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# *Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation*<sup>1</sup>

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The segmented assimilation theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding the process by which the new second generation – the children of contemporary immigrants – becomes incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society and the different outcomes of this process. This article examines the issues and controversies surrounding the development of the segmented assimilation theory and reviews the state of recent empirical research relevant to this theoretical approach. It also highlights main conclusions from recent research that bear on this theory and their implications for future studies.

The segmented assimilation theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding the process by which the new second generation – the children of contemporary immigrants – becomes incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society and the different outcomes of this process. Portes and Zhou (1993) have observed three possible patterns of adaptation most likely to occur among contemporary immigrants and their offspring: “One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight into the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity” (p. 82). These scholars refer to the divergent destinies from these distinct patterns of adaptation as “segmented assimilation,” posing an important theoretical question of what makes some immigrant groups become susceptible to downward mobility and what allows them to bypass or to get out of this undesirable route. This article examines the issues and controversies surrounding the development of the segmented assimilation theory and reviews the state of recent empirical research relevant to this theoretical approach.

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## *ASSIMILATION TO WHAT? CONCEPTS, ANOMALIES, AND CONTROVERSIES*

### *Classical Assimilationism Revisited*

In the literature on immigrant adaptation, the assimilation perspective has dominated much of the sociological thinking on the subject for the larger part of this century. Central to this perspective are the assumptions that there is a natural process by which diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture and to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society; that this process consists of gradually deserting old cultural and behavioral patterns in favor of new ones; and that, once set in motion, this process moves inevitably and irreversibly toward assimilation. Classical assimilationists argue that migration leads to a situation of the "marginal man," in which immigrants are pulled in the direction of the host culture but drawn back by the culture of their origin (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937). This painful bipolar process, as Park sees it, entails a natural race relations cycle of contact, competition, accommodation (Park, 1928). Impacted by biotic forces (impersonal competition) and social forces (communication and cooperation), diverse immigrant groups from underprivileged backgrounds are expected to eventually abandon their old ways of life and completely "melt" into the mainstream through residential integration and occupational achievement in a sequence of succeeding generations.

While Park emphasizes the natural process leading the reduction of social and cultural heterogeneity to the neglect of structural constraints, Warner and Srole (1945) highlight the potency of such institutional factors as social class, phenotypical ranking, and racial/ethnic subsystems in determining the rate of assimilation, also in terms of residential and occupational mobility. According to Warner and Srole, the assimilation of ethnic minorities is especially problematical because the subordination of minority groups is largely based on ascribed characteristics. They argue that, although differences in social status and economic opportunity based on culture and language will disappear over the course of several generations, the social mobility of readily identifiable minority groups, especially blacks, is likely to be confined within racial-caste boundaries. They thus identify skin color, language of origin, and religion as key factors in determining the level of acceptance of minorities by the dominant group. These factors, they maintain, are combined with socioeconomic status to set the speed of complete assimilation for various groups.

While Warner and Srole make an important contribution to the Parkian tradition by introducing into the framework the interaction effects between internal group characteristics and external institutional factors in explaining

the pace of assimilation, Gordon (1964) provides a typology of assimilation to capture the complexity of the process, ranging from cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude-receptional, behavior-receptional, to civic assimilation. In Gordon's view, immigrants begin their adaptation to their new country through cultural assimilation, or acculturation. Cultural assimilation, is for Gordon, a necessary first step and is considered the top priority on the agenda of immigrant adjustment. However, Gordon argues that acculturation does not automatically lead to other forms of assimilation (*i.e.*, large-scale entrance into the institutions of the host society or intermarriage), or that acculturation may take place and continue indefinitely even when no other type of assimilation occurs. Ethnic groups may remain distinguished from one another because of spatial isolation and lack of contact, and their full assimilation will depend ultimately on the degree to which these groups gain the acceptance of the dominant population. Structural assimilation, in contrast, is the "keystone of the arch of assimilation" that will inevitably lead to other stages of assimilation (Gordon, 1964:81). Though vague about how groups advance from one stage to another and what causes change, Gordon anticipates, nevertheless, that most ethnic groups will eventually lose all their distinctive characteristics and cease to exist as ethnic groups as they pass through the stages of assimilation, eventually intermarrying with the majority population and entering its institutions on a primary-group level.

From the classical assimilationist standpoint, distinctive ethnic traits such as old cultural ways, native languages, or ethnic enclaves are sources of disadvantages (Child, 1943; Warner and Srole, 1945; Wirth, 1925/1956). These disadvantages negatively affect assimilation, but the effects are greatly reduced in each of the successive generations, since native-born generations adopt English as the primary means of communication and become more and more similar to the earlier American population in life skills, manner, and outlook. Although complete acculturation to the dominant American culture may not ensure all immigrants full social participation in the host society, immigrants must free themselves from their old cultures in order to begin rising up from marginal positions. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, America seemed to have absorbed the great waves of immigrants who arrived primarily from Europe. Sociological studies have indicated progressive trends of social mobility across generations of immigrants and increasing rates of intermarriages, as determined by educational attainment, job skills, length of stay since immigration, English proficiency, and levels of exposure to American culture (Alba, 1985; Chiswick, 1977; Greeley, 1976; Lieberman and Waters, 1988; Sandberg, 1974; Wyrwal, 1961).

*Anomalies*

Beginning in the 1960s, the classical assimilation perspective with its application to the more recently arrived non-European immigrant groups has met with challenges. Instead of eventual convergence into the mainstream core as predicted by assimilation theories, recent research has witnessed several anomalies. The first anomaly concerns the persistent ethnic differences across generations. Conventional assimilation models of immigrant adaptation predict assimilation as a function of the length of U.S. residence and succeeding generations. But this is not how it always seems to work. Recent studies have revealed an opposite pattern: the longer the U.S. residence the more maladaptive the outcomes, whether measured in terms of school performance, aspirations, or behavior and regardless of immigrant groups (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Rumbaut and Ima, 1988; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Landale and Oropesa (1995) found that the disadvantages were reproduced, rather than diminished, in poor immigrant families who had lived a longer time in the United States. They found, for example, significant increases of children living in single-parent families across generations of U.S. residence and across many Asian and Latin American nationality groups. By the third generation, in particular, the prevalence of single-parent headship among all nationality groups of Latin American children (ranging from 40% of Mexicans, 50% of Cubans, to 70% of Dominicans) and Filipino children (40%) constituted a serious disadvantage. This situation implies that even if the parental generation is able to work hard to achieve higher positions and higher incomes, their children's access to these gains may be seriously circumvented by acculturation (Landale and Oropesa, 1995).

Studies on intergenerational mobility have also revealed divergent rather than convergent outcomes, suggesting that early and insignificant differentials in advantage result in substantial differences in educational and occupational mobility in later years (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963; Perlmann, 1988). In their study of educational attainment of 25 religioethnic groups in the United States, Hirschman and Falcon (1985) found that neither generation nor length of U.S. residence significantly influenced educational outcomes. Specifically, children of highly educated immigrants consistently fared much better in school than fourth or fifth generation descendants of poorly educated ancestors, regardless of religioethnic backgrounds. In a study of the Irish, Italian, Jewish, and African Americans in Providence, Rhode Island, Perlmann (1988) showed that, even with family background factors held constant, ethnic differences in levels of schooling and economic attainment persisted in the second and later generations and that schooling was not equally commensurate with occupational advancement for African Americans as for other European Americans across generations.

