

Cyber-extended Identity Among Young Female Armenian Immigrants: A  
Segmented Assimilation

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## Abstract

Interviews with seven female immigrant Armenian high school students explore their modes of incorporation through examining how their interactions with the Internet shape their conceptions of home, ideas about citizenship, differences from their parents and each other, and gender identity role development. Differences emerged between 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation participants' interactions with websites and the effects of these interactions on their modes of incorporation. Broad, flexible, and sometimes conflicting ideas about citizenship and gender roles emerged. As a result, the young women create a between-ness blurring the distinctions between life off-line and online where ethnicity and citizenship are flexible and where they accommodate without assimilation. These young women use their unique 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, possibly cyber-extended identities, to challenge status quos established by their parents, schools, and society. The ability choose how to integrate and the impact of Internet technology on these choices, support contemporary 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants development of identities that allow them to accommodate without assimilation and develop flexible group memberships.

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**Introduction and Plan of the Paper**

This research seeks to investigate how incorporation of 1.5 (children who immigrate before the age of 16) and 2<sup>nd</sup> (children of immigrant parents) generation Armenian female immigrant high school students is impacted by the extension of identity through their interactions with ethnic Armenian websites. Further I ask what behaviors and beliefs these young women have that support successful modes of incorporation and from where these behaviors and beliefs come. I discovered how they use their unique 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, possibly cyber-extended identities, to challenge status quos established by their parents, schools, and society. I find that these young women live lives in-between. They all struggle with how to live their ethnic, generational, and gender identities and use the Internet as one vehicle toward identity development. The ability to choose how to incorporate and the impact of Internet technology on these choices, support contemporary 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants development of identities that allow them to accommodate without assimilation and develop flexible group memberships.

Most current research focused on immigrant incorporation shares a biased interest in first generation immigrants to the neglect of their 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children. These young immigrants have a major impact on the U.S. economy and institutions like schools and health care and our society will continue to feel their impact well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The character of this impact depends on how contemporary 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation youth incorporate themselves into their new countries. Incorporation of

immigrant children and their families is a critical issue with widespread implications for educators, researchers, and practitioners. These 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant youth have increasingly global perspectives and interests. They are far more technologically adept than previous generations (Benitez, 2006). They use technologies like the Internet, text messaging, and e-mail to adjust to life in the United States (Levitt, 2000, Parker and Song, 2006) and maintain connections with their ancestral homelands (Levitt, 2003, Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Today's young immigrants are products of and contributors to an increasingly global world. As a result, their conceptions of home, ideas about citizenship, and gender identity roles are dynamic and have yet to be fully researched.

First I will discuss the concept of segmented assimilation and how transnational practice and diasporas are ways in which ethnic groups achieve a segmented assimilation. Then I explore the possible extension of identity on the Internet by young female immigrant Armenians. Cultural citizenship is discussed in the context of immigration and the Internet. Then the context of this research is presented with a brief history of the Armenian community in Glendale, California. Following the section on research design, I analyze interviews with seven young female Armenian immigrants on four themes that emerged from the interviews: transnational practice, cultural citizenship, gender role development, and differences between 1.5 generation and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women. Finally, I share examples for the interviews that are elucidating of how the Internet works to extend the many identities of these young women.

### *Segmented Assimilation*

Few contemporary scholars have found immigrants assimilating in a Gordian (Gordon, 1964) fashion where an immigrant acculturates and then is assimilated into

majority culture. The ways in which immigrants adjust to or incorporate majority culture differs based on various factors both internal and external. How then do new 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants fit into historical and contemporary views of the immigrant experience? Incorporation for the contemporary 2<sup>nd</sup> generation is to manage the challenges of growing up in an environment foreign to themselves and to their parents (Portes, 2001). Because various social and psychological forces shape their identity, finding a meaningful place in the society of which they are the newest members is a challenge (Portes). They must integrate external factors like their parents' national loyalties and racial identities with their own experiences and beliefs as they develop individual and group identities (Portes).

Lieberson (1973), in responding to the work of Gordon (1964) reiterates that assimilation is not a straight line but a process of steps that occurs over generations. Through the process, each generation moves a little further from the ground zero community begun by the ethnic group's first immigrants. Lieberson's work implies successive generations of immigrants face distinct issues in society and their own ethnic group. How they resolve these issues affects the assimilation level at which they engage.

Immigrants adapt to new cultures and societies in various ways. They may adapt by assimilating, a social process where a minority or immigrant cultural group is absorbed into the dominant group resulting in the loss of the immigrant or minority groups cultural distinctiveness (Park and Burgess, 1969). They may accommodate without assimilating where they engage in a process of cultural modification (Gibson, 1987). Their incorporation outcome may be a segmented assimilation that includes many different ways that a new immigrant may adapt to a new society (Portes and Zhou, 1993)

including transnational behaviors. One way segmented assimilation occurs is through transnational practices when immigrants maintain close and frequent ties to their ancestral homeland (Smith 2006). Additionally, second generation immigrants differ from their parents in how they incorporate (Levitt 2001). The mode of incorporation contemporary 1.5 and 2nd generation youth chose will significantly influence their future social and economic mobility and will likely differ from the path of their parents. These choices are shaped by their interactions on the Internet; conceptions of home, ideas about citizenship, and gender identity roles are impacted by their interactions on the Internet ultimately shaping individual and group identities.

Second generation immigrants who remain dedicated to the family and the familial requirements placed on them retain more cultural practices including native language (Gans, 1997). Second generation immigrants, who engage with their ethnic community and speak their parent's language, as well as English, have higher achievement in school than their peers who do not integrate or do not maintain their parent's language (Gans). The case histories presented by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) not only reveal the inadequacy of the assimilation model, but suggest 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants follow a path of segmented assimilation.

Rumbaut (1994) surveyed 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant youth and found that two-thirds of respondents identified themselves with their parent's ethnic origins. The remaining third identified themselves in a way connected with their American-ness. His research revealed the strong influence acculturation has on identification and assimilation. The tendency toward assimilative self-identification (hyphenated American-ness) is influenced by naturalized U.S. citizenship, and fluent use of English.

