

Immigrant Boys' Experiences in U.S. Schools¹

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Currently the children of immigrants² comprise 20 percent of youth population in the United States (Hernández & Charney, 1998; Landale & Oropesa, 1995). The majority of these children have Latino, Asian, or Caribbean origins--representing unprecedented cultural and linguistic diversity (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The last fifteen years have witnessed growing scholarly attention to their adaptation (e.g., Gibson, 1988; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Laosa, 1989; Olsen, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Sung, 1987; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). However, the issue of gender has been relatively unexplored in the literature on immigrant youth (Goodenow & Espin, 1993; Valenzuela, 1999). Several scholars have identified a general pattern that is consistent with the national trend: immigrant girls tend to outperform boys in educational settings (e.g., Brandon, 1991; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rong & Brown, 2001). Yet to date, very few studies have explored why this gendered pattern may exist. This chapter examines the experiences of schooling among immigrant youth, with a particular focus on the immigrant boy experience in school context.²

Gendered Trends Among Immigrant Youth

Gender appears to be a significant force in shaping patterns of adaptation among immigrant youth. Portes and Rumbaut contend that, “gender enters the picture in an important way because of the different roles that boys and girls occupy during adolescence and the

different ways in which they are socialized” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 64). Although there has yet to be a large-scale empirical comparative study concentrating specifically on gender differences in immigrant children’s academic engagement and achievement, a number of studies confirm the national trend that immigrant boys lag behind immigrant girls in academic settings across ethnic groups (e.g., Brandon, 1991; Gibson, 1988; Lee, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Qin-Hilliard, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters, 1996). Brandon’s (1991) study of Asian American high school seniors shows that females reached higher levels of educational attainment faster than males. Rong and Brown (2001) find that African and Caribbean immigrant black females outperformed their male counterparts in schooling attainment. Waters’ (1996) study of Caribbean American teens also suggests that it was far more likely for girls to graduate from high school than for boys. Similarly, Gibson (1993) finds that Mexican girls did better than boys in terms of grades and attitudes toward school.

Other researchers have found similar gender trends in academic engagement. In their recent report on second generation youth with various Latino and Asian origins, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) find that boys are less engaged, have significantly lower grades, lower level of interest and work effort, lower career and educational goals, and are less likely to adhere to their parents’ language compared to girls. Similarly, in her work with Latino high school students, Lopez (in press) finds that young women turn in homework more often; participate in more cultural activities; have better relationship with teachers; and have more optimistic future outlook at school compared to their male counterparts. In fact, she points out that young women’s high school experience is described as “institutional engagement and oppression” and young men’s as “institutional expulsion” (Lopez, forthcoming, p. 23).

In this chapter, we will report preliminary findings from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation (LISA) study. We will focus on the following two questions: Among immigrant students, what are the similarities and differences in schooling experiences for boys and girls? When differences occur, how might we account for them?

Method

Currently in its fifth year, the Harvard Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study (L.I.S.A.) was designed to deepen our understanding of immigrant youth's academic engagement and schooling outcomes. A total of 400 students, ages 9 to 14, stratified by gender and country of origin, from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico were recruited within the first few years of immigration. Youth were recruited from fifty-one schools in seven school districts in Massachusetts and northern California. Participating schools provided access to students, teachers, staff, and school records.

Our study takes an interdisciplinary, longitudinal, and comparative approach. This project utilizes a variety of methods including structured student and parent interviews, ethnographic observations, projective and objective measures, reviews of school records, and teacher questionnaires and interviews. We adopt research strategies in the anthropological tradition to gain perspective on immigrant cultural models and social practices relevant to adaptation in the new setting. Youth are observed and interviewed in their schools, their communities, and their homes. These ethnographies allow us to gain the informants' points of view as well as identify locally relevant themes. Psychological methodologies including structured interviews, sentence completions, and narrative tasks are deployed to carefully establish a data baseline on immigration histories, social and family relations, as well as academic attitudes and behaviors. Using triangulated data is crucial when faced with the