Clearly, outcomes of adaptation vary, depending on where immigrants settle – whether in affluent middle-class suburbs or in impoverished innercity ghettos. While the emergence of a middle-class population is a distinctive aspect of today's immigration, a disproportionately large number of immigrant children has converged on underprivileged and linguistically distinctive neighborhoods. There, the immigrants and their children come into direct daily contact with the poor rather than with the middle class; they are also apt to encounter members of native minorities and other immigrants rather than members of the dominant majority, creating new obstacles for assimilation.

Another anomaly is what Gans (1992a) describes as the "the second generation decline." Gans noted three possible scenarios for today's new second generation: education-driven mobility, succession-driven mobility, and niche improvement. He observed that immigrant children from less fortunate socioeconomic backgrounds had a much harder time than other middle-class children succeeding in school. A significant number of the children of poor, especially dark-skinned, immigrants faced multiple risks of being trapped in permanent poverty in the era of stagnant economic growth and in the process of Americanization because these immigrant children "will either not be asked, or will be reluctant, to work at immigrant wages and hours as their parents did but will lack job opportunities, skills and connections to do better" (Gans, 1992a: 173-174). Gans anticipated a dismal prospect for the children of the less fortunate who must confront high rates of unemployment, crime, alcoholism, drug use, and other pathologies associated with poverty and the frustration of rising expectation. Perlmann and Waldinger (1996) called this phenomenon "the second generation revolt." They argue that such revolt was not merely caused by exogenous factors, such as racial discrimination, declining economic opportunities, and the exposure to the adversarial outlooks of native-born youths, but also by endogenous factors inherent in the immigration process, including premigration class standing and the size and the nature of immigrant inflows.

Still another anomaly is the peculiar outcomes of contemporary immigrant adaptation. In America's fastest growing knowledge-intensive industries, foreign-born engineers and other highly-skilled professionals disproportionately take up various key technical positions, and some even ownership positions. In immigrant enclaves, ethnic commercial banks, corporate-owned extravagant restaurants, and chain supermarkets stand side by side with traditional rotating credit associations, coffee/tea houses, and mom-and-pop stores. In upscale middle-class suburbs, wealthy immigrants with "bags" of monies buy up luxurious homes and move right in, jumping several steps ahead and bypassing the traditional bottom-up order. In urban public schools, neither valedictorians nor delinquents are atypical among immigrant children regardless of timing and racial or socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, in the past fifteen

years, the list of top ten award winners of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search, one of the country's most prestigious high school academic contests, has been dominated by the 1.5 or second-generation immigrants. Many of these immigrant children are "FOBs" (fresh off the boat) and from families of moderate socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhou, 1997). While immigrant children are overrepresented on lists of award-winners or on academic fast tracks, many others are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors, school failure, street gangs, and youth crime. Even Asian Americans, the so-called "model minority," have seen a steady rise of youth gang memberships. Some of the Asian gang members are from suburban middle-class families, attend magnet schools, and are exceptionally good students.

### *Controversies and Alternative Perspectives*

These anomalies immediately question the applicability of the classical straight-line assimilation, invoking heated theoretical controversies and the development of alternative frameworks. Gans (1992a, 1992b) advances a bumpy-line approach to the defense of classical assimilationism. He argues that acculturation or Americanization has continued among immigrants, "be they the descendants of the European immigrants who arrived here between 1880 and 1925, or of the latest newcomers to America" (1992b:42). However, Gans asserts that these immigrants also construct their own acculturation and assimilation in response to environmental pressures. Schools, American peers, and the media exert powerful influences on immigrant children; the prevailing youth culture and the freedoms (particularly personal choices in dress, dating, sexual practices) unavailable in their old country also overwhelm them. Because of exposure, these children are likely to develop expectations of life in America much higher than those of their parents; they will neither be willing to accept immigrant parental work norms nor work in "un-American" conditions as many of their parents do. Thus, some of the children may not even be able to carry out their parents' wishes and expectations of moving up and "making it in America," much less to fulfill their own expectations. Gans considers these divergent patterns as various bumps (either imposed by the host society or invented by immigrants themselves) on the road to eventual assimilation into "nonethnic" America. He implies that for the new second generation, especially for the children of dark-skinned, poor and unskilled immigrants, "delayed acculturation" may be more desirable.

Alba and Nee (1997) too, are enthusiastic defenders of classical assimilationism. They believe that assimilation also should work for contemporary immigrants because it has worked so well in the past for turn-of-the-century immigrants. They argue that the anomalies noted above are adverse effects of contemporary structural changes that classical assimilationism is unable to

anticipate. First, the continuously high rate of mass immigration has limited the host society's "breathing space" for absorbing and integrating immigrants and has constantly replenished ethnic communities, setting a major road block to assimilation. Second, the growing "hourglass" economy, with knowledge-intensive, high-paying jobs at one end and labor-intensive, low-paying jobs at the other, has taken away several rungs of the mobility ladder that are crucial for enabling immigrants, especially those with little education and few job skills, who started from the bottom to climb up. Third, the distinctiveness of skin color of most new immigrant groups, especially of those deemed phenotypically black, may exert a powerful influence on the pace of assimilation. Alba and Nee consider the diverse outcomes simply as the differences in the speed of assimilation and attribute them to variations in pre-migration as well as post-migration human capital characteristics, spatial distribution, coethnic populations, group size, and continual mass migration. Despite intergroup differences, Alba and Nee expect that, with enough time, contemporary immigrants will look more like other Americans and become assimilated into the American middle class through intermarriage, residential integration, and occupational mobility.

Explicit or implicit in these arguments lie the general assumptions that there is a unified core of American society, be it "nonethnic" America or "middle" America, into which immigrants are expected to assimilate, and that, with enough time, assimilation will eventually occur among all immigrants and their offspring regardless of national origins, phenotypical characteristics, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Other scholars disagree; their criticisms target primarily at the assimilationist ideas of a unified core, ethnic-cultural inferiority, and irreversible assimilation. What is being debated, though, is not whether assimilation will eventually happen among contemporary immigrants, but whether the assimilation framework is applicable to their American experiences.

