

## **Literature Review**

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## **The Relationship Between Familial Roles, Anxiety and Second-Generation Americans of Color**

### **A Literature Review**

#### Introduction

The United States has become a popular destination for people of different countries and populations. Immigrants, particularly from non-white countries, have come to the U.S. from all over the world for work, education and overall better living conditions. These foreigners of color are able to receive American citizenship after a number of years, if they entered the country legally. Migrants commonly establish families in the United States, birthing children, or bringing children as infants or school-aged, that are called second-generation Americans, and raising them in the country. This creates a dual-culture, one that is American and one that is ethnic, for the immigrant's offspring. Recent studies have shown that anxiety disorders can be predisposed in specific demographics. There are demographics that are overlooked due to lack of representation, concern for resistance and misinformation. In this literature review, six scholarly peer-reviewed research articles were chosen to further explore the relationship between anxiety disorders, family roles and second-generation Americans of color.

#### The American Dream

The American dream is a concept that is well-known internationally among numerous cultures and backgrounds. Since the land was "discovered" by Europeans hundreds of years ago, the United States has been a dreamland to those who have heard about the country and willingly want to travel to it. It is seen as a place of opportunity and achievement, in comparison to other nations that do not provide such avenues for its citizens fairly, or at all. Children of immigrants are born and raised in this country of freedom and do not have a direct comparison of being born and brought up outside of the United States. In *The Young Researcher's "Exploring First and Second Generation Immigrants' Perceptions of the American Dream"* (2021), author Tamara Ashkar conducts a study exploring first and second generation immigrants and their perceptions of the American Dream. In the qualitative study, Ashkar used a Google Form survey to question the aforementioned groups, open to all ages, to evaluate the difference in responses. The participants were sent a link to their emails to complete the survey, and minors needed parental consent to participate. Anonymity was maintained by the omission of asking for identifiable information.

This study resulted in the researcher receiving an array of opinions from the participants. Regarding the progression of the American Dream, many first generation immigrants feel that the American Dream has not changed its meaning or significance overtime and do not believe it will ever change, even over time. Some expressed that they believe the definition of the idea may change in the future, but were unsure of what it would look like. Many first generation immigrants reflected that hard work and drive were crucial keys to success and were associated with being independent from government provision. These respondents saw that success boiled down to "how bad do you really want it?" (Ashkar, 2021, p. 310). Many of the respondents from

this group felt that they achieved the American Dream. Only a few of the first generation participants believed that the American Dream was not attainable for everyone, regardless of the amount of work and will a person may exercise. Interestingly, the second generation participants expressed that their views on the American Dream were constantly changing. The responders gave themselves “reality checks” and allowed the ideal to be molded and customized to fit a realistic dream, more attainable to their circumstance. Even so, most responders from this group saw the American Dream as “unfair” and “unequal” (2021, p. 313). The results of the study showed the disparities between the two generations and coined that generational experience can shape perspective (2021, p. 314). First generation immigrants heavily leaned towards the traditional ideal of the American Dream and remained optimistic, while the second generation Americans leaned more towards the realization of barriers, (e.g. discrimination, education, and socioeconomic status), and saw the idea as intangible, as if the idea is truly just a dream.

#### Ethnic versus American Family Dynamics

Racial minorities in the United States were commonly known to be overlooked by healthcare professionals, educators, employers, and the media, among many other sects of living in the country. According to authors Susan S. Chang and Catherine L. Costigan, writers of *Parental roles and relationships in immigrant families: An international approach* (2018), this unfortunate phenomenon also accounts for research conducted for parenting and parent-child relationships; most of the research focusing on families with European backgrounds rather than families of color (Chang & Costigan, 2018, p. 1). The ethnic backgrounds of migrating parents and second generation American children in this book include people from countries such as India, Mexico, Russia and China (2018, p. 3). Parenting is not an experience for every human being, but it is a universal opportunity for human beings of every race, culture and ethnicity. Similarly, being a child is an occurrence that every living child, teenager and adult on the earth has experienced, regardless of background. The lack of research for parenting and child-parent relationships across cultures is alarming and gives way to failure in observing important occurrences in these demographics. Cultural influences on parenting are varied and each culture has its own customs for parenting, views on child-rearing and what being a good parent, or a good child, looks like (2018, p. 2). The authors of this text raised awareness to parental belief systems reflecting larger cultural norms, that motivate parenting practices and influence daily life in the home and outside of the home. These parental beliefs directly influence the child(ren) a parent is raising and can become conflicting for the child, especially if the child is raised in the home with a set of cultural norms that contrast the cultural norms they witness and experience outside of the home.

