

The Structuring of Active Development: Immigrant Youth Participation in School and Community Activities

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Introduction

There is a burgeoning literature on youth participation in school and non-school extracurricular activities and its provision of developmental advantages for youth. Much of this research uses cross-sectional data to examine how participation in extracurricular activities affects risk behaviors, academic achievement, and emotional and cognitive development (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1984; Larson and Kleiber 1993; Larson et al. 2004; Eccles and Barber 1999; Eccles and Templeton 2002). For example, Hansen et al. (2003) discovered that adolescents who participate in organized activities reported that they had more experiences with problem solving and effort than they did in required academic classes. These youth also disclosed that organized activities helped them to manage anger, anxiety, and stress. Using nationally representative data, Marsh (1992) found that participation in school-sponsored activities led to improved GPA, higher educational aspirations, increased college attendance, and reduced absenteeism among high school students.

While we have learned much about the benefits of participation in organized activities, no studies to date have documented or analyzed extracurricular participation among immigrant and second-generation youth, a population that could potentially benefit from such activities. In this paper, we fill the gap in the literature by focusing on how youth in immigrant families are incorporated in schools and neighborhoods by examining their participation in school and non-school extracurricular activities. We use two nationally representative data sets to explore this.

The contributions of this paper are substantive and methodological: we identify the general patterns and predictors of participation for immigrant and second-generation youth as well as the larger youth population, and uncover interesting life course effects that would not have been discovered had we not compared the two data sets. We also highlight the consistencies and differences between the results from the two national data sets, which is likely to have important implications for other studies using these data sets to understand immigrant adaptation.

Background Literature

There is scant research on what factors encourage youth participation in school and non-school activities, as most of the research on participation links activities to developmental outcomes. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) analyzed PSID-Child Development Supplement and NSAF data and found significant differences in out-of-school participation in programs and activities that promote learning and development across socioeconomic status and race (Wimer et al. 2006). Specifically, youth from lower-income families were less likely to participate in out-of-school structured activities compared to youth from higher-income families. In terms of race, Latino youth were underrepresented in these activities, whites were overrepresented, and blacks fell somewhere in between, but other factors such as socioeconomic status were likely to contribute to these differences. The HFRP did not provide any information for Asians as a group despite the fact that their numbers continue to increase. Given the growing diversity within as well as between racial groups, it will be vital to investigate the differences in school and non-school extracurricular activities by race, ethnicity, and generation. Using ECLS-K data to study on the participation of elementary school children, Raleigh (2008) finds that net of

socioeconomic status and family structure, Asian and black immigrants are more likely to participate in music lessons than native-born whites, while Hispanic natives are less likely to participate than their white counterparts. She also finds that all racial groups, regardless of nativity, are less likely to participate in organized sports compared to native-born whites. While this study is helpful in understanding some of the patterns of participation, its focus is limited to elementary school. We build upon this research and focus on the middle- and high-school years to understand the patterns and predictors of participation in school and non-school extracurricular activities, with a special emphasis on youth in immigrant families.

More Literature and Expectations

Studies have found that immigrant youth tend to be less acculturated than their native-born peers in terms of English fluency and the adoption of American values and norms. In addition, studies show that immigrant parents impose more restrictions on their children's activities than native-born parents (Kao 2004). Many immigrant families place a higher value on the coethnic community which provides effective systems of support and control than on schools and other mainstream institutions to socialize their children (Zhou and Bankston 1998). Networks outside of the ethnic community are often viewed as counterproductive to the norms, values, and practices that are encouraged within the ethnic community. Based on these past findings, we expect that immigrant generation will be important in understanding participation in extracurricular activities. Specifically, we expect that first- and second-generation youth will be less likely to participate in extracurricular activities because they will be less acculturated than their third-generation counterparts and

because immigrant parents may view some extracurricular activities as detracting from the norms and values of the coethnic community.