challenges of validity in conducting research with groups of diverse backgrounds. By sorting through self reports, parent reports, teacher reports, and our own observations, we are able to establish both concurrence and disconnection in what youth say they do, what others say they do, and what we see them do. The longitudinal design also allows us to calibrate changes over time. An interdisciplinary, multicultural team of over 30 bilingual and bicultural researchers enables us to gain entry into immigrant communities; establish rapport and trust with our participants; and develop culturally sensitive instruments. It also provides an interpretive community for understanding data and findings in context. In this paper, we will be reporting on preliminary findings that emerged from surveys, structured student and teacher interviews, field notes, as well as report cards.

Results

Academic achievement

Findings from our study regarding academic achievement confirm the gender trend found for boys in general (Cornell, 2000; US Department of Education, 1995; Grant & Rong, 1999; Kleinfeld, 1998; Pollack, 1998) and Latino and black males in particular (Dunn, 1988; Lopez, forthcoming). Analyses of report card data reveal that the immigrant boys in our sample who attend middle and high schools in seven school districts obtain on average lower grades than do girls ($F=5.52$, $df=1$, $p=.02$). Girls have a significantly higher GPA than boys in language arts. Boys also lag behind girls in math, science, and social studies. In fact, across every single ethnic group in our sample--Chinese, Dominican Republican, Central American, Mexican, and Haitian--boys have statistically lower grades than do girls. Furthermore, girls were most likely to score in the highest grade range of B+ or better (24 percent of girls compared to 16 percent of boys), while boys were more likely to be represented in the lowest range of D- or lower (11 percent of

boys compared to 8 percent of girls). Hence, girls tended to be the highest achieving students, and boys were more likely to be disengaged.

This trend of girls outperforming boys at school also emerged from the teacher interview data. As part of the study, we asked 74 teachers in seven school districts in urban areas on the East and West coasts who work with middle school and high school immigrant students about their perspectives on teaching immigrant students. As a part of a series of questions they were asked to respond to the question: “Have you noticed differences between how immigrant girls are doing and how immigrant boys are doing?” A total of 40 percent responded either that they had not noticed differences or that it depended upon the issue or the student. Strikingly, however, 44 percent responded that boys did more poorly than girls either academically or socially. Only 13 percent thought that boys were doing better than girls on the whole. For example, a teacher working largely with Haitian students in the Boston area noted: “I would say that in general...the girls do better...because over the years that I have been here, most of the students who have gotten accepted to those Ivy League schools were girls for the most part.” Immigrant origin girls succeed in schools in less strictly academic ways as well—a counselor working with Latino students in California told us: “Student body presidents and officers are almost always girls.”

Academic Engagement

In recent years, a number of scholars have argued that academic achievement and adjustment are in large part a function of academic engagement (Jordan, 1999; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch & Darling, 1992; Wick, 1990). In order to perform optimally in the educational journey, the student must be engaged in learning. When a student is engaged, he is both intellectually and behaviorally involved in his schooling. He

ponders the materials presented; participates in discussions; completes assignment with attention and effort; and optimally applies newfound knowledge in new contexts. Conversely, when academically disengaged the student “simply go(es) through the motions” (Steinberg, Brown & Dornbusch, 1996, p. 15), putting forth minimum (and in extreme cases no) effort. Conceptually, we separate academic engagement into three dimensions—cognitive, behavioral, and relational. Cognitive and behavioral engagements are viewed as the manifestation of engagement, and relational engagement is viewed as mediator of these engagements. As part of the L.I.S.A. study, we developed an interview protocol that examined these dimensions of academic engagement. Interviews were individually administered in the student’s language of preference by bilingual researchers.

Cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement was defined as the student’s reported intellectual or cognitive engagement with schoolwork. This dimension includes both the elements of intellectual curiosity about new ideas and domains of learning, as well as the pleasure that is derived in the process of mastering new materials—do the students report that learning is inherently interesting to them? Cognitive engagement was assessed by asking students if they were currently interested in something; whether or not this interest was academically related; whether they derived pleasure from learning new things; as well as a composite score based on endorsing interest in math, science, language arts, and social studies courses. Our analyses show that the cognitive engagement scores for boys were not statistically different from those for girls, and thus indicated no difference in cognitive engagement by gender.

