



How do Children of Immigrants Experience Parental Involvement in their Education?

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Many children of immigrants have low socioeconomic backgrounds and yet attain high levels of education. What guides members of this group to this educational success is, however, a matter of theoretical dispute. While some have argued that immigrant families establish norms that promote positive school behaviour, others have highlighted the educational selectivity of immigrants. Based on interviews with 28 children of immigrants to Norway enrolled in prestigious tracks of higher education, I ask how these children have experienced their parents' involvement in their everyday lives. Drawing on detailed information about their families' status both before and after migration, I show that parental involvement can be understood as linked to their social class. However, instead of juxtaposing class and immigrant status, I argue that children of immigrants with 'high status' in their country of origin might experience a double drive to succeed: the middle-class drive *and* the immigrant drive.

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INTRODUCTION

In Norway, children of immigrants participate in tertiary education at higher rates than the native majority (Hermansen 2016) and tend to choose prestigious educational tracks characterised by comparatively high earnings potentials (Bratsberg, Raaum & Røed 2014; Schou 2009) despite more often coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. What guides members of this group to this educational success is, however, a matter of theoretical dispute. While some have portrayed the success of children of immigrants as a story of social mobility against all odds, accounted for by a notion of immigrant culture and drive (Heath, Rothon & Kilpi 2008; Hermansen 2016; Midtbøen & Nadim 2021), others argue that the apparent upward mobility is a function of faultily measured cross-country social reproduction (Feliciano 2020). The latter group of studies have emphasised that the geographical and historical contexts in which education is completed (contextual attainment) should be taken into account when attempting to understand the processes behind children of immigrants' educational accomplishments (Engzell 2019; Feliciano & Lanuza 2017).

Drawing on 28 in-depth interviews with children of immigrants enrolled in prestigious educational tracks, I aim to illustrate how a contextual and subjective retrospective positioning of immigrants' social class helps illuminate the role of immigrant parents' involvement in their children's upbringing. Drawing on detailed information about their family's status before and after migration, I ask how the interviewees experienced their parents' involvement in their everyday lives. If we integrate an understanding of the parent's social status in the context of the sending society's context, their involvement can be understood as specific to their social class. Many interviewees whose parents had perceived 'high status' in their country of origin had jobs and salaries in Norway indicating low status. Many among this group experienced their parents' involvement as akin to what Lareau (2011) calls 'concerted cultivation', a parenting style associated with the educated middle class.

Instead of taking sides with one of the strands in the theoretical dispute of previous research – juxtaposing class and immigrant status – the analyses of this article indicate that these factors interplay and pull in the same direction. More specifically, the feeling of having to 'prove oneself', which is integral to the immigrant drive (Friberg 2019), might also engender a 'concerted cultivation' style of parenting. Immigrant parents' experiences of racism and discrimination, and the resulting fear that their children might not enjoy the same privileges as enjoyed by the white majority, could also trigger a 'safe' strategy of working toward high-status goals on their behalf (Vincent et al. 2013). Thus, children of immigrants with 'high status' in their country of origin might experience a double drive to succeed: the middle-class drive and the immigrant drive.

This article makes two important contributions. First, and empirically, it adds to and nuances a relatively new literature that identifies immigrant selectivity as accounting for children of immigrants' intergenerational mobility. Second, and theoretically, the article is to my knowledge, one of few studies to apply Lareau's (2011) theoretical framework to study the everyday lives of children of immigrants. By doing this, the article makes it evident that the educational achievement of children of immigrants' is not simply *either* a story of social mobility *or* a story about cross-country social reproduction. Rather, we need a heterogenous set of explanations to understand different educational outcomes among different groups of children of immigrants.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION IN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES

