

# Extracurricular Participation Among Adolescents from Immigrant Families

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**Abstract** Participation in organized after-school activities could be especially beneficial for youth from immigrant backgrounds, whose families often have little knowledge of American school systems. The role of extracurricular involvement in the achievement and motivation of students from immigrant families was examined among 468 eleventh grade (52.4 % female) students from Asian American (44.4 %), European American (19.0 %) and Latino (36.5 %) backgrounds who varied in generational status (first: 25 %; second: 52.4 %, third: 22.6 %) and attended high school in the Los Angeles area. Participants completed questionnaires regarding their extracurricular activities, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation. Students' grade point average (GPA) was obtained from official school records. Controls included parental education, ethnicity, generational status, gender, school, and the outcome variables in tenth grade. First generation students were less likely to participate in academic activities than their third generation peers but, overall, there were few generational differences in participation. Participation predicted achievement and engagement after accounting for tenth grade levels of educational adjustment. Most notably, although all students benefitted from participation, the gain in GPA as a function of participation was greater for first generation than third

generation students. Results suggest that organized after-school activities are particularly important for students in immigrant families, providing them with additional experiences that contribute to academic achievement.

**Keywords** Adolescent · Immigrant · Academic adjustment · Extracurricular activities

## Introduction

Involvement in organized extracurricular activities has been associated with academic achievement and engagement (Mahoney and Cairns 1997; Roeser and Peck 2003). These relationships have been observed in achievement measures such as grade point average (GPA), as well as more subjective measures like school belonging and intrinsic motivation (Brown and Evans 2002; Fredricks and Eccles 2010; Larson 2000; Vandell et al. 2005). These associations have been observed across various measurements of participation, such as breadth—the number of different activities in which students are enrolled—and specific types of activities, including sports, arts or academics (Fredricks and Eccles 2006a, b; Rose-Krasnor et al. 2006). Importantly, some studies suggest that extracurricular activities might be especially beneficial for underserved populations (Blomfield and Barber 2011; Brown and Evans 2002; Marsh 1992; Marsh and Kleitman 2002).

Adolescents from immigrant families from Latin America and Asia are the two fastest rising ethnic groups in the US (Grieco et al. 2012), but extracurricular activities remain understudied among immigrant populations. Exploring the role of extracurricular activities among immigrant youth is important because, although they hold high academic expectations for their children, parents from

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immigrant backgrounds also report a lack of familiarity with factors useful for navigating the American school system (Fuligni and Fuligni 2007; Kirk et al. 2011). Extracurricular activities, therefore, could serve to enhance the achievement and motivation of early generations of immigrant youth by mitigating the relative lack of social capital in this population (Pong et al. 2005; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995). In the current article, we explored the dynamics of extracurricular participation among students from immigrant families by examining generational variations in the level of involvement in extracurricular activities during high school as well as in the academic outcomes of such involvement.

#### Academic Outcomes and Extracurricular Involvement

Extracurricular involvement has been associated with a variety of academic outcomes, and our study focused on actual achievement, school belonging and intrinsic motivation. Relative to other types of out-of school activities like parent, sibling and self-care, students who participate in extracurricular activities have higher GPAs, even while controlling for previous levels of achievement (Mahoney et al. 2005). Furthermore, this relationship has been found across development (Cooper et al. 1999; Fredricks and Eccles 2010). Cooper et al. (1999) found, for example, that spending time in organized extracurricular activities was associated with a higher GPA and test scores relative to working or watching television for sixth to twelfth graders, even while controlling for gender, grade level, ethnicity, free-lunch eligibility, and level of adult supervision after school. The current study examined the role of after-school activities in GPA among immigrant youth.

In addition to academic achievement, a sense of school belonging is seen as a critical academic outcome because it has been linked with a variety of positive behaviors such as prosocial behaviors, academic resilience as well as decreased misconduct at school, delinquency, dropping out and substance use (Battistich and Hom 1997; Calabrese and Poe 1990; Gonzalez and Padilla 1997; Jenkins 1997; Sankey and Huon 1999). Participating in extracurricular activities has been found to be related to school belonging (Brown and Evans 2002; Finn 1989). A study with over 1,700 seventh to twelfth graders who varied by socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity found that Latino, African American and European American students who participated in after-school activities reported a stronger school connection, even after controlling for gender, grade level and SES (Brown and Evans 2002). Therefore, we also examined the role of after-school activities in the school belonging of immigrant youth.

Finally, mean levels of intrinsic motivation have been found to decrease across development (Gottfried et al.

2001). However, participating in extracurricular activities has been found to be associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation among adolescents (Larson 1994; Vandell et al. 2005). Vandell et al. (2005) assessed intrinsic motivation utilizing watches that beeped randomly after school among an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample of middle school students. Watches signaled students to write down what they were doing, where they were and whom they were with. They found that students reported their highest levels of intrinsic motivation when they were participating in extracurricular activities than any other type of activity after school. Our study examined intrinsic motivation as a measure of academic engagement as it related to participation in after-school activities among immigrant youth.