Behavioral engagement –student self report. Behavioral engagement refers to the degree to which students actually engage in the behaviors necessary to do well in school—attending

classes, participating in class, completing assignments, and putting forth effort. We consider both general academic behaviors as well as subject specific behaviors from both the student and teacher perspectives. Behavioral engagement was assessed by asking students to report expended effort in math, science, language arts, and social studies courses, attendance, lateness, and course skipping frequency. They were also asked to rate a series of academic behaviors on a four-point Likert scale (e.g., turning in homework, paying close attention in class, putting forth best efforts in class and on projects). Findings demonstrate no gender differences in self-reported behavioral engagement. The only exception is that boys admitted to skipping classes more often than girls.

Behavioral engagement—teacher report. Although boys did not report many differences in their own behaviors, analyses of the behavior checklists completed by teachers revealed another picture. Teachers were asked to rate a series of academic behaviors on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very poor to very good for each participant in our study. Teachers reported that boys were more likely than girls to demonstrate poor or very poor attention in class, whereas girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate good or very good attention (see Table 1).³ Teachers also reported that boys were more likely than girls to demonstrate poor or very poor motivation and effort, whereas girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate good or very good motivation and effort. Similar patterns were reported for behaviors such as compliance with teacher requests: 13 percent of boys demonstrated very poor or poor behaviors compared to 9 percent of girls, whereas 61 percent of boys compared to 77 percent of girls demonstrated good or very good behaviors. Teacher also reported that girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate very good attendance, very good punctuality, and were more likely to complete homework. Boys, however, were more likely to fall in the very poor ratings for each of these

manifestations of academic engagement. For the teacher reports, no significant gender differences emerged for the following academic behaviors—asking questions, teacher relations, peer relations, helping peers, or principal referrals. Interestingly, although teachers also did not report significant differences between boys and girls in English reading or English oral expression, or native language reading, oral, and written language, they did report that girls demonstrated better understanding of English. Furthermore, teachers reported that boys were more likely to have very poor or poor written English skills (79 percent of boys compared to 42 percent of girls). Overall the teachers perceived the girls in a much more positive light than the boys. One teacher response summarizes well the general outlook of many of the teachers:

Girls, in general...tend to be more willing to buckle down, do their work, get all of their homework in. With boys, lots of times, there is more of a tendency to get distracted, to take as a role some anti-social types of behavior.

Table 1
Teacher reported levels of behavioral engagement by gender (n=297)

		Boys	Girls	Chi-Square P value
Attention	Very Poor/Poor	24%	13%	.002
	Good/Very Good	47%	67%	
Motivation/ Efforts	Very Poor/Poor	30%	11%	.0001
	Good/Very Good	44%	68%	
Behavior	Very Poor/Poor	13%	9%	.002
	Good/Very Good	61%	77%	
Attendance	Very Poor/Poor	9%	8%	.02
	Good/Very Good	71%	79%	
Punctuality	Very Poor/Poor	8%	7%	.02
	Good/Very Good	68%	79%	
Homework	Never	7%	1%	.0001
	Occasionally	21%	12%	
	Almost Always	27%	38%	
	Always	19%	36%	

Relational engagement. Relational engagement is the degree to which students report meaningful and supportive relationships in school with adults as well as peers. We consider both the emotional as well as tangible functions of these relationships. Relational engagement was assessed by a composite score based on responses to a four-point Likert scale (from very true to very false) on thirteen items such as “Teachers care about me and what happens to me in class;” “I can count on my friends to help me in school;” and “If I have questions about school work, I can count on someone there to help me.” Strikingly, we found that boys reported lower levels of relational engagement in school than girls ($F= 5.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

Relationships with Teachers and Administrators

Our structured student interview data indicated that boys tended to report more conflict with administrators and teachers at school than girls. Boys were particularly more likely than girls to report experiencing or witnessing their male friends’ negative interactions with the security guard at school. Boys were also more likely than girls to perceive schools as a “prison.”

