent’s rules] growing up, I would agree with them now. Now that I’m older[,] I see the value in them.” Not only did he begin to “value” his parents’ rules, he, along with the other participants, also began to see the value in having a multi-ethnic background.

Cultural Pride

Despite the struggles individuals faced, without being prompted, all but two of the students expressed some sort of cultural pride. Part of the cultural pride comes from the fact that they are "different". Participant 3 reflected the general sentiments of the group when she stated, "Seeing how my family interacts and how we are different from everyone…its something that makes me feel special." For her, along with other participants, what was once the source of embarrassment now is something that makes her feel "special."

Another aspect that individuals saw as being beneficial in regards to cultural pride was the fact that they are bilingual or able to speak two different languages. Participant 6 stated:

> I love saying that I'm 100% Polish because I think its such a fun fact[,] and like not a lot of people know a different language[.] I think it's really important for other people to be bilingual because it helps you with everything[.] I feel it makes you a well-rounded person.

Like Participant 6, others were very appreciative of the fact that they are able to speak multiple languages. Participant 2 stated, "[Speaking in another language] is one of the greatest gifts my parents have given me." Participant 7, on the other hand, is not bilingual, but instead wishes her parents had taught her Arabic. She explained, "I really want to learn Arabic. I wish we had learned it when we were younger." She sees the value in this aspect of the culture and says that although she does not know the language "I am very proud [of my culture]."

Summary and Implications

It seems as though each individual has a different story. The degree of acculturation of each person and family therefore varies depending on various factors, such as when the parent immigrated to the United States, where the family settled down once they immigrated, and the country of origin of the parents. When the parent immigrated to the United States seemed to play a large role in how closely their child identified as having the same ethnicity as their parents

or whether they considered themselves to be American. The location the parents immigrated to also was significant, as the individuals that lived in areas with other individuals from the same culture seemed to have more cultural pride and identified more with that culture. The stronger identification with the parents' culture and the cultural pride could be due to a stronger sense of community. Along the lines of cultural identification, how much an individual identified with their parents' culture depended on the age the parent immigrated to the United States. The younger the parents were when they immigrated to the United States, the less the child seemed to identify with their parents' culture. This could be due to the fact that the longer the parents had spent in the United States, the more acculturated they were, and the less they themselves identified with their country of origin. If they came when they were younger, their children seemed to have a general background of their culture, such as knowledge of some common food, but if the parents came to the United States when they were older, the participant seemed to feel more of a cultural attachment to their parents' home country.

Open-mindedness

An unexpected finding was the openness to other cultures and desire to try new things. All participants expressed some interest in other cultures and in traveling. It is possible that the reason for the openness and desire to try new things is due to the immigrant parents. As Participant 6 explained, "[My mom] thinks that travel is important to be a well-rounded person." Her experiences with traveling may have created this belief and therefore she may have passed on the importance of traveling and being exposed to different things. Participant 3 also stated, "I love different cultures, different languages…it gives me a different perspective[.] Because I am from a different culture[,] I understand the differences that people have." As many of the participants mentioned their openness to new cultures and desire to new things, it may be that the

fact that having a different cultural background allowed these participants to have more of an open mind and interest in different cultures. They are already exposed to differences and because they have a mixture of cultures that makes up their ethnic backgrounds, they are already more culturally competent and accepting of these differences. That being said, their background may be the cause of being more open-minded about differences.

Support Systems

Something that almost all participants mentioned was a support system that helped them cope with growing up with immigrant parents. Some individuals mentioned growing up in communities where their culture was the norm and they therefore could make friends with other individuals from a similar ethnic background. Other individuals mentioned an on-campus group that gave them a source of support and allowed them to express their culture. The importance of these support systems is consistent with previous research. "Immigrant children from intact [especially two-natural-parent] families or from families associated with tightly knit social networks consistently show better psychological conditions, higher levels of academic achievement, and stronger educational aspirations than those in single-parent or socially isolated families" (Zhou, 1997, p. 80). It may be that the individuals have a place where they can freely express themselves without judgment or that they are surrounded by individuals who have gone through a similar situation and therefore can relate to them. Whatever the reason, it seems that the existence of some sort of support has been what helped the individuals manage the struggles of the two cultures.

