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THE PRODUCTIVE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Abstract. *This essay focuses on the productive role of children in immigrant families, and their various resource contributions. We first identify a contemporary understanding of children as targets of emotional and financial investment that parents make to secure their children's future success. This investment model views children as mostly passive receivers of resources. In contrast, we review research that showcases various productive contributions of children in immigrant families, including academic and language help, emotion work, and financial contributions. We end the review by identifying two theoretical perspectives that scholarship on productive role of children in immigrant families relies on, the social exchange theory, and the culture of collectivism. We contrast these two theories with a relational work perspective in economic sociology, which suggests that children's productive role in immigrant families is not only an example of instrumental reciprocity, or expression of collectivism, but part and parcel of relational work that involves dynamic negotiation of economic and social relations within and outside of immigrant families.*
Keywords: *children, immigration, family, economy, resource contributions*

Introduction

Across the globe, people are on the move. By some estimates, 200 million people, about 3% of the world's population, can be found in a country other than the one where they were born (Castles and Miller, 2009). Using the UN's definition of a migrant as a person who has lived outside of their country of birth for 12 months or longer, the number of international migrants in Europe was 64 million in 2005, a number which has been growing steadily since 1960 (Castles and Miller, 2009). In the United States, migrants

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comprise about 15% of the population, or 45 million people. The growth of foreign-born individuals inevitably leads to growth in immigrant families. In 2007, for example, about one-quarter of the children in the United States were either foreign-born or native-born with migrant parents (Clark, Glick and Buress, 2009).

Families, immigrant or native-born, can be viewed as reciprocity-based self-sustaining units: individual members turn to each other for support; parents bear a disproportionate amount of functional, emotional, and financial responsibilities for the whole family; and a sense of obligation due to filial ties influences individual behavior (Treas et al., 2014). The act of immigration has a significant influence on reconfiguring the roles, expectations and interactions within families (Kibria, 1993; Dreby, 2010; Dreby, 2012; Smith, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Therefore, we may expect that intra-household economic roles of individual family members, including the productive role and resource sharing contributions, are likely going to be reconfigured because of immigration as well.

Our focus in this essay is the productive role of children in immigrant families, which has received very little attention in the literature (but see Zelizer, 2002; 2012). This omission is not surprising; it is often assumed that children are not active economic producers but, rather, the recipients of economic resources provided by parents or other care-givers, and, if anything, shapers of family consumption patterns (Chin, 2001; Pugh, 2009). We question this assumption and economic asymmetry in resource contributions across family members. Specifically, we propose that immigrant families provide a strategic research site to investigate children's productive economic roles and relations. By production we mean any effort that creates value (Tilly and Tilly, 1998) and contributes resources. Given this broad definition, resources can be as varied as financial contributions through paid work; household services that may be otherwise paid if hired from outside the home (such as school help and chores); or emotion work that helps support current/future financial contributions of other family members. Of course, the particular contributions that children make in their household are dependent upon their age and gender, and we might see ethnic group differences if migration streams differ with respect to childhood expectations at home. We should also say from the onset that we do not mean to imply that children in native-born families lack productive economic roles; they likely have them (cf. Pugh, 2014) but these are not the object of our attention here, given our focus on how the circumstance of immigration redefines traditionally expected roles and relations of parents and children.

The essay starts by discussing the dominant "children as investment" model of childhood, which focuses on children as emotional assets rather than productive agents. In this model, households invest in improving

children's future socio-economic outcomes. We then show how the productive role of children in immigrant families challenges this investment model and we review research on various kinds of resource sharing practices in immigrant families. These include academic and language help, emotional resources and financial contributions. What explains immigrant children's productive contributions? In a third section, we identify two theoretical perspectives that largely shape the literature explaining immigrant children's economic role: social exchange theory and collectivism. We conclude by proposing an alternative theoretical account, which leverages recent conceptual developments in the new economic sociology by focusing on immigrant children's relational work as they negotiate, through resource contributions, their economic and family relations in immigration situations.