Multiculturalists forcefully reject the assimilationist assumption of a unified core. Scholars from this perspective perceive American society as composed of a fluid and heterogeneous collection of ethnic and racial minority groups, as well as the dominant majority group of European Americans (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Handlin, 1973). They believe that immigrants actively shape their own lives rather than exist passively as beneficiaries or victims of "ineluctable modernizing and Americanizing forces" (Conzen, 1991). Thus, they are concerned with a fundamental question of how different the world may look if the experiences of the excluded are placed at the center of our thinking. From this standpoint, premigration cultural attributes inherent to ethnicity are not assumed to be inferior traits which should necessarily be absorbed by the core culture of the host society; rather these primordial characteristics constantly interact with the host society to reshape and reinvent themselves. Greeley (1976:32) contends that "ethnicity is not a way of look-



ing back to the old world . . . [but] rather a way of being American, a way of defining yourself into the pluralist culture which existed before you arrived." Conzen and her associates (1992:4-5) conceptualize ethnicity as "a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes and historical memories," grounded in real-life context and social experience. According to these scholars, premigration cultural attributes cannot be equated with homeland cultures because immigrants tend to select carefully not only what to pack in their trunks to bring to America, but also what to unpack once settled. Homeland cultural norms and values may not be entirely inconsistent with those of the host country. Just as some aspects of immigrant cultural patterns may continue in a state of uneasy coexistence with the requirements of the host country, other aspects of immigrant cultural patterns may "fit" the requirements of life there or may even be prerequisites for "making it in America" (Fukuyama, 1993). Still others are modified, changed, adapted, transformed, reformed and negotiated in the course of immigrant adjustments (Garcia, 1996).

The multicultural perspective offers an alternative way of viewing the host society, treating members of ethnic minority groups as a part of the American population rather than as foreigners or outsiders, and presenting ethnic or immigrant cultures as integral segments of American society. However, the questions of "second generation decline" and "second-generation revolt" have been unanswered within this theoretical framework. While how people construct or invent their own ethnicity has been emphasized, how they also construct their own acculturation and assimilation has been understudied. Gans (1992a) points out that pressures of both formal acculturation (through schooling) and informal acculturation (through American peers and the media) will undoubtedly impinge on the second generation.

The elusiveness of ethnic characteristics also creates problems in the use of the multicultural framework as an explanatory tool. Each generation passes cultural patterns, often subtle patterns, to the next, but the mechanisms of this process are unclear, and many assumptions and attitudes of ethnic group members are hard to identify and measure (Archdeacon, 1983). Also, the constituents of American diversity are not equal; maintaining a distinctive ethnicity can both help and hinder the social mobility of ethnic group members. For example, first generation members of some immigrant minority groups, such as the Mexicans, have seldom been able to motivate their children to excel in school and move upward in the host society, while other groups, such as the Asians, have far more often succeeded in pushing younger people toward upward social mobility (Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997). After all, how immigrants become incorporated into the American mosaic has not been clearly theorized.

Another major theoretical stance is the structural perspective, which offers a framework for understanding the differences in social adaptation of ethnic minority groups in terms of advantages and disadvantages inherent to social structures rather than in the process of acculturation or selective Americanization. The structuralists, too, refute the assimilationist assumption of a “nonethnic” unified core and present an American society as a stratified system of social inequality, in which different social categories – whether birth-ascribed or not – have unequal access to wealth, power and privilege (Barth and Noel, 1972). From this perspective, immigrants and ethnic minorities are constrained by the ethnic hierarchy that systematically limits their access to social resources, such as opportunities for jobs, housing, and education, resulting in persistent racial/ethnic disparities in levels of income, educational attainment, and occupational achievement (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Portes and Borocz, 1989). Consequently, the benefits of “becoming American” depend largely on what stratum of American society absorbs the new immigrants. Overall, the structural perspective raises skepticism about eventual assimilation and interethnic accommodation as suggested by the assimilation perspective and implied by the multicultural perspective, because of inherent conflicts between the dominant and subordinate groups in the hierarchy. On the issue of immigrant adaptation, this perspective maintains that the process of becoming American may not lead uniformly to middle-class status, but rather to the occupation of different rungs on the ethnic hierarchy. The structural perspective has considerable plausibility in that it takes into account the effects of structural constraints. However, this theoretical framework is constructed at the “grand” level to predict macro processes and general patterns of social mobility; it thus lacks explanatory power on how to deal with the varied and disparate outcomes of a given process or pattern for diverse ethnic groups and the members of these groups who themselves display diverse socioeconomic characteristics.

### *SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION: IDEAS, CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH*

Theoretical controversies surrounding classical assimilationism are generally concerned with how immigrants adapt to American society and with the forces that promote or impede their progress. The assimilationist, multicultural and structural perspectives have approached similar issues from different standpoints. Assimilationists focus on the changes that a new environment can bring about in cultural patterns and describe how immigrants and their succeeding generations gradually move away from the old country ways. Multiculturalists recognize that original immigrant cultural patterns constantly reshape and reinvent themselves as an indispensable part of American

society and thus may never completely disappear. Structuralists emphasize that the extent to which immigrants adopt host country ways and the benefits of adopting these ways depend on the social and economic structure of the host country. While each of these perspectives makes a significant contribution to our understanding of immigrant adaptation, the issue on divergent destinies has been understudied. The segmented assimilation theory has thus come about to fill the gap, advancing an alternative framework for delving into the complex process of immigrant adaptation in postindustrial America.

Segmented assimilation can be viewed as a middle-range theory that concerns why different patterns of adaptation emerge among contemporary immigrants and how these patterns necessarily lead to the destinies of convergence or divergence. Drawing on the existing literature, this theory places the process of becoming American, in terms of both acculturation and economic adaptation, in the context of a society consisting of segregated and unequal segments and considers this process to be composed of at least three possible multidirectional patterns: the time-honored upward mobility pattern dictating the acculturation and economic integration into the normative structures of middle-class America; the downward-mobility pattern, in the opposite direction, dictates the acculturation and parallel integration into the underclass; and economic integration into middle-class America, with lagged acculturation and deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and solidarity (Portes and Zhou, 1993). The theory attempts to explain what determines into which segment of American society a particular immigrant group may assimilate.

Possible determinants are manyfold, including a range of individual-level factors and contextual factors. The most important individual-level factors influencing immigrant adaptation include education and other factors associated with exposure to American society, such as aspiration, English language ability, place of birth, age upon arrival, and length of residence in the United States. Structural factors include racial status, family socioeconomic backgrounds, and place of residence. The assimilation models also specify these two sets of variables, suggesting that educational achievement, stronger aspiration and motivation, proficiency in English, native birth or arrival at a young age, longer U.S. residence, lighter skin color, higher family class status, and residence outside ethnic enclaves should contribute to successful adaptation (Alba and Nee, 1997). However, the segmented assimilation theory diverts from the classical framework with regard to the effects of these determinants – it assumes that these two sets of determinants are in themselves of minimum importance and focuses instead on the interaction between the two. The discussion that follows elaborates on the conceptualization of the interaction effects, delineates some of the major concepts and propositions about segmented assimilation, and reviews empirical evidence from recent research that bears on these theoretical ideas.