There is a potential for selection effects by which high achieving and more engaged and motivated students become more involved in extracurricular activities in the first place. Therefore, it is critical for non-experimental studies of the implications of such involvement to control for pre-existing characteristics within a longitudinal framework (Bohnert et al. 2010; Fredricks and Eccles 2010). As such, our study controlled for levels of student achievement, school engagement, and intrinsic motivation during the previous year when estimating the association between extracurricular involvement and these academic outcomes.

#### Types of Extracurricular Involvement

A more complete understanding of the role of extracurricular involvement can be obtained by measuring involvement in a variety of ways. First, involvement can be assessed as the presence or absence of any kind of extracurricular participation, and any participation has been found to be associated with higher grades, intrinsic motivation and academic aspirations when controlling for gender, ethnicity, and parental education, and prior levels of adjustment (Darling et al. 2005). Due to the lack of research on after-school activities and immigrant youth, the relationship between the overall presence or absence of participation and the outcome variables of was our primary analysis of interest.

Another way of measuring involvement is to assess the breadth of participation across different activities. Breadth is the variety of contexts in which students participate (i.e., sports, community service, arts) (Bohnert et al. 2010). Breadth has been found to be associated with a series of academic and motivational outcomes (Bohnert et al. 2010; Larson et al. 2006; Rose-Krasnor et al. 2006), even years after having participated (Denault and Poulin 2009). Although participating in a variety of activities appears to be associated with positive outcomes for youth, allowing

them to explore and navigate a range of contexts, it is important to note that some studies have found that there is a curvilinear relationship between breadth and GPA, academic engagement, expectations, and belonging (Fredricks and Eccles 2010; Knifsend and Graham 2012). That is, after a certain number of activities, the apparent benefits afforded by participating in extracurricular activities may plateau or even decrease. Given these associations present in previous literature, but understudied among immigrant youth, our study also explored the potential predictive role of breadth in academics.

Lastly, researchers have also examined different types of participation (Eccles and Barber 1999; Hansen et al. 2003) and different activities have been found to be associated with specific outcomes (Bohnert et al. 2010). For example, Eccles and Barber (1999) found that, although participating in sports and prosocial activities were both associated with higher GPAs, sports involvement also was related to risky behaviors, whereas prosocial activities were not. In light of the findings in previous research, the analysis by type of activity was also an exploratory direction in our study among immigrant youth. Our study, therefore, followed previous research by examining diverse indicators of extracurricular participation, including overall participation, the breadth of participation and the presence of a curvilinear association within breadth, as well as five different types of participation: sports, service, arts, academics and other activities (social, ethnic/religious, and other).

#### Adolescents from Immigrant Families

The apparent value of extracurricular activities for academic performance and motivation has led to increased attention upon whether they may be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged students, such as low performing students and those from ethnic minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds who tend to have limited access to such activities. Studies have found that the benefit in academic self-concept for adolescents from low-income homes who participate in activities is greater than those from more affluent backgrounds who also participate in activities (Blomfield and Barber 2011; Marsh 1992; Marsh and Kleitman 2002). That is, youth who are at greater risk for poor academic outcomes may be the ones who show more optimal outcomes when participating in extracurricular activities (Mahoney 2000; Mahoney and Cairns 1997). For instance, high amounts of participation resulted in greater reading gains for African American youth than for European American youth (Mahoney et al. 2006) and school belonging increased more for Latino youth who participated in extracurricular activities, relative to that of other ethnic groups (Brown and Evans 2002). Therefore, we were particularly interested in examining the

moderating role of immigrant status between the association of participation and academic achievement and engagement.

Students from immigrant families face several challenges due to the fact that their parents are less familiar with the educational system in their host country, and it remains unclear the role extracurricular activities could play in their academic development. Even though earlier generations of immigrant families from Latino and Asian American backgrounds sometimes show higher levels of academic performance and motivation, they also demonstrate a lack of familiarity with some of the school activities and practices conducive to academic achievement (Fuligni and Fuligni 2007; Kirk et al. 2011). In extracurricular activities specifically, Simpkins et al. (2013) found several barriers to participation for Mexican-origin teens based on the family's background and generational status. These barriers included a lack of documentation, which created transportation problems due to not having a driver's license. Immigrant parents also expressed resistance to extracurricular activities because they were perceived as too fast-paced and complex, like many undesirable aspects of American life (Simpkins et al. 2013). So, even though first generation Latino and Asian American parents hold high academic aspirations and expectations for their children constantly across development, their children could be falling short of these expectations due to their lack of knowledge regarding optimal methods of navigating American school systems (Goldenberg et al. 2001; Sue and Okazaki 1990; Raleigh and Kao 2010).