Children as Investment Model

To understand resource sharing within and between households, we must first understand the historical and contemporary role of children in families. Viviana Zelizer (1985) shows that between 1870 and 1930 in the United States, the understanding of the value and meaning of children shifted. While in the early 19th century, children held important economic roles as contributors to the family welfare, the process of sacralization of children, rendered them economically useless to the household, even if emotionally priceless. Children came to occupy central locations in the emotional life of the family at the same time that they were moved to the periphery of the household's economic sphere. Under the "economically useless but emotionally priceless" view, contemporary families do not – even should not – extract labor or resources from their children (Aries, 1962; Illick, 2002; Jenks, 2005). This passive and resource-starved role for children is built into assumptions of various theories, such as the resource dilution hypothesis in sociology, which suggests that due to fixed resources and downward flows from parents to children, increasing the number of children in a family decreases (educational) investment in each one child, thereby diminishing these children's educational achievement and attainment (Blake, 1992).

Moreover, contemporary research shows that not only are children emotionally priceless but they are also objects of investment. In *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau (2003/2011) documents the mechanism through which investment in children occurs, as well as its consequences. Middle-class families engage in "concerted cultivation," a parenting strategy in which children take center stage in family life. Parents spend an enormous amount of resources – financial and otherwise – to build skills of their offspring, even at the expense of the family unit. Among lower-class families,

parents engage in the "accomplishment of natural growth." Under this strategy, parents do as much as they can to invest in their children, but largely, children's proclivities and interests are unguided, without constant parental supervision. In short, Lareau finds that contemporary parents in the United States believe that childhood and adolescence is a time of investment. Although specific parenting strategies differ between middle-class and poor families, they both see investment in children as necessary to prepare their offspring for socio-economic success as adults. As Levey Friedman (2013) argues, this includes involving children in a multitude of extra-curricular activities, all with the focus on how these will aid children's future careers and achievements.

We call this approach "children as investment model", characterized by downward resource flows – from parents to children. Notably, the resources involved are not only practical (such as help with school) and emotional (as part of caring for children), but by-and-large financial, so that the word "investment" here has multiple meanings. Perhaps the clearest example of financial investment aligned with the "children as investment model" is the purchasing of a home in a safe neighborhood with good schools for children. As Warren and Tyagi (2003: 23) encapsulate: "families... used up the family's economic resources, and took on crushing debt loads in sacrifice to [the] twin goods [of safety and education], all in hope of offering their children the best possible start in life." While our focus is on parental investment during childhood and adolescence, we also see it later in the life course when parents contribute to pay for their children's college-related expenses, or with the newlywed's acquisition of a home (for more examples, see Bengtson, 2001; Eggebeen and Davey, 1998; Furstenberg, 2004; Furstenberg et al., 1995; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1986; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Logan and Spitze, 1996). In short, the investment model calls for parents to provide all manner of resources to their children, to invest in them emotionally and financially. As such, advertently or inadvertently, this perspective relegates children to receivers of family resources and not contributors of them. In contrast, we proceed to review scholarship that highlights the productive contributions of children, specifically in immigrant families.

Productive Role of Children in Immigrant Families

The migration literature has documented the myriad ways that migration impacts family life (Kibria, 1993; Dreby, 2010; Dreby, 2012; Smith, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Increasingly, studies have provided evidence to support the claim that children have an expanded role, relative to their peers with native-born parentage, and engage in adult-like responsibilities in immigrant households. We proceed to review research that showcases

these patterns by focusing on a variety of resource sharing, including academic and language resources, emotion work and financial contributions.

It is also important to underscore that the economic role of children in immigrant families may differ according to the socioeconomic status of the household, timing of arrival, and gender, among other factors. In upper-class families, children may be less productively engaged and more objects of investment, but not so much in lower-class households. This is consistent with the literature that shows that children living in poverty undergo "adultification" and "perform extensive labor in their families as a function of poverty... [and] these roles and responsibilities may be 'out of sync' with contemporary social and institutional notions of what children are expected to do" (Burton, 2007: 331). Economic roles are likely also going to be shaped by the timing of arrival to the host country (Bachmeier and Bean, 2011; Dreby, 2012; Smith, 2006). The time of parental and child migration may dictate the role that children take on in their households. First generation children, who by definition arrive as adolescents and young adults, face enormous pressure to enter the labor force and support their families (Lukes, 2013; Smith, 2006). Finally, female children may face additional pressures to take gendered responsibilities, such as caring for siblings, cooking, cleaning, and providing emotional support (Dreby, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999).

Moreover, while most of the scholarly studies we found pertain to the U.S. context where we observe productive roles among children in the largest ethnic minority groups – Latinos (Orellana et. al., 2003; Morales and Hanson, 2005) and Asians (Song, 1999; Park, 2005; Rumbaut and Komaie, 2010), this phenomenon is not limited to the United States (Zelizer, 2002). For instance, Hua and Costigan (2012) document language brokerage in Canada. Renzaho et al. (2011) document role reversal in Australia as do Ponizovsky and colleagues (2012) in Israel.

