Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Exploring Immigrants Life Course Welfare Use in Metropolitan New York.

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Abstract

In this study we test the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency by examining the current use of public assistance of 1.5 and second generation immigrants who grew up in households that relied on welfare. Using data from the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study we explore the impact of receiving social assistance as a child and adolescent on the current use as young adult of social assistance.

Results show that most immigrants are assimilated to native counterparts concerning welfare use. Our findings suggest that circular poverty and not a culture of dependence is behind immigrants' welfare use throughout the life course.

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Introduction

Do immigrants assimilate into or out of welfare? The perception that immigrants assimilate into welfare and transmit to their children a culture of dependence on public assistance fueled the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The PRWORA, also known as "welfare reform", imposed strict federal regulations on immigrants' access to social assistance (U.S. House of Representatives, 1996).

The perceived transmission of welfare dependency from one generation of immigrants to the next dramatically affected the social policy of the U.S. and the well being of noncitizens; as immigrants were barred from access to basic rights such as medical care (Fix, 2009). Immigrant restrictionists have used the idea that immigrants develop an intergenerational dependency on welfare as a main argument against restoring noncitizens' access to social services, as this would promote the migration of people who are prone to rely on public assistance (Borjas, 1999a, b; Wasem, 2010). A major concern is that if immigrants receive public support to assist their incorporation they may raise their children to rely on welfare. Yet this is a normative idea for which there is hardly any empirical evidence. There is a positive correlation between receiving welfare as a child and relying on public assistance as an adult. However, most research has focused on the non-immigrant population (Bartholomae, Fox, and McKenry, 2004; Beaulieu et al., 2005; Borjas and Sueyoshi, 1997; Pepper, 2000). Only a small number of studies have examined the correlation between immigrant parents and their offspring' use of public assistance (Borjas, 1999c, 2011; Butcher and Hu, 2000) and none of them had data which linked parents' welfare receipt with children being in the welfare rolls as adults. This

study examines the use of public assistance of adult immigrants who grew up in households that relied on welfare. The main research question is: *do immigrants who received public assistance growing up rely on welfare during adulthood more than comparable native born individuals?*

To answer our question we use data from the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study (Kasinitz et al., 2008) to examine the impact of growing up in a household that received welfare on the likelihood of second and 1.5 generation immigrants using public assistance during adulthood. We distinguish among five welfare programs: (1) free school lunch, (2) Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and disability grants, (3) Medicaid, (4) food stamps, and (5) Social Security.

The ability to speak the host country's language, having a job according to one's qualifications or being married to a native-born person are some of the indicators employed in the assimilation literature to gauge the degree of incorporation of immigrants in receiving societies (Alba and Nee, 2003). Similarly, immigrants' reliance on welfare from one generation to the next reflects economic assimilation. Unlike other studies in this area which have compared immigrants' use of welfare to native born whites with native born parents; the present study compares immigrants' reliance on public aid with equivalent native born groups to offer a more nuanced understanding of their assimilation pathways.

This study adds to the existing literature on the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency in that we are able to distinguish between the 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant generations and to distinguish different types of social programs. In addition, we can identify whether respondents grew up in a household that received public

assistance and thus assess the impact of past reception on the current reliance on social benefits. Furthermore, this research employs comparable immigrant and native born groups instead of using middle class whites as the reference for welfare enrollment in the US. This provides a more robust test of the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency argument than previous research.

Background

Some people believe that relying on welfare is a behavior transmitted from parents to children. Proponents of this hypothesis believe that collecting public assistance alters individuals' work effort, their motivation to pursue education and discourages professional aspirations. Children who grow up in environments that rely heavily on welfare inherit this attitude. They are socialized to participate in public assistance and they model their behavior after parents and neighbors. As a result, being on the welfare rolls is expected during adulthood and there is no stigma associated to it (Moffitt, 1992; Murray, 1984; Patterson, 1981; Rank and Hirschl, 1999).

In addition to the behavioral and attitudinal components of the "welfare culture" this perspective posits that long-term dependency is taught during childhood. In welfare-dependent households children learn the norms and regulations that govern the public system of social assistance. Becoming familiar with the intricacies of the welfare system from an early age not only fosters dependency in adulthood but also discourages exploring unfamiliar territories such as training or the job market. Lack of formal training jeopardizes socioeconomic security and turns young adults back to the welfare rolls (Baron, Cobb-Clark, and Erkal 2009; Corcoran and Adams, 1997; Mead, 1986; Rank and Cheng, 1995).

Alternatively, the structural perspective attributes transgenerational welfare use to limited parental and environmental resources. Parents on social assistance do not have the means to invest in their children who usually attend lower quality schools. In addition, families on welfare are more likely to be single-parent households with a large number of children located in poor neighborhoods. These families do not have the resources for the development of the next generation. As a result, being raised in a welfare environment places the next generation at a greater risk of depending on public aid and constrains intergenerational mobility. Scholars with this perspective posit that it is the lack of opportunities, therefore, and not the use of welfare itself that is the main determinant of the reproduction of poverty (Bartholomae et al., 2004; Levine and Zimmerman, 1996; Lee, Singelmann, and Yom-Tov, 2008; Wilson, 1996).

Studies Assessing these Theories within the Immigrant Population

Limited research has examined the impact of growing up in a household reliant on welfare on the likelihood of collecting public assistance during adulthood for the immigrant population. The study of immigration and public assistance has mainly focused on whether the type of welfare system influences immigrants' inflows (Borjas, 1999a; Dodson, 2001), on immigrants' use of social benefits in host countries (Fix, 2009), and on natives' support of the welfare state as a result (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010). The small number of studies on transgenerational welfare dependency for the immigrant population is at odds with the policy repercussions (i.e. the welfare reform of 1996) stemming from the perceived abuse of the welfare system by the immigrant population.