#### Ethnic versus American Family Dynamics continued

Achievement is a subjective definition because the meaning changes depending on who is asked to define it. As mentioned before, the American Dream was defined differently between first generation immigrants and second generation Americans, their offspring. There was even disagreement within the groups themselves on defining the American Dream. Parenting styles and expectations are heavily based on cultural norms and can create a definition of achievement, as a parent and as a child, that may not be agreeable with the child’s definition of achievement, especially if their definition is according to the culture they are exposed to outside of the home. Another possibility is that the child undertakes the definition of achievement from their parent,

which may still not be agreeable to the current country's societal definition, and causes conflict inward and possibly outward, as well. In the journal article "Family Orientation and Achievement Goal Orientations among the Children of Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Families," it states that studies have reported connections between achievement motivation and a child's family orientation, specifically children from immigrant and non-immigrant families (Kim, et al., 2020, p. 134). Previous studies have used the achievement goal theory framework while this particular study is geared to expand on past research, and to examine the role of family orientations of highschool youths from immigrant and non-immigrant families. A total of 331 highschool students, ages 13 through 16, participated with 141 boys and 187 girls in western United States. The highschool had a highly diverse immigration population (2020, p. 141). The premise to this study is to measure the perceptions of the students' parental goals and classroom goal structures to weigh their personal achievement motivations (2020, p. 138). The children were split into two groups: one being labeled "children of immigrant families" and the other being labeled "children of non-immigrant families."

Immigrant families tend to show interdependence, as opposed to their non-immigrant family counterparts, so it is likely that children of immigrants have a connection between their parents' goals and their own achievement (2020, p. 140). In order to conduct the study, the researchers used a Patterns of Adaptive Learning survey, which measured goal mastery in the classroom and performance achievement (2020, p. 142-143). The study resulted in finding that students' perceptions of classroom mastery goals are directly linked to their own personal mastery goals and do not directly correlate to their parents' master goals, immigrant or non-immigrant. Through further speculation, the researchers found a link between the students' mastery goals and their particular generation, as well as their parents' mastery goals and their generations (2020, p. 148). The findings of this research supported that student's family orientations are directly related to goal orientation. Performance achievement was more directly linked to family orientation than goal mastery, indicating that family orientation could be felt by students as internal pressure but not as internalized values as a chance to show gratitude towards their sacrificial parents (coming to a new country and working hard for their children to gain opportunity) (2020, p. 151). Student achievement motivation is generally created by classroom culture but is rooted in the values of their families at home. The research showed that children of immigrant families had significantly higher scores for family orientation, compared to the children of non-immigrant families, solidifying the interdependence research of immigrant families. This recommends that family orientation explains a large array of differences between children of immigrant families and non-immigrant families in the construction of performance goals (2020, p. 154). This can help educators understand their students' better, no matter the background. This insinuates that children from immigrant families are directly influenced by their parents' culture, customs and experiences.

#### Features of Anxiety Disorders

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) is where the criteria for anxiety disorders reside. According to the text, anxiety is associated with muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger and cautious or avoidant behaviors. Fear can accompany anxiety, being an emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat which activates "fight or flight" within the nervous system (2013, p. 189). There is generalized anxiety disorder, as well as other disorders that cause specific reactions or depend on specific

circumstances. The crucial features of generalized anxiety disorder are persistent and excessive worry about various domains, including work and school performance, that the individual finds difficult to control. Also, the individual experiences physical symptoms, including restlessness, feeling on edge, being easily tired, irritability, difficulty focusing, muscle tension and sleep disturbance (2013, p. 190). These disturbances are also not better explained by another mental disorder (2013, p. 222). Females are twice as likely than males to experience generalized anxiety disorder. According to the text, this diagnosis is more prevalent among individuals of European descent compared to those of non-European descent, particularly those living in “first-world” countries (2013, p. 223). This touches on the research on parents and parent-child relationship being mostly done with families of European descent than any other demographic when there are parents and children in all cultures and backgrounds. The median age of onset is 30 years old, but the range is broad and can develop over the course of a lifespan. Risk and prognostic factors include temperament, environment and genetics- one-third of the risk of experiencing the disorder through genetics. Culture also influences how generalized anxiety disorder and anxiety’s other disorders reveal itself through an individual, causing diagnostic issues (2013, p. 224). These factors greatly impact the perception of anxiety disorder in a second generation American, who is dealing with dual-culture and not being able to express themselves clearly and consiesly, as well as possibly having parents that have an undiagnosed anxiety disorder, or any other undiagnosed mental disorder.