Academic and Language Resource Contributions

One way that children can contribute to their immigrant families is by providing practical support to their siblings and parents, such as with homework for siblings, and interpretation and translation for siblings and parents. In fact, Valenzuela (1999) finds that one of the three roles that children play in immigrant families is that of a tutor. Orellana and colleagues document not only children of immigrants' work as translators, interpreters, and advocates for their family due to their parents' lack of English language proficiency, but also the contributions that these children provide to their communities, especially their schools (Orellana, 2001; Orellana et al., 2003; see also Jones and Trickett, 2005). At Pico Union, the neighborhood in Los Angeles where Orellana and colleagues observed the role of children, they

found, for example, that children's work for the school, especially as classroom assistants, provided much needed support for classroom teachers. Children of immigrants offset personnel shortages, a consequence of tight budgets in their schools (Orellana, 2001).

At home, with regards to academic support, children may turn to their siblings for help because 1) parents lack the country of reception language proficiency and institutional know how to help, and because 2) siblings help "bridge some home-school differences in teaching/learning processes" (Volk, 1999: 5). Provision of homework help is a particularly good example because it is a resource that all children need, and one that schools expect parents to fulfill. Some immigrant parents may be unable to provide children with homework help because of long work hours. Assigning a sibling to help with homework – or having the sibling take it upon herself to help – solves parental time constraints, thereby serving as a solution to a family-unit problem. Further, homework help is an important contribution because it is important for academic achievement in all educational settings due to homework's impact on both grades and tests (Cooper et al., 2006). The extent of homework help provision among children of immigrant is, however, an empirical question, and may differ by ethnicity. For instance, it may be more common in low-income Latinos and less in Asian immigrant families, because the "tutor" role is fulfilled, among Asians, by a vast supplementary community education network (Zhou and Kim, 2006; Lee and Zhou, 2014). Additionally, sibling structure in the home might matter, with older siblings helping younger siblings more than the other way around (Valenzuela, 1999).

Emotion Work Contributions

Emotional labor, Hochschild (1983) writes, is the "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (Hochschild, 1983: 7). Although emotional labor has been widely deployed in labor market settings, less attention has been provided to Hochschild's insight – in *The Managed Heart* – that emotional labor is also deployed at home (Wharton and Erickson, 1993; Zedeck, 1992; Yanchus et al., 2010; Zapf, 2002). Hochschild writes that emotion work refers "to the same acts [as emotional labor] done in a private context where they have use value" (Hochschild, 1983: 7). Erickson (2005: 338) suggests that emotion work encompasses "activities that are concerned with the enhancement of others' emotional well-being and with the provision of emotional support" (see also Thoits, 1996). Examples include showing appreciation, expressing empathy, offering encouragement, listening to difficulties and accomplishments related to everyday life, and providing advice.

While research into children's emotion work efforts is limited, some evidence about these processes is available (Galinsky, 1999). We know, for example, that in poor households, one of the ways that children are "adultified" – or engage in non-normative roles – is through peerification/spousification, which requires, among other responsibilities, that children provide emotional support to their parents. They, for example, often serve as "emotional confidants" to their parents (Burton, 2007: 334). Similarly, children look for "mood clues" to minimize conflict in their homes (Becker et al., 1998; Boulding, 1980; Galinsky, 1999; Olsen, 2000; Robson and Ansell, 2000).

Additionally, some immigrant families face certain structural features associated with migration that spur the need for children to engage in emotion work in their homes (see Shih and Pyke, 2006). For example, immigrant mothers rely on children for emotional support during family separations, such as those due to detention of their undocumented partners (see Dreby, 2012; 2015). More broadly, lack of parental English language proficiency may limit the extent to which parents can emotionally support their children when children have negative experiences at school. Similarly, if migration substantially lowers the family's socio-economic status, or the family finds itself experiencing poverty, immigrant parents' work schedules may prevent their availability for emotional support to their children. Therefore, it may be the case that children in immigrant families are more likely to listen to the problems of their siblings and to provide advice than is the case among children in native-born families. Such behaviors – listening and providing advice – are those of an "advisor," which immigrant children may be more likely to take on than their native-born counterparts as a consequence of migration-related factors (Valenzuela, 1999).