*Structural Constraints: Changes in the Context of Reception*

The contemporary American context that greets immigrants and their children has changed drastically from the context that once greeted turn-of-the-century European immigrants. Several trends are particularly noteworthy. First, the gap between rich and poor, which progressively narrowed for most of the twentieth century, has been widening in recent years. The part of the American workforce, referred to as "knowledge workers" or as "symbolic analysts," has seen its economic advantages steadily increase as information technology and management become more critical to the economy (Drucker, 1993; Reich, 1992). At the same time, the situation of most American workers has worsened. Between 1979 and 1989, the incomes of the top 5 percent of American wage-earners increased from \$120,253 to \$148,438, while the incomes of the bottom 20 percent decreased from \$9,990 to \$9,431 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984, 1994). Over the course of the 1980s, 80 percent of American workers saw their real hourly wages go down by an average of about 5 percent. Blue collar jobs, the kinds of jobs generally available to newly arrived immigrants, not only pay less than in previous years, but there are also far fewer of them. Jobs in manufacturing and in unskilled labor have been disappearing at a particularly rapid rate (Mishel and Bernstein, 1992). Although the American economy has not yet taken on the shape of an "hourglass," the trend is toward expanding classes of poor and rich and a shrinking middle class. In such an economic structure, even U.S.-born Americans find their chances for economic mobility lessening. The situation for many immigrants is bleaker, except for the unusually fortunate, the highly educated, and the highly skilled (Waldinger, 1996).

Contemporary economic hardships are different from the hardships of the Great Depression and hardships in many Third World countries. Although there is a growing class of poor Americans, there are relatively few deaths from starvation in the United States. Until the early 1990s, the welfare state had made access to public assistance relatively easy (Rumbaut, 1994a; Tienda and Liang, 1994). While opportunities for stable jobs with good incomes were rare for low-income individuals, food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children were readily available. Public assistance did not provide a comfortable way of life, for welfare payments averaged less than half the amount defined as poverty level income (Sancton, 1992); it did provide, nonetheless, a means of existence for the chronically poor, unemployed, or underemployed. Yet, members of this expanding class of poor were not being offered chances for socioeconomic improvement; they were, for the most part, being fed and housed and maintained in their social and economic limbo.

These unfortunate circumstances were exacerbated just prior to the 1996 presidential election when President Bill Clinton signed a Republican welfare

reform bill. The bill limits public assistance to two continuous years and mandates a five-year lifetime maximum with neither public jobs nor childcare for recipients who exceed the limit, and nothing for their children. The implementation of the bill would change the nature of the welfare state in new and significant ways: it would cut off the lifeline of the poor, especially children, driving them into deeper poverty; it also would exclude legal immigrants from much access to basic forms of assistance, forcing poor immigrant families to swim or sink. Long-term effects of the welfare bill remain to be seen, but it appears that millions of children will be thrown into poverty, and chances for the truly disadvantaged to get out of poverty will be even more limited.

Second, poverty has been highly concentrated in the innercities in which most low-skilled immigrants converge. The poor are not, of course, being housed evenly across the American landscape. Even before new information technologies and the globalization of production began shrinking the American working class, the automobile industry promoted the suburbanization of the middle class. With the contraction of American manufacturing, and the suburbanization first of middle-class population and later of middle-class jobs, poverty has become concentrated in urban areas (Herbers, 1986; Muller, 1981). These changes have adversely affected not only individual minority members, but also minority communities. In central cities, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, and other members of immigrant minority groups do not simply predominate entire neighborhoods, they are also the poorest of their respective groups who are left behind by their affluent coethnics. Institutional discrimination and segregation have exacerbated the social and economic processes of minority concentration in low-income communities (Massey and Denton, 1993; Moore, 1989; Moore and Vigil, 1993; Wilson, 1987).

The creation of concentrated low-income neighborhoods has had social consequences for the people who live in these locales, and particularly for young people who form their expectations from the world they see around them. Increasing unemployment has resulted in a decrease in the number of marriageable men in a community and a corresponding increase in single female-headed households. Without middle-class models, without roles in economic production, and without roles in families, young men in low-income communities tend to become marginalized and alienated (Darity and Myers, 1995; Testa and Krogh, 1995; Wilson, 1987). Social isolation and deprivation have given rise to an "oppositional culture" among young people who feel excluded from mainstream American society and oppressed by it.

Neighborhoods affect schools since public school attendance in the United States is based on place of residence; the economic and social influences also are felt in neighborhood schools. Moreover, students in schools shape one

another's attitudes and expectations. In a disruptive urban environment caught between rising hopes and shrinking opportunities, younger members of native-born minorities have become increasingly skeptical about school achievement as a viable path to upward mobility and have thus responded to their bleak futures with resentment toward adult middle-class society and with rejection of mobility goals.

Third, lowered chances for mobility create frustration and pessimism for all American young people, but these emotions are most strongly felt by those at the bottom. When those at the bottom are also members of historically oppressed minority groups, the frustration is compounded by the need to maintain self-esteem, so that rejection of middle-class mores and opposition to authority become important strategies for psychological survival (Fordham, 1996). Likewise, while there is a strong anti-intellectual streak in American youth culture at all socioeconomic levels, the rejection of academic pursuits is especially intense in minority schools, where many students tend to identify teachers and school administrators with oppressive authority, see little hope in their future entry into the middle class, and rebel against learning. In today's second generation, a sizable proportion of the children live in poor urban neighborhoods and thus go to underprivileged schools dominated by other immigrant children or by other minority students. These schools provide poor learning environments and are often even dangerous places. Many immigrant children find themselves in classrooms with other immigrant children speaking a language other than English or with other native minority children, who either have problems of keeping up with schoolwork or consciously resist academic achievement. Because students in schools shape one another's attitudes and expectations, such an oppositional culture negatively affects educational outcomes of immigrant children.

### *Class and "Color"*

Family socioeconomic status shapes the immediate social conditions for adaptation. As noted above, the class status is the most crucial factor because it determines the type of neighborhoods in which children live, the quality of schools which they attend, and the group of peers with which they associate. Coleman and his associates (1966) report that children do better if they attend schools where classmates are predominantly from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Children who live in poor innercity neighborhoods confront social environments drastically different from those who live in affluent suburban neighborhoods. These children suffer from unequal distribution of educational resources, which seriously curtail their chances in life, trapping them further in isolated ghettos (Davis, 1993; Jencks and Mayer, 1990). Ghettoization, in turn, produces a political atmosphere and a mentality that

preserves class division along racial lines, leading to the greater alienation of minority children from American institutions and further diminishing their chances for upward mobility (Fainstein, 1995).

The significance of class has a direct implication on the adaptation outcomes of immigrant children. Those from middle-class backgrounds are able to benefit from financially secure families, good schools, safe neighborhoods, and other supportive formal and informal organizations, which ensure better life chances for them. Children with poorly educated and unskilled parents, in contrast, often find themselves growing up in underprivileged neighborhoods subject to poverty, poor schools, violence and drugs, and a generally disruptive social environment.