Researchers have long deemed that the socioeconomic background of children with immigrant parents' is not so important in explaining their educational successes, and several alternative theories have been put forward. One popular explanation sees educational achievement as the result of the amount of social capital that exists in the immigrant group's community (Lee & Zhou 2015; Leirvik 2016; Modood 2004; Portes & Rumbaut 2001), often defined as *ethnic capital* (Shah, Dwyer & Modood 2010) or *ethnicity as social capital* (Zhou 2005). The main idea is that children of immigrants benefit from membership in an ethnic community that provides them access to advantageous resources (Alba & Foner 2015). In the literature on children of immigrants' educational accomplishments, mobilising ethnic capital is an important strategy in what Portes and Zhou (1993) term 'selective acculturation', or the third assimilation pathway. They argue that preserving cultural elements from the parents' home country can help the second generation achieve successful integration outcomes. Immigrants or children of immigrants who join ethnic groups where these cultural and moral attributes are shared and transmitted will have an advantage when it comes to being successful in the host country's institutions. These attributes include norms of obligation, patriarchy, hard work and superior expectations (Leirvik 2016; Modood 2004; Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Zhou & Bankston 2001).

Regardless of the validity of this 'cultural' explanation, how children of immigrants' educational successes are understood has real consequences for their lives. When their academic successes are understood as the result of 'ethnic capital', as described earlier, children of immigrants are seen as individuals lacking 'agency', living under the strict rules of their overly – pushy parents (Mirza & Meeto 2018). In Norway, which has a universal education system with a focus on equality, students are taught that independence and autonomy are important values that should guide their choices in life (Smette 2015). The suspicion that children of immigrants' educational successes come about through 'immigrant culture' might be particularly salient in this context.

Recently, scholars have criticised this research for overplaying the importance of cultural attributes as explaining educational attainment among children of immigrants (Engzell 2019; Feliciano 2020). They argue that in order to understand these individual's educational achievements, we cannot ignore who their parents were before migration. Several recent studies have constructed a contextual measure of immigrants' education by comparing their attainment with that of their peers of the same sex in their country of origin using the Barro-Lee international education dataset (Feliciano 2020). In the latest analysis of Norwegian data, Hermansen (2018) finds that non-Western immigrants rank high in educational attainment relative to their birth cohort in their home country, but low relative to the median educational levels of their Norwegian birth cohort.

While some resources, such as financial capital, can be lost during the migration process, others, are more transferable (Erel 2010; Fernández-Kelly 2008). Pre-migration social status can matter through the same mechanisms that shape class reproduction more generally, such as cultural capital (Feliciano 2020). By including the pre-migration social status of the interviewee's parents, I show how these insights are relevant for understanding the educational behaviour of children of immigrants in a way that compliments, rather than dismisses, more 'cultural' perspectives of immigrant drive and ethnic capital.

The analyses presented in this article are based on individual in-depth interviews with 28 children of immigrants (18 female and 10 male), all enrolled in prestigious educational tracks such as medicine, law, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering and finance. This non-representative sample of successful young adults was carefully selected to investigate different roads to success. An unintended consequence, however, is that the sample is also biased towards those with high-status parents. Regardless of social class and occupational status in the country of origin, the parents of all my interviewees were in the lower echelons of the social stratification system in Norway. However, when asked about their parents' occupation and educational achievement, and about their own 'understanding' of their parents' social status, all but three interviewees – talked about their families as having 'high status' before migrating. When recruiting for a study like this, it is likely that you come in contact with people from families with resources.

Individual explanations might end up being highlighted in interview data because they are the most readily accessible. Occasionally, this can lead to an undervaluation of important factors such as institutional, geographical and historical features of both the sending and receiving countries (Lamont & Swidler 2014; Small, Harding & Lamont 2010). When a focus on individual factors is paired with selection according to ethnicity or country of birth, it can lead to an overemphasis of cultural explanations and a failure to consider other relevant categories (Nadim 2015; Prieur 2002). Thus, to allow for the possibility that immigrants and their children have different paths to success (Fernández-Kelly 2008), I included children of immigrants with parents born in different countries: 17 interviewees with parents from Asia (mostly Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam); 6 with parents from the Middle East (including Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon); 2 with parents from Somalia; 1 with parents from Chile; 1 with parents from Russia; and 1 with parents from Poland. All the interviewees fit the label 'model minority' as they all have excelled in school. All had lived most of their lives in Norway: 22 were born in Norway, 2 arrived at school starting age and 4 arrived between the ages of 11 and 16. All interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014.