Social Control Theory (Hirschi 1969; Sampson and Laub 1990) postulates that the strength of ties between the adolescent and the social institution affects behavioral development, and that disadvantaged settings may reduce opportunities for youth to develop these positive attachments. Organized extracurricular activities are positively associated with social institutions and can help immigrant youth by connecting them with peers and adults familiar with the American school system (Mahoney et al. 2009). These activities, therefore, could be especially beneficial in helping bridge the gap in social capital faced by youth from immigrant families. For first generation immigrant youth extracurricular activities might provide them with mentors and peers that fill the gaps in academic social capital (Rhodes 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009). For second and third generation immigrant youth, participating in extracurricular activities could ameliorate the decrease in academic motivation by connecting them with American institutions in a positive way (Vandell et al. 2005). To our knowledge, the differential role of extracurricular activities for the academic adjustment of students from immigrant families has not yet been examined.

## Current Study

We examined three questions regarding involvement of extracurricular activities among immigrant high school adolescents' pertaining to their academic achievement, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation. First, does generational status predict participation? Research examining the differences in participation by generational status is limited. However, one study found that Mexican-origin immigrant parents reported more barriers to participation (Simpkins et al. 2013), while another showed that first generation Latino adolescents participated more, regardless of nationality (Simpkins et al. 2011). Given the lack of research in the area and the conflicting results, we did not articulate a strong hypothesis regarding the role of generational status as a predictor of participation. Second, we asked: does participation predict academic outcomes, controlling for earlier levels of those outcomes? Other studies have found support for the association between participation and academic outcomes while controlling for demographics and prior adjustment (Darling et al. 2005; Fredricks and Eccles 2010). We hypothesized that participation would predict these academic associations even while controlling for earlier levels of those outcomes, regardless of generational status. That is, we hypothesized that participating in after-school activities during eleventh grade would be predictive of eleventh grade GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation, over an above demographic and tenth grade GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation controls—for first, second and third generation immigrant students. Finally, we were interested in the role of immigrant status as a modifier of the relationship between participation and GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation. Previous research has posited that first generation adolescents are more disadvantaged in terms of their academic social capital (Fuligni and Fuligni 2007; Kirk et al. 2011) and that disadvantaged youth tend to show stronger associations to positive outcomes when they participate in after-school activities (Blomfield and Barber 2011; Mahoney 2000; Mahoney and Cairns 1997). Therefore, we hypothesized that although participating after-school activities would predict higher levels of GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation for all three generations of immigrant youth—these associations would be more pronounced for first generation youth.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 468 eleventh grade students (47.6 % male and 52.4 % female) from three high schools in the Los Angeles

area completed questionnaires. These took approximately 30–45 min to complete during the school day as part of an ongoing longitudinal study examining the role of family and ethnic identification in academic and psychological adjustment across time. The first school in the study was predominantly Latino and Asian American with lower to middle class families. The second school was also lower to middle class with mostly Latino and European American students. The third school was mostly Asian American and European American with middle to upper-middle class families. No ethnicity composed the majority of any one school. Instead, the two dominant groups each made up between 30 and 50 % of the total population at each school. The 468 eleventh grade students in this study represented 77 % of an original sample of 608 students who were recruited a year earlier from the same three high schools during the tenth grade; the original sample of 608 students represented 66, 60, and 53 % of the students enrolled in the three schools at the tenth grade. Our analyses focus on the 468 students at the eleventh grade because appropriate measures of extracurricular participation were not obtained until the eleventh grade and we wished to use tenth grade assessments of GPA, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation in order to control for selection effects when examining the association between participation and aspects of academic achievement and engagement at the eleventh grade.

The sample of 468 students used in the present analyses included those from Latin American (36.5 %), Asian (44.4 %), and European (19.0 %) backgrounds. Students from other ethnic backgrounds did not constitute large enough groups for analyses and were dropped. Overall, 25.0 % of the students were of the first generation (i.e., foreign born), 52.4 % were of the second generation (i.e., American born with at least one foreign born parent), and 22.6 % were of the third generation or greater (i.e., both students and parents were American born). First and second generation students comprised a higher proportion of students from Latin American (first: 32.5 %, second: 43.7 %) and Asian (first: 60.7 %, second: 52.7 %) backgrounds as compared to those from European backgrounds (first: 6.8 %, second: 3.7 %).

Students reported their parents' level of education on a scale where 1 = "Elementary/Junior High," 2 = "Some High School," 3 = "Graduated High School," 4 = "Some College," 5 = "Graduated College," and 6 = "Graduate or Professional School." Averaging both parents' educational levels revealed that students from Latin American backgrounds had parents with lower levels of education ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) than their counterparts with Asian backgrounds ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ), who in turn had parents with less education than those with European backgrounds ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ),  $F(2, 465) = 82.95$ ,

$p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.26$ . The educational attainment of parents of third generation students ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) was higher than that of both first ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) and second ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) generation students,  $F(2, 465) = 37.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .14$ .