Butcher and Hu (2000) investigated how first generation immigrants' reception of cash transfers affected the second generation's dependency on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). They used the 1970 Census for the first generation and the 1994-96 Current Population Survey (CPS) for the second generation. Unable to link parents with children because of data limitations they opted for a grouping estimation strategy at the aggregate level of country of origin. The model predicted a positive and significant correlation between first and second generation immigrants use of welfare. However, this positive correlation vanished after adjusting for the education of the second generation indicating that growing up in a poor environment was a stronger determinant of adult welfare use than parents' reliance on public assistance per se. Additionally, small coefficients suggested that immigrants and natives reliance on public aid would converge by the third generation. Another study with a national representative sample of the U.S. corroborated the convergence hypothesis after observing that by the third generation immigrants from Western and Eastern Europe depended on public assistance less than comparable native born whites with native born parents (Brandon and Tausky, 2000).

Borjas (1999c) also found a link between foreign born reception of cash benefits and enrollment in the Food Stamps program of the second generation of the same ethnic group using the 1970 Census and the 1995-98 CPS. Although the cross-sectional nature of the data prevented linking parents with children, he argued for a "culture of dependence" after observing that receiving cash transfers in 1969 was positive and significant even after adjusting for the immigrants' skill level in the model. This finding suggested that parents' reliance on welfare was the best predictor of their offspring' use

of food stamps regardless of the skill composition of the immigrant groups. Recent work with the Current Population Survey supports the transferability of welfare hypothesis. Children of immigrants have higher rates of participation in welfare programs than comparable children of native born and these differences persist into adulthood (Borjas, 2011).

A different study employing the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth examined how growing up in an immigrant family enrolled in public assistance affected the educational attainment and labor force participation of the next generation (Balistreti, 2010). Exposure to welfare in childhood lowered the probabilities of graduating from high school and college for both immigrants and natives alike, but the negative effect was substantially larger for the children of natives. In other words, although receiving public assistance growing up lowered the chances of educational attainment for both populations, the children of immigrants fared much better (had higher graduation rates), than their native peers. A similar pattern held for labor force participation. Parental welfare receipt among immigrant families had a negligent effect on their offspring's inactivity whereas the impact was substantially steeper for the native population

The scant research on the intergenerational transmission of welfare among immigrants is inconclusive mainly because of data limitations that have prevented linking individuals from the same family across generations. This study adds to this gap in the literature by incorporating precise measures of welfare use of foreign born groups and their offspring as well as a more inclusive set of variables than previous research (ethnicity, immigrant generation, and a variety of public assistance programs) therefore addressing the question more comprehensively.

Data and Methods

The data source for this study comes from the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study (Kasinitz et al. 2008); a representative telephone survey of 3,332 young adults (aged 18 to 32) who lived in New York City and in the inner suburban counties of New York and New Jersey.

These data are exceptionally appropriate to address our research question for four reasons. First, the study contains specific information on individuals' current use of public assistance as well as information on whether respondents' grew up in a welfare-dependent household. Second, it includes a wealth of information regarding alternative determinants of welfare use such as education, income and employment. Third, it provides information on a wide range of public assistance programs. Fourth, the large number of ethnic groups included in the data makes it possible to compare the assimilation trajectories of immigrants to that of comparable native born groups.

Sample

The samples were generated using list-assisted random-digit dialing (RDD) with two-stage stratification aimed to identify suitable candidates: native born respondents to parents who migrated after 1965 (the second generation) and foreign born who moved to the U.S. before the age of 12 (the 1.5 generation). The final samples (about 400 respondents per group) include five second generation and five 1.5 generation groups. One group from South America (which include participants from Ecuador, Peru, Colombia) and four remaining groups from Dominican Republic, West India, China and Russia respectively as well as three native born comparison groups: white, black and

Puerto Rican. Therefore our analysis contains a total of 13 groups (5 second generation groups, 5 groups belonging to the 1.5 generation and 3 native born comparison groups).

Measures

This study employs five outcome variables: (1) Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and disability, (2) free school lunch (3) Medicaid, (4) food stamps, and (5) Social Security. Each dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether a household receives the specific program.

SSI and disability is a means-tested cash program that provides benefits to the aged, blind or disabled individuals (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2011). The remaining dependent variables (except for Social Security) are means-tested non-cash programs. Free school lunch provides balanced free lunches each school day to children from households at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2011). Medicaid provides health care for low-income or very low-income individuals who have a child with a disability, or are responsible for children under 19 years of age, or are disabled themselves, or pregnant or have been unemployed for a long period of time (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2012). Food stamps are vouchers which aim to supplement the food intake of low-income households (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2008). Finally, Social Security provides workers with retirement, disability, family and survivors benefits (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2011)

To explore the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency, in addition to immigrant generation, ethnicity, country of origin and welfare use growing up, we employ two groups of control variables (determinants of current participation in social

assistance programs and determinants of participation during childhood) designed to account for alternative explanations of welfare use such as poverty.

Natives in our study are U.S. born respondents with U.S. born parents. A person born abroad who moved to the U.S. before the age of 12 is considered a1.5 generation immigrant. Second generation immigrants are native born respondents with at least one parent born in another country.

To account for the ethnic/racial background of the respondent and the country of origin we combined answers to two questions: (1) *Would you say the members of this household are? Asian; Hispanic; Black but not Hispanic; White but not Hispanic; or something else?* Respondents could select one or more categories. (2)Based on answers to the first question, the second question inquired about country of origin for each ethnic/racial category (i.e. if a Hispanic person was identified in question (1) then he or she was asked *"And which of the following would describe the ethnic background of the members of this household who are Hispanic? "Dominican, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, or something else?"* Respondents who reported belonging to more than one group (i.e. Ecuadorian and Peruvian) were asked which group they felt closest to and assigned to that group (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

Determinants of current participation in social assistance programs include demographic indicators and measures of education, employment, income and whether the respondent currently co-resides with her parents.