Furthermore, the presence of a support system could be the reason these participants did not express any significant struggles with risky behavior. The support system can act as a protective factor and buffers against risks. A study done by Gladow and Ray (1986) found

"informal support systems do have a positive impact" (p. 120). Therefore, an informal support system would minimize the struggles second-generation immigrants would experience, as they would have a positive impact on the individual. Despite not having significant struggles with risky behavior, rebellion was expressed, which could be taken to more extremes with different individuals in different situations. If an individual does not have a support system and is trying to fit into a group, they may feel the pressure of participating in alcohol or drug activity. They may therefore be more likely to participate in these activities, especially if they are also struggling with internal conflicts.

Limitations

This study has a couple of limitations that need to be mentioned. To begin with, the participants were self-selected. Therefore, there is somewhat of a participation bias in the sense that these individuals had a desire to share their stories. This type of participation bias needs to be accounted for. Furthermore, the sample was taken from a private, small Catholic college. That being said, the participants most likely came from a somewhat privileged background or had access to resources other individuals may not have had access to. Individuals in college most likely have a support system that aided them and gave them the support they needed to get to college and possibly in other areas of their lives as well. Therefore, if the sample were individuals in their late-teens or early-twenties, but not necessarily in college, the results may be different. For example, individuals in their late-teens or early-twenties that are not in a college, because they dropped out of high school may not have had a helpful support system while they were growing up, and may not currently have a support system. These individuals may therefore express more struggles with risky behavior and mental health.

Implications

Keeping the limitations in mind, while this study does not necessarily completely support or refute the immigrant paradox, what has been found is that individuals appear to have more of an open-mind when it comes to differences. Further research could be done on this topic to see if there is a causal relationship between having immigrant parents and having an open mind. This study also found that these individuals value and are proud of their culture. In order to ensure that individuals are able to express themselves and the pride they have for their cultures, support systems are important. Further research could be done to address the role support systems play in a successful assimilation and acculturation of second-generation immigrants. Along these lines, participants not only mentioned community support systems, but support systems in their school. Research could be done to see if other universities and colleges have groups and support groups such as the one present at the college the participants attend. It could be important to understand the role that these groups specifically play in helping individuals while they are in college. Furthermore, it could be beneficial to see if there are any support groups at the elementary or high school levels and see if they affect these second-generation immigrants. As all children are required to attend elementary school and high school, these places should offer support systems. If they do not have specific groups that could serve as support for these individuals, it should be school policy to be welcoming of immigrants and second-generation immigrants so that the school can become a supportive institution and provide the students with the feeling of belonging. The importance of having school policy that supports immigrants and their children was supported by Borjian and Padilla (2010), suggesting, it is important for the school to offer support to each of their students. Borjian and Padilla (2010) states, “Teachers play a crucial role in supporting the educational development of immigrant

students…without cultural understanding and respect, teachers will severely limit their capabilities in fostering growth and academic enhancement of their students" (p. 325). Therefore, it is extremely important for these institutions to adopt policies that foster cultural understanding and respect.

Not only is it important to have these support systems present, but individuals also need to be able to utilize and have access to them. Therefore, while working with a second-generation immigrant, a worker should be familiar with the different types of support systems available. If an individual is lacking these support systems, the worker should help identify different groups that may be able to serve as a support system for the individual. Immigration will continue in this country for years to come. It is our duty to ensure that immigrants and their children feel free to identify with whatever culture they choose and hopefully, in doing so, diminish the struggles they may feel in having to choose between two cultures.

Appendix A

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a social work major at Providence College, inviting you to participate in a study to share your experience about growing up with immigrant parents. Data gathered in this study will be reported in a thesis paper in a social work capstone course at Providence College. It will also be added to the Providence College digital commons database.

At this time, students with one or both parents who have immigrated to the United States are being recruited for this study. Participation will involve answering questions about growing up with immigrant parents. The interview time should not exceed 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder and the tapes will be destroyed once the data has been analyzed.

There are no anticipated significant risks associated with involvement in this research. There is always the possibility that uncomfortable or stressful memories or emotions may arise while thinking about these past experiences. Participants are free to stop participation in the study at any time until identifying information is removed from the responses. The researcher, if necessary, will also provide referral resources for psychological support.