## Measures

### *Eleventh Grade Extracurricular Participation*

At the eleventh grade, students responded “Yes” or “No” to the following question: “Do you participate in any organized clubs, sports, or other activities at school?” If “Yes,” students then checked off “Yes” or “No” to the types of activities in which they participated from a list. This list included eight options: “Sports,” “School Publication (e.g., school newspaper, yearbook),” “Arts (e.g., dance, theater, choir, music, art),” “Social (e.g., peer counseling, student government),” “Academic (e.g., national honors society, academic decathlon),” “Community service club or organization,” “Ethnicity/religion-related club or organization,” and “Other.”

Students’ responses were used to create three indices of participation. First, “Participation” represented whether students participated in any type of activity (0 = No, 1 = Yes). This was our primary measure of interest. Second, in order to further explore participation, a measure of “Types of Activities” was created. Using categories employed in previous research (Fredricks and Eccles 2006a; Hansen et al. 2003), activities were coded into five categories: (1) sports, (2) service (e.g., community service club or organization), (3) arts (e.g., dance, theater, choir, music, art), (4) academics (academics and school publication), and (5) other (social, ethnic/religious, and other), where 0 = No, 1 = Yes for each type of activity. Finally, summing the number of different types of activities in which students participated from the original list of 8 activity types created a measure of breadth (Bohnert et al. 2010). Scores on breadth ranged from 0 to 6.

### *Tenth and Eleventh Grade Point Average (GPA)*

Official school records were obtained from each school at the end of the academic year at the tenth and eleventh grades. Grades were coded (F = 1, D = 2, C = 3, B and A = 4) and averaged for a composite GPA. A majority of students enrolled in similar academic levels (e.g., remedial, regular or AP/honors) of English, social studies, and science courses (65–74 % were in the same level of courses). The levels of mathematics classes varied, but grades were not standardized within this subject because students who enrolled in higher-level courses typically earned higher grades than those in the lower-level classes.

### *Tenth and Eleventh Grade School Belonging*

Students indicated the extent to which they identified with their school at the tenth and eleventh grades using a seven-item scale adapted from Tyler and DeGoey (1995). They used a scale that ranged from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree” to respond to items such as “My school is important to the way I think of myself as a person” and “I feel close to people at my school.” The scale had adequate internal consistency for both tenth grade ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and eleventh grade ( $\alpha = .90$ ). This scale has been associated with several achievement measures such as intrinsic value of education and utility value of education (Neel and Fuligni 2012).

### *Tenth and Eleventh Grade Intrinsic Motivation*

At the tenth and eleventh grades, students responded to two items adapted from Eccles (1983): “In general I find working on school...” and “How much do you like working on schoolwork?” Items were rated on a scale from 1 “Very Boring” to 5 “Very Interesting” and 1 “A Little” to 5 “A Lot,” respectively. The two items were highly correlated both at tenth,  $r(595) = .66$ ,  $p < .001$  and eleventh grade,  $r(466) = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ . This is a well-established measure that has been used in previous research (Jodl et al. 2001; Meece et al. 1990).

## Results

### Attrition Analyses

Participants who completed interviews in both the tenth and eleventh grades were compared to those who only participated in tenth grade. Students who participated in both waves ( $M = 2.91$ ) differed from students who participated only in tenth grade ( $M = 2.59$ ) in their GPA,  $F(1, 589) = 5.03$ ,  $p = .025$ , but not in school belonging,  $F(1, 592) = 3.39$ ,  $p = .066$  or intrinsic motivation,  $F(1, 594) = .17$ ,  $p = .684$ . There were ethnic differences in retention of the original sample in that Latino students showed higher attrition levels (71.6 %) than their Asian American (78.1 %) and European American (79.8 %) peers,  $\chi^2(1, N = 601) = 14.17$ ,  $p = .003$ .

### Predictive Analyses

Three sets of analyses were employed and all analyses controlled for ethnicity, gender, parental education, and the school attended by the students, the latter because of the potential for different extracurricular opportunities across

**Table 1** Regressions predicting overall participation at the eleventh grade

	Participation		
	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$
Constant	.78	.07	
First generation	-.08	.08	-.09
Second generation	-.09	.07	-.08
Latino	-.04	.08	-.04
Asian American	.09	.08	.08
Gender	.02	.04	.02
Parental education	.03	.02	.11
School 1	-.03	.06	-.03
School 2	-.10	.07	-.08

Participation represents whether students participated in any extracurricular activity at the eleventh grade (0 = No; 1 = Yes). Parental education is centered at the mean education level of the sample. First and second generation represents dummy codes comparing these students against the baseline of third generation students. Latino and Asian American represent dummy codes comparing these students against those from European backgrounds, gender is coded dichotomously (0 = male; 1 = female), and School 1 and School 2 represent school controls against the baseline of School 3. None of the predictors in the model were statistically significant

schools. First, we examined the relationship between generational status and participation in extracurricular activities. Then, analyses were conducted examining the relationship of extracurricular participation at the eleventh grade with GPA, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation at the eleventh grade, while also controlling for these outcomes in the tenth grade. Finally, we examined generational status as a moderator of the association between participation and the academic outcomes, which included the same demographic controls and the previous levels of academic outcomes. For each set of the three sets of analyses, we initially present results in tables and the text according our primary participation measure of interest, which is whether or not students were engaged in any type of extracurricular activity. These results were then followed by the exploratory analyses of type and breadth of participation, which are reported in the text.