His research also showed that being foreign-born and not holding U.S. citizenship led respondents to prefer a national origin based self-identification. Moreover, his research found, for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant children, children's ethnic self-identification reflected that of their parents and particularly that of their mother. Levitt's case studies (2003) provide insights into the lives of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children. The work makes clear that many differences exist between transnational immigrants and their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children. Her interviews with transnational 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Mexican adolescents revealed the purpose of much of their network participation is to combat negative images of their ethnicity and to please their parents. Levitt fears that in trying to assimilate, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation may choose not to engage in transnational behaviors. She warns though, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation in the United States is still young, and has not had much opportunity to choose, or not choose, to engage in transnational behaviors (Levitt, 2001).

Parents and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children conflict as parents try to instill an ethnic or national pride in their children that counter children's Americanizing experiences at school (Portes and Zhou, 1993). 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children find themselves torn between inconsistent sets of values. Immigrant youth who manage to retain the traditional ideals of their ethnic community have, in the long term, better educational and economic mobility (Portes and Zhou). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found the path of acculturation immigrant parents follow has a direct effect on the acculturation of their children. The researchers believe that in this case, transnational connections may support immigrant parents in solving these conflicts. When consonant acculturation occurs, both immigrant parents and their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children abandon the home language and become acculturated together, avoiding some intergenerational conflict, but losing connections to

their native culture. Through selective acculturation however, both the immigrant parents and their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children retain the home language and crucial aspects of the home culture. The family becomes bilingual and bicultural. Portes and Rumbaut believe that in this scenario, parents are not defensive about the home culture, and children are more receptive and respectful of it, relieving generational conflict.

King et al. (2004) believes a complex interaction of external factors such as discrimination and segregation and internal factors like social networks, education level, and financial resources interact to influence integration for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. Their research substantiates the findings of Zhou (1997), Gans (1992), and Portes and Zhou (1993) in finding various modes of incorporation exist for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and that they differ from that of their parents.

These are generalizations that belie the great diversity among 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation groups and individuals. The major contradiction of 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young immigrants is their particular paths towards and away from typical assimilation. The contemporary second generation's incorporation, according to Rumbaut (1996) is likely to vary depending on the conditions and contexts in which they grew up. Young 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who remain connected to their ethnic communities achieve incorporation best (Levitt, 2003, Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). These studies suggests 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who stay connected to their communities, communicate well in their first language and English, and continue the religious practices of their ancestral homeland experience upward mobility.

A path of segmented assimilation, according to Xie and Greenman (2005), occurs when an immigrant makes a conscious decision to both preserve their culture and to



integrate economically. Gibson's (2001) research found that immigrants who surround themselves with others of their own ethnicity both at home and their jobs can manage successfully with little acculturation to the host society. Gibson's work supports Portes and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation idea calling it accommodation without assimilation. Accommodation without assimilation, when immigrants retain their native culture and language, provides a protection from discrimination. While little empirical evidence exists for either assimilation or accommodation without assimilation, various case studies provide strong examples of immigrant groups who enjoy social and economic mobility while accommodating to the new country rather than assimilating into it.

Most research focused on transnationals shows that as the world continues to globalize, migrants wish to preserve their connections with their ancestral homeland. Globalization implies an absence and disregard for geography, territorial boundaries, and cultural representations. To the contrary, transnationalism is self-consciously aware of territoriality, national boundaries, and local culture. It may seem contradictory then that transnationalism could be a consequence of globalization. Transnationalism is a result of transnational practice, and transnational practices arise in a globalized world. Transnationalism, because language is retained and networks are maintained, is a way for immigrants to accommodate to a new country. Moreover citizenship in a globalized world is no longer based on traditional ideas about birth and location, nor is it based solely on blood or on soil. Rather a dynamic exists between the dual forces of globalism and localism. Global citizenship and local cultural citizenship counter the purpose of the nation-state; transnational immigrants, no longer rooted to their ancestral homeland (but

not detached from them either) simultaneously globalize, and engage nationalistically. Although they seemingly rupture boundaries and borders, contemporary transnational immigrants engage in an identity politics that celebrates, rather than dismisses, the nation (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). Diasporas are the exemplary communities of transnationals because they occupy a unique, unbounded single social space influenced by many physical geographies. Their social networks span many countries, as do their economic and political interests. Transnational connections, in turn, affect the experience of diasporic migrants in such a way to alter the assimilation process resulting in accommodation without assimilation, and flexible ideas about citizenship unbounded by traditional national or cultural limitations. Transnational practices support immigrant accommodation without assimilation because transnational practices create social spaces unrestrained by physicality.

Segmented assimilation theory recognizes the diversity of lifestyles in the United States may result in divergent assimilation paths for immigrants (Xie and Greenman, 2005). Further increasing access to lifestyle choices, the Internet has a proven and powerful ability to impact individual and group identities, articulate citizenship, and develop national ideals (Tyner and Kuhlke, 2000). Strengthening group identity with new technologies such as e-mail and the Internet may shape and change immigrant incorporation in ways that cannot be foreseen. Because various social and psychological forces shape their identity, including their interactions with the Internet, finding a meaningful place in the society of which they are the newest members is a challenge for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. The ability choose how to integrate and the impact of Internet technology on these choices, support contemporary 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants

development of identities that allow them to accommodate without assimilation and develop flexible group memberships. 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who use the Internet may be more likely to accommodate without assimilating to life in the United States. The greatest distinction of the second generation may be to control the future course and point of view of their ethnic communities. Their ability to adapt to and succeed in school and in a global market place is important not only to the success of individuals, but their communities as well.

### *Immigrant youth identity and cyberspace*

As successive generations of immigrants face distinct issues in society and their own ethnic group, shared activities, including visiting web sites, will support the creation of group identities unique to them. For 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants remaining connected to their ethnic community in their ancestral homeland and in their new country supports social and economic mobility. Parents and 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant children sometimes conflict as parents try to instill values in their children that are in opposition with children's Americanizing experiences at school. These same young immigrants conflict with a society that is sometimes in opposition to what they have learned from their families. Ultimately 2<sup>nd</sup> generation access to and understanding of the Internet allows them to challenge their parents, dominant culture, institutions, and structures, and may have an emancipatory effect. 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant youth may use the Internet as a means to resolve the conflicts they encounter with their parents and society in ways not yet imagined.