In contrast, other studies have used the immigrant optimism hypothesis to understand the assimilation patterns of immigrant youth (Kao and Tienda 1995; Louie 2004). According to this hypothesis, the second generation has the best of both worlds: they have the advantage of mastery of English and growing up in American institutions, but they also inherit their parents' positive attitudes about American society and determination for upward mobility. From this body of research, we expect that second-generation youth will participate in extracurricular activities at rates similar to the third-generation. The values that the second generation inherits could motivate them to get involved and the advantages they have over immigrants would allow them to avoid the barriers that prevent immigrants from joining in the first place.

Scholars have also suggested that ethnicity will be important in understanding adaptation outcomes for immigrant youth. In a study of the children of immigrants from San Diego and Miami, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) discover that ethnic background has a positive effect on academic achievement for Chinese/Koreans, Laotians/Cambodians, and Vietnamese, and a negative effect for Mexicans. The authors suggest that these ethnic effects reflect differences in refugee status, access to ethnic enclaves/communities, socioeconomic origins, and contexts of reception. We expect to find differences in terms of ethnicity independent of generational status.

Finally, relationships within the family are important in shaping youth development. Parents and children are understood as active agents who are making choices about their lives, and research suggests that parents who are engaged in their communities will encourage the positive development of their children and a smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood.

For example, Elder and Conger (2000) find that among Iowa farming families, parents who are highly involved in their communities tend to have access to more information, opportunities, and resources that can aid in their children's positive development. Community involvement often leads to the formation of local networks of parents who share information about programs, schools, and teachers. In addition, active parents have access to information about high-quality programs and organizations, and are more likely to enroll or encourage their children to participate. In addition, research on immigrant youth suggests that parental expectations play an important role in the academic achievement of their children (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Kao and Tienda 1995). We expect that parents' involvement in school- and community-based organizations and high parental expectations will facilitate their children's participation in extracurricular activities.

Data and Methods

We use two nationally representative data sets to find out if the patterns and predictors of participation in school and non-school extracurricular activities are consistent across samples and different time periods. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is a data set of adolescents, grades 7 through 12 (see Bearman et al. 1997). The study used a stratified random sample of all high schools in the U.S., and sampled and interviewed approximately 20,000 students from these high schools and their feeder middle or junior high schools in 1994. These students were re-interviewed in 1996 and then again in 2001-02, providing longitudinal data on the transition from adolescence to adulthood. One of the most comprehensive data sets on adolescents, Add Health included an oversample of immigrant groups including Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Chinese. The National Educational Longitudinal

Study (NELS) of 1988 was compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES 1900). In 1988, NCES interviewed a random sample of 25 eighth-graders from 1,000 randomly selected middle schools. The students were re-interviewed in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000, providing a longitudinal sample of adolescents transitioning into adulthood. The NELS data set also oversampled for Asians and Hispanics, and surveyed parents, teachers, and school administrators in addition to students.

Both data sets provide extensive measures of participation in extracurricular activities. Specifically, NELS provides information on participation in school clubs, youth groups, and neighborhood clubs for three waves of data. Add Health generally provides information on school-sponsored activities for Wave I. Both data sets have detailed information on specific types of school activities (i.e. academic, performance, sports, student leadership) in which youth participate.

Our analytical sample from Add Health consists of individuals who completed the Wave I in-home survey.¹ After replacing missing values through multiple imputation methods, we are left with a total level-1 sample size of 18,049 respondents. Exploring the different points of the life course separately results in sample sizes of 4,755 for 7th and 8th graders; 6,603 for 9th and 10th graders and 6,691 for 11th and 12 graders. Our level-2 unit of analysis is the respondents' school. The full sample includes a total of 128 schools.

In the Add Health data, we determined immigrant status through the birthplaces of the respondent and his or her biological parents. We classified respondents born outside of the U.S., regardless of parents' birthplace, as first generation immigrants. Native-born respondents with at least one foreign-born biological parent were classified as the immigrant second generation.