A boy from El Salvador told us:

(At school] I don’t like them taking electronic devices (pagers, cell phones) away, it’s ridiculous; (our school) is a closed campus; it doesn’t get windows; (it is) too old. They want to put cameras; we’re going to be prisoners...not good when security wants to catch you. They are rude and rough with the students. The security often throws you to the ground, not to me, but I have seen it.

A Dominican boy stated in response to the question about “how do teachers and administrators treat most students?” in the following way:

Bad. One time, a security guard threw my friend to the ground to search him because he saw my friend had a small knife in his pants’ pocket. Another example is the teachers who always screaming “go to class” and threatening you with suspending you from

school. They say all these yelling at you. Everything is bad, if you talk, listen to music, etc.

Similarly, a Chinese boy who later dropped out of high school responded to the question “How do you feel about your school?” by saying: “Quite good. In terms of playing, quite fun to play. Easy to cut classes. I can walk out any time I want. Things I don’t like? Of course the security guards. They always stop me and ask me many things, probably because of my appearance.” When asked “How do teachers and administrators treat most students?” he responded: “Not much. Teaching is just a job. Teachers just try to get by day by day and get salary at the end of the month, whether you learn things or not, it’s not their business.”

The interview data also suggested that boys reported more racism at school than girls. For example, when asked his feelings about his school, one Dominican boy told us:

The school environment is fine. The majority of the teachers are friendly, but some never leave the racism against Hispanics. What I like most is to share with people and to learn. What I don’t like the most is the teachers’ racism, and that some teachers do not care about the students... A teacher that I asked to speak slow because I didn’t understand much English, told me that is what for I had come to the US for and here English is spoken and he told me to go back to Santo Domingo.

Similarly, another boy reported,

Sometimes I didn’t like some teachers. One teacher (Puerto Rican male) use to call me racial slurs in a joking manner. I used to hate those comments and told him so but he continued doing so. I got picked on by a teacher so much that once I was going to hit him. I got suspended for 8 days for it and he never got even reprimanded.

The immigrant boys in our study reflect on their lack of connection to, and their hostile and racist experiences with their teachers and administrators. The boys appear to respond to these largely negative interactions with teachers by effectively “checking out” of the academic process.

Teacher Expectations

Consistent with Lopez's (in press) insightful ethnographic observations, teachers in our study report having different expectations for the boys than for the girls. A teacher in the Boston area admitted:

I find the girls are far more focused when it comes to their education. Also keep in mind, teacher perceptions play a key role. We tend to know that if a girl is very quiet she is a very good student and we tend to nurture that type of individual far more. It may explain why a lot of girls tend to be successful.

Field notes taken by a researcher working with the LISA project in the San Francisco Bay area also reveal gender-based expectations from teachers:

The teacher told me that before she started teaching she got 'cultural awareness training' about the Mexican community in San Diego. She said: 'they told me that Latino boys are aggressive and really, really, really, macho and very hard to teach. And they taught me that the girls are pure sweetness.' I asked her if she thinks these 'insights' are true. 'Well, yes' was her response."

Teachers in our study readily admitted to favoring girls:

Girls...are more hardworking, more than boys are. They are also neater with the work, more organized...I usually favor girls more than boys, I also favor children that work diligently day after day, not necessarily the more intelligent ones...Girls are more respectful than boys are.

Consistent with our survey findings regarding teachers reports of behavioral engagement, the teachers told us in their interviews that they typically had more negative perceptions of the boys than the girls. These negative teacher expectations may well contribute to gender differences in academic outcomes.