Interviewees were recruited through different channels, including through the University of Oslo, the Tamil Resource Centre and my own network. The interviews lasted between one and a half and three hours, with most of them taking place at the University of Oslo campus, in accordance with interviewees' preferences. Often, we met after class as they wanted to save time. I began each interview with a set of background questions about their parents' background, their education level, their family situation, where their parents had migrated from and why, and so forth. Then, I asked questions about their upbringing. After finishing this first part of the interview, I asked about their educational choice. To encourage the interviewees to give the most detailed accounts as possible, I always asked an open question like 'When was the first time you thought about studying medicine/law/engineering/etc?'. At the end of the interview, I asked, 'Where do you see yourself in 10 years?'. I transcribed all the interviews myself and I coded them into the following codes by using Nvivo: 'status before migration', 'status arriving in Norway' and 'status now'. I did this after becoming aware of the relatively high status of my sample when transcribing the text. After coding their perception of their class background, I organised the interviews using other empirical codes, such as 'leisure time', 'homework', 'activities', 'holidays', 'teachers', 'school' etc. As I wanted to understand more about the participants' family background, I also created codes to organise the interview material according to their

parents' labour market participation and language skills. Although the analysis was mainly content-oriented, it focused on the interviewees' subjective understanding. Before I began conducting the interviews, the project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, NSD.

THE CASE OF NORWAY

Immigrants to Norway encounter a generous, egalitarian and redistributive welfare state, where most educational and basic social services are publicly funded (Reisel, Hermansen & Kindt 2019). High employment rates, low economic inequality and an extensive social safety net – all key characteristics of this welfare state – make Norway an interesting case for studying the children of immigrants and their incorporation in the educational system. Norway's comprehensive educational system is characterised by late tracking and a high level of national standardisation in the curriculum. Reducing social divisions and ensuring access to higher education for all are explicit political goals. Students make their first educational choice between the ages of 15 and 16, before graduating from compulsory schooling. This is late compared to other European countries (Reisel, Hermansen & Kindt 2019). Further, most Norwegian universities are public (and thus do not charge tuition fees) and the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund provides students with loans on an equal basis. Several studies suggest that these features benefit students from low socioeconomic and immigrant backgrounds (Alba & Foner 2015; Reisel, Hermansen & Kindt 2019; Crul, Schneider & Lelie 2012). However, the Norwegian unitary school system is occasionally criticised for not being sufficiently equipped to handle student diversity. The overall focus on equality and social cohesion can tip over into a school system and culture where similarity is considered a precondition of inclusion (Hagelund 2008; Seeberg 2003). In Norway, students learn that educational choice should be made based on 'self-knowledge' and autonomy. However, previous research has shown that this 'ideal motive' is not associated with the educational choices of immigrants' children (Kindt 2018). Rather, a sense of obligation to follow parental advice is occasionally interpreted as a sign that members of this group are not free to make their own choices. Still, recent research shows that children born into the low end of the parental-income distribution in Norway have fallen behind in terms of several outcomes and argues that higher educational requirements in the labour market has increased the importance of parental support for success in educational institutions (Markussen & Røed 2019). Studying children of immigrants' experiences with *parental involvement* in Norway seems to be vital for understanding their life-trajectories as well as their educational accomplishments.

RESULTS: IMMIGRANT DRIVE AND 'CONCERTED CULTIVATION'

What Is Their Social Status?