These new immigrants given the many family, social, and global influences they encounter, will choose to self identify in broad and flexible terms. Because identity is

both selective and strategic, the Internet supports development of flexible and personalized individual and group identity construction.

### *Cultural citizenship*

Cultural citizenship is a set of cultural and social processes that impact everyday life beyond a legal understanding of rights and responsibilities (Siu, 2001). Siu defines cultural citizenship as simultaneously asserting belonging to a particular nation and claiming membership in a larger, perhaps diasporic community. Cultural citizenship differs from legal or national citizenship because cultural citizenship shapes behaviors of daily life and differs between culture groups. Siu contends the relations between nations and current geopolitics structure how diasporic peoples imagine and practice cultural citizenship. In a diaspora, where people identify and operate in more than one political context, cultural citizenship becomes an important descriptor (Siu). Ong (1996) disagrees with these observations. She believes groups negotiate citizenship within society's structures. For Ong cultural citizenship is the result of self-making by individuals and groups and being-made by the hegemonic state. Globalization, decolonization, and multiculturalism raise questions about individual and group identity, citizenship status, and move cultural citizenship from an idea to a possibility. For 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who interact with the Internet, the possibilities for this kind of negotiation seem almost limitless.

### *Armenians*

This research focuses on Armenian immigrants, because their strong social ties and diasporic history (Levitt, 2001) suggests they may present a good exemplar of a transnational community. Armenians in California are understudied considering their

large population and influence. In addition, Armenians likely experience a segmented assimilation because of their well-developed ethnic identity (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr, 1996).

Because of their history, Armenians living in California today are a diverse group. California now hosts the largest (pop. 204,631) Armenian community in the United States (Euroamericans.net, 2006). Los Angeles is the most ethnically diverse Armenian center in the world (Sabagh, et al., 1990) and the city of Glendale (home to the largest community of Armenians outside of Armenia) lies just northeast of and adjacent to the City of Los Angeles. Armenians in Glendale form the largest community of Armenians (53,000, 27% of the total population, 2000 Census Data) outside the Armenian capital city Yerevan. The history and experience of Armenian immigration in Glendale is prototypical of the majority of Armenian immigrants to the United States over the last fifty years.

“The Genocide” refers to the systematic destruction of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire during and just after World War I. It was characterized by the use of massacres and forced march deportations. The total number of Armenian deaths is believed to be between one and one-and-a-half million. This event is denied by the current Turkish government and is one of the rare issues that all Armenians share agreement on. It arouses anger, and disturbs their sense of justice and equality. The genocide also brings Armenians together as a people (Bakalian, 1992). Bakalian believes the unique experience of Armenians as a people have made them resilient to the forces of assimilation. Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (1996) believe Armenians likely experience a segmented assimilation because of their well-developed ethnic identity, which has

increased since the reestablishment of the state of Armenia. The shared memory of the genocide unites Armenians and creates a sense of responsibility to the community, both past and future (Pattie, 1999). The community patterns found by Bakalian suggest first and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants successfully engaged in both the Armenian and United States communities, leading her to claim a dual frame of reference for these groups.

Nationalism and contemporary nationalistic movements are rapidly shaping the conception of the ancestral homeland further narrowing ideas about Armenian identity (Pattie, 1999). Politically active leaders urge diasporic Armenians to claim citizenship of the ancestral homeland, the Republic of Armenia. For immigrant Armenians the question of whether the ancestral homeland is a myth of return or a practical reality remains. This ancestral homeland diametric and the realities, restrictions, and opportunities of the new country, may influence the ethnic identity development of 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Armenian immigrants.

### **Research Design**

Criteria for participation in the study were to be a 1.5 or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Armenian immigrant and be enrolled in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade in one of the four Glendale Unified School District High Schools. The decision to choose high school students as respondents for the study is based on two assumptions: their ethnic identity is fairly stable by 9<sup>th</sup> grade (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1998) and their relative maturity will allow them to clearly articulate their Internet use and experiences. Young women became the focus of the study because none of the young men choose to participate.

Through one-on-one interviews, I elicited narratives that begin to explain how the incorporation of 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female Armenian immigrant high school students

is impacted by the extension of their ethnic and individual identities, their conceptions of home, ideas about citizenship, and gender identity roles is shaped through their interactions with ethnic Armenian websites. I heard about their ideas of home, community, and citizenship in the context of their Armenian-ness and discovered how they perceive the global and the local as a gauge of transnationalism. I asked questions to determine what behaviors and beliefs these students have that support successful modes of incorporation and to discover from where these behaviors and beliefs came. I discovered how they use their unique 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, possibly cyber-extended identities, to challenge status quos established by their parents, schools, and society.

I visited six Armenian language classes at Glendale High School at different times over two days to recruit participants for this project. Over the following two weeks seven female 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Armenian immigrant high school students were interviewed. I interviewed four 1.5 generation and three 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women individually at The Glendale Public Library. Interviews were both structured and conversational to encourage participants to both share information related to the research questions and to allow respondents latitude to express feelings as well as share experiences.

This work is not an attempt to analyze the entire Armenian community in Glendale. I relate and discuss the stories of only a few 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female Armenian immigrant high school students. These findings should not be generalized to a broader population. However, the lives of the young women presented here disputes the homogenous picture of the Armenian diasporic community in the United States presented by some scholars and in popular media. While this work is also not an examination of

adolescent angst, the particular trials of adolescence (testing parental control for example) must be considered when hearing the words of these young women. Some of their concerns are no different from the concerns of adolescent women in general and cannot be attributed in a distinct way to their ethnicity or incorporation experiences. It must also be remembered that the additional stresses of immigration likely exacerbate their already complicated adolescent lives (Phinney, et al. 2001).

### **Findings and Analysis**

For the current generation of immigrants, visiting web sites supports the creation identities unique to them. The 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants featured in this study use the Internet to connect with friends, family, and the broader Armenian community, listen to and download Armenian Rap music, and get news about Armenia. Favorite websites include: hamovhotov.com, armenianmusic.com, armenianidiots.com, armenialive.com, thearmenianblog.com, and hayastan.com, as well as the perennial favorites, myspace.com and youtube.com.