#### *Does Generational Status Predict Participation?*

Multiple regressions were used to examine the relationship between generational status and whether students participated in any activities at the eleventh grade while controlling for ethnicity, gender, parental education, and the school attended by the students. As shown in Table 1, results indicated that generational status was not associated with participation in any extracurricular activities.

Ethnicity, gender, SES and school also were non-significant predictors of overall participation.

When separate types of activities were examined using the same regression model, there was only one generational difference such that first generation students were less likely to participate in academic activities than their third generation peers ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .025$ ). In terms of ethnicity, students from Latino backgrounds were less likely to participate in service activities ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p = .030$ ) than students from European backgrounds. Asian American students participated in more academic ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and other ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p = .022$ ) activities than those from European backgrounds. Girls participated more than boys in service ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p = .003$ ), arts ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and other ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p = .004$ ) activities. Parental education was a significant predictor only for sports, with higher parental education being linked with greater sports participation ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .004$ ).

Finally, similar analyses of the breadth of activities showed that first generation students participated in a fewer different activities than third generation students ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p = .024$ ). Students with Asian backgrounds participated in a greater variety of activities than those with European backgrounds ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Girls also participated in a greater variety of activities than boys ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and students with parents of a higher education level also reported more breadth ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .033$ ).

#### *Does Participation Predict Academic Achievement and Engagement?*

Next, we conducted multiple regressions to examine the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and school-related outcomes (i.e., GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation) at the eleventh grade while controlling for ethnicity, parental education, gender, school and the respective dependent variable during the previous school year. We found that participating in extracurricular activities at the eleventh grade was associated with significantly higher GPA, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation (see Table 2) even after controlling for demographic factors and GPA 1-year earlier at the tenth grade. We conducted the same regression analyses of specific types of activity involvement. Sports activities were positively associated with GPA ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .044$ ). Sports ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .002$ ), service ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p = .006$ ), and arts ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .002$ ) activities were significantly positive predictors of school belonging. None of the other associations between specific activities and school outcomes were significant.

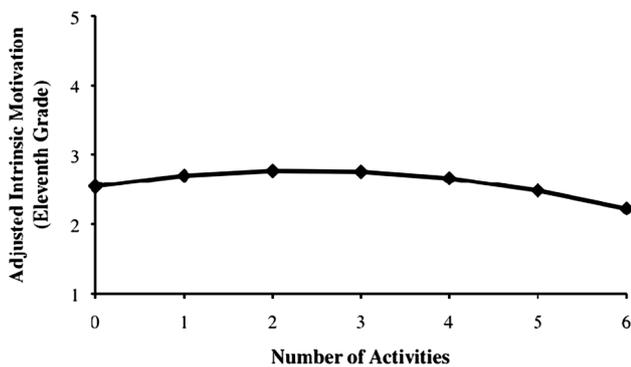
Using the same regression analyses, the breadth of activities in which adolescents participated predicted

**Table 2** Predicting GPA, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation from participation

	Academic outcome								
	GPA			School belonging			Intrinsic motivation		
	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$
Constant	.65***	.12		1.19***	.17		.80***	.16	
Tenth grade level	.74	.03	.75***	.59	.04	.56***	.56	.04	.56***
Participation	.13	.05	.08**	.38	.08	.19***	.20	.08	.09*
First generation	-.03	.08	-.02	.15	.12	.07	.08	.13	.04
Second generation	-.01	.07	.00	.13	.11	.07	.05	.12	.03
Latino	-.10	.08	-.07	-.11	.13	-.06	.09	.14	.05
Asian American	-.00	.08	.00	-.14	.13	-.08	.03	.14	.02
Gender	.08	.04	.05	-.14	.07	-.08*	.14	.07	.07
Parental education	.01	.02	.02	.00	.03	.00	-.01	.03	-.02
School 1	.04	.06	.03	-.19	.10	-.11*	-.06	.10	-.03
School 2	-.07	.07	-.04	-.34	.10	-.15***	-.14	.11	-.06

Participation represents whether students participated in any extracurricular activity at the eleventh grade (0 = No; 1 = Yes). “Tenth Grade Level” refers to the level of the dependent variable at the tenth grade. First and second generation represents dummy codes comparing these students against the baseline of third generation students. Latino and Asian American represent dummy codes comparing these students against those from European backgrounds, gender is coded dichotomously (0 = male; 1 = female). Parental education is centered at the mean education level of the sample, and School 1 and School 2 represent school controls against the baseline of School 3