All but three interviewees in this study experienced a mismatch between their ascribed status in Norway, and their subjectively experienced social status. Their parents had low-skilled jobs in Norway, for instance, in nursing homes, childcare centres or post offices, or as cleaners. Some were mother tongue instructors at primary schools. Still, the interviewees talked about their parents as 'high up', or as 'part of the elite' back home. Kanyian is a typical example. His parents migrated from Sri Lanka with a plan

to study medicine. Several of their siblings had already taken higher education in Sri Lanka – something quite rare at the time, Kanyian told me. His grandfather was always greeted in the streets, as he was what Kanyian called ‘a respected man’. As life in Norway made it too difficult for his parents to obtain higher education, they settled for low-skilled jobs. Today, his father works at a post office, and his mother in a nursing home. Their objective socioeconomic status in Norway is much lower than Kanyian’s subjective understanding of his social status background. The same goes for Salima. Her parents grew up in Pakistan and her mother was highly educated before migrating to Norway. Her educational credentials were never approved by Norwegian officials. After several years working short-term jobs, she found a job working as a mother tongue instructor at a school in her neighbourhood. Maryam, another interviewee, had a grandfather who used to work as a teacher – a ‘high-status occupation’, she explained. Because of the civil war, her mother couldn’t pursue her dream of becoming a teacher, and she now works as an assistant in a pre-school. Hibba’s parents, from Palestine, were enrolled in university before they migrated to Norway. Since arriving, they have worked in different local restaurants. Sanaa explains that her family was upper class in Iraq; her father is an educated doctor. In Norway, his educational credentials were not approved, and he has mostly been unemployed. These examples are typical in the sense that they entail a mismatch in the interviewees’ ascribed and experienced social status origins.

As already outlined, immigrants’ pre-migration status has long been disregarded in the literature, with the consequence that they are often placed in the wrong categories. When selection effects are neglected, we run the risk of misunderstanding individuals’ life trajectories (Feliciano 2020). If we acknowledge the part played by these individuals’ own assessments of their social status, our analysis and understandings of their educational choices start to look rather different. Instead of understanding their choices as a result of culture, we might also look at the literature on middle-class parenting.

‘Concerted Cultivation’

Within the above-mentioned body of literature, a well-known theory is Lareau’s concept of ‘concerted cultivation’, a cultural logic in which middle-class parents engage ‘by attempting to foster children’s talents through organized leisure activities and extensive reasoning’ (2011: 747). Thus, class positions shape distinct practices, how people ‘do parenting’. The theory has spurred substantial research on the role of class in families’ child-rearing practices, which has often concluded that the reproduction of social inequality comes about through different economic as well as emotional and developmental investments (Aarseth 2017; Irwin & Elley 2011; Stefansen & Aarseth 2011; Vincent & Ball 2007). Concerted cultivation aims to make the most of children’s talents and abilities, often leading to an active life filled with ‘enrichment activities’. Children are also encouraged to participate in conversations with adults and speak up for their views and needs. This leads to a situation where middle-class children develop a sense of entitlement. They learn that they should advocate for their individual needs, without feeling embarrassed about it. This gives them an advantage in life and can eventually reinforce existing inequalities.

The degree and form of ‘concerted cultivation’ can, however, vary. While some parents see cultivation most important in the present, others see ‘enrichment activities’ as a strategy to secure future mobility. The activities can be instrumental, equipping children with as many advantages as possible to secure skills for the future (Vincent

& Maxwell 2016). Regardless of the form ‘concerted cultivation’ takes, this type of parenting requires extensive resources:

Parental labour and cost. Not only do parents need to have enough material resources to pay for all activities, but they also need to have enough time to be thoroughly involved in their children’s lives. (Vincent & Maxwell 2016)

PARENTS’ INVOLVEMENT AND THE ORGANISATION OF DAILY LIVES

Changing the point of departure of the analysis of the educational success of children of immigrants by including their parents’ status before migration, I find that the ‘concerted cultivation’ way of parenting resembles what the interviewees describe. They talked about having highly involved parents who organised and facilitated their multiple ‘enrichment activities’. Kanyian, for example, played several instruments and sports during his childhood and went to weekend school to learn about Tamil language and culture. He talked about how important it was for his parents that he grew up to be a respected man. For them, it was not just important that he succeed in education: ‘for my parents it has been important that we are successful in school, sports and music’. His parents had clear goals for him and his siblings, as is typical for middle-class parenting, and the numerous organised activities in which he participated all served this future purpose (Lareau 2011). When he was home, he ‘couldn’t just chill’:

After homework you could go out and play. But, after playing we couldn’t just chill. Then we had to do math tasks for older kids. My uncle, he is a professor, he gave us a lot of books. So in second grade, we solved math problems designed for fifth grade students. That helps.