Because identity for transnational and diasporic groups is not based on geography (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Clifford 1994), the Internet provides a perfect venue for the development of not only individual, but group and ethnic identities (Levitt 2002). I purposefully choose to interview adolescent women to explore their experiences of immigration, which we know differ from that of their parents (Portes and Zhou, 1993). These young women also face the challenges of living in an urban environment and attending urban schools.

The topics discussed with these young women are contemporary (Rap music, the elections in Armenia, their friends and families) and occur within a real life context.



Their responses provide descriptions of the situation being explored: extension of identity via the Internet and its effect on incorporation. I examine the interplay of their responses with the context in which they occurred to develop understanding of their lives.

I highlight four major themes that emerged from the interviews and how these themes might impact these young women's incorporation process.

- ways in which these young women's lives are lived transnationally via the Internet
- their desire to achieve cultural citizenship (Flores and Benmayor, 1997) based on 'Armenian-ness'.
- how they explore, question, and develop their gender roles
- differences between 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women in the areas of the ethnic self-identification, their relationships with their parents, and gender role conceptualizations.

*Transnational practice, cultural citizenship, and the Internet*

Transnational theory, in the view Glick-Schiller et al. (1995), includes three elements that are pertinent to these findings: retention of connections to the ancestral homeland in part to resist racism and other inequalities in the new country, a way to avoid assimilation, and superseding the nation-state in terms of achieving cultural citizenship. Their work fails to sufficiently consider factors that limit or extend transnational life, especially the particular role of adolescence, a failure I address through these interviews. Incorporation and transnationalism are not mutually exclusive (Levitt, 2002) being more transnational does not mean being less American. Transnational practices have great potential to facilitate positive assimilation for these young women

(Levitt, 1993); by helping them maintain connections to their ancestral homeland, increasing their esteem for Armenia, and offering information about and support in resisting racism and sexism. These young women's transnational practices and the role these practices play in identity development and incorporation can be analyzed through three key Internet interactions: interactions that retain connections to the ancestral homeland, interactions that present Armenia and Armenians in a positive way, and Interactions that help them resist racism and sexism.

All of the young women interviewed used the Internet to maintain connections with their families outside of Glendale in some way. Many kept regular e-mail contact with cousins as close as Burbank (a neighboring community) and with friends and family as far away as Iran. They also reported sending photos of family and school activities and events to their ancestral homeland and of receiving some on a weekly or monthly basis depending on the family, but explained that the access to either computer hardware or the Internet itself in some countries, particularly Iran, limited their ability to communicate. Some of the young women's families visit Internet cafés; others use the Internet at their jobs. They value these contacts both for the familial ties and for the news from home. Their connections with home go beyond the family however; they took great interest in the Presidential election in Armenia, even the young women who were not born in Armenia. All of the young women were well informed about the election, both with the facts of the process and outcome and of the many controversies that continue to swirl about both candidates. While some of this information came from family and friends, the majority of it came from blogs and chat sites. The young women shared a keen interest in what they called 'gossip' about the situation. It is also clear that they

considered events in Armenia in a very serious way. Their third, and least preferred, source of information online is Armenian news services.

The young women visit many ethnic Armenian websites. Their primary reason is to download music, and their secondary reason is to get information about Armenian history and culture, usually for homework or school projects. They also visit sites that show Armenian cartoons and post Armenian jokes. A popular (if unfortunate site) is Armenian idiots.com. The young women report that this site is funny, if embarrassing. They also believe it is important for people who have the misfortune to be posted as an ‘Armenian idiot’ see that the ways they behave are not appropriate, represent the Armenian community in negative ways, and are not acceptable to other Armenians (an interesting form of social control).

The young women also visit ethnic Armenian websites to get basic information on Armenian culture and history for homework and school projects. They cautioned me ‘not everything you read on the Internet about Armenia is true,’ but each of them had, at one time learned something they considered positive about their heritage that they did not know before. As with other websites, most of the sites they use for information also include blogs, and it seems, blogging about anything is irresistible for these young women. Most of time, blogging about Armenian culture and history is positive for them as well, but a few of the young women share incidents when they believe someone was trying to represent Armenians in a bad light, whether purposefully or not. They believe people who would post a negative comment about Armenia or Armenians on an Armenian website could not be an Armenian.

Some websites the young women visit are dedicated to issues of discrimination or critiques of governments. There is much online discussion of perceived discrimination and racial profiling of Armenians by the local police. Online, young Armenians give account of overzealous officers and problems at airports. These reports are viewed critically, but with great interest.

They also visit chat rooms to discuss what it means to be an Armenian woman in Glendale. Although the young women have disparate beliefs about how an Armenian woman in the United States should behave, they all have great interest in the topic. They chat with other young Armenian women about abusive boyfriends and husbands, and about the appropriateness of husbands helping with household chores. There was recently a lively discussion in a chat room about whether an Armenian woman should ever marry a non-Armenian man, and if she did, would the children produced really be Armenian? Having a venue for grievances about racism and sexism provides another source of efficacy for these young women. By chatting with others who are like themselves and have had similar experiences they may learn skills or strategies to avoid discrimination and violence, or at least ways to deal with negative incidents if they occur.

Armenian Rap music is extremely popular with all of the young women. The rappers sing about Armenia, the Genocide, romance, and the difficulties of life in the United States. They Rap in English, Armenian, and sometimes both; the music integrates traditional Armenian music with a modern American Rap beat. Armenian Rap, according to the young women interviewed, is very popular with young Armenians, but held in disdain by their parents and grandparents. The older generations, I am told, feel rapping about the Genocide degrades Armenian history. Perhaps this disdain is exactly

why the young women like it. They report that the rappers think they are ‘gangsters’. This gangster image however, is a positive one for the young women. They believe the Rap music and the Rappers are an example of one way to be American and yet stay Armenian. They are proud of these musicians for their musical talent and willingness to define the issues they believe the Armenian community must deal with. When visiting Armenian Rap music websites, the young women blog about the Rappers and the issues (racism, violence, the Genocide) with other young Armenians. In doing so, they are participating in a discourse about the future of the Armenian diaspora in the United States, creating a sense efficacy you can hear in their voices. Gangsterism on the part of the Rap musicians these young women admire may be a form of accommodation, as might their admiration by the young women interviewed. Armenian Rap music in its performance and consumption is interesting because it is a possible place for accommodation without assimilation to happen. It may represent another in between place these young immigrants are creating where they can meld tradition, American culture, and completely new ideas into a format for political and cultural action and change.