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$



**Fig. 1** Eleventh grade intrinsic motivation according to number of extracurricular activities

higher GPA ( $\beta = .07, p = .027$ ) and school belonging ( $\beta = .16, p < .001$ ) at the eleventh grade. Finally, analyses of the potential curvilinear association between the breadth of activities and academic outcomes revealed a quadratic relationship between the variety of activities and intrinsic motivation (linear term:  $\beta = .10, p = .038$ ; quadratic term:  $\beta = -.11, p = .015$ ), such that the initial positive association at lower levels of breadth turned negative at higher levels of participation, with the peak level of intrinsic motivation occurring at approximately two to three activities (see Fig. 1). There were no significant curvilinear associations between breadth of activity involvement and GPA or school engagement.

*Does Generational Status Modify Associations with Academic Outcomes?*

In order to examine differences by generational status of the adolescent in the observed outcomes associated with participation, we repeated the regression analyses described above with the addition of appropriate interaction terms (i.e., first generation X participation and second generation X participation). We found a significant difference in the relationship between any participation and GPA for first and third generational students (see Table 3). As shown in Fig. 2, the association of participation for GPA was greater for first generation as compared to third generation students. The size of difference in GPA according to participation for second generation students was between that for first and third generation students. We did not find similar interactions between participation and school belonging and intrinsic motivation.

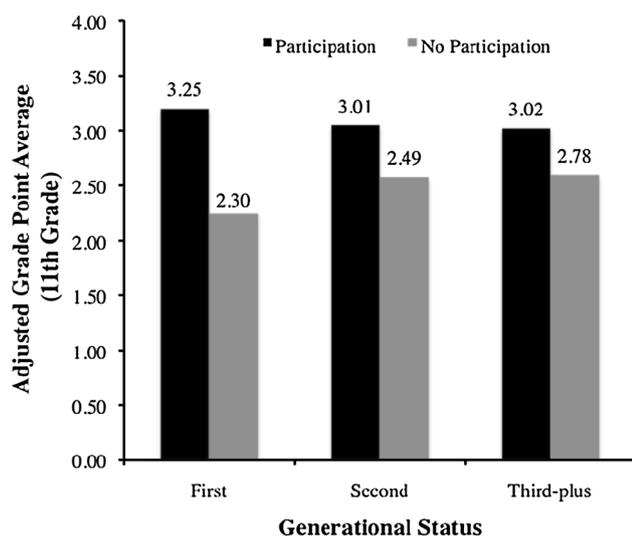
Similar analyses of specific types of activity involvement showed differences between first and third generation students participating in academic activities ( $\beta = .08, p = .051$ ). Specifically, first generation students who participated in academic activities had higher GPAs ( $M = 3.62$ ) than first generation students who did not participate in academic activities ( $M = 2.74$ ). Although third generation students who participated in academic activities had higher GPAs ( $M = 3.34$ ) than third generation students who did not participate in academic activities ( $M = 2.83$ ), the magnitude of this difference was

**Table 3** Generational variations in predicting GPA, school belonging, and intrinsic motivation from participation

	Academic outcomes								
	GPA			School belonging			Intrinsic motivation		
	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$
Constant	.70***	.14		1.17***	.19		.83***	.20	
Tenth grade level	.74	.03	.75***	.60	.04	.56***	.57	.04	.57***
Participation	.06	.10	.04	.39	.17	.20*	.15	.18	.07
First gen. $\times$ participation	.33	.14	.20**	.17	.22	.07	.18	.24	.03
Second gen. $\times$ participation	-.01	.12	.00	-.10	.19	-.06	.00	.21	.00
First generation	-.33	.13	-.19**	.02	.21	.01	-.05	.22	-.02
Second generation	.01	.12	.01	.20	.19	.11	.04	.20	.02
Latino	-.08	.08	-.05	-.10	.13	-.05	.10	.14	.05
Asian American	.02	.08	.02	-.13	.13	-.08	.03	.14	.02
Gender	.07	.04	.05	-.15	.07	-.08*	.13	.07	.07
Parental education	.01	.02	.01	.00	.03	.00	-.01	.03	-.02
School 1	.03	.06	.02	-.19	.10	-.11*	-.06	.10	-.03
School 2	-.08	.07	-.04	-.34	.10	-.15***	-.14	.11	-.06

Participation represents whether students participated in any extracurricular activity at the eleventh grade (0 = No; 1 = Yes). “Tenth Grade Level” refers to the level of the dependent variable at the tenth grade. First and second generation represents dummy codes comparing these students against the baseline of third generation students. Latino and Asian American represents dummy codes comparing these students against those from European backgrounds, gender is coded dichotomously (0 = male; 1 = female). Parental education is centered at the mean education level of the sample, and School 1 and School 2 represent school controls against the baseline of School 3. The two interaction terms test whether the prediction of academic outcomes by participation varies as a function of students’ generational status

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$



**Fig. 2** Eleventh grade GPA according to extracurricular participation (Yes or No) and generational status

significantly greater for first generation students. In contrast, the association between sports participation and school belonging differed between third generation students and their second generation counterparts, ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p = .026$ ). The difference in school belonging between those who did and did not participate in sports was greater

among third generation students ( $M_s = 3.49$  vs. 2.67) than among second generation students ( $M_s = 3.28$  vs. 3.07).