The "color" status of the majority of contemporary immigrants sets them apart from European Americans. Although many of them never may have experienced prejudice associated with a particular skin color or racial type in their homelands, immigrant children, especially those whose phenotypes resemble African Americans, have confronted a reality in their host society where their ascribed physical features may become a handicap, creating additional barriers en route to upward mobility (Waters, 1994; Portes, 1995). Recent research has found that the socioeconomic circumstances of today's predominantly nonwhite second generation vary by the skin color. Using the 1990 Census data, Oropesa and Landale (1997) showed that poverty rates for immigrant children ranged from 21 percent among non-Latino European Americans, 24 percent for non-Latino African Americans, 27 percent for Asian Americans, to 41 percent for Latino Americans. Among the second generation (U.S.-born with at least one foreign-born parent), there was a substantial drop in poverty rates for all racial groups, but the magnitude of the decline varied by race: while poverty rates between the first (or the 1.5) and second generation dropped more than half among non-Latino European-American and Asian-American children, they only dropped less than a third among non-Latino African-American and Latino-American children. The conditions for third generation children (U.S.-born children with U.S.-born parents) were most disturbing. Except for Asian Americans, there was no appreciable socioeconomic improvement between second and third generation non-Latino European Americans and Latino Americans, but there was a significant deterioration among third generation non-Latino African Americans, whose poverty rate jumped to 40 percent, a 26 percentage point increase from that of their first generation counterparts. These statistics reveal an obvious effect of race, implying a severe class handicap associated with skin colors.

Racial status influences the social adaptation of immigrant children in ways closely connected to family socioeconomic status. Indeed, Wilson (1978) has argued that contemporary racial inequality has become largely a matter of social class. Past racism, in his view, essentially delays the entry of

racial minority members into full participation in the American economy until the old blue collar opportunities have largely disappeared, leaving non-whites in jobless neighborhoods. While the Wilsonian approach emphasizes the impact of economic restructuring, the segmented assimilation theory places more emphasis on the effect of continuing racial discrimination.

One such effect is residential segregation on the basis of class and race. Massey and Denton (1987) provide convincing evidence that the physical and social isolation of many black Americans are produced by ongoing conscious, discriminatory actions and policies, and not simply by racism in past historical periods.

Minority children have suffered from unequal distribution of economic and educational resources that seriously curtail their chances in life and trap them in isolated ghettos. Consequently, the inequalities of class and race that plague American society are carried into the American educational system. Innercity schools then become "arenas of injustice" that provide unequal opportunities on the basis of race and class (Keniston, 1977). Davis (1993) found that poor African American and Latino-American families who moved from innercity neighborhoods did better in school and in labor markets than those left behind. The pattern generally held true for immigrant children who attended suburban schools.

Another effect is the development of an "adversarial subculture" among those who are trapped in innercity ghettos (Portes and Zhou, 1993:83). The children and grandchildren of earlier immigrants or native minorities who have failed to move up the socioeconomic ladder have concentrated in inner cities; and to a large extent, their unfortunate circumstances are a direct result of racial discrimination coupled with economic restructuring (Wilson, 1978). These downtrodden native minorities have thus reacted to racial oppression by constructing resistance both as conformity – "unqualified acceptance of the ideological realm of the larger society" – and, more frequently, as avoidance – "willful rejection of whatever will validate the negative claims of the larger society" (Fordham, 1996:39). Consequently, they develop an adversarial outlook which entails the willful refusal of mainstream norms and values, rather than the failure of assimilation (Fordham, 1996; Kohl, 1994; Wilson, 1996). School achievement is seen as unlikely to lead to upward mobility, and high achievers are seen as sell-outs to oppressive authority. This adversarial outlook can exercise a powerful influence on the newcomers and their children in inner cities (Portes, 1995; Portes and Zhou, 1993).

The confrontation with the innercity places the second generation in a forced-choice dilemma: if they strive to meet their parents' expectations for academic achievement, they are likely to be ostracized as "uncool," "nerdy" or "acting white" by their American peers in schools; if they submit to peer pressure and attempts to become "American," on the other hand, they are likely



to adopt the cultural ways, including the language and behavior, of the innercity. The forced-choice dilemma confronting Chicano and Puerto Rican youth is a case in point. Gibson (1989) and Bourgois (1991), in their respective studies, found that Chicano students and Puerto Rican students who did well in school were forcefully excluded by their coethnic peers as "turnovers" acting "white." This dilemma encompasses three aspects: the immediate American context in which an adversarial outlook prevails; the internal structure of the immigrant community; and the social ties linking the second generation to this particular context and to the immigrant community (Portes, 1995). In innercities, exposure can either lead to downward mobility or confine immigrant offspring to the same slots at the bottom level from which they began (De Vos, 1975; Hirschman and Falcon, 1985; Ogbu, 1974; Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997; Portes, 1995; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997). In other words, this type of assimilation can cause them to be stigmatized and condemned by their own community as well as by the larger society; it can also destroy all of their parents' hopes for them.

### *The Ethnic Factor: Advantages and Disadvantages*

But how can one account for the fact that immigrant children tend to do better than their American peers of similar racial status and socioeconomic backgrounds who attend public schools in the same neighborhoods? Ogbu (1974) attributed different outcomes to a group's social status in the receiving society. He distinguished between immigrant/voluntary minorities and caste-like/involuntary minorities. In his line of reasoning, either group members of racial minorities could accept an inferior caste status and a sense of basic inferiority as part of their collective self-definition or they could create a positive view of their heritage on the basis of cultural and racial distinction, thereby establishing a sense of collective dignity (*also see* De Vos, 1975).

While this is true for both immigrant minorities and caste-like minorities, the difference lies in the advantageous or disadvantageous aspects of racial or ethnic identity. Ogbu (1989) showed from his research on Chinese-American students in Oakland, California, that in spite of cultural and language differences and relatively low economic status, these students had grade point averages that ranged from 3.0 to 4.0. He attributed their academic success to the integration of these students into the family and the community, which placed high values on education and held positive attitudes toward public schools.

Race or ethnicity may be related to performance in the school system for cultural reasons, as well as for purely socioeconomic reasons. It is possible that cultural values, such as a tradition of respect for teachers, affect how young people respond to the American institution of public education. The experi-

ence of immigration, moreover, can reshape cultural values. Ogbu (1974, 1983, 1989, 1991) pointed out that immigrant groups frequently sought upward mobility, so that education often came to occupy a central place in immigrant aspirations. But the deliberate cultivation of ethnicity may also be a factor. Gibson (1989) for example, found that the outstanding performance of Punjabi children in a relatively poor rural area of Northern California was a result of parental pressure put on children to adhere to their own immigrant families and to avoid excessive Americanization. Similarly, Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1989) found that Southeast Asian refugee children (excluding Cambodians and Hmongs) excelled in the American school system, despite the disadvantaged location of their schools and their parents' lack of education and facility with English. These researchers, too, attributed Southeast Asian academic achievement to cultural values and practices unique to ethnic families. Even among Southeast Asian refugees, intra-ethnic effect was significant. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) found that Vietnamese high school students did much better in both GPAs and test scores than their Cambodian and Laotian peers and that, overall, the strongest predictor of GPA was the measure of ethnic resilience.