Demographic indicators are age (ranging from 18 to 32), gender (1=male), number of offspring (ranging from 0 to 10 or more), disability (1=yes) and, immigration status (1= not official status).

The education variable is based on the question "*What was the highest grade of school or year of college that you attended or completed?"* Answers ranged from no formal schooling to PhD. We use dichotomies indicating whether respondents have (1) high school diploma or less (2) incomplete college, (3) completed college or higher.

Employment status is measured using a binary variable that takes the value of one if the individual is currently employed full- or part-time and zero otherwise. Household income (ranges from none to $ 300,000 and over) is generated using self-reported answers to the question *"would you tell me your total HOUSEHOLD annual income. This figure should include the income of everybody who lives in your current household, including wages, salaries, interest, dividends, and all other incomes."* Current co-residence with parents is coded as one if the person volunteered that he lived with his parents and zero otherwise.

Determinants of participation in public assistance during childhood include respondents' parents' education, how often they worked during the respondent's childhood, and a series of dummy variables including whether: respondent grew up with both parents (1=yes), co-resident grandparents helped with respondent' upbringing (1=yes), mother was disabled (1=yes), and father was disabled (1=yes).

We constructed parents' education with the answers to the question *"What was the highest grade of school or year of college mother/father completed?"* Answers ranged from no formal schooling to PhD. Dichotomies indicate whether respondent' mother and father had (1) high school diploma or less (2) incomplete college, (3) completed college or higher.

To account for how often the respondent's parents worked during the respondent's childhood we create a dummy variable with the answers to the following question *"How much of your childhood did your mother/father work for pay, off the books, or work in a family business ... would you say all the time, some of the time, a little, or not at all?"* (1=most of the time) captured the indicators *"all the time"* and *"some of the time"*

Respondents' participation in welfare programs during childhood is composed of one indicator variable that takes the value of one if the individual grew up in a household that received at least one of the social programs listed above and zero otherwise.

Analytic Strategy

Our analytic strategy consists of three parts. First, we calculate weighted means and test if there are significant differences in welfare use among the groups involved in the study. Second, to assess the intergenerational dependency on public assistance, we estimate two sets of nested logistic regression models on the probability of currently receiving each welfare program. The general model we estimate is:

$$\ln\left(\frac{p_{ikj}}{1-p_{ikj}}\right) = \beta_{0k} + \sum_j \beta_{1kj} I_{ikj} + \beta_{2k} PA_{ikj} + \sum_j \beta_{3kj} (I_{ikj} * PA)_{ikj} + \beta_{4k} X_{ikj} + \varepsilon_{ikj} \quad (1)$$

Where p_{ikj} is individual i's (who belongs to immigrant-generation group j) probability of currently receiving welfare program k, I is an indicator for immigrant-generation group, PA is an indicator of having grown in a welfare-dependent household,

and X is a vector of covariates that control for socio-economic determinants of past and present participation in welfare.

Because of our small sample size and the many interactions to be estimated (13 ethnic-generation groups times the indicator of growing up in a welfare-dependent household) our data tends to be quasi completely separated in the logistic regression framework (Albert and Anderson, 1984; Santner and Duffy 1986). In other words, there are some cells in which the probability of receiving a welfare program is almost one. In this sense, the maximum likelihood function used to estimate the parameters grows larger the larger the coefficients. As a result, these tend to infinity (i.e. the maximum does not exist). Fortunately, Heinz and Schemper (2002) developed a method to overcome the problem of quasi-complete separation by penalizing the likelihood function such that the estimates converge to a finite number. The coefficients presented in this analysis are odd ratios (OR) and are estimated using this method (Stata command: *firthlogit*).

We also estimate two sets of ordinary least square (OLS) regressions where the dependent variable is the count of all welfare programs currently received. We do this in order to explore the role of past welfare use on the overall magnitude of current welfare dependence. The general regression model is the same as in (1) with the exception that the outcome of interest is the number of programs currently in use rather than the probability of participation in one particular subsidy. This outcome ranges from 0 to 5. For this particular specification we report beta (β) coefficients.

We introduce each group of predictors separately to better gauge their impact on welfare use. The first model reports only the unadjusted association between each immigrant generation/ethnicity variables and each welfare program. Results from this

model are presented in the descriptive section. The second model adds an indicator of past reception of at least one welfare program plus an interaction between ethnic generation and past reception of at least one welfare program. The third model includes this interaction and adds the determinants of welfare receipt while growing up as well as current determinants of welfare use.

As mentioned above, to better assess immigrants' assimilation pathways we compare their reliance on public benefits with analogous native born groups. Therefore, following the strategy employed by Kasinitz and colleagues (2008:12-15) we compare the reliance on welfare of immigrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru (South Americans) and Dominican Republic with that of native-born Puerto Ricans. Likewise, we compare West-Indian immigrants with native born blacks. Finally, immigrants of Chinese and Russian descent are compared with native born whites.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 provides the frequency distribution of participation in each welfare program as well as the frequency distribution of the determinants of welfare participation by group. It highlights systematic variations across the thirteen groups in the study. It shows that immigrant groups are fairly equally divided between second and 1.5 generations, although South Americans and West Indians are more likely to be second generation, while Chinese and Russians tend to be overrepresented in the 1.5 category.