Financial Contributions

Evidence suggests that many children of immigrants are important financial contributors to their households during childhood years. These children, for instance, work as street vendors, agricultural workers, cashiers and support staff in family-owned businesses. Song (1999) and Park (2005) document the extent to which Korean and Chinese family-owned ethnic businesses rely on the labor of their children for its economic survival. Without the labor of their children these businesses would capsize, because their unpaid labor boosts profit margins, however marginally. Emir Estrada highlights the economic role children play among Latino immigrant families in Los Angeles through their work as street vendors (Estrada, 2012; Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2010). These children not only support their parents in street vending, but, at times, solely run vending carts, even as minors during early adolescence. Agius Vallejo and Lee (2009) document the process

of "giving back" among immigrants, in which adult children serve as their family's (parents') safety nets during financially-difficult times, as well as a source of constant support to their parents' and extended kin's lifestyles. More recently, Camayd-Freixas (2013) documents immigrant child labor in meatpacking plants and Romano (2011) documents child labor among agricultural workers. Further, the work of Fuligni and colleagues shows that immigrant children feel family obligations most strongly, though these obligations find varied expressions across the immigrant groups (Fuligni et al., 1999; Fuligni, 2001; Fuligni and Pedersen, 2002; Fuligni et al, 2002; Hardway and Fuligni, 2006).

As the immigrant children transition to adulthood and work for wages in the labor market, the financial responsibilities to the family may not only endure but increase with their increased age-related earning potential. Thus, unlike children with native-born parentage who may be relying more and more on their parents for financial support, even through the transition to adulthood, immigrant families may be experiencing different – opposite, even – resource sharing patterns. According to Rumbaut and Komaie (2010), research from "Southern and Northern California, Miami, New York City, and elsewhere suggest that the pattern of support in immigrant families often flows reciprocally... [and] in the opposite direction than that indicated by data on preponderantly native-parentage families" (56). Likewise, Agius Vallejo and Lee (2009) found that among middle-class adult children of immigrants, those who had experienced the most economic hardships as children were the most likely to financially give back to their parents.

Given the extent to which some immigrant parents rely on their children for family wellbeing, it is possible that, under times of duress or in some critical junctures, children might be – knowingly or not – exploited in their households. Sometimes there is a thin line between helping out in the family, and investing most of the time and energy for the overall well-being of the household rather than a child's own pursuits (Song, 1999). For the case of young adults, Rosales (2014) finds that coethnic members, who often provide opportunities for economic integration to new immigrants, often their kin, sometimes, in the process, also exploit them (cf. Mahler, 1995; Peck, 2000). Further, scholars document cases of children participants in immigrant labor, where exploitation is often perpetrated by the employer, but also by the child's families, including parents (O'Neill, 2004), who commit them to employers (Blagbrough and Glynn, 1999), sometimes in exchange for monetary loans (Basu and Chau, 2004). Disadvantages to family household contributions may also come in more subtle forms. Dreby (2015), for example, documents the case of a parent who explicitly thwarted her child's educational ambitions because she needed her child to work to help defray household expenses after her partner – the child's father – was deported.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Productive Role of Children in Immigrant Families

The literature that we reviewed so far has established that children in immigrant families are important economic contributors to their family's welfare, which contrasts with the idea of "a priceless but useless" child. Because of specific circumstances related to immigration, these findings also contrast with the children as investment model, which we identified in the beginning of the essay. In this last section of the essay, we summarize the theoretical underpinnings that the research we reviewed largely relies upon, namely social exchange theory and culture of collectivism. We end this section by introducing an alternative theoretical perspective, one focused on relational work in economic sociology that may prove useful for future research investigating the economic contributions of children in immigrant families.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (for a review see Cook et al., 2013) is an often used framework to understand the logic of resource sharing in families, including immigrant families. Social exchange, as defined by Homans (1961: 13), one of the early social exchange theorists, is a transaction that is tangible or intangible, more or less rewarding or costly, and it has to happen between at least two parties. Homans relied heavily on behavioralism, assuming that people continue to engage in behavior that is rewarded, stop that which is punished, and are more likely to engage in actions that are considered more valuable, rather than less valuable, to them. From this perspective, a person engages in exchange relations based on a subjective cost-benefit analysis; one engages in activities based on rewards and costs associated with them.