Additionally, we examined the moderating role of generational status on the relationship between breadth of participation and GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation. We found differences between first and third generation students in terms of their GPA when they participated in a greater breadth of activities ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Follow-up analyses examining the simple slopes for each generational group showed that as first generation students participated in a greater breadth of activities they showed higher GPAs ( $b = .15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas the same was not the case for second ( $b = .02$ ,  $p = .401$ ) and third generation students ( $b = .01$ ,  $p = .848$ ). Generational status did not modify the previously-reported significant curvilinear association between breadth of activity involvement and intrinsic motivation, nor did it modify the previously-reported non-significant curvilinear associations with GPA and school belonging.

## Discussion

Students from immigrant families are a quickly growing segment of the US population (Grieco et al. 2012). Immigrant youth are academically motivated, but often lack the

knowledge required for success in American schools (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995). Participation in organized after-school activities has been found to be a predictor of many academic outcomes, particularly for students with greater academic needs, such as low-income and low-achieving students (Blomfield and Barber 2011; Cooper et al. 1999; Fredricks and Eccles 2010; Mahoney et al. 2005; Marsh 1992; Marsh and Kleitman 2002). As such, extracurricular activities could provide immigrant youth with additional experiences from which they can benefit. In the current article, we explored the dynamics of extracurricular participation among students from immigrant families by examining generational variations in the level of involvement in extracurricular activities as well as the association of such involvement with a variety of academic outcomes. Although we observed few differences in the level of involvement according to generational status, the finding that extracurricular activities were more strongly associated with GPA among first-generation students than among their peers suggests that these activities may be a critical component of the successful adjustment of immigrant students to American schools.

Adolescents from immigrant families generally participated in extracurricular activities at the same rate as their peers from families with American-born parents. The rate of participation in any type of activity was similar, as was involvement in sports, service, and art activities. The only generational differences existed in terms of academic activities and the overall breadth of activities, with third generation students evidencing higher participation than their first generation peers. It is unclear why generational differences were only evident in these indices of involvement, but they may reflect the more limited knowledge held by immigrant parents and students about the existence of academic-oriented extracurricular activities, which tend to be less visible than others, as well as their potential value for college applications. If so, this lack of knowledge would be consistent with the more limited social capital regarding education held by immigrant families and students (Fuligni and Fuligni 2007; Kirk et al. 2011). Our findings differ, however, from a previous study that reported that first generation Latino students, regardless of nationality, participated more than their native-born peers (Simpkins et al. 2011). It is unclear why this may be the case, but our study included more ethnic groups and a more limited grade range (i.e., eleventh grade activity involvement) than the Simpkins et al. (2011) study. Simpkins et al.'s (2011) finding that participation declined with age suggests that our range of participation was more truncated than that observed in this study, thereby potentially reducing the chance of observing generational differences. The role of generational status as a predictor to participation should be replicated with other samples of immigrant youth across a variety of contexts and locations.

Consistent with previous studies, we found that involvement in extracurricular activities was associated with better academic achievement and engagement, over and above self-selection effects (Mahoney and Cairns 1997; Roeser and Peck 2003). Specifically, this study found that participating in extracurricular activities was related to higher GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation. This was true regardless of the type of participation and even when taking into account ethnicity, generational status, gender, SES, and earlier levels of academic achievement and engagement. We observed only one association in support of the over-scheduling hypothesis, with breadth in activity involvement demonstrating a curvilinear association for intrinsic motivation. At moderate levels of involvement, between approximately two to three activities, students reported greater interest in their schoolwork. Beyond three activities, however, the association turned negative such that students who reported six activities reported levels of intrinsic motivation similar to that of students who did not participate at all. This finding is consistent with some previous studies that examined the over-scheduling hypothesis (Denault and Poulin 2009; Knifsend and Graham 2012), but it should be noted that the curvilinear pattern was found for only one out of three measures of achievement and engagement that were examined.