[Table 1 around here]

Among natives, whites report the lowest rates of participation in all welfare programs (participation ranges from 2.0% in food stamps to 6.3% in Medicaid), whereas

blacks report the highest weighted rates in all programs except for Social Security benefits and food stamps (participation ranges from 8.2% in Social Security benefits to 34.2% in Medicaid). Among immigrant groups, Dominicans –especially the 1.5 generation- show the highest rates of participation in welfare except for SSI and Social Security benefits. Participation ranges from 11.6% for Social Security benefits to 39.1% for Medicaid, although the rate for Social Security benefits is not significantly different at the five percent level from that of Puerto Ricans (9.8%), their native comparison group. Second generation Chinese immigrants use Social Security benefits more than any other group (17.4%) and the difference is significantly different from the 4.8% participation of native whites, their host comparison group. In contrast, 1.5 generation Russian immigrants and 1.5 generation South American immigrants have the lowest rates of participation in free school lunch programs (5.7%) and Social Security benefits (4.2%) respectively.

Past and current participation on public assistance is very similar among groups. Native born whites relied the least on welfare growing up. Only 26.1% lived in households that received welfare from at least one program during childhood. In contrast, almost 90% of 1.5 generation Dominicans lived in families that received public aid while growing up. Except for second generation Russians, where only 33.7% lived in a household that participated in welfare in their childhood, more than two thirds of all the other groups have co-resided with welfare recipients in the past. Contrary to the current distribution, where blacks have the highest welfare participation rates in most categories, the highest participation rates during childhood are more evenly distributed across groups. Around 80% percent of 1.5 generation South Americans and second generation

Dominican immigrants grew up in families which received welfare. Similarly most of 1.5 generation Chinese immigrants and native Puerto Ricans were raised in welfare-dependent environments (84.9% and 81.3% respectively).

Moving onto indicators of current determinants of welfare participation, native born whites have the highest education attainment and employment rates (54.3% completed college or a higher degree and 78.0% are employed). In contrast, only 10.9% of 1.5 generation Dominicans have a higher education degree and only 50.8% of second generation Russians are currently working; yet they have the highest household income ($104,746) of all groups. At the opposite end are blacks and 1.5 generation Dominicans with $39,000 and $34,000 household income respectively.

Concerning past determinants of welfare enrollment, Russian parents attained the highest level of education (almost 70% of the mothers and 60% of the fathers of the 1.5 generation immigrants completed college or higher degrees). In contrast, less than 5% of the mothers of second generation Dominicans attended any college. Among the native born, Puerto Ricans are at the lowest end of the educational strata (less than 10% of parents completed college). Among immigrants West Indian mothers and Chinese and Russian fathers worked most often whereas among natives white fathers and black mothers participated most in the labor market. The majority of Chinese and Russian 1.5 generation immigrants grew up with both parents (88.7% and 85.8% respectively). At the opposite end of the continuum are the native born blacks with just 41.3% being raised with both parents present in the household. Chinese and Russians also shared most often their childhood household with grandparents who helped in their upbringing ---20.1%

and 23% respectively---, whereas native whites had grandparents involved in their rearing the least (only 5.8% answered yes to this question).

Multivariate Analyses

Next, we explore whether the ethnic differences in past welfare use account for the ethnic differences in current reliance on social assistance. Table 2 presents logistic regression results (odds ratios) for the determinants of current participation in the five welfare programs. Note that odds ratios greater than 1 indicate positive effects, smaller than 1 indicate negative effects, and equal to 1 indicate no effect. Therefore, the closer an odds ratio is to 1, the smaller the effect. Odds ratios are multiplicative coefficients that also can be interpreted in a form of (odds ratio −1) x100, as the percentage change in the odds of current welfare use per one unit of change in the independent variable.

For each program, the first column presents the odd ratios of current reliance on public assistance for each of the 10 immigrant groups. In addition, it contains an indicator of past welfare receipt and the interaction between past welfare receipt for each immigrant group. These interactions are our main variables of interest as they highlight the distinct contribution of growing up in a welfare dependent household on the ethnic differences in current welfare participation. The second column within each program adds controls of past and current determinants of welfare participation to adjust for the influence of alternative explanations (i.e. poverty and intergenerational mobility) of welfare use throughout the life course.

[Table 2 around here]

Table 2 shows that once we adjust for past and current determinants of welfare use, immigrants are not different from natives in their current use of welfare. The 1.5

generation West Indian immigrants constitute the only exception. Even after controlling for past and present determinants of welfare use the West Indians' odds of enrolling in the food stamps program are one third that of the native blacks, while the odds of participating in disability subsidies and SSI are six (14) times higher for the 1.5 generation Russians than for the native born whites (their comparison group).

Growing up in a household that received social assistance is consistently a strong indicator of current use of welfare for all immigrant groups. However, none of the associations between past and current reliance on public aid are significantly larger for the immigrant groups than for their native counterparts. Although some associations are significantly different for the immigrant population in the uncontrolled models (the first column of Table 2 for each program), they are explained away as a combination of poverty and/or inter-generational mobility. For example, West Indians raised in a household which received public assistance have 82% lower odds of currently receiving disability subsidies and SSI than native blacks (OR=0.18). However, this association disappears after adjusting for past and present determinants of welfare use; which suggests that the ethnic difference in free school lunch enrollment between groups is mainly driven by the higher socio-economic status of West Indians as compared to native blacks (as Table 1 shows). Actually, the socio-economic indicators that replace being of West Indian origin as significant predictors of current use of welfare are years of education (OR=0.86), number of children (OR=1.57) and father's education (OR=0.92) (data available upon request).

Alternative specifications

Table 3 provides ordinary least square results (OLS) for a welfare index as the dependent variable. The welfare index is the sum of welfare programs currently received by the household.

[Table 3 around here]

As with the logistic specification, Table 3 shows that, after adjusting for alternative determinants of welfare use, growing up in a welfare dependent household is consistently a strong and significantly positive determinant of current reliance on public assistance for immigrants and natives alike. Unlike in the logistic models, however, past and current determinants of welfare use do not explain second generation West Indian, Russian, and Chinese immigrants' inter-generational reliance on public assistance. Even after adjusting for socioeconomic indicators of welfare participation second generation Russian (β=1.15) and both groups of Chinese (β=0.23 and β=0.22 for the second and 1.5 generation respectively) immigrants who grew up in welfare-dependent households rely more on public assistance than their native peers who also experienced welfare growing up. Second generation West Indians, however, exhibit a negative intergenerational association, with immigrants who grew up in welfare-dependent households receiving 0.45 fewer programs than comparable native blacks.

