

June 2020

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### Recommended Citation

Shafeek Amin, Neveen (2020) "Assimilation and Educational Achievement: The Case of Coptic Orthodox Egyptian Immigrants in Texas," *International Social Science Review*. Vol. 96 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol96/iss2/2>

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## Assimilation and Educational Achievement: The Case of Coptic Orthodox Egyptian Immigrants in Texas

### Cover Page Footnote

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## **Assimilation and Educational Achievement: The Case of Coptic Orthodox Egyptian Immigrants in Texas**

Since 1965, changes in US immigration policies have led to mass waves of immigrants. In 2016, the foreign-born population of the United States reached 43.7 million, an increase of 12.6 million since 2000, comprising 13.5 percent of the total American population. Moreover, there were more than 16.6 million children (under the age of 18) with an immigrant parent.<sup>1</sup> The implications of this trend depend greatly on the ability of immigrant groups and their children to be upwardly mobile and become highly educated. Debate swirls around how well children of immigrants are faring and what factors promote their educational success. Some of the immigrant literature suggests that the key to educational success is assimilation into the host society,<sup>2</sup> with assimilation being “the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast, other research suggests that maintaining ties to one’s ethnic identity and strong adherence to and high involvement in one’s ethnic community promote educational success, particularly for those of lower socioeconomic origins.<sup>4</sup> Despite the different conclusions, almost all previous studies focus on ethnicity in examining the assimilation process of immigrants in the US. There is a paucity of research that focuses on religion in investigating immigrants’ assimilation.

This study focuses on the assimilation of a unique sample of Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-immigrants<sup>5</sup> in Texas—a small sub-group of Middle Eastern immigrants in the United States. Most immigrant groups’—such as Asians and Hispanics—identifies are based on a specific ethnicity. As a result, most studies examining the immigrant experience place a heavy emphasis on how ethnicity influences the assimilation process of immigrants. However, Coptic immigrants, an ethno-religious group, are identified not only by their ethnicity, but also by their

religion and as Jennifer Brinkerhoff states, “Copts are retaining their Coptic, Egyptian, and American identities in diaspora.”<sup>6</sup> While there is research examining the important role of religion among diverse minority adolescents and young adult,<sup>7</sup> little is known about how ethnicity and religion intersect to shape assimilation of various immigrant families—both parents and children. To date, only a handful of studies have examined the incorporation experiences of Coptic immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

In a recent study examining assimilation and heritage identity of Coptic diaspora, Brinkerhoff finds that Coptic immigrants achieve upward mobility as they assimilate into mainstream society, developing American identities, while retaining their Coptic and Egyptian ones.<sup>9</sup> Expanding on previous literature on Coptic immigrants and drawing on a unique sample of Coptic immigrants living in Texas, this study offers insight into the factors that shape the assimilation process of this group. To do so, this paper analyzes the effects of parental involvement—both within their ethnic group /community and within mainstream society, on their children’s educational achievement.

This study addresses the following question: What factor is more important in shaping student academic success among children in Coptic immigrant families: parental school involvement or religious involvement? The working hypothesis is that both factors, parental religious involvement in the co-ethnic community and parental school involvement, contribute to children’s educational achievement, but that parental religious involvement will have greater influence on children’s achievement compared to parental school involvement. An online self-administrated survey constructed in 2009 especially for this research provides the data to examine this question.

*Background: The History of the Coptic Orthodox Egyptian Immigrant Population*

Egypt is home to the largest indigenous Christian population in the Middle East region. In 2017, the estimated number of Egyptians was 104.2 million, of which 94.8 million were living in the country and 9.4 million were abroad. Roughly 9 percent identified as Coptic Orthodox Christians (Copts),<sup>10</sup> and one percent as other Christians.<sup>11</sup> Unlike in Egypt, most Egyptian immigrants in the United States are Christians.