Similar to what Kanyian describes here, Lareau (2011) observes that middle-class children enjoy free play and leisure time, but never for long stretches of time and always sandwiched between other activities. Kanyian could go out and play with his friends, but never for long periods and always between finishing one activity and starting another.

Many of the interviewees mentioned highly organised everyday lives similar to the one described by Kanyian. Music lessons, dance lessons, sports activities, weekend and summer schools were all part of the interviewees’ lives. Not all parents had the social network, or the financial resources needed to allow their children to participate in these kinds of activities, but they still managed to fill their children’s lives with activities with a *clear purpose*, as is typical of parents engaged in the ‘concerted cultivation’ type of parenting (Aarseth 2017; Stefansen & Aarseth 2011). Maryam’s mother, for example, organised Maryam’s life in such a way that her daughter would grow up to be an independent woman:

Freedom, independence, a home you can call your own [...] a car and all of that. These things have always been what my mom strives for, and it is also what she wants for us. She has always told me that “you have to work hard to get what you want from life, because you can”.

It was crucial for Maryam’s mother that Maryam learn how to handle the household budget and to drive a car, and that she gets an education that would allow her to be financially independent as an adult. Thus, her everyday life was filled with activities

that would serve this purpose, such as studying, going to the library, taking driving lessons and overseeing paying her mother's bills. While not filled with as many *organised* activities as the other interviewees, her upbringing was characterised by an involved mother, trying to equip her daughter with advantages to facilitate her future success.

Maryam's mother wasn't just involved. Maryam talked about how she loves discussing things with her mother:

I love discussing with my mom. Everything from abortion to a lot of stuff. My mom is not entrenched in her thinking, she always finds arguments for and against. She can never just accept something. If someone tells my mom that she is not allowed to do something, oh hello [...] "Why are you telling me that – you cannot tell me that!"

Maryam told me that by having these conversations with her mother, she had learned to stand up for herself. In my interviews, many talked about how their parents had engaged in conversations with them, how they talked to them about the importance of different things in life, such as education. Some also talked about how they would never let anyone decide for them: 'it is my life' was a typical statement in the interviews. As Sanaa puts it, 'I am the boss. I do not like to be bossed around!' This feeling of entitlement is typical of middle-class children (Lareau 2011). It might be that the interviewees' subjective understanding of their 'high social status' made this sense of entitlement stronger than what previous qualitative research on children of immigrants' upbringing has shown (Leirvik 2014). When Sanaa was about to choose what to study, she went to talk with one of the authorities at her mosque:

I have it in me, you know – that it is always a good idea to talk to someone smart before making important decisions in life. So I just went to the mosque and said: "Give me the smartest person around", and when I met him I said "I want to study medicine, now tell me what you think is good and bad with that decision!" I just said it to his face, like that. It was kind of cool, actually.

This behaviour – demanding that authorities accommodate individual needs and putting forward individual demands – plays an important role in the reproduction of inequality and is something middle-class children are socialised into (Lareau 2011). However, the mosque is a religious institution and none of the interviewees gave examples of situations where they had approached authorities in non-religious, majority-white institutions. Moreover, although Sanaa is putting forward her individual demands, it is less clear what it means for enabling school promotive behaviour.

By including parents' status before migration, the analysis shows how much of the parental involvement in the interviewees' upbringing mirrors patterns found in research on middle-class children. The interviewees who reported having parents with 'high status' in their country of origin also described childhoods characterised by involved parents. Organised everyday lives with activities intended to serve a future purpose and engagement and communication with parents, which are central elements in the cultural logic of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2011). However, despite having a 'high status' before migration, none of the parents had the economic resources associated with this type of parenting. The question is, then, that what mechanisms does pre-migration social status shape children of immigrants' educational outcomes?