Assimilation into what?

Some might argue that comparing the welfare behavior of certain immigrants groups with native minorities like Puerto Ricans and blacks establishes a rather low standard given the precarious situation of these native groups. Furthermore, many scholars would advocate for white middle class natives use of public assistance as the benchmark of "true" assimilation (Haller, Portes, and Lynch, 2011).

We provide an alternative specification for the association between growing up in a welfare dependent household and reception of public assistance during adulthood where we compare each immigrant group against native whites. This strategy responds to those who consider white middle class the goal for immigrants' integration in the U.S. Moreover, placing native whites as the only omitted group in the models allows comparing the different immigrant groups' reliance on welfare throughout the life course.

[Table 4 around here]

Columns (1) through (5) in Table 4 display the odd ratios for the interaction terms between growing up in a welfare dependent household for each immigrant group as well as for native blacks and Puerto Ricans. The model adjusts for past and present structural determinants of welfare use.

Results indicate that overall, growing up in a family that received public aid does not make immigrants more susceptible than native born whites to be on the welfare rolls during adulthood. Exceptions are second generation Dominicans whose odds of participating in Medicaid are six times higher than those of the native whites who received at least one welfare program growing up.

As exhibited by the odd ratios corresponding to native whites, past reception of public assistance is largely correlated with living in a household that receives free school lunch, Medicaid and/or Social Security benefits during adulthood. Between the two other native groups, native blacks use of welfare is not different from that of native whites. In contrast, Puerto Ricans have odds of receiving SSI and disability benefits that are about six times higher than that of comparable native whites if they grew up in a welfare dependent household.

The last column in table 4 present the linear coefficients for the welfare index constructed as the sum of welfare programs currently received in the household. Results indicate that welfare consumption during childhood does not determine reliance on public assistance during adulthood for 1.5 generation South Americans, West Indians and Chinese immigrants in excess to that of the native-born whites. In turn, native whites who grew up in welfare-dependent households are associated with 1.65 more public programs in adulthood that those who did not grew up in contact with the welfare system. Second generation Russian immigrants are the most vulnerable immigrant group to consume public assistance during adulthood if raised in a household dependent on welfare (β=1.32). After the native whites and the five groups assimilated to the native whites, second generation South American immigrants who grew up in a household who received public aid are the ones who will rely the least on welfare as adults (β=0.42).

It is important to note that native white New Yorkers may not represent the average middle class after all. Over half of the sample where born somewhere else and moved to the city as young adults to pursue higher education and high income jobs. In effect, we find that while 86% of individuals other than native whites were born in New York, only 47% of native whites did. Furthermore, out of those who were born somewhere else, whites moved to the city when they were 20 years old, on average, while the mean age of movers from other groups was 10 years old. In addition, 67% of native whites born outside New York have a college degree, which constitutes a very high percentage, especially when compared to the 34% of native whites born in the city and to the 19% of non-white groups that have one.

Native whites in the sample are a selected group of high achievers and therefore substantially different from the *true* American middle class; which constitutes an unfair comparison and invalidates the original purpose of assessing immigrants' assimilation to welfare use against *average* native whites. Therefore, we replicate the non-linear and the linear analyses shown in tables 2 and 3 for Russians and Chinese immigrants this time comparing them only with the 47% of native whites born in New York (results available upon request).

The welfare behavior of Russian and Chinese immigrants resembles that of the a*verage* whites (more coefficients are insignificant than with the full sample). However, when there are significant differences they follow the same pattern as with the full sample of native whites: even after adjusting for structural determinants of welfare use, Russian immigrants who received at least one welfare program during childhood will enroll more often in public assistance during adulthood than native counterparts. Likewise, Chinese immigrants who grew up in a welfare environment will be more prone to enroll in Medicaid than native whites born in New York. These results suggest that although immigrants are more assimilated to the *true* white middle class (native born New Yorkers) there are still significant differences not driven by the selected nature of the native born sample (high achieving native whites who moved to New York in early adulthood to pursue education or high end jobs).

Discussion

The perception that immigrants distinctively raise their children to rely on public assistance motivated the provisions denying benefits to legal immigrants in the 1996 welfare reform. Our research questions this assumption and shows that although growing

up in a welfare dependent environment is correlated to the use of public assistance in adulthood, the pattern is similar for immigrants and natives. In other words, we find that while most inter-group differences in current welfare participation are explained by whether the person grew up in a household where someone received public aid; once we account for past and current structural determinants of welfare use, almost all immigration groups are assimilated to native counterparts concerning welfare use. Furthermore, against popular belief, traditionally disadvantaged immigrant groups do not rely on public aid more than other immigrant groups. Actually, of all immigrants in the sample Colombians, Peruvians and Ecuadorians (the South American group) have the lowest reliance on welfare over the life course. Our results suggest that circular poverty and not a culture of dependence is behind immigrants' welfare dependency throughout the life course.

Notwithstanding these important insights, this study is limited in some ways. Data limitations prevented us from studying cultural preferences for welfare use both in the U.S. and in their countries of origin. Future research using longitudinal data on both structural and cultural factors should attempt to disentangle the various ways in which structural and cultural determinants of welfare use shaped each other over time.

Although we control for many of the factors that determine welfare participation while growing up, and we can –to some extent- rule out the scenario where household members who received welfare during childhood are currently co-residing beneficiaries; we do not have a full account of the household roster and we cannot completely discard this hypothesis. For instance, a plausible scenario is that respondents' disabled siblings who received social benefits during childhood are still co-residents and this would

explain the positive correlation between growing up in a household that received welfare and relying on social benefits during adulthood.