Discussion

Consistent with the literature, data from our study suggest that immigrant boys tend to demonstrate lower academic achievement and encounter more challenges in school than immigrant girls. From the student self-report data, we learn that boys do not report less cognitive or behavior engagement in school than girls. However, boys report being more disengaged relationally in the school than girls. They also tend to feel less support from teachers and staff and are more likely to perceive school as a negative, hostile, and racist environment. In addition, the teachers themselves report having more negative expectations of the boys than the girls. Thus, boys' poorer academic achievement and performance may not be due to less academic interest or capacity for learning ("cognitive engagement") or from less effort applied in relation to schoolwork ("behavior engagement"). Rather, their poorer academic performance may be due to the combination of low social support ("relational engagement"), hostile experiences in school, and negative teacher expectations. In other words, negative social relations in school may be an important factor in explaining why immigrant boys are doing worse in school than their female peers.

Social relations. A critical difference between boys and girls is in the realm of social relationships. Social relationships serve a number of crucial functions including: providing a sense of attachment and support within trusting relationships; inculcating aspirations, goals, and values; and conferring status and identity, among others (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In particular, relationships within schools provide several forms of support critical to academic outcomes including: access to knowledge about academic subjects, college, the labor market, and how bureaucracies operate; as well as advocacy; role modeling; and advice (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In a series of elegant studies of Mexican-American adolescent social networks within schools,

Stanton-Salazar found that although boys were more likely to report family cohesiveness and supportive parental relationships, their school based relationships were less supportive. Boys were less likely to be “engaged with teachers and counselors...boys appeared to communicate less, which forced them to infer the meaning of an agent's words and actions, usually from a position of little trust” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 203).

As part of the L.I.S.A. study, a separate interview was administered specifically to assess networks of relationships. Participants were asked to name the most significant people in their lives and people that were important to them in the following categories—family members (including extended family), peers, adults in schools, adults in the community (e.g., mentors, neighbors, church members, community leaders), as well as individuals still in country of origin. In addition, they were asked about pertinent demographic data about these significant individuals (including racial and national background, language of communication, frequency and place of contact). Finally, using a modified Q-sort strategy, the participants were asked to name which of these individuals served which functions (e.g., which of these people helps you with your homework? which of these people can you tell your troubles to? which of these people tells you about what to do to get to college?).

Analyses of these data were quite revealing. Although there were no gender differences in the number of people spontaneously named in the initial list of “most important people” in their lives, there was a significant difference in quality of these relations. Boys were more likely than girls to report they had no one to turn to for specific functions, including: no one to help with homework (24 percent of boys vs. 15 percent of girls); no one to tell their problems to (17 percent of boys vs. 5 percent of girls); no one they trust to keep their secrets (15 percent of boys vs. 8 percent of girls); and no one to turn to if they needed to borrow money (7 percent of boys

vs. 2 percent of girls). In addition, we found that girls were more likely to name supportive relationships specifically with adults in their schools than were boys (49 percent of girls had at least one supportive adult relationship in school vs. 37 percent of boys).

These findings support the other findings reported in this chapter. They suggest that gender differences in the quality of relationships in and out of school may help to explain the gender differences in academic outcomes. If boys are not receiving as much support (e.g., for school-related as well as non-school related difficulties) and guidance in and out of school, and are more likely to experience overt acts of hostility and low expectations from their teachers, they may find it much more difficult to achieve academically than girls. Research with non-immigrant youth has consistently found that teacher/student support as well as student/student support is critical for the academic achievement of both boys and girls (see Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998).

Negative social mirroring. In addition to problems of support and expectations, there are other reasons, including negative social mirroring, that may help to explain why immigrant boys may perform more poorly in school than immigrant girls. Anthropological cross-cultural evidence from a variety of different regions suggests that the social context and ethos of reception plays an important role in immigrant adaptation. As John Ogbu (1978) and George DeVos (1980) have persuasively demonstrated, for youth coming from backgrounds that historically have been and continue to be depreciated and disparaged within the host society, academic outcomes are compromised. Boys from disparaged groups appear to be particularly at risk of poor academic outcomes. This is true, for example, for Afro-Caribbean youth in Britain, Canada, and in the United States; for North African males in Belgium; Koreans in Japan; and for Moroccans and Algerians in France (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). These developing