As such, resource exchange theory would predict that family members will contribute resources to their family based on the benefits that such contributions could confer to them, and following norms of generalized reciprocity. For instance, even if children do not earn money to contribute to the family pot, as parents do, they might nevertheless contribute doing some chores or providing homework help and emotional support to their siblings, so they continue to be supported by the parents who value these contributions. In some sense, even being nice to parents and siblings is done for instrumental reasons: to direct future rewards to oneself. In short, social exchange theory hinges on the assumption that family members' behaviors, including resource sharing patterns in immigrant households, are a consequence of instrumental decisions made by rational actors, that is

individuals with clear goals and stable preferences who strive to maximize utility, however they might define such utility.

Culture of Collectivism

Another frequently invoked explanation for the resource sharing patterns in immigrant families, including the contributions of its children, is collectivist culture. At its core, collectivism is a label to describe family dynamics in which the family unit takes precedence over its individual members' goals, preferences, and actions – a group-based orientation (Pyke and Bengtson, 1995; Agius Vallejo and Lee, 2009) that is often contrasted against the individualistic orientations of native-born White families. Some scholars suggest that immigrants are more likely to exhibit these collectivist orientations because they exercise cultural practices that trace back to their countries – and cultures – of origin. Because immigrants of Asian and Latin American background are the most numerous in the United States today, scholars suggest – implicitly or explicitly – that religious and cultural practices associated with countries of origin as the source of these immigrants' collectivism (Baca Zinn, 1982/1983; Sean-Rivera, 1979). In the case of Asians, for example, Fuglini (1998: 783) writes "the hierarchical relationship between parents and children in many Chinese families traditionally should remain much the same through adolescence and adulthood, in part because of Confucian principles that dictate children should obey their parents their entire lives." In the case of immigrants from Latin American countries, scholars find individual subordination to the family, often referred to as familism, and find that it is "integral" to Hispanic culture (Desmond and Lopez Turley, 2009; Halgunseth et al., 2006). For example, researchers find *familism*, *respeto*, and *educación* are associated with country of origin practices that usually fade, at different rates, with acculturation (Halgunseth et. al., 2006). Prins (2011), for example, finds that for individuals in a rural Salvadoran town, the definition of being an educated individual includes moral, social as well as academic dimensions, including scripts regarding manners and comportment. This concept of an educated individual is similarly found among Mexican American and Puerto Ricans in the United States, and Latinos more generally in the United States (Harwood et al. 1995; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999a). An alternative explanation suggests that collectivism emerges in the United States, as a response to structural difficulties associated with migration (Bean et al. 1996; Agius Vallejo and Lee, 2009). Regardless of the source of these cultural practices – imported cultural practices or responses to structural difficulties, or, a mixture of both – researchers suggest that collectivism is a Latino and/or Asian cultural attribute that shapes individual attitudes and,

therefore, behavior, including resource sharing between family members and the contributions of children in particular.

Relational Work of Children in Immigrant Families

To a certain degree, the social exchange theory and collectivism perspectives posit that the traits that shape resource-sharing dynamics among family members in immigrant families, whether personal or cultural, are stable. In the case of collectivism explanations, for instance, cultural traits are observed in immigrants' countries of origin, are brought to the country of destination at the time of migration, and continue to exert their power on family behavior in the host country. Similarly, instrumental considerations of exchange are generalized to pertain relatively uniformly across various family situations.

However, we have reasons to believe that migration related exigencies and new circumstances associated with them, redefine family roles and relations, and as such require matching with new economic practices. Once we consider this dynamic aspect focused on situated interactions and negotiated relations, the notion of relational work, recently introduced in economic sociology (Zelizer, 2005b, 2012; Bandelj, 2012, 2015) offers a useful conceptual tool to understand the productive role of children in immigrant families.

It is precisely Viviana Zelizer, the author of a seminal book on the changing value of children (1985), who introduced the notion of relational work in her recent research. Relational work, Zelizer (2012a) argues, is the effort of people to try and find appropriate matches between social relations, economic transactions, and media of exchange. From a relational work perspective, economic interaction is not stable and given but has to be *worked out* dynamically and in specific situations – thus relational *work* (Bandelj, 2012). The focus is not only on the structure of social relations in which economic action is embedded (Granovetter, 1985) but also on the of meaning-making of actors engaged in relational work, emotional underpinnings and potential power asymmetries that shape exchanges (Bandelj, 2015).