Although most criteria for welfare eligibility are at the household level our measures of welfare use are at the individual level, so we cannot fully account for most programs' eligibility criteria. Determinants of welfare eligibility that we do not observe such as household composition (for instance, we do not have information on how many children live in the household; we only know how many children respondents have) nor do we know the how many people are 65 years of age and older. We also do not know the household size, which prevents us from calculating income per capita, the actual determinant for receiving most public programs. In addition, we lack information on the immigration status of other household members, so it is not possible to be certain of how many people per household are actually eligible to receive public aid. This limitation implies that some of the differences we ascribe for welfare participation to the different ethnic groups might be determined instead by differentials in household socioeconomic status rather than by immigrants' dependence on public programs.

In summary, our research questions the popular belief of a culture of welfare dependency among the immigrant population in the U.S. However, based on this belief most immigrant groups are denied access to government assistance in the U.S. which can make their incorporation unnecessarily difficult. It is important to separate the wheat from the chaff when making political decisions that affect vulnerable populations.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the New York Second Generation Project

		Immigrant groups										Native groups		
		South American		Dominican		West Indian		Chinese		Russian				
	Full sample	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	White	Black	Puerto Rican
Number of observations	**3332**	**242**	**167**	**263**	**161**	**219**	**186**	**351**	**257**	**38**	**188**	**409**	**422**	**428**
Panel A: ***Current participation in public welfare programs***														
Free school lunch	15.6	14.2**	16.2	17.5	30.8**	11.4***	18.3	9.5***	20.1***	6	5.7*	2.7	24.2	21.6
SSI and disability	9.9	13.2	6.7***	14.2	11.8	6.7***	4.6***	7.1	3.2	10.6	12.8	4	15.2	13.4
Medicaid	22.2	19.1***	16.7***	28.3	39.1*	15.5***	19.8***	16.1***	18.7***	10.6	14.1***	6.3	34.2	30.9
Food stamps	13.4	5.9***	6.5***	15.0***	25.3	8.6***	6.6***	3.7	4	12.6**	5.8**	2	22.4	23.7
Social Security	8.2	10.7	4.2**	10.1	11.6	10.7	6.7	17.4***	11.1***	5.3	13.1***	4.8	8.2	9.8
Program count	0.8	0.7***	0.5***	1	1.4	0.6***	0.6***	0.6***	0.6***	0.6*	0.5***	0.2	1.3	1.2
Participation in at least one public welfare program during childhood	64.6	73.9	79.9	82.5	89.9	67	69.8	64.1	84.9	33.7	76.9	26.1	79.7	81.3

Notes: Weighted averages. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.01 test the null of equality to average program use of corresponding native comparison group (CEP and Dominicans are compared to Puerto Ricans; West Indians are compared to Blacks; and Chinese and Russians are compared to Native Whites).

Table 1 (cont'd). Descriptive statistics for the New York Second Generation Project

		Immigrant groups										Native groups		
		South American		Dominican		West Indian		Chinese		Russian		White	Black	Puerto Rican
	Full Sample	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5	2nd	1.5			
Number of observations	**3332**	**242**	**167**	**263**	**161**	**219**	**186**	**351**	**257**	**38**	**188**	**409**	**422**	**428**
Panel B: ***Markers of current socioeconomic status***														
Mean age	24.7	24	24	23.8	23.5	23.2	23.7	22.8	22.4	21.2	22.5	25.8	25.5	24.2
% Male	43.4	54.1	48.3	40.4	40.1	54	39	54.6	53	43.5	50.7	45.5	38.6	40.6
Individual's highest education:														
High school diploma or less	32	23.3	30.8	33.1	39.5	29.1	31.6	7.3	16.7	15.8	14	16.9	40.7	48.8
Incomplete college	42.9	60.7	53	53.2	49.6	55.1	53.7	52.1	52.1	61.4	59.3	28.8	45.7	40.1
Complete college or higher	25.1	16	16.2	13.7	10.9	15.8	14.7	40.6	31.2	22.8	26.7	54.3	13.6	11.1
% Employed	68.2	71.7	73.8	70	64.2	68	62.2	67.5	57.5	50.8	67.4	78	61.7	65.4
Mean number of offspring	0.62	0.35	0.48	0.56	0.88	0.37	0.65	0.04	0.04	0.21	0.18	0.23	1.09	0.85
Mean household income	49,418	54,832	50,976	42,184	34,815	62,686	53,914	58,638	50,014	104,746	68,337	59,355	39,031	42,882
% disabled[+]	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.1	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.9	3	1.2
% lack of official status	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.3	0	0.9	0	0	0
% co-residing with parents	12.7	10.3	9.8	13.9	8.6	25.4	20.3	16.7	13.6	30.6	15.6	9.4	10.3	13.7
Panel C: ***Markers of childhood socioeconomic status***														
Mother's highest education:														
High school diploma or less	58.8	70.2	70.5	75.4	79.7	52.4	65.1	71.8	84.2	48.4	18.3	39	58.9	75.7
Incomplete college	16.9	14.5	14.8	18.1	9.8	21	15.4	6.3	4.3	8	7.9	17.1	22.1	13.3
Complete college or higher	22.9	11.8	12.3	4.9	9.9	24.9	18.7	21.2	10.3	41.6	69.8	42.3	18.5	9.3
Missing values	1.4	3.5	2.3	1.5	0.5	1.7	0.9	0.7	1.2	2	4	1.6	0.5	1.6
Father's highest education:														
High school diploma or less	66.8	68.3	76.3	77	81.7	67	73.8	65.8	80.2	49.4	31.8	40.9	77.1	82.9
Incomplete college	10.5	15.3	9.4	10.8	7.3	12.7	10.4	8.9	4.4	11.1	9.9	10.8	11.2	9.2
Complete college or higher	21.8	14.8	12.7	11.4	10.4	16.9	13.5	25	13.6	32.5	55.2	47.6	11.7	7.5
Missing values	0.9	1.6	1.6	0.9	0.6	3.3	2.2	0.3	1.8	7.1	3	0.7	0	0.4
% grew up with both parents	58.4	72.6	63.5	62	55.6	56	46.4	86.2	88.7	75.8	85.8	71.9	41.3	54.7
% co-resident grandparents	8.8	11.5	9	10.3	8.4	13.8	11.9	20.1	14.1	12	23	5.8	8.6	6.5
% mother worked most of the time	77.1	79.4	74.2	74.5	77.8	90.3	89.2	80.6	81	67.2	84.2	70.6	84.3	67.2
% father worked most of the time	81.3	84.8	83.6	84.2	82.1	78.4	74.3	89.4	91.5	90	93	89.2	73.1	79.7
% mother disabled	1.7	1.2	1.6	2.1	2.3	0.7	0	0	1	0	0.5	1.2	1.1	4.4
% father disabled	0.5	0	1.6	0.7	1.2	0	0.5	0.3	0.7	0	0.9	0.5	0.2	0.8