youth, like the children in our sample, are keenly aware of the prevailing ethos of hostility of the dominant culture (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). We asked our sample of children to complete the sentence “Most Americans think that [Chinese, Dominicans, Haitians, Mexicans –depending on the child’s country of origin] are...” Disturbingly, the modal response was the word “bad.” Others, even more disconcerting included: “stupid,” “useless,” “garbage,” “gang members,” “lazy,” and “we don’t exist.” When expectations of sloth, irresponsibility, low intelligence, and danger are reflected in a number of social mirrors including the media, the classroom, and the street, the outcome can be devastating for immigrant children’s adaptation (Adams, 1990; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Psychologically, what do children do with this negative reception? Are the attitudes of the host culture internalized, denied, or resisted? The most positive possible outcome perhaps is to be goaded into “I’ll show you. I’ll make it in spite of what you think of me.” More likely, however, the child responds with self-doubt and shame, setting low aspirations in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: “They are probably right. I’ll never be able to do it.” Yet another worrisome response is that of “You think I’m bad. Let me show you how bad I can be.” Immigrant boys’ less positive attitudes toward school may be attributable not only to their different experiences at school but also to how they are perceived within a larger social context (Lee, 2001; Lopez, forthcoming; Olsen, 1997; Qin-Hilliard, 2001; Sarroub, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters, 1996).

Peer pressure. Another factor that may help to explain boys' poorer school performance may be related to peer pressure. Many researchers have noted that peer pressure to reject school is quite strong among boys (Fordham, 1996; Gibson, 1988; Qin-Hilliard, 2001; Smith, 1999; Waters, 1996). Furthermore, behaviors that gain respect with their peers often bring boys in conflict with their teachers. Some researchers point out that immigrant boys from certain ethnic

backgrounds are more pressured by their peers to reject school when compared to immigrant girls (Gibson, 1993; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters, 1996). In her research with Punjabi youth, Gibson (1993) indicates that immigrant boys in general are more likely than their sisters to develop an “oppositional relationship” with the educational system or to see schooling as a “threat to their identity.”

Field notes from the L.I.S.A. study suggest that immigrant boys are more quickly recruited into the mores of their new social environments that are often in deeply impoverished inner-city schools that do not foster cultures of high achievement orientation. Observing an English as a Second language middle-school classroom, a researcher on our team noted, “I didn’t see much interaction between recently arrived immigrant girls and the Chicana (young women of Mexican origin that have been in U.S. for two or more generations) students. In contrast, the immigrant boys seemed to be taken under the wing of the ‘backroom boys’”--a term the researcher coined to describe disengaged boys that sat in the back of the classroom often disrupting instruction. Another set of field notes revealed: “In contrast to the recently arrived immigrant boys, recently arrived immigrant girls sit to the front left of the classroom. They tend to huddle together, and are very quiet. They don’t participate in class but they follow along...as a strategy of survival.”

Statements made by a number of teachers reveal similar patterns of boys’ more rapid integration into their social settings. A teacher working in a largely Latino high school in the Boston area noted:

In terms of the guys, one of the hardest things I see is they need to become tough. Dialogue becomes something of the past. You have to save face, you have to argue it out. The lack of tolerance is much more pronounced. The readiness to fist fight, to take it out...it has a lot to do with the environment of our schools and cities.

Another teacher noted: “In Hispanic culture it’s not too cool to be smart, carrying books...[This affects boys more than girls] because they don’t want to be harassed.” A teacher working with a diverse group of immigrant origin students told us:

The males seem to have more leeway, more freedom to be with friends and so they kind of become a little bit more, too, maybe I shouldn’t let anyone here hear me say that—too Americanized...The ones who still retain their customs from their country...actually do better academically...[The problem of adopting] “the clothing, speech, slang, and other mannerisms” [of the new culture is] not really so much with the young ladies.

Hence, as Portes (1998) has noted, social relations can generate positive as well as negative social capital. Peer pressure to be cool, tough, and possible “American” may make it difficult for immigrant boys to do well in school.