¹ Sample cuts were made to eliminate those missing survey weights (n=1821) as well as Native Americans and those choosing the Other Race category due to their small numbers (n=397). A total of 548 individuals in four schools were also dropped from the analysis because of inadequate level-2 data.

Those with two native-born parents were classified as native born (third generation or beyond). Respondents were also considered native born if they reported a native-born parent and were missing information about the other parent. The small number of individuals missing information on both parents (n=360) were initially coded as missing and later imputed.

Our dependent measures of participation in school clubs or sports are constructed from a list of 33 activities included in the in-school portion of the survey, where each respondent was asked to mark those that he or she participated or planned to participate in the year of the survey. We constructed dummy variables in which respondents were coded as one if they participated in at least one of the activities listed. We explore separate items grouping all clubs and all sports together, as well as more specific items measuring certain types of clubs membership: academic clubs, language clubs, leadership clubs and the performing arts.

For the NELS data, we use youth and parent data from waves 1 through 3, restricting our analysis to respondents that participated in all three waves. We further restrict our analysis to students who were still in school as of wave 3, though they may have dropped out at wave 2 and returned. The final analytic sample contains 14,841 individuals. The primary predictors and control variables are taken from wave 1. Immigrant generation is measured by two dichotomous variables indicating whether respondents are first generation immigrants (born outside the U.S.) or second generation immigrants (those born in the U.S. of foreign-born parents). If nativity information was available for only one parent, the child is considered to be second generation if she or he was born in the U.S. and the parent was born outside the U.S. The comparison group is the native born, who are those youth who were born in the U.S. of native-born parents.

To measure participation at each wave, we constructed several dichotomous indicators of participation in a variety of activities during the year. Like the Add Health data, we measure

participation in school activities – sports teams, academic clubs, vocational clubs, leadership groups, performing arts – and non-school extracurricular activities – neighborhood sports, youth groups, religious activities, fine and performing arts.

To estimate accurate models, we used multiple imputation techniques to deal with missing data. To deal with the issue of clustered responses within schools, we used hierarchical linear models (HLM) to analyze the data. This method is appropriate because it relaxes the least squares regression assumption of uncorrelated error terms across individuals, which is likely violated given the sample collection procedures in both datasets. HLM also allows us to properly control for school level factors that may influence activity participation. Finally, we used sample weights to ensure that our results would reflect the national population.

Preliminary Results

Due to the different structures of the data sets – NELS surveyed 8th graders and Add Health combines the responses from 7th through 12th graders in the first wave of data collection – we conducted separate HLM models by grade in an attempt to produce parallel analyses. Three sets of nested models were estimated: one for junior high (7th-8th grade), early high school (9th-10th grade) and later high school (11th-12th grade). These analyses produced interesting preliminary results and highlighted life course patterns that would not have been visible if the data were not separated out by grade.

First, the results from both data sets indicate that in junior high, first- and second-generation youth are less likely than native-born students with U.S.-born parents to participate in school clubs and sports. These effects are net of gender, age, race, and socioeconomic status. We expected this result because immigrant youth are less likely than their counterparts in native

families to be fully integrated into mainstream institutions such as schools. Both data sets also generally show that the first- and second-generation effects on participation in all clubs and sports, as well as the different types of clubs tend to disappear by high school. For Add Health, the generation effects do not appear at all in simple models with age, gender, and generation, but for NELS, these effects for high school youth disappear after race variables are added to the model.

The preliminary results also show that different types of parental involvement were important for different types of activities. For example, membership in the parent-teacher association and membership in a civic or social organization were both important for leadership and sports, but not academic clubs in for youth in junior high. In high school, only PTA membership is an important predictor of participation in many different types of clubs.

As we move forward in our analyses and comparisons across data sets, we will pay close attention to the effects of race, ethnicity, and parental aspirations. Using the NELS data, we will also explore the participation rates and predictors of music, arts, dance, and other lessons outside of schools among youth in immigrant and U.S.-born families.

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