#### Identity and Second Generation Americans

Second generation Americans have influence from their parents and families, as well as influence from school, work and any other factors that are rooted outside of the home. Parents raise their children based on their own cultures, so children of immigrant families are exposed to duality. This can create identity issues within an individual, not being able to distinguish their own interests, desires, goals and dreams from the other two influences. This inward conflict can influence performance achievement and to either unveil an anxiety disorder or to develop one. A recent study done by Esther Somé-Guiébré presents the struggle of young African children in America that are facing challenges in connecting with their identities. The children were brought to the United States with their parents, who have won diversity visa lotteries by the US Department of State (2020, p. 41). The study happened at a tutorial program organized for the children of refugees and immigrants in the United States. The students that attended were mostly elementary school-aged children of Vietnamese and Congolese descent. The study focused more so on 30, native French speaking, Congolese children who were in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that have only been in the United States for three years. The tutors of these children were all college students that were native speakers of English and Caucasian, with only one being Asian American and another being Nigerian American. These tutors were mostly members of sororities and fraternities fulfilling a volunteer service requirement for their houses (2020, p. 41). The methods used for this study included direct observation and interviews with the children, their parents, the tutors and the director of the program. Four observation sessions were conducted for three hours for five weeks (2020, p. 41). The analysis for this study was inductive.

One particular participant, named Jonas, was a young boy that was brought to the United States by his parents at a very young age. During group activities that discussed his home country of Congo, the child struggled to identify aspects of his country of origin, only recalling

food and the languages spoken. The other children were seen to really enjoy soccer, a popular sport in many countries worldwide. One particular student did not enjoy playing the sport with the other children. He stated when asked why, "I hate soccer...I like basketball...I want to play basketball that way I can play with my friends who are African American. My friends don't know how to play soccer." (2020, p. 44). Many of the children's parents complained about the languages spoken by the children, and how they believe their offspring are losing their roots. The data analyzed by the researcher showed that French-speaking African immigrants are "in-between" and have hybrid identities (2020, p. 44). There is an identity from back home and an identity of the new home. Unfortunately, the children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds are being marginalized by their new homeland, with the American school system having a negative effect on these children's academic achievement. In order to accommodate, the children leave behind their ethnic culture in attempts to adapt to American culture, which would remind them of their ethnic background and may not accept them as true Americans.

The experience of coming from a different country and being raised in the United States is one of having an identity and losing it to form another, while being born in the U.S. to immigrant parents has an individual on the search for an identity they never had. Both cases for second-generation Americans can be grounds for fear, worry and anxiety.

#### Mental Health within Second Generation Americans

Racial and ethnic minorities commonly face discrimination in the United States. This can be attributed to colonization, slavery and a number of laws and customs developed by Europeans in the past. When immigrants of color come to the U.S. and birth children, these second generation Americans face discrimination, even though they are considered Americans. Children who are brought along with their parents from foreign countries are raised in American culture and would view themselves as Americans, even though others may not. This can cause internal conflict, resulting in low self-esteem, anxiety, and identity crises. In a study conducted by Adriana Espinosa, titled "Discrimination, Self-Esteem, and Mental Health Across Ethnic Groups of Second-Generation Immigrant Adolescents (2020)," the researcher monitored perceived discrimination in the population, since research has indicated that immigrants and their children may be at risk for mood disorders among other mental disorders (2020, p. 1539). Self-esteem is composed of different factors, including family and the general environment (meaning outside of the home). Second generation Americans are commonly overlooked when looking at specific demographic predispositions for mental disorders.

The study took place in Florida and California focusing on youth, specifically mid-adolescence, late adolescence and early adulthood. These students were followed over the course of two years. These groups were interviewed and the data was collected by using the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study. The interview questions were directed towards perceived discrimination and self-esteem. The results from this research showed that although the participants were of minority groups, the participants of African descent reported facing discrimination more so than Hispanics and Asians (2020, p. 1543). Overall, the participants agreed to believe that discrimination oftentimes has direct effects on self esteem and some of the youth reported facing low self-esteem due to discrimination and struggling with identity.

## The Role of Social Media

Social media has been a rising focal point of American society in recent years. On these platforms, individuals are able to connect with others nearby, far away and internationally. This gives room to second generation Americans to learn more about their parents' countries and cultures outside of their parents, and gives them the ability to connect with others who are in similar predicaments. A study was done by Chrisitan Reyes with American-born children of immigrants from Central America. The research aimed to see the effects of social media on this group of second generation American youth during the country's time of extreme nationalism, xenophobia and hate crimes (2021, p. 2). The results of the study showed the discomfort of the youth due to Trump supporters and the rise of attention on deportation and ICE. The fallout from COVID-19 led to a difference of what the participants saw online, but fortunately also witnessed a rise in people talking about immigration, culture clash and living at home with immigrant parents.

## Conclusion

The research available to the public does not clearly state the correlation between anxiety, family roles and second generation Americans. Most of the studies mentioned above touch on each subject, but separately, and it is not easy to find articles that touch on the three topics at once. This leads to the fact that there is a lack of research in anxiety diagnosis within this demographic and how their families directly affect this. It creates the question of whether there truly is a correlation between the three or if they are indeed independent of each other.

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