Family responsibilities. Gender differences in family responsibilities at home may also play a role in explaining differences in academic outcomes between girls and boys. Research findings consistently suggest that compared with their brothers, immigrant girls have many more responsibilities at home (Lee, 2001; Olsen, 1997; Qin-Hilliard, 2001; Sarroub, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 1996). Valenzuela (1999) finds that compared with boys, immigrant girls participate more in tasks that require “greater responsibility” and “detailed explanations.” Their roles include translating; advocating in financial, medical, legal transactions; and acting as surrogate parents. Eldest children in particular are expected to assist with such tasks as babysitting, feeding younger siblings, getting siblings ready for school in the morning, and escorting them to school (Valenzuela 1999). Similarly, Lee (2001) finds that Hmong girls, in particular, are often expected to cook, clean, and take care of younger siblings. Olsen (1997) observes in her study that besides childcare and household chores like cleaning and washing, many immigrant girls, especially the oldest daughters, need to work to help the family,.

Based on two waves of data collection, we found that although boys and girls did not report different levels of responsibility for translating, girls were significantly more likely to report responsibilities for cooking and childcare. Several teachers in our study expressed concern about excessive home expectations for immigrant girls. It is also possible, however, that developing a sense of responsibility at home may transfer to school settings. Jurkovic et al. (in press) found that while “filial responsibilities” sometimes compete with schooling pursuits, performing care-taking tasks also provided youth with an increased sense of personal and interpersonal competence.” Hence, these responsibilities may provide unanticipated benefits to girls who shoulder greater household responsibilities.

Conclusion

Our data present strong evidence not only of poorer academic performance among immigrant boys than among immigrant girls, but also the reasons why such gender differences may exist. Our data suggest that immigrant boys may not struggle in school because they have less internal motivation or are less able to achieve in school (i.e., cognitive or behavioral engagement). Rather they may struggle because of the social context that offers them little support, guidance, and encouragement to do well in school. The context of the school, home, and peers as well as the larger culture should be considered in any discussion of gender differences in academic outcomes among immigrant youth.

It is important to note, however, that there may be tremendous variation across and within immigrant groups that needs to be explored. Not all immigrant girls thrive in school and not all immigrant boys struggle in school. For example, Lee (2001) finds that although Hmong adolescents, girls tend to have higher motivation and achievement, they were also more likely than boys to drop out of high school. Similarly, Gibson (1988) finds that Punjabi boys took more

advanced courses, had higher rates of college attendance, and earned higher degrees than Punjabi girls. A recent article in the *New York Times* reports that although Latino boys have a higher high school dropout rate (28 percent) than Latina girls (26 percent), Latina girls are found to leave school earlier than boys and are less likely to return (Canedy, 2001). This trend favoring boys seems to be particularly strong in cultures that are considered more traditional and have stricter gender role expectations and gender grading (Gibson, 1988; Qin-Hilliard, 2001; Sarroub, 2001). These findings underscore the need to look at within and across gender group variation in school outcomes among immigrant adolescents.

It is also important to note that although the focus of this chapter was on gender differences, there were a lot of similarities detected between the immigrant boys and girls. For example, perceptions of school safety, attitudes toward Americans, beliefs about American attitudes toward their ethnic group, as well as responses on many projective narrative tasks revealed no gender differences. A number of common denominator experiences—including shared immigration stress, schooling and neighborhood contexts as well as the ethos of reception— may account for the similarities in the experiences of immigrant boys and girls (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Future research should continue to consider gender differences in immigrant children's adaptation. We should also search for the commonalities, as well as the particular risks, challenges, and protective characteristics that are relevant to the lives of all immigrant youth. Inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, triangulated research is essential to begin to understand the lived experiences, in and out of school, of the understudied population of immigrant youth. Given the high proportion of immigrant origin youth, their adaptations will have crucial implications for the nation we become.

ENDNOTES

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² In discussing immigrant youth we will be referring to both the first generation (that is children who are born abroad) as well as the second generation (children born in the new land of foreign both parents).

³ All difference reported between boys and girls are tested with chi-square analyses. Only differences that reach statistical significance are reported in this chapter.

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