These young women engage in online practices that are transnational in nature and facilitate positive assimilation. Their well maintained connections (these young women are online nearly everyday) to their ancestral homelands, Internet enhanced esteem for Armenia and Armenians, and the information and support they get online around issues of racism and sexism support the ability to accommodate without assimilating.

### *Gender identity development*

The difficulties of defining and developing efficacy in their roles as women were apparent in the interviews. A common concern for them is their perceived oppression of women that they experience within their community. This perception is especially strong among the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women. They, like all adolescents, are offered many ideas about being a woman in contemporary society. Their fathers, brothers, and boyfriends prefer the traditional roles that benefit males. The young women claim to want more freedom to make choices and be independent. It is interesting that the Armenian Rap music they spend so much time downloading and blogging about extols a traditional view of women. Armenian Rap also presents an image of women not wholly accepted by the young women in this study, presenting yet another source of conflict and opportunity for flexible identity development.

### *The 1.5 Generation and the 2nd Generation*

Distinct differences between 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women in their uses of the Internet, views about their ethnicity, and their incorporation experiences emerged from the interviews.

Arguing with their parents about time spent on line is a common complaint among these young women. They shared that their parents do not understand why they need to be online. One young woman voiced her frustration with her mother's inability to understand why she had to go online to do her homework. When her mother suggested she go to the library instead, the young woman was shocked at her mother's backward mindedness. One young woman shared her confusion over why her mother thought it was acceptable to send emails to her cousins in Europe, but not to email her friends in

Glendale (Roudometof, 2005, Levitt 2002). Their mother's purposes for the Internet clearly differ from that of the young women's and have led to many conflicts (Benitez, 2006). Many of the families limit the time the young women are allowed to spend online. The young women find this infuriating. For these young women, the Internet is a primary social sphere and a necessary tool for their education.

1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Armenian immigrant high school students report using the Internet about the same amount of time in a given week. Both groups also report using the Internet to complete homework assignments. However, this is where the similarities end.

The focus of the 1.5 generation young women is on Armenia. 1.5 generation young women use the Internet to email friends and family in their ancestral homeland. They chat about Armenia with other Armenians. They chat about Armenian music, Armenian culture, and Armenian history. They prefer Armenian websites in Armenian.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women, the focus is broader. They use the Internet for information on Armenian culture and history but report only doing so when they need to write a paper for school. Their chatting behavior, although it sometimes includes topics relevant to Armenia or Armenian culture, is centered on gossip or a good story. They have little interest in Armenian politics unless it is accompanied by some intrigue. They prefer Armenian websites in English.

Both 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women visit websites that feature music, but again their preferences are different. The 1.5 young women report downloading both traditional Armenian music and American style Armenian Rap, whereas the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women report only downloading Armenian Rap and some popular

American music. The difference between these two groups of young women is not in their online behavior, but rather the focus of online their behavior.

The way these two groups of young women view Armenians and being Armenian also differed. 1.5 generation young women reported having Armenian values and believe it is important to behave like an Armenian. The Genocide is central to their identity as an Armenian. They all agreed that being near people of you own blood is very important and that they would only marry a man that is Armenian. All the 1.5 generation young women identified themselves as Armenian.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women are far less homogenous in their ethnic identification (Rumbaut, 1994). These young women each self-identified differently (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1998). One identified herself as American, one as Armenian-American, one as American-Armenian, and one identified herself as American-American. They see themselves as different from their 1.5 and new immigrant peers. They describe these newer immigrants as brash, uncouth, and embarrassing (Dahinden, 2008). Contradictorily, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women attempt to reconnect with Armenian culture through activities they consider American, like Genocide protests and Armenian language Rap music.

The 1.5 generation young women enjoy living in Glendale with other Armenians. They like being part of a group they relate to. They participate in the many Armenian cultural opportunities available in Glendale. They prefer to have Armenian friends and appreciate that they have so many peers to choose from. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women believe there are too many Armenians in Glendale. They believe new immigrants view them as too American and dislike them because of it. They also believe that because



there are so many Armenians in Glendale that non-Armenians discriminate against them, especially the police. These young women prefer to participate in both American and Armenian cultural events. They keep a wide circle of friends and one reported having no Armenian friends (Phinney et al., 2001). Two young women refer to themselves as ‘cheerios’, meaning beige on the inside, and white on the outside. They like Armenian Rap music for the ‘Gangsterism’ as much as the music. Being a gangster is to be American in their view. They also have a realization that they are different from their parents and grandparents, particularly on the issue of appropriate gender roles and behavior. They feel Armenian women are oppressed by Armenian men and one expressed anger at her mother for allowing it to happen. There is more variability in the cultural behaviors and feelings towards their community among these 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women (Portes and Zhou, 1993).

Overall, the 1.5 generation young women are more like their parents, and report having fewer arguments with them, than their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation cohorts. The greatest difference between the 1.5 generation young women and their parents is their ability to speak English well, and their Internet use. This skill gap increases between the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women and their parents (Benitez, 2006). The 1.5 generation young women actively participate in Armenian cultural activities and enjoy being part of the community. They feel safe around so many people like themselves. The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young women struggle with living within the Armenian community and their gender roles.

These young women live lives in between. They all struggle with living their ethnic, generational, and ethnic identities. Perhaps between is where they will choose to

stay: how they want to be Armenian and how they want to be American. Will they continue to use the Internet as a tool to create a flexible citizenship (Ong, 1993) where between-ness is the norm? What is clear from these interviews is that a sense of place, social networks, and cultural citizenship can be enhanced on the Internet and shape individual and group identities.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The following interview excerpts begin to elucidate how Internet use may shape and change immigrant incorporation. Great variation exists in these young women's immigrant's incorporation experiences and through their own words perhaps we can begin to discover the how and why of this variability. These interview selections offer an opportunity to tie Internet use by 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants directly to issues of incorporation. These interviews also describe the use of Internet technologies by young members of a diaspora community and the development of the virtual communities that ethnic websites promote. The names used in the interviews are not the young women's true names. I will follow the alias names with their generational status in parenthesis.