Notes: +Disability is measured as a response to a work history question "Are you currently disabled and not able to work?". It does not capture disabled individuals who are able to work despite of their handicap.

Table 2: Determinants of current participation in five public welfare programs

	Free School Lunches		Medicaid		Food Stamps		Disability and SSI		Social Security Benefits	
	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES
Panel A: South American and Dominicans (Omitted: Puerto Ricans)										
= 1 if 2G South American	1.826	2.68	2.054	2.294	0.757	1.008	0.499	0.818	1.198	1.25
= 1 if 1.5G South American	0.262	0.267	0.815	0.871	0.211	0.211	0.341	0.343	1.495	1.743
= 1 if 2G Dominican	0.183	0.226	1.747	1.638	0.453	0.475	0.238	0.27	1.058	1.016
= 1 if 1.5G Dominican	1.545	1.531	4.818	3.914	2.214	0.922	3.571	1.65	0.897	0.849
=1 if past receipt	**5.843*** **	**3.153** **	**9.794*** **	**7.490** **	**7.849*** **	**4.312*** **	**8.688*** **	**4.169** **	**3.842** **	**3.991** **
= 1 if 2G South Am. and past receipt	**0.274***	0.457	0.586	0.611	0.801	1.188	0.467	0.583	1.225	1.005
= 1 if 1.5G South Am. and past receipt	2.977	5.471	0.677	0.726	2.316	3.693	0.697	1.208	0.279	0.23
= 1 if 2G Dom. and past receipt	4.461	5.806	0.606	0.693	1.899	2.409	2.309	3.057	0.978	0.872
= 1 if 1.5G Dom. and past receipt	0.898	1.172	0.154	0.201	0.525	1.407	0.242	0.642	1.27	1.267
Constant	**0.059*** **	0.772	**0.019*** **	**0.101***	**0.073*** **	**4.700***	**0.045*** **	0.994	**0.032*** **	0.593
Observations	1,252	1,246	1,250	1,244	1,252	1,246	1,249	1,243	1,249	1,243
Panel B: West Indians (Omitted: Blacks)										
= 1 if 2G West Indian	1.263	2.03	0.766	0.742	0.563	0.621	0.897	1.182	1.686	1.451
= 1 if 1.5G West Indian	2.094	2.034	0.133	0.091	0.452	**0.296***	1.16	0.742	0.228	0.18
=1 if past receipt	**7.697*** **	**6.106*** **	**3.156** **	**2.424***	**4.428*** **	**2.815*** **	**9.422*** **	**4.905*** **	**2.686***	**2.753***
= 1 if 2G WI and past receipt	0.307	0.365	0.526	0.653	0.649	0.887	0.378	0.569	0.861	0.856
= 1 if 1.5G WI and past receipt	0.342	0.535	2.846	4.545	1.151	2.003	**0.182***	0.404	4.958	5.368
Constant	**0.052*** **	**0.012*** **	**0.067*** **	0.241	**0.145*** **	6.068	**0.040*** **	6.306	**0.040*** **	0.092
Observations	814	805	810	802	819	811	812	801	814	799

Notes: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.01. Columns headed "No controls" show the full specification in the table. Columns headed "SES" show the most complete model, which includes controls for age, sex, education, employment status, household income, an indicator of whether the person is disabled, is in an illegal immigration status and lives with his parents. It also controls for mother's and father's education, whether the person grew up with his parents and/or his grandparents, mother's and father's work status and disability status.

Table 2 (cont'd): Determinants of current participation in five public welfare programs

	Free School Lunches		Medicaid		Food Stamps		Disability and SSI		Social Security Benefits	
	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES	No Controls	SES
Panel C: Chinese and Russians (Omitted: Whites)										
= 1 if 2G Chinese	1.089	1.215	1.419	1.319	**2.345***	1.870	2.369	2.383	**2.481***	1.743
= 1 if 1.5G Chinese	**4.596****	3.300	0.810	0.644	0.704	0.505	0.814	0.876	0.810	0.668
= 1 if 2G Russian	4.535	4.365	1.904	1.842	0.506	0.408	1.863	1.860	0.606	0.536
= 1 if 1.5G Russian	**4.221***	4.078	1.036	1.238	1.478	1.495	**5.445****	**6.212****	1.036	1.097
=1 if past receipt	**6.084*****	2.855	1.977	1.446	**3.974*****	**2.232***	**5.167****	**3.443***	**3.186*****	**2.386***
= 1 if 2G Chi. and past receipt	1.698	2.016	1.008	1.118	0.671	0.789	0.324	0.423	1.094	1.399
= 1 if 1.5G Chi. and past receipt	0.688	1.093	0.628	0.787	2.245	2.497	1.023	1.162	1.534	1.694
= 1 if 2G Rus. and past receipt	0.406	0.482	2.610	2.992	5.416	6.989	5.392	5.989	2.616	3.085
= 1 if 1.5G Rus.and past receipt	**0.193***	0.342	2.555	2.796	0.907	1.294	0.234	0.295	1.612	1.612
Constant	**0.015*****	0.449	**0.037*****	**0.034***	**0.044*****	0.911	**0.012*****	0.089	**0.037*****	0.167
Observations	1,319	1,299	1,296	1,285	1,311	1,258	1,310	1,299	1,292	1,282