Benefits of participating in this study include helping researchers to formulate a better understanding of the first-generation Americans and their acculturation to the American society.

Confidentiality will be protected by storing signed consent forms separately from data obtained in the study. Once the data are obtained, all identifying information linking the participant to his or her response will be destroyed so that responses can no longer be identified with individuals. Data will be reported by making generalizations of all of the data that has been gathered. Brief excerpts of individual responses may be quoted without any personal identifying information.

Participation in this study is voluntary. A decision to decline to participate will not have any negative effects for you. You may withdraw from the study at any time up until Friday, March 23rd when the researchers will finalize the data.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Melissa Weiss , mweiss2@friars.providence.edu

_____ _____

(Name) (Date)

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

Appendix B

1. Demographics of participant
    a. Age?
    b. Gender?
    c. Year in School?
    d. Ethnicity?
    e. Major?
2. Parents information
    a. Where are they from?
    b. What language do they speak?
    c. Why/when did they immigrate to the United States?
3. How do your think your parents would define their culture?
4. How would you define your culture? Explain.
5. How has the way you define and see your culture, and how your parents do, impacted you?

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Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

	Gender	**Class Year**	**Major**	**Ethnicity**	**Language Spoken**
P1	Male	Senior	Senior	Armenian	**Armenian**, English
P2	Female	Sophomore	Humanities	Hispanic	**English, Spanish**
P3	Female	Sophomore	Management & Marketing	Greek	**Greek**, English
P4	Female	Senior	Art History	Spanish	**Spanish**, English
P5	Female	Senior	Health policy & management	Portuguese	**Portuguese**, English
P6	Female	Freshman	Undeclared	Polish	**Polish**, English
P7	Female	Freshman	Elementary & Special Education	Lebanese	English
P8	Male	Sophomore	Sociology	Jamaican	English

Notes: P1=Participant 1, P2=Participant 2, P3=Participant 3, P4=Participant 4, P5=Participant 5, P6=Participant 6, P7=Participant 7, P8=Participant 8

Bold font indicates the first language learned

Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants' Parents

		Country of origin	Age of Immigration (years)	Reason for Immigrating to the United States	Language spoken by individual	Language spoken at home
P1	Father	Syria	Early 20s	Wanted to attend college in the United States	English, Arabic, Armenian, Turkish	Armenian
	Mother	Lebanon	Early 20s	Wanted to attend college in the United States	English, Arabic, Armenian	Armenian
P2	Father	Argentina	12	His father received a good job opportunity and Argentina was becoming politically unstable	English, Spanish	English, Spanish
	Mother	United States	N/A	N/A	English, Spanish	English
P3	Father	Greece	17	He wanted "new opportunities"	English, Greek (with a very thick accent)	English
	Mother	Greece	7	She wanted "new opportunities"	English, Greek	English
P4	Father	Colombia				
	Mother	Peru				
P5	Father	Azores	22	After meeting P5's mother while she was on vacation, he moved to the United States to work	Portuguese, English (learned upon arrival through job)	English
	Mother	United States of Portuguese decent	N/A	N/A	English, Portuguese	English
P6	Father	Poland	17	His parents wanted "to have a better life"	Polish, English	English
	Mother	Poland	After marrying P6's father	To start a family with P6's father	Polish, English	English
P7	Father	Lebanon		Because of the civil war in Lebanon between the Muslims and the Christians he had been living in the basement of his house for three months. He came to the U.S. to escape the threat of the civil war and eventually attend college.	Arabic, English (learned upon arrival to the United States)	English

	Mother	United States of Lebanese decent	N/A	N/A	English	English
P8	Father	Jamaica	23	Better opportunities and education for his children		
	Mother	Jamaica	19	Better opportunities and education for her children		

Note: P1=Participant 1, P2=Participant 2, P3=Participant 3, P4=Participant 4, P5=Participant 5, P6=Participant 6, P7=Participant 7, P8=Participant 8

Participant 4's parents separated and had little contact with her father. She was also separated from her mother as her mother was deported. She ended up living with her aunt, who immigrated from Peru, and uncle, who is originally from the United States, until going to college. Her mother has recently been able to get her paperwork approved and has since immigrated to the United States. Both speak Spanish and her mother is in the process of learning English.