#### *Transnational practice*

Gupta and Ferguson (1992) found that identity for immigrants is not based in place; rather it is at the intersection of space and culture. This dominance of culture and ethnicity above ideas of place encourages the creation of and participation in imagined communities, like those created on ethnic websites. They believe that these virtual communities challenge traditional ideas of culture. Berjouhi (1.5) describes this phenomenon, 'I use Armenian chats; I did not know there were so many of us everywhere. It is like a gathering, looking at your own blood, it feels good.' When asked

what she talks about in Armenian chat rooms, she explained, 'I like to get opinions about the election in Armenia. Ter-Petrossian (Levon Ter-Petrossian, one of the Presidential candidates in the 2008 election) wants to be friends with Turkey. He wants us to forgive, but not to forget. The people don't want to be tortured anymore,' she also learned, 'The history of Armenia should be part of your life, and it is good to get peoples opinions about Armenian history on the Internet.' Anoush (1.5) has similar experiences, 'When I chat on websites I know Armenians from everywhere, they are like relatives, we are so close together. We talk about music, songs, politics stuff, old Armenian cartoons. I chatted with an Armenian girl, not from Armenia, saying 'it (the genocide) was 100 years ago, get over it' I was so mad, I wanted to write her back, but I knew she wouldn't understand anything.' Narine (2.0) has found a community of Armenian music lovers, 'I like Armenian rap websites, and I like to chat about the music. It is really good. They talk about a lot of the issues we are facing.' Navarette-Huerta (2006) also found instances of immigrant groups attempting to influence politics on the Internet. Zepure (1.5) went online to the 'Armenian Genocide Recognition Petition' website. 'They are trying to get 1.5 million Armenians to sign, that is how many died. The story of the genocide is there. I signed my name, its like history; you are making history, being a part of the 1.5 million Armenian now, so it's exciting. When I put my name on the online petition I felt like part of a group that cared about a specific issue that was also important to me. I've always been involved in Armenian politics; I actually e-mailed CNN to complain about their online coverage of the April 24th protests last year.' Anoush (1.5) had a similar experience; 'The fact that we always protest on April 24th makes me happy. I like to be able to find the protests on the Internet.' The Internet can be used to resist

assimilation and increase group identity when used as a community resource as Zellen (1998) found in his research with a Cherokee community who used the Internet as a tool in their debate about culture preservation. Anoush (1.5) had this experience, 'On the Internet I saw a quote, it said, 'A real Armenian never forgets the genocide', I liked that. All of the websites agree on one thing, that you cannot forget you are Armenian.' Zepure (1.5) likes the online Armenian community she has found because, 'A lot of Armenians now, like me, aren't into the old traditions, and websites for new Armenians can make you want to be more a part of the Armenian culture.' Seda (2.0) uses Armenian websites as a resource for her homework, 'I once had to write a report about the genocide so I went to some websites. Or when my friends or teachers talk about something about Armenia and I am interested in it, I look online to see more.' Often the students wanted current information from their ancestral homeland creating a single social space from their ancestral land and their new country in much the same way Pedraza's (1999) research showed how the Internet can combine the ancestral homeland and the new country into one social space. Armenia was holding an election for President, and the young women wanted 'first hand' information. Seda (2.0) explains, 'Today I was online to find out about the election. The people were talking shit about Levon (Ter-Petrosian), about how he is kidnapping people and turning off the water so people will vote for him. My family said Serzh (Srezh Sargsyan Former Prime Minister and Ter-Petrosian's adversary in the 2008 election) and was the real bad guy that he had brought in his Russian mafia to make people vote.' Anoush (1.5) also wanted to be involved, 'I went online and saw what was going on when I saw what was going on with Serzh (Sargsyan), what he did, I didn't like it.' These behaviors support Mavroudi's (2007) assertion that a

diaspora is long distance nationalism with ancestral homeland oriented political goals as Berjouhi (1.5) discovered, ‘The people (Armenians) care, and think about it (the genocide). I was very happy when I read on the Internet about California recognizing the genocide. I also learned from a website, I can’t remember which one, that Christianity is a tradition from way back that makes us unique. The history of Armenia should be part of your life, and it is good to get people’s opinions about Armenian history on the Internet, but there are fake accounts by Turks that claim to be Armenian, but they are not, and they say bad things.’ Zepure (1.5) believes in exercising caution, ‘Everyone on the Internet agrees that the genocide happened, and the Internet is a way to get the attention of the world onto the genocide, but you should learn about the genocide from books and your parents.’ Liu (2000) found that immigrants also use websites to develop assimilative behaviors. Anoush (1.5) maintains her own website, ‘I have a blog about how people should be responsible, about how Armenians in Glendale don't take control of their own lives.’ Saunders’ (2006) work may begin to explain some of these behaviors. He found that the Internet has the ability to reunite people and allow them to claim a new cyber-identity as a group. The cyber-national communities he studied gave minorities a new means of unity and new ways to assert their ethnic identity. Those marginalized groups challenged the dominant culture by preserving national identities through recording songs, legends, myths, histories, and photos.

These interviews reveal beliefs held and behaviors practiced by these young women that are associated with successful incorporation. Their stories also indicate that these beliefs and behaviors came from various sources. Xie and Greenman (2005) found the maintenance of ethnic cultural values is protective for children. Stories told to Levitt