While more recent studies of the educational experiences of Asian-American children indicate that parents' socioeconomic status, length of U.S. residence, and homework hours significantly affect academic performance, these studies also show that controls for such factors do not eliminate the effect of ethnicity (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Rumbaut, 1995; Rumbaut, 1996; Rumbaut and Ima, 1988). Portes and Rumbaut (1996) reported findings from a large random sample of second-generation high school students in Florida and southern California, showing that parents' socioeconomic status, length of U.S. residence, and homework hours significantly affected academic performance, but that controlling for these factors did not eliminate the effect of ethnicity (Rumbaut, 1996). Kao and Tienda (1995) found, based on data from the National Education Longitudinal Studies (NELS), that parental nativity and children's birthplace had different effects on children's academic outcomes depending on race and ethnicity. Portes and MacLeod (1996), also using NELs, reported that the negative effect of disadvantaged group memberships among immigrant children was reinforced rather than reduced in suburban schools, but that the positive effect of advantaged group memberships remained significant even in innercity schools.

In a recent research on adolescent development, though originally not intending to focus on ethnic differences, Steinberg (1996) revealed a surprisingly prominent and strong role that ethnicity played in structuring adolescents' lives, both in and out of school. He found that Asian-American students outperformed European-American students who, in turn, outperformed

African-American and Latino-American students by significantly large margins; the ethnic differences remained marked and consistent across nine different high schools under study after controlling for social class, family structure, and place of birth of parents. He also found that the ethnic effect persists in important explanatory variables of school success, such as the belief in the payoff of schooling, attributional styles, and peer groups. Steinberg concluded that ethnicity emerged just as important a factor as social class and gender in defining and shaping the everyday lives of American children.

However, the advantages attached to ethnicity may be limited for caste-like minorities. If a socially defined racial minority group wishes to assimilate but finds that normal paths of integration are blocked on the basis of race, the group may be forced to take alternative survival strategies that enable them to cope psychologically with racial barriers but that do not necessarily encourage school success. Matute-Bianchi (1986) found that the relationship between scholastic achievement and ethnicity did not hold for native-born Chicanos and Cholos who had been uprooted from their Mexican heritage and were trapped in a caste-like minority status. They reacted to their exclusion and subordination with resentment, regarded efforts toward academic achievement as "acting white," and constructed an identity in resistance to the dominant majority white society. Suárez-Orozco (1991) reached similar conclusions about native-born Mexican Americans, who perceived the effect of the educational system as continued exploitation.

Nonetheless, not all immigrant groups can fit into the category of immigrant/voluntary minority. In the case of Dominican immigrants, Pessar (1987) noted that many first-generation members of the group were able to improve their living standards by pooling resources in their households and that they were mostly satisfied with what they had achieved, comparing their lives in America to their lives in the Dominican Republic. However, she cast doubt on whether the struggle of first generation immigrants would steer the second generation to upholding their parent's aspirations and fulfilling their own expectations of socioeconomic mobility. She speculated that Dominican children were likely to be frustrated and disappointed if they found themselves trapped at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder because of "blatant discrimination" and "lack of access to prestigious social networks" linking them to higher professions (Pessar, 1987:124–125). Portes and Stepick (1993) and Waters (1994, 1996) also noted such a trend among Haitian youth in Miami and West Indian youth in New York City toward rapid assimilation into ghetto youth subcultures, at the cost of giving up their immigrant parents' pride of culture and hopes for mobility on the basis of ethnic solidarity. Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) also pointed out that the prospect of downward assimilation would disproportionately affect children of Mexican immigrants.

*Immigrant Cultures versus Leveling Pressures*

If growing up in poor neighborhoods has adverse social consequences for native-born minority children, how, then, do neighborhood and peer-group settings affect the children of contemporary immigrants? Socioeconomic status and race are not all that counts; just as important is social capital embedded in the family and the ethnic community. Recent research has shown that 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 (Portes, 1995; Portes and Schauffler, 1994; Rumbaut, 1994b, 1996; Suárez-Orozco, 1989; Zhou and Bankston, 1994).

Since members of racial or ethnic minorities can respond to the disadvantages imposed by the larger society via establishing group solidarity, it is important to consider the extent to which immigrants and their children are able to use a common ethnicity as a basis for cooperation to overcome structural disadvantages. In the segmented assimilation framework, ethnic networks are conceptualized as a form of social capital which influences children's adaptation through support as well as control. The central argument is that individual and structural factors are intertwined with immigrant culture and predisposed group characteristics to shape the fates of immigrants and their offspring. An immigrant culture may be referred to as the "original" culture, consisting of an entire way of life, including languages, ideas, beliefs, values, behavioral patterns, and all that immigrants bring along with them as they arrive in their new country. This "original" culture may be seen as hindering the adaptation of members of the ethnic group (the assimilationist perspective) or as promoting this adaptation (the multiculturalist perspective). Seeing immigrant cultures as American microcosms of other nations, however, involves overlooking the historically dynamic nature of all cultures. As discussed previously, cultures may persist while adapting to the pressures of American society, resulting in many similar patterns of cultural orientations among different immigrant groups (Conzen, 1991). These newly adapted cultural patterns are often confused with those of their original cultures. American ethnic foods offer an example of this cultural reshaping. Each type of ethnic food – Italian, Mexican, or Chinese – is distinctive in itself, but they are quite similar in the process of fitting the taste of the general American public. If a particular dish does not appeal to the public taste, it will not be known or accepted as an ethnic dish no matter how authentic it may be.

Similarly, the cultural traits that characterize a group depend not only on how the group selects these traits as its identifying characteristics but also on

how the larger society treats them. If the cultural characteristics an immigrant group selects for display in America are approved by the mainstream, the group will generally be considered having an advantageous culture, and otherwise a deficient culture. For example, most of the Asian subgroups – such as Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Vietnamese – whose original cultures are dominated by Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism often selectively unpack from their cultural baggage those traits suitable to the new environment, such as two parent families, a strong work ethic, delayed gratification, and thrift. Also, they either bury at the bottom of their trunks or keep strictly to themselves other things considered not so fit, such as nonconfrontation, passivity, submissiveness, and excessive obligations within the family. Since the things unpacked resemble ideals of the mainstream (WASP) culture, these “proper” original cultures set a tone of favorable treatment, which may help the group to focus on other difficulties of adjustment and enable group members to capitalize on the ethnic resources.

On the other hand, if a group displays characteristics that are not comparable to the ideals of the mainstream, or seem similar to characteristics identified with or projected onto native-born minorities, such as matriarchal families, these traits will be combined with the race/ethnic factor and seen as “deficient” cultural characteristics and thus stigmatized. The groups so stigmatized will receive unfavorable treatment from the larger society, which can exacerbate the situation and trap the group in a vicious cycle. Therefore, the effect of an immigrant culture varies, depending not only on the micro-social structures on which culture is based but also on macro-social structures of the larger society of which the immigrant culture is a part.