Some resources, such as material and financial resources, are often lost in the migration process, whereas others, such as cultural resources, are more transferrable. The interviewees who saw themselves as coming from 'high status' families also saw higher education as the 'natural' thing to do. To be admitted to a prestigious educational track was something they had wanted from a young age (see also Kindt 2017). The following excerpts are typical of the interviews: 'I have always wanted to become a doctor [...]. It was easy', or 'It was just natural for me, to aim high', 'For me it felt natural to perform well', 'I have always been clever, so it would have been unnatural for me to not pursue higher education', 'The motivation comes from me, from my inner self'. Salima, a young woman studying law, elaborated:

For me, it never even occurred to me that I could choose something less demanding, or that I should only get a bachelor's degree. The plan was always to take higher education; I have just taken that for granted.

To pursue a prestigious educational track seemed like the natural thing to do – or something interviewees just 'took for granted'. By pursuing higher education, they were following what had always been their goal. Most of them had families in which higher education was the norm. They talked about siblings and cousins, many with prestigious degrees and well-paid jobs: '*All my cousins have higher education, you know one doctor, some economy and one engineer*', one told me. For many, this educational success was directly linked to their grandparents. Salima told me,

Well, you know, even my grandmother completed high school, something really uncommon in Pakistan when she was young. So we're just a really well-educated family

Salima's narrative exemplifies how the sending society's context is central to understanding immigrant selectivity. For a woman in Pakistan 50 years ago to have completed some high school indicates high social status, whereas the same is not necessarily the case in Norway (Feliciano 2020). The interviewee's sensitivity towards their grandparents, and the frequency with which the latter played a central role in their own educational narratives were prominent. Some talked about their grandparents as their 'role-models' or as someone they 'looked up to'. Maryam talked about how her grandfather still inspires her, although he died before she was born. She told me:

For my grandfather, education was the goal. When my mom was little, he used to tell her 'Oh, my dearest girl. I think you will grow up to be a teacher'. And she just never forgot about that.

Her mother had always talked about her father, how his greatest wish for his children was to be strong, independent and educated. By pursuing higher education, she followed what she saw as her family legacy.

The way in which the interviewees stressed their individuality, that their choice was 'natural', it came from their 'inner self' and was something they had 'always wanted', can be seen as a logical extension of their middle-class 'concerted cultivation' upbringing and points to the transferability of social status. For example, when immigrant parents talk to their children about their lives 'back home', this can have a profound impact upon how their children define themselves. The interviewees in this study seem to have learned and internalised what is possible to achieve – not

only through their parent's objective socioeconomic status in the receiving society, but also through shared family narratives passed on through generations (Feliciano 2020; Fernandez-Kelly 2008). Thus, they could allow themselves to aspire to a higher status themselves.

INVOLVEMENT REQUIRES TIME AND LANGUAGE

In addition to the interviewees' sense of their family legacies, and their 'taken for granted' attitude towards higher education, they mentioned two resources in particular that their parents could draw on. First, most of the parents with a high pre-migration status worked in the regulated economy, where they had regulated work hours. Although the pay was not high, it was enough that they could work single shifts. This enabled them to spend *time* with their children, and thus to do the parental labour required for involved parenting. Second, their work often required a minimum level of Norwegian language skills, thus most of the parents with a high pre-migration social status had learned to speak Norwegian 'good enough' (male student), or 'quite well actually' (female student). This also enabled their parents to be involved, as they could communicate with the school staff and teachers and help with homework. An organised life requires a lot of time, energy and emotional investment from parents (Vincent & Ball 2007). One young woman, Geetha, told me:

When we were younger, my parents took us to all kinds of activities, and they sat there and waited with the other parents [...] They also helped me with my homework, even on Friday evenings (laughs).