(1993) by Mexican immigrants suggest they find upward mobility through the maintenance of ethnic community connections, use of their native language, and traditional religious practice. The young women in this research shared much the same experience. Unlike Levitt's study however, some of the community connections and learning of traditions came from the Internet. Anoush (1.5) explains, 'I love living in Glendale as an Armenian. It is a smaller Armenia.' Her sense of community is not solely derived from place, '(Armenian) websites can teach you about pride and religion, music, culture, history, they talk about everything Armenian, they might also teach you something wrong, so you should check with your parents.' Zepure (1.5) has the same conflicted experience, 'Living around other Armenians helps to change my mind about being Armenian, and people help you to speak Armenian.' then she adds, 'A lot of Armenians now, like me, aren't into the traditions, and a website that is for Armenians can make you want to be more a part of the Armenian culture.' Rozin (2.0) feels both the positive and negative aspects of ethnic maintenance, 'Living with Armenians in Glendale helped me learn to dress like an Armenian, the whole fashion thing,' but she adds, 'There are Armenians who push you away from what you like, to be more Armenian. They try to hold you back. Sometimes it feels like, because we are Armenian we can't go to a Mexican restaurant, that I should only eat Armenian food.' Siran (2.0) describes her interactions with the community negatively, 'with so many Armenians together in Glendale they are too quick to judge.' Anoush (1.5) agrees, 'It is harder to be Armenian in Glendale than other places because there are so many of us, Armos (immigrants from Armenia) think we are a disgrace, we should only be with Armenians and listen to Armenian music.' Although the retention of traditional ideas is supportive of immigrant

youth, Portes and Zhou (1993) found these ideas are often in conflict with the ideas immigrant youth learn at school and from friends outside the ethnic community. These conflicts lead 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants to choose modes of incorporation that differ from their parents. Siran (2.0) sums up the effect well, 'I'm Armenian, and I was born in America and whatever values and customs I have learned, I don't let anyone change that. I am myself.' Anoush (1.5) has also found her own way, 'Anyone I marry, they don't have to be Armenian, but they have to respect my culture and speak Armenian to the children.'

As an effect of the extension of their identity and the diversity of their modes of incorporation, is an expectation that these 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Armenian immigrant high school aged females will challenge the status quo of their parents, their community, schools, and society. Portes and Zhou (1993) and Rumbaut (1994) found that the second generation is flexible in their ethnic self-identification and there is a diversity of outcomes for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation incorporation. Zepure (1.5) makes her experience clear, 'Living as an Armenian in Glendale, is to be born with Armenian traditions, but with American style. You don't always go to church on Sunday, but you still respect the traditions.' Rozin (2.0) too, has challenged the traditional, 'I would rather hang out with someone who is not Armenian,' and Seda (2.0) adds, 'I am happier now that all my friends are not Armenian even though some Armenians aren't my friends because of the choice' and 'I have more fun on the fourth of July than on Armenian holidays.' Rozin's (2.0) father has noticed as well, 'My Dad calls me an American, that I am cheerios' (cheerios is a reference to having beige skin covered in white). Siran (2.0) also chooses her friends on her own terms, 'It is more important to me that someone is a good, honest,

and hardworking person more than if they are Armenian.’ Seda (2.0) shares, ‘I want to go to college somewhere where I will say, OMG there are no Armenians there, I want to go there!’ Siran (2.0) has a unique way of describing herself, ‘I am an American-American. I strongly believe in my race but there are some things that Armenians do that I don't agree with like they pick fights for no reason.’ These young women challenge many of the beliefs they have been taught at home. ‘I am not into what a lot of Armenians are learning or have learned that girls should be one way and boys should be another,’ explained Zepure (1.5). Phinney et al. (2001) found that immigrant adolescents construct identity by synthesizing their old and new culture. 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Armenian immigrant high school students are no exception. This may be because as Levitt (2000) found, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation uses digital media more than their parents.

Anoush (1.5) describes herself, ‘I have an American mentality and traditions,’ and how other Armenians represent themselves, ‘Mostly you see websites of guys who want to be gangsters.’ Berjouhi (1.5) bemoaned her generation’s sometimes less than benevolent use of the Internet, ‘It is very easy for someone in Glendale to go on the Internet, say something that is not true, and my family in Iran can see it, nothing is private.’ Websites that focus on Armenian Rap music are popular and offer more than music. Siran (2.0) shares, ‘I like Armenian rap websites, and I like to chat about the music. It is really good. They talk about a lot of the issues we are facing. They talk about the backstabbing Armenians do to each other or how their friends died in gangs or gang violence and stuff like that. They rap about how we are being abused because the police are really racist towards us I guess.’ Armenian Rap music sites are also a stop for Zepure (1.5), ‘I like the Armenian rap websites, they sing in Armenian with a different



beat from traditional Armenian music. They sing about romance and the genocide, and life in America.’ Rozin (2.0) also likes Armenian Rap websites, and comedy sites, ‘I like a website called ArmenianIdiots.com because they make fun of Armenians. It is kind of disgraceful because it is called ArmenianIdiot.com, and they are all from Glendale, we know who they all are.’

Siran (2.0) describes representations of Armenians she sees online, ‘On You Tube Armenians make comedy videos about Armenian culture and although they are funny, I don't like to see them. It makes me feel embarrassed.’ Siran (2.0) learns about generational differences online, ‘I saw an interesting posting about how Armenian guys are really violent but we should know that their generations have been taught a certain way,’ and ‘I learned about respect for the older generations too. I did not know that why dying my hair or having a piercings was disrespectful. But it is because they did not have those things.’ These statements exemplify what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation is both products of and contributors to an increasingly global world and as a result they may conflict with their parents because they have American educations and speak English well. These findings are also consistent with Benitez’ (2006) finding that the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation’s knowledge of English and the Internet skills learned at school widens the generation gap. Rozin (2.0) shares, ‘I negotiate with my mom about things, but my dad just always asks why? Why? Why? The dads are always more protective over the girls.’ ‘I argue with my parents over chores, my independence, and how much freedom I have, because my brother has a lot of freedom.’

These interviews reveal behaviors and beliefs these young women have that support successful modes of incorporation and from where these behaviors and beliefs

come. An immigrant who chooses a path of accommodation without assimilation or segmented assimilation, (I am using the terms interchangeably) speaks her native language and English with ease. She understands the social norms of both cultures and participates effectively in each. She has friends outside of her culture group, but the core of her social life is within her family and cultural community. She may identify as a hyphenated American or as American. She has pride in her heritage, but is also critical of traditional aspects she finds old-fashioned.

These young immigrants create a life of between-ness that blurs the distinctions between life offline and life online. Their friends, family, and leisure time exist in both places simultaneously and in concert. In this between-ness they construct a place where individual ethnicity and citizenship are flexible and dynamic. This flexibility of individual identity allows them to accommodate as needed or desired without assimilation.