However, to maintain a cultural tradition is one thing, to pass that tradition onto the next generation is quite another – especially when the process occurs in a different cultural environment. The clash between the parents’ social world and that of the children is the most commonly cited problem of intergenerational relations in immigrant communities. In fact, intergenerational conflicts are not simply a unique immigrant phenomenon (Berrol, 1995; Child, 1943), they are also an American phenomenon rooted in the American tradition of a “moral rejection of authority” (Gorer, 1963:53). In a recent comparative study of adolescents, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) found that intergenerational conflicts were more common among European-American adolescents who were more ambivalent toward authority and schooling and were more peer-oriented than among Latino-American adolescents who were more respectful of authority and more family-oriented. They attributed this gap to the impact of changing American youth culture that glorified the contempt for authorities and an emphasis on peer recognition, implying that assimilating into the American youth culture could cause more harm than good for immigrant adolescents.

The frequent difficulties facing the new second generation arise from the struggles of individuals to balance the demands of American culture with those of immigrant cultures (Dublin, 1996). Portes and Rumbaut (1996:Ch. 7) conceptualize the acculturation gaps between immigrant parents and their children in a typology of “generational consonance versus dissonance.” Generational consonance occurs when parents and children both remain unacculturated, or both acculturate at the same rate, or both agree on selective acculturation. Generational dissonance occurs when children neither correspond to levels of parental acculturation nor conform to parental guidance, leading to role reversal and intensified parent-child conflicts. According to Portes and Rumbaut, these acculturation patterns interact with contextual factors – racial discrimination, urban subcultures, and labor market prospects – to affect the adaptational outcomes of children. When contextual factors are unfavorable, as is the case confronting the majority of today’s second generation, consonant acculturation enables immigrant children to lean on material or moral resources available in the family and the immigrant community; it thus increases the probability of upward assimilation. On the contrary, dissonant acculturation severs ties between children and their adult social world, deprives children of family or community resources, and leads them farther and farther away from parental expectations. In inner cities, immigrant children who rebel against parental values and mobility expectations are likely to identify with the leveling downward norms of their immediate social environment and acculturate into an adversarial outlook in response to discrimination and blocked mobility, as exemplified by Haitian children in Miami and West Indian children in New York City (Portes and Stepick, 1993; Waters, 1994, 1996).

### *Social Capital: Networks of Support and Control*

How is it possible to ensure that immigrants and their offspring maintain their cultural values and work habits and learn the skills for socioeconomic advancement? What enables immigrant families and their children to withstand the leveling pressures from the inner city? The key is to examine the networks of social relations, namely how individual families are related to one another in the ethnic community and how immigrant children are involved in these networks. The networks of social relations involve shared obligations, social supports, and social controls. When, for example, Korean Americans obtain from other Korean Americans low-interest loans requiring little collateral, or Chinese-American students receive encouragement and approval in after-school Chinese language classes for their general academic orientations, these are forms of social support inherent in particular patterns of social relations within the ethnic community. When, on the other hand, a group mem-

ber experiences disapproval, or even ostracism, from co-ethnics for failing to attain a respected occupation, this is a form of social control.

Zhou and Bankston (forthcoming) propose a model of ethnic social relations and examine it with a community-based study of Vietnamese adolescents in New Orleans. In the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, they observed that Vietnamese adolescents were constantly reminded of their duty to show respect for their elders, to take care of younger siblings, to work hard, and to make decisions upon approval of parents not simply within a particular family but in the community where other families practiced similar values. In this "watchful and ever-vigilant" community, young Vietnamese found little competition from other desiderata because the social world of their families was restricted to the closed and highly integrated circles of the ethnic group. Since what was considered good or bad was clearly specified and closely monitored by these networks, young people found it hard to "to get away with much." The researchers concluded that the conformity to traditional family values and behavioral standards required a high level of family integration into a community that reinforced these values and standards. The outcomes of adaptation, therefore, depend on how immigrant children fit in their own ethnic community, or in their local environment if such an ethnic community is absent, and how their ethnic community or the local environment fit in the larger American society. In the case of the Vietnamese, being part of a Vietnamese network appears to offer a better route to upward mobility than being Americanized into the underprivileged local environment, or for that matter into the native-born mainstream youth subcultures.

Clearly, social support and social control may channel individuals into particular forms of behavior, using both material and social-psychological means; however, both stem from relationships based on value-orientations brought from the home country and adapted to the circumstances of the host country. Here, two sociological concepts – Coleman's concept of social capital and Durkheim's concept of social integration – are most relevant. Coleman (1988, 1990) defines social capital as the existence of a system of relationships that promotes advantageous outcomes for participants in the system. More specifically, he explains that social capital in the raising of children comprises the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up. In Coleman's view, social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community.

Norms, social networks, and relationships between adults and children may have absolute value; that is, some types of relationships or norms may be of value to children in any environment. In the contemporary American context, certain general characteristics of immigrant families, such as the intact family and the respect for elders, may help children advance in any segment of the host society. If, however, these families live in social environments that

are not conducive to academic achievement and upward mobility, then these characteristics may take on even greater importance. As Zhou and Bankston (forthcoming) suggest, the need for the importance of accepting community, prescribed norms and values and the need for cultivating social relationships depends largely on the opportunities offered to immigrants in their host country. In disadvantaged neighborhoods where difficult conditions and disruptive elements dominate, immigrant families may have to consciously preserve traditional values by means of ethnic solidarity to prevent the next generation from acculturating into the underprivileged segments of American society in which their community is located.

Furthermore, the community provides a context in which social capital is formed. The adult society surrounding a family can reinforce familial support and direction, mediating between individual families and the larger social setting. Immigrant children and parents often interact with one another in immigrant communities. If patterns of interaction are contained within a tightly knit ethnic community, these children and parents are likely to share their similar experiences with other children and parents. In this way, the community can create a buffer zone to ease the tension between individual self-fulfillment and family commitment. The community can also serve to moderate original cultural patterns, to legitimize reestablished values and norms, and to enforce consistent standards. This situation resembles Sung's (1987) description of immigrant children in New York's Chinatown in the mid-1980s. Sung observed: "For Chinese immigrant children who live in New York's Chinatown or in satellite Chinatowns, these [bicultural] conflicts are moderated to a large degree because there are other Chinese children around to mitigate the dilemmas that they encounter. When they are among their own, the Chinese ways are better known and better accepted. The Chinese customs and traditions are not denigrated to the degree that they would be if the immigrant child were the only one to face the conflict on his or her own" (p. 126).

However, membership in any group is a matter of degree. Individuals may belong to social groups to varying degrees. If norms, values and social relationships within an ethnic group do influence the adaptation of group members, the influence should logically depend on the extent to which individuals hold the norms and values and participate in the social relationships. Hence, participation in social relationships and acceptance of group norms and values are interrelated; the more individuals associate with a particular group, the greater the normative conformity to behavioral standard and expectations prescribed by the group. However, ethnic communities can, plausibly, hinder the adaptation of young members of immigrant groups. Richard Rodriguez (1982), in his eloquent memoir *Hunger for Memory*, maintains that his own success has depended on his leaving his Spanish-speaking neighborhood behind. Similarly, it is possible that immigrant children must



cast off their traditions and languages to participate fully in American society. The question is whether the person who succeeds in leaving the poor ethnic community represents an outlier or a trend.