Notes: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.01. Columns headed "No controls" show the full specification in the table. Columns headed "SES" show the most complete model, which includes controls for age, sex, education, employment status, household income, an indicator of whether the person is disabled, is in an illegal immigration status and lives with his parents. It also controls for mother's and father's education, whether the person grew up with his parents and/or his grandparents, mother's and father's work status and disability status.

Table 3: Determinants of the number of current public welfare programs received
Linear regression results

	Program count	
	No Controls	SES
Panel A: South American and Dominicans (Omitted: Puerto Ricans)		
= 1 if 2G South American	-0.015	0.123
= 1 if 1.5G South American	**-0.201****	-0.214
= 1 if 2G Dominican	-0.145	-0.127
= 1 if 1.5G Dominican	0.187	-0.091
=1 if past receipt	**1.214*****	**0.779*****
= 1 if 2G South American and past receipt	**-0.565*****	-0.271
= 1 if 1.5G South American and past receipt	**-0.604*****	-0.264
= 1 if 2G Dom. and past receipt	-0.076	0.099
= 1 if 1.5G Dom. and past receipt	-0.163	0.154
Constant	**0.228*****	**2.416*****
Observations	1,258	1,253
R-squared	0.108	0.263
Panel B: West Indians (Omitted: Blacks)		
= 1 if 2G West Indian	-0.010	0.167
= 1 if 1.5G West Indian	-0.059	-0.125
=1 if past receipt	**1.188*****	**0.781*****
= 1 if 2G WI and past receipt	**-0.764*****	**-0.445*****
= 1 if 1.5G WI and past receipt	**-0.657*****	-0.303
Constant	**0.310*****	**1.702*****
Observations	826	820
R-squared	0.127	0.351
Panel C: Chinese and Russians (Omitted: Whites)		
= 1 if 2G Chinese	0.099	0.062
= 1 if 1.5G Chinese	0.003	-0.061
= 1 if 2G Russian	-0.056	-0.088
= 1 if 1.5G Russian	0.039	0.080
=1 if past receipt	**0.363*****	**0.192****
= 1 if 2G Chi. and past receipt	0.165	**0.230***
= 1 if 1.5G Chi. and past receipt	0.180	**0.218***
= 1 if 2G Rus. and past receipt	**1.104****	**1.152****
= 1 if 1.5G Rus. and past receipt	0.124	0.190
Constant	**0.117*****	0.287
Observations	1,324	1,321
R-squared	0.095	0.165

Notes: Weighted regressions. Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.01. Columns headed "No controls" show the complete specification in the table. Columns headed "SES" show the most complete model, which includes controls for age, sex, education, employment status, household income, an indicator of whether the person is disabled, is in an illegal immigration status and lives with his parents. It also controls for mother's and father's education, whether the person grew up with his parents and/or his grandparents.

Table 4: Determinants of current participation in five welfare programs. Native Whites omitted.

VARIABLES	(1) Free school lunch	(2) Disability and SSI	(3) Medicaid	(4) Food stamps	(5) Social Security	(6) Program count
=1 if past receipt	**3.343****	1.302	**2.011***	2.154	**2.404***	**1.650*****
= 1 if 2G CEP and past receipt	0.430	3.399	2.499	1.313	1.523	**0.427****
= 1 if 1.5G CEP and past receipt	4.636	3.751	7.210	2.296	0.375	0.246
= 1 if 2G Dominican and past receipt	5.819	5.042	**5.765***	5.978	1.519	**0.956*****
= 1 if 1.5G Dominican and past receipt	1.368	1.065	2.901	1.230	2.090	**0.917*****
= 1 if Native PR and past receipt	1.017	**5.594***	2.258	2.027	1.473	**0.893*****
= 1 if 2G West Indian and past receipt	0.670	1.150	1.205	1.284	0.911	0.248
= 1 if 1.5G West Indian and past receipt	0.863	6.109	2.488	0.813	4.404	0.198
= 1 if Native Black and past receipt	1.652	2.187	1.520	2.552	1.081	**0.790*****
= 1 if 2G Chinese and past receipt	2.051	1.215	0.856	0.493	1.337	-0.011
= 1 if 1.5G Chinese and past receipt	1.327	0.739	3.161	1.824	1.567	-0.179
= 1 if 2G Russian and past receipt	0.449	3.739	7.641	8.559	3.680	**1.321****
= 1 if 1.5G Russian and past receipt	0.283	2.999	1.509	0.451	1.520	**0.711*****
Observations	3,364	3,351	3,337	3,363	3,337	3,387

Notes: Weighted regressions. Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.01. These models include controls for ethnicity, past receipt of at least one welfare program as well as the following current and past socio-demographic characteristics: age, sex, education, employment status, household income, an indicator of whether the person is disabled, is in an illegal immigration status and lives his parents. It also controls for mother's and father's education, whether the person grew up with his parents and/or his grandparents, mother's and father's work status and disability status. Columns 1 to 4 are log odds. Column 6 shows coefficients from linear regression models.