#### *Cultural Citizenship and the Internet*

The young women interviewed seek cultural citizenship, what Rosaldo and Flores (1997) contends is the right to be different from the dominant national community. This particular approach to citizenship surpasses legalities to include issues of belonging, entitlement, influence, and possible status derived through language use acceptance. They want the right to feel at home in Glendale despite their cultural differences with the non-Armenian community. They want to express their 'Armenian-ness' even though 'Armenian-ness' means something different to each of them. These young women, in and through the Internet, accomplish some aspects of cultural citizenships. The young women share activities like signing petitions, and discussing Rap artists and blog or chat

about Armenian history and current events, both activities that Rosaldo and Flores would agree creates group identity and enhances a feeling of community. The fact that these activities occur online differentiates these young women from their parents, who likely engage in the same practices, but within an off-line geographic space. These acts, whether or not online, distinguish them as an ethnic group and serves to separate them from others, a quality of cultural citizenship (Rosaldo and Flores). The creation, examination, and use of ethnic identities and organizations often involve manipulating cultural symbols and histories (Rosaldo and Flores). This practice occurs online at Armenian Rap sites where the tradition music of Armenia is transformed into something distinctly American, but because of its Armenian roots remains separate and distinct from Rap music that might be produced by another immigrant group. The same is true of online petitioning. While other ethnic groups may create and post petitions about issues important to them; only Armenians can post a petition demanding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. This use of the Internet opposes government policy (although California recognizes The Genocide, The United States government does not) and simultaneously resists assimilation of the group by strengthening ethnic community ties (Zellen, 1998).

As ethnic communities define and practice their cultural citizenship, social networks become increasingly important in overcoming geographic boundaries, and the hegemonic state. The Internet is a perfect venue for the development of unbounded social networks. The young women interviewed all maintained networks of Armenian friends, family, and bloggers outside of Glendale. When the young women use the Internet to challenge histories and opinions about the Genocide, critique the local police,

and participate politically on an international scale they begin to create a way of belonging to a group that extends beyond the boundaries of geography, the limits of state imposed law and local norms.

*Gender role identity construction and the Internet*

Identity construction is clearly impacted by these young women's interactions with the Internet. Traditional female roles are reinforced through the gangster identity they so enjoy. In this identity men are powerful and women are objectified, they accept these roles in the context of gangsterism. In contrast, they are educated on the Internet of the many personal and professional opportunities available to them as women. They research college choices, and share their abhorrence to data they find about domestic violence within their community. As adolescents, they are in the stormy midst of developing their personal sexual and gender identities. The acceptance of these seemingly contradictory models is not new. Whether the message came from the Soviet government, a theocratic regime, or the media of the west they are not unlike their mothers and grandmother who also endure conflicting messages about what it means to be a woman. The Internet is just another vehicle for these conflicting messages. However, these young women are also using the Internet as a venue for discussion of the conflict they feel. Their online discussions do not reduce this conflict for them, but I believe they do have a greater sense of efficacy about resolving their conflict because of the openness in which they explore and discuss it online. Overall, because of the opportunities for sense of efficacy it seems to offer as a venue for grievances about racism and sexism, the Internet has a positive effect on the identity development of these young women.

## Summary

The development of a positive Armenian Identity is strongly supported through the Internet. Despite the 'outing' of some 'Armenian Idiots' online, Armenian websites overwhelmingly offer positive representations of Armenian identity. These young women experience and can participate in the sharing of traditional Armenian music, and the creation of a distinctly American influenced sound. Via the Internet they can participate in local, national, and international politics building self-esteem and self-efficacy. They are empowered by signing petitions and blogging about important issues. They maintain long distance relationships with family and friends keeping and expanding social network system essential to positive identity construction.

Their conceptions of home are solidified and expanded with the ability to maintain relationships with far away family and friends The Internet allows them to connect with their ethnic community both locally and globally and to participate in the development of these communities in meaningful ways. Their ideas about citizenship are impacted by these participations. They share a belief that what they say about Armenia, Armenians, and the Armenian community in Glendale is heard and responded to. They also participate in a broad community of women as they explore their gender identity roles through their discussions in blogs and chat rooms. These discussions, their critique of Armenian Rappers views of women, and their observations of gender roles within and outside their families and community continues to cause them conflict. Their response is to not 'have it all' but to choose a between-ness where they are flexible, as the situation deems necessary, in their identities. This cyber-supported between-ness leaves an imprint on their incorporation choices resulting in a segmented assimilation. They have

chosen when to choose to be Armenian, when to be American, and when to just be themselves. The ability to choose how to incorporate and the impact of Internet technology on these choices, support contemporary 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants development of identities and allows them to accommodate without assimilation while developing flexible and dynamic group memberships.

#### *Recommendations for research*

While this research purposely emphasizes the local-level life of individuals, larger institutions and influences need to be more fully understood in relation to individual Internet use. Creators of websites designed for viewing by young immigrants have nearly complete control over what these young immigrants view. Hearing their stories will add depth to understanding this phenomenon. This research included only young women, whom Rotheram-Borus et al.'s 1998 study found are more similar to the norms of their ethnic group than are boys. The question of whether less similarity to parental norms might change Internet use among young men remains unanswered. These young women's Internet interactions around gender role issues raise interesting questions. The bulk of research in this area focuses on the impact of women on the Internet and on issues of gender equity. More research focused on the Internet as a tool for exploration by young women about women's issues is needed.

#### *Implications*

For researchers and educators these interviews demonstrate the influence of the Internet and ethnically focused websites cannot be ignored. Institutions must be aware that young immigrants do turn to the Internet for identity building experiences. Many of the behaviors the young immigrant women in this study engaged in (language retention

and participation within their ethnic community) have been shown to have very positive effects on academic performance. Hao and Bonsted-Bruns (1998) found a higher rate of language retention among immigrant children promoted academic success. Gans (1997) observed that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who engage with their ethnic communities and continue to speak their parent's language as they learn English have higher achievement in school than their peers who either do not incorporate or those who do not maintain their parents language. Bankston and Zhou (1995) similarly found that literacy in parents' language was strongly associated with ethnic self-identification, and consequently contributed to high academic performance. Schools, in their own best interest and the interest of the students they serve, need to recognize and support ethnic identity exploration behaviors on the Internet.

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