The ethnic context also serves as an important mechanism for social control. For this reason, the concept of social capital can be treated as a version of one of the oldest sociological theories, Durkheim's theory of social integration. Durkheim (1897/1951) maintains that individual behavior should be seen as the product of the degree of integration of individuals in their society. The greater the integration of individuals into a social group, the greater the control of the group over the individual. In the context of immigrant adaptation, children who are more highly integrated into their ethnic group are likely to follow the forms of behavior prescribed by the group and to avoid the forms of behavior proscribed by the group. In considering whether a particular ethnicity should be seen as a source of social capital (or as a disadvantage), it is necessary to examine how integration into that particular ethnic community affects the adaptation of young people.

While networks of ethnic social relations function as an important source of support and control, recent research has found evidence to indicate that the cohesion of family and ethnic ties tends to deteriorate with longer duration of U.S. residence, as in the case of refugees from Central America (Gil and Vega, 1996). Researchers have also cautioned that even strong cultural identities and social ties, which may be considered as sources of social capital, may sometimes be insufficient because of racial or class disadvantages. In a study of a ghetto African-American community, Stack (1974) showed that African-American families depended on patterns of coresidence, kinship-based exchange networks for survival. This means of survival, however, demanded the sacrifice of upward mobility and geographic movement, and it discouraged marriage because of structural constraints such as the inexorable unemployment of African-American women and men. Welfare policies disrupted the support networks and conspired against the ability of the poor to build up equity. Similarly, Fernández-Kelly (1995) found, in a study of teenage pregnancies in a Baltimore ghetto, that kinship networks in ghettos were often graced with strong family and friendship bonds but that these networks lacked connections to other social networks that controlled access to larger sets of opportunities. Moreover, symbols of ethnic pride and cultural identity that developed in reaction to social isolation and racial domination (*e.g.*, the sparkling mounds of braided hair of young African-American women) became signals that barred access to resources and employment in the larger society. Such truncated networks and reactive ethnicity could severely limit the ability of children to envision alternative paths out of the ghetto and to turn cultural capital into resourceful social capital (Fernández-Kelly, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Kohl, 1994).

## CONCLUSION

For the new second generation, growing up American can be a matter of smooth acceptance or of traumatic confrontation. The children of today's diverse immigrant groups are generally eager to embrace American culture and to acquire an American identity by becoming indistinguishable from their American peers. In some cases, however, they may be perceived as "unasimilated" even when they try hard to abandon their own ethnic identities. In other cases, they may be accepted as well-adjusted precisely because they retain strong ethnic identities. In the long journey to becoming American, their progress is largely contingent upon human and financial capital that their immigrant parents bring along, the social conditions from which their families exit as well as the context that receives them, and their cultural patterns – including values, family relations, and social ties – reconstructed in the process of adaptation. The host society offers uneven possibilities to different immigrant groups. These unequal possibilities may limit the opportunities of immigrant groups, but they do not necessarily constitute a complete denial of opportunity.

The segmented assimilation theory recognizes the fact that immigrants are today being absorbed by different segments of American society, ranging from affluent middle-class suburbs to impoverished innercity ghettos, but that becoming American may not always be an advantage for themselves nor for their children. When immigrants enter middle-class communities directly, or after a short transition, it may be advantageous for them to acculturate and assimilate. When they enter the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy of drastic social inequality, the forces of assimilation come mainly from the underprivileged segments of this structure, and this is likely to result in distinct disadvantages, viewed as maladjustment by both mainstream society and the ethnic community. Such contextual differences mean that paths to social mobility may lead to upward as well as downward outcomes. In the case of those who start from the very bottom, of course, the outcome is not so much assimilating downward as staying where they are. The question is what makes some immigrant groups susceptible to the downward path, or to the permanent trap, and what allows others to avoid it?

Major determinants can include factors external to a particular immigrant group, such as racial stratification, economic opportunities and spatial segregation, and factors intrinsic to the group, such as financial and human capital upon arrival, family structure, community organization, and cultural patterns of social relations. These two sets of factors affect the life chances of immigrant children not only additively but also interactively. Particular patterns of social relations in the family or the ethnic community may sometimes counter the trend of negative adaptation even in unfavorable situations.

When immigrant children are under pressure to assimilate but are unsure which direction of assimilation is more desirable, the family or the ethnic community can make a difference if it is able to mobilize resources to prevent downward assimilation. Likewise, when the children are received in innercities, they may benefit by cultivating their ethnic ties in their ethnic communities to develop forms of behavior likely to break the cycle of disadvantage and to lead to upward mobility. The focus on the interaction between structural factors and sociocultural factors in recent research has shed new light on the understanding of the complex process of assimilation in the second generation.

The interest in the new second generation has been growing recently. However, there is still a big gap between the strategic importance of the new second generation and current knowledge about its conditions (Portes, 1996). Data on which the existing body of research is based mostly on regional survey research and ethnographic studies on selected immigrant groups. Census data sources have been, or are being, scrutinized by some researchers to describe the current state of immigrant children, their geographic distribution and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, school attendance, fertility pattern, the labor market opportunities facing entrants to the labor force, and the establishment of independent households (Hirschman, 1994; Jensen and Chitose, 1994; Mollenkopf, Kasinitz and Waters, 1995; Landale and Oropesa, 1995; Zhou and Bankston, forthcoming). A major drawback of U.S. census data (1980 and 1990) is that a critical variable – the birthplace of parents – has been dropped from the decennial census since 1980, making it impossible to directly identify the children of immigrants (Hirschman, 1994). Researchers have to use the ancestry question as a proxy. This treatment of ethnic origin variable is problematic. Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) note that, because of high rates of intermarriages in the third generation, the respondent's choice of ethnic identity is selective, making it difficult to accurately predict the independent effect of ethnic origin on intergenerational mobility.

Moreover, the census data do not have any direct measures for contextual effects of the family, the school, the neighborhood, and the ethnic community nor do they have detailed information on school performance. There are a few other national surveys that offer important data that the census lack, such as NELS and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (known as Add HEALTH). These data sets have oversampled some minority and immigrant groups and have detailed information about contextual influences of the family, the school, and the community on adolescent health, behavior, family life, peer relationships, goals, aspirations, academic performance, and related variables. However, they do not contain viable subsamples of the most recently arrived national-origin groups within broader regional categories to conduct comparative analyses.

For further theoretical inquiry, the following questions may offer some stimuli: Will members of a generation born or reared in the United States gradually be pulled away from a heritage vastly different from those of the Europeans who arrived over the course of this century? Will those who rebel against this heritage be the best adjusted, socially and economically? Will racial barriers limit the participation of immigrant children in American life? How would being hyphenated Americans influence the ways in which immigrant children become assimilated, and why may some of these ways be more advantageous than others? Will immigrant families and ethnic communities persist in affecting the lives of children of the second generation? Will cultural distinctiveness of hyphenated Americans eventually melt down into a pot of Anglo-American homogeneity? If not, what will ethnic diversity mean for the offspring of today's new second generation? Each of these questions has theoretical as well as practical implications. Given the unique characteristics of and the scanty knowledge about the complex ways in which the second generation of new immigrants are "becoming American," future studies are both urgent and necessary.

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