Copts began to emigrate to the US in significant numbers during the last part of the twentieth century. Like any other immigrant group, while some Copts came to the US looking for a better life for their children or for economic reasons, others came seeking educational and occupational opportunities.<sup>12</sup> Another motive for Copts migration, as Youssef Ibrahim claims, was the low level of Middle Eastern Christians' political, social, and economic status in their countries due to ever increasing pressure from Islamic fundamentalists over the past several decades.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the last thirty years, Copts, especially university professors, physicians, and businessmen, have been eliminated from high positions in Egypt. Accordingly, hundreds of thousands of Copts have immigrated to the US, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe. The majority of the first Coptic immigrants to the US were well-educated, professionals, and skilled workers.<sup>14</sup>

In 1996, the United States established its Green Card lottery application program. From 2001 to 2015, 68,006 Egyptians were randomly selected,<sup>15</sup> leading to more socioeconomic diversity in the population of Egyptians immigrating to the US; in contrast to earlier waves of Egyptian immigrants, more belonged to low or lower middle-class families.<sup>16</sup>

Egyptian immigrants constitute the second largest immigrant group from Arab countries, after Iraq. Estimates of the total number of Egyptian immigrants in the US have varied from

182,000<sup>17</sup> to over 350,000, with the largest concentration of Egyptians living in New Jersey, New York, California, Illinois, Florida, and Texas.<sup>18</sup> Most of the Egyptian population in Texas is concentrated in Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. Although the exact numbers of Coptic immigrants in the US are difficult to trace, according to data collected by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), there were 92,191 Coptic Orthodox Christians in the US in 2010.<sup>19</sup> Another scholar estimates the numbers of Coptic immigrants in the US at 350,000.<sup>20</sup> Following the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath, the number of Copts seeking asylum in the US has increased significantly.<sup>21</sup>

For most Coptic communities in the US, church is not only a place of worship but also the “social center” of their lives.<sup>22</sup> Most social interaction among members happens there. For instance, after the weekly liturgy, most church members gather for a common meal in a designated area in the church. Also, during Christmas, Easter, and summer holidays, church members come to church and spend time together.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Coptic churches in the US play a significant role in the lives of Coptic Orthodox immigrants and their children.<sup>24</sup>

### *Assimilation Theory*

Understanding the assimilation process of the post-1965 “new immigrants” in the US and their children has been a priority for many scholars.<sup>25</sup> Richard Alba and Victor Nee define assimilation as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.”<sup>26</sup> There has been considerable debate among scholars regarding the assimilation process of the new immigrants and their children. Some scholars argue that the assimilation process of new immigrants, especially those who come from more developed countries and /or well-educated and skilled workers from less-developed countries, will inevitably lead to upward mobility assimilation.<sup>27</sup> Other scholars argue for the possibility of downward mobility

assimilation, particularly for immigrants coming from less-developed countries with low job skills, low educational levels, and no English proficiency.<sup>28</sup> Many scholars argue that for both groups upward mobility assimilation is possible even when retaining immigrant's culture and social ties with ethnic community groups.<sup>29</sup>

Social mobility trajectories of the second generation of immigrants tend to depend on the origins of their immigrant parents and their entry points of immigration into the US.<sup>30</sup> As a result, those who enter the upper-middle or middle class stratum will benefit from good neighborhoods, high-quality schools, well-educated parents, and high economic status; whereas those who come into the lower-class stratum will experience the negative impact of poor neighborhoods, bad schools, less-educated parents, and low economic status.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, Min Zhou and Carl Bankston find that Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans live in poorer neighborhoods and are less-educated; however, because of social capital made available to them in their immigrant community, as well as strong ties to their ethnic group, these children outperform their counterparts in school and tend to have specific college plans.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut note that children of immigrants who maintain close relationships with friends from their ethnic communities tend to perform better in school.<sup>33</sup> These findings suggest that the social capital made available within families and in their community plays an important role in the well-being of immigrants and their children.