The idea of relational work goes against the differentiation between the sphere of intimacy and economy as two separate worlds, whereby any connection between the two is assumed to cause contamination of social relations. Instead, economy and intimacy are considered connected worlds where individuals negotiate the combinations of intimate and economic relations through relational work (Zelizer, 2005b). Applied to immigrant families, the intimate family relations, which attain new meaning through migration situations, are being reaffirmed or challenged through economic transactions within a family, and reflect negotiation of variable meanings, economic transactions and media of exchange. For instance, Song (1999)

reports about contributions of children in family businesses of immigrant Chinese in the UK and children's expectations of payment for this work. Song finds great variation in how children interpret the reasons for their work and payment expectations. They are not simply driven by the Chinese culture and strong sense of family obligation. Nor are their actions generally reflective of instrumental reciprocity whereby they would work in family businesses to be able to expect some other returns and rewards from the family. Instead, children "articulated complex and ambivalent feelings about helping out" (Song, 1999: 81). While some expected quid pro quo payment, others thought it was inappropriate or even disrespectful to receive money because their family needed their help to survive. Several thought a small monetary payment was appropriate as a symbolic gesture or token of appreciation. Some emphasized other kinds of material goods received in return for their labor. A few thought payment was wrong because it could be seen as a bribe from parents, who could then ask children for more work than they should. Apparently, children negotiated specific circumstances of their family life, the meaning of relations to parents (influenced by Chinese culture but not determined by it), and expected amounts and forms of payment.

The varied expectations and experiences in ethnic family businesses that we can glean from Song's respondents are reflective of the relational work perspective, which strides the dynamic middle ground and allows for multiple motives of economic action (instrumental and non-instrumental), and situational, rather than essentialist, meaning making. Attention is paid to emotional embeddedness of economic interactions (Bandelj, 2009) and implications for the relations of power (Tilly, 2006) across family members are revealed.

In brief, from the perspective of relational work, economic contributions of children are not natural outcomes of cultural imperatives, nor solely strategic considerations of costs and benefits. Rather, they are negotiated in everyday interactions between children, siblings and parents. To deal with immigration-related contingencies, children have to take on roles that they may have not previously assumed, such as that of a provider, tutor, or advisor, and parents may have to forgo some aspects of their provider and caretaker roles. This reconfigures traditionally expected parent-children and sibling relations and calls for new economic engagements, and appropriate media of exchange, to match them.

Conclusion

In this review essay, we focused on resource sharing among immigrant families. In particular, we suggested that children of immigrants make substantial productive contributions to their households' economic life. This economic role remains under the radar due to contemporary social

valuation of children as economically useless but emotionally priceless (Zelizer, 1985), and because of the increasing view of children as targets of financial and emotional investment through concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003/2011).

In contrast, we focused due attention to the productive role of children in immigrant households. We suggest that a set of obstacles and opportunities associated with migration lays the groundwork for more economically involved and useful roles of children in their homes. Subsequent to migration, for example, immigrant parents often lack host country language proficiency, have limited knowledge of host country institutions, experience a reduction in familial and social ties, face devalued educational credentials, and struggle with cultural norms in their host country that may redefine their parenting practices as unacceptable (such as corporal punishment as a disciplinary strategy). These difficulties redefine family roles and relations, including those of children. As we reviewed, research showcases children's contributions as language and cultural brokers; domestic and care-workers; and workers in immigrant family businesses and outside the home to contribute financial support to the family.

Looking toward future research, we are convinced that demographic shifts, especially the exponential growth of immigrant families, may bring increased attention to the economic role of children in these families. For instance, recent research on the convergence of immigration and criminal law in the United States, suggests that families will bear the brunt of the policies that detain family members or even deport them back to their countries of origin (Kanstroom, 2007; Menjívar and Abrego, 2012). Such processes would redefine economic roles and relations in affected immigrant families and may place further adult-like demands on children in these families.

Finally, our goal in this essay was not only to uncover the productive role of children in immigrant families but also to identify the theoretical perspectives that have informed this research so far, namely the social exchange theory and culture of collectivism perspective. We add to the conceptual toolkit of researchers who examine these issues by suggesting that relational work in economic sociology is a fruitful perspective to apply to immigrant family life. Going beyond concerns with instrumental reciprocity, or expressions of collectivism, attention to dynamic negotiation of economic and social relations within and outside of immigrant families can help make sense of how, when, and why children make productive contributions to their households.

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