Most importantly, we observed that the apparent benefits of participation can be modified by generational status. Specifically, the association between participation and GPA was greater for first generation students as compared to third generation students in overall of participation, participation in academic activities, and a greater breadth of participation. Our results suggest that all students who evidenced higher levels of these types of participation benefitted in terms of their GPA. However, the gain in GPA as a function of participation was greater for the first generation students who showed greater overall participation, as compared to those who did not. Teenagers of immigrant backgrounds face different barriers to success in academic institutions according to their generational status (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995). First generation students tend to show higher levels of engagement and effort in school than second and third generation students (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), and their parents instill high levels of academic aspirations and expectations (Raleigh and Kao 2010). However, in spite of these advantages, these families many times face a lack of familiarity with American school systems that can impede these students from meeting their academic expectations (Fuligni and Fuligni 2007; Kirk et al. 2011). Our results suggest that extracurricular activities could at least partially compensate for this lack of social capital and help boost students' achievement. As explicated by Social Control Theory

(Hirshi 1969; Sampson and Laub 1990) extracurricular activities could be helping students from first generation immigrant families to bridge the gap in academic social capital necessary to succeed, just as they appear to do for those from lower socioeconomic and ethnic minority backgrounds (e.g., Blomfield and Barber 2011; Brown and Evans 2002; Mahoney et al. 2006).

The one exception to the results discussed above was a finding that sports participation provided an apparent greater advantage in terms of school belonging among third generation students than among their first generation counterparts. Sports have been found to be associated with positive academic tracks (Eccles and Barber 1999) and even cooperative goal orientations (Takemura et al. 2007). Another explanation could be that later generations might be disadvantaged in terms of their school belonging (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995), and that sports are helping these youth connect to their school in a positive way (Mahoney et al. 2009). It is unclear why this was the case for third generation students, and it should be noted that it was the only result obtained that suggested a greater benefit of participation for third generation students.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to report a differential benefit of extracurricular participation according to generational status and our findings need to be replicated among different and perhaps larger samples of youth. An interesting variable among immigrant youth could be the ethnic composition of their community or their school (Juvonen et al. 2006). The ways extracurricular activities could meet the needs of immigrant youth in new host communities and historically receiving host settings could be different, and even differ by generational status (Potochnick et al. 2012) or industrialization history of the society (Larson and Verma 1999). Additionally, it would be important to examine whether these differential outcomes are more evident during the high school years than during earlier in students' academic history. Denault and Poulin (2009) found, for example that the best predictor of outcomes in eleventh grade was participation in seventh grade and that participation generally decreased from seventh to eleventh grade. It would be important to examine if the discrepancies in outcomes found in our study among eleventh graders would be even more pronounced in earlier years in education. We did not collect information about participation before the eleventh grade and our results might show different patterns at earlier ages due to developmental factors existing at eleventh grade like shifts in social identity and time use (Barber et al. 2005; Shanahan and Flaherty 2001).

Additional studies need to examine the precise mechanisms by which extracurricular activities help foreign-born students. Whether by providing greater access to education-related social capital, by strengthening ties to teachers and

other students, or even by enabling the parents of immigrant students to meet and learn from other parents through activities and events, extracurricular involvement may be particularly important for immigrant students, just as they seem to be for other students who face unique challenges to their academic success (Eccles et al. 2003). Finally, parental characteristics could also be examined as moderators between immigrant youth and their participation or benefits of participation (Simpkins et al. 2013). Language is one of the challenges immigrant parents face (Ramirez 2003), and one of the reasons participation could be particularly important for earlier immigrant generations. Unfortunately, our study did not collect data on this variable.

Given some limitations in our study, results should be interpreted with caution. First, attrition analyses showed that our participants were significantly different in terms of their GPA, such that those who participated in both waves had higher GPAs. Also, Latino students participated significantly less than Asian American and European American students from Time 1 to Time 2 of this study. Even with controls for self-selection effects in our models, it could be that differences in population samples across waves could have impacted our results. Additionally, our analyses would have been strengthened if we could have controlled for family income and baseline levels of extracurricular participation. Unfortunately, these data were not collected in our sample.

## Conclusion

Our study was the first to examine the moderating role of immigrant status on the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and academic outcomes. Although we did not find generational status to be a consistent predictor of participation, we did find that participating in extracurricular activities predicted higher levels of GPA, school belonging and intrinsic motivation. Importantly, our results suggest that first generation youth who participate in extracurricular activities show greater advantages in terms of their GPA. Previous studies have found that, although they tend to be very motivated in their studies, immigrant youth do not always have access to the knowledge required to successfully navigate the American school system (Pong et al. 2005; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995). Our findings suggest that extracurricular activities can be a very valuable resource for first generation immigrant youth. Due to a lack of social capital, first-generation youth may be at-risk for earning lower grades, despite their desire to succeed. However, our findings suggest that the experience of extracurricular activities might significantly mitigate the lack of social capital, assisting immigrant youth with their aspirations to succeed in American schools.

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**Author Contributions** DEC participated in the formulation of the research questions, performed the statistical analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as helped draft the manuscript. AJF conceived of the study, and participated in its design and coordination, interpretation of the data and helped draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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