The parental involvement could in some cases feel like 'too much', as experienced by Sara:

My mom was extremely, extremely involved, she even had more contact with my teachers and student counsellors than me! [...]. In the end I thought it was a little too much, now I am over 18 and I am like "I think you have to back off".

Nee and Sanders (2001) argue that pre-migration social status sorts immigrants into various labour market trajectories. While immigrants with low financial and cultural capital often end up in the 'ethnic economy', where hours are deregulated and host language skills rarely are required, immigrants with a higher social status often tend to gain employment in the mainstream economy. While the sample in this study is too limited to make empirical conclusions about this, time and Norwegian skills were clearly important resources that many of the interviewees' parents drew on.

Huy's parents did not have these resources. He was one of the three interviewees already mentioned who understood that their parents had come from poor conditions in their home country. His family migrated from poor conditions in their country of origin to Norway where they worked in restaurants, mostly doing the dishes. To make ends meet, his mother also worked as a seamstress, typically during the night while the family slept. Huy talked about a childhood with absent parents, working double shifts. Still, Huy told me that they made it clear that getting an education was a priority. To make this possible, Huy was sent to summer schools and weekend schools throughout his childhood. While his parents did not seem to have the same resources (either time, or Norwegian language skills) as the parents in my sample

with 'high status' in their country of origin, they were members of a tight-knit and seemingly well-organised, ethnic community. At the time of the interview, Huy was about to graduate from a prestigious educational track in Norway. In many senses, he is the typical case of a child of immigrants who made it to the top 'against all odds' (Cruel, Schneider & Lelie 2012). His story serves as an example of how seemingly similar people still have different pathways to attaining educational credentials. Although we lack the data to make any conclusions about the organising principles of the community Huy was part of, his story indicates that his community was more important for his educational success than his parents' own involvement. Thus, we need a heterogeneous set of explanations to understand different educational outcomes among different groups of children of immigrants.

DISCUSSION

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS AND MIDDLE-CLASS CHILDREN

In her seminal work, Lareau (2011) looked at both class and race and how they mattered for child-rearing practices. She argued that, in the US context, it is primarily class that regulates how parents engage and are involved in their children's upbringing (see also Vincent et al. 2013). This argument has been met with criticism, particularly that the insistence on class over race as a structuring principle creates a 'hierarchy of oppression' (Vincent et al. 2013: 438). So far, this study has shown that by shifting the point of departure, and including parents' status *prior* to migration, we can see that a lot of the parental involvement in the interviewees' upbringing mirrors patterns found in research on middle-class families. The interviewees that reported having parents with 'high status' in their country of origin also described having their parents involved in their childhood, leading organised everyday lives with activities intended to serve a future purpose, and engaging in conversations with their parents, all central elements in the cultural logic of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2011). However, as I did not interview the parents themselves, I don't know if they would have recognised their children's descriptions. Further, the way the interviewees in this study acknowledged the role their parents played in their own success is not a typical finding in other studies of middle-class children. The interviewees in this study do not try to challenge the moral authority of the middle class, rather they embrace this social class and insist on being included in it. Belonging to the 'middle-class' stereotypically involves having certain attitudes, values and modes of behaviour that are often the opposite of those assumed to be prevalent in immigrant families (Archer 2011; Rollock et al. 2011; Rollock et al. 2013). By insisting that their educational choice was easy and 'natural', the interviewees rejected being positioned as obedient and a product of their parent's culture. Because white middle-class academic performance is understood as authentic and legitimate, identifying as middle class can also be understood as a 'covering' strategy (Goffman 1963), or a way of reducing stigma to gain legitimacy and acceptance for their educational accomplishments. Although it might be the case that the interviewees in this study engage in a 'counter-discourse' to reduce stigma (e.g. Kindt 2018), their parents also seem to have been able to draw on a diversified set of resources to enhance their children's behaviours and mindsets, in ways conducive to academic success.

While I argue that the interviewees' everyday lives in childhood resemble the lives of native middle-class children in a number of ways, I do not contend that they are alike. The differences between immigrant and native families are numerous and

important to acknowledge. One example is the perceived source of the appropriate behaviour, and the process through which it appears. While middle-class parenting is often understood as a process where parents find their children's talents and make the most of them (Stefansen & Aarseth 2011; Vincent & Ball 2007), I show how this parental involvement is experienced differently by children of immigrants. The interviewees all reported that their parents had set clear goals for them and that they were involved in their lives to ensure that these goals could be met. Such external goal setting by the parents, which is apparently not based on the child's intrinsic abilities, might be related to their immigrant status. Potentially, a fear of prospective discrimination – that their children might not have the privilege and luxury enjoyed by the white majority – could trigger a 'safe' strategy, where enrichment activities are seen as instrumental, to secure children's skills for the future (Fangen & Lynnebakke 2014; Heath, Rothern & Kilpi 2008; Vincent et al. 2013).

This feeling of having to 'prove yourself' through high-status academic credentials can be interpreted as a strategy to prevent future discrimination and was also talked about in my interviews: 'You have to be one step ahead [...]. You can't simply be as good as the rest; you always have to prove yourself a little more' (Male, medicine), is a typical expert. However, instead of positing class and immigrant status as opposites in an attempt to explain these young adults' behaviours and accounts, I argue that we should understand them as interplaying factors (e.g. Vincent et al. 2013). Because of hardship due to migration, experience with discrimination and racism, and challenges related to resettlement in the host country, parents with immigrant backgrounds might be extra involved in their children's schooling. If these parents also have enjoyed a high social status before migration, this might lead to an intensified investment in their children's education in the host country. Thus, class and immigrant-minority status can be understood as pulling in the same direction towards a form of concerted and involved style of parenting. This means that children of immigrants' educational achievements do not need to be framed as either a consequence of their families' culture or their parent's educational selectivity. Rather it seems that those whose parents had 'high status' in their country of origin might have a double drive to succeed – the middle class and the immigrant drive.

The data upon which these findings are based is limited in that it comes from a small, carefully selected sample of successful children of immigrants. It should also be noted that retrospective interviews always run the risk of bias because previous experiences are interpreted in light of present experiences. The fact that my respondents were all successful in terms of education may obviously have influenced how they talked about their experiences in adolescence. Further, it is important to state that the basis of the involvement and drive might vary between different groups of immigrant families. Social status before migrating is one of the characteristics that appears to be important for how children of immigrants experience their families' involvement in their everyday lives. The possible role of variety in children of immigrants' lives in terms of upbringing, parental resources and ethnic communities warrants further investigation in future research.

CONCLUSION

In the literature, involved immigrant parents are sometimes seen as a sign of social control within immigrant communities (Bankston 2004; Leirvik 2016; Zhou 2005). One influential strand of research has focused on how immigrant parents make sure

that their children have as little leisure time as possible, so as to avoid downward assimilation (Portes & Zhou 1993). Some immigrant parents control their children's leisure time in a way that violates their freedom, which can have a severe impact on the child's mental health (Bankston 2004; Leirvik 2016). To some extent, this article confirms a form of 'social control' within the immigrant family, albeit not one that seriously infringes on the interviewees' own freedom and health. As shown, several of the interviewees clearly understood that their parents had strict rules, paid attention and were actively involved in their children's lives. However, the article questions whether this kind of parental involvement stems from common cultural attributes common of their ethnic community.

When immigrant parents have high social status origins, they seem to be able to draw on a diversified set of resources to help their children excel in school. In addition to *time* and *language skills*, they seemed to draw on shared family narratives that allowed their children to aim high.

Future research should address the potential variation in paths to educational success among children of immigrants. Instead of juxtaposing class and immigrant status, the interaction between class-based resources and more immigrant-specific resources (such as cultural characteristics) could be addressed. More specifically, with an entirely different research design, future research could address the role of 'hidden selection bias' when there is a mismatch between the original social status of immigrant families and the measured host country social status resulting from the systematic downward mobility experienced in the migration process.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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