One prominent theory that has emerged from the aforementioned debate among scholars is segmented assimilation theory.<sup>34</sup> This theory presents a framework for studying different outcomes of the children of new immigrants by understanding how they integrate into the stratified system of the host society.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, segmented assimilation theory helps in understanding educational achievement of Coptic American children and, specifically, to what

extent Coptic parents' involvement, in school or in their ethnic community, affects their children's educational achievement.

Proposing the segmented assimilation theory, Portes and Zhou affirm that America is a stratified and unequal society, and therefore, different segments of society are available to which immigrants may assimilate. The authors describe three possible paths of assimilation that immigrants may take. The first path, predicted by classical assimilation theory, is to increase acculturation and integration into the white middle class, which leads to upward mobility. The second path is acculturation and assimilation into the urban underclass, which leads to downward mobility. The third and final path, is "selective acculturation," a phrase proposed by Portes and Zhou, is the deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's culture and values.<sup>36</sup>

Segmented assimilation theory formed by studying more economically diverse immigrant communities in the US, such as those of Mexican, Asian, and Vietnamese groups.<sup>37</sup> The dearth of studies that address Coptic immigrants in the US makes it difficult to judge whether the same theory applies to this population and what path of assimilation this group takes. A recent study, Brinkerhoff, finds that Coptic diaspora follows upward mobility assimilation, as indicated by their high socioeconomic status and increasing intermarriage. Moreover, the author highlights the significant role that the Coptic Church plays in sustaining cultural identity and facilitating positive assimilation of its members. This study also finds that Coptic immigrants and their children experience "selective acculturation" by retaining their cultural heritage as they assimilate into the mainstream society, suggesting that "upward mobility can be achieved without loss of heritage identity." The author finally argues that for Coptic immigrants "assimilation with upward mobility does not require substitution of one culture for another."<sup>38</sup>

*Parental School Involvement and Children's Educational Achievement*

A great number of studies suggest that parental school involvement positively affects homework habits, graduation rates, and educational achievement / attainment of their children.<sup>39</sup> Educational achievement / attainment of children of immigrants is considered an indicator of success and adaptation to mainstream society, which depends on children's cognitive ability, parental economic status, and the availability of parental social capital for their children.<sup>40</sup> There are different forms of parental school involvement, such as volunteering in school, attending parent-teacher meetings, communicating with teachers about school matters, helping children with school projects, and discussing school activities with children at home.<sup>41</sup> Whereas a few studies find that children do not do well in school if their parents help them with homework and reward them for good grades, others find that frequent participation in parent-teacher meetings and mentoring and supervising children positively affect children's school success.<sup>42</sup> Parental involvement in school may help develop children's homework behavior, enhance children's self-esteem, and improve their school attainment. Discussing school activities with children, as a form of parental school involvement, is also strongly related to children's school achievement.<sup>43</sup> Immigrant parents perceive the significance of education as an avenue of their children's upward mobility. Robert Crosnoe argues Mexican migrant parents' dreams for their children are accomplishable through education.<sup>44</sup> As parents are the most significant force in their children's lives, it is not surprising that parental school involvement plays a central role in children's educational success.

Research in this area indicates that parents' socioeconomic status (SES) has a significant effect on children's achievement in school.<sup>45</sup> Suet-Ling Pong, Hao, and Gardner assert that parents' SES explains the achievement gap between foreign-born Hispanic and native white students.<sup>46</sup> By the same token, Crosnoe's 2006 study shows that immigrant

children from high income families tend to perform better in school than those from lower income families.<sup>47</sup> In addition, controlling for parents' SES, the author finds that parents with origins in Latin America tend to have lower level of participation in their children's school than white Americans. Even after considering parents' SES, Latino immigrants report the lowest level of school participation compared to their white American, African American, and Asian American counterparts. The author argues that parental school involvement relates more to their ethnicity than to their SES.<sup>48</sup> A more recent study finds that parents' involvement in their children's education mediates the relationship between parents' SES, in particular, family income and mothers' level of education, and their children's academic achievement.<sup>49</sup> In a later study, Crosnoe highlights the importance of family-school partnerships (such as parents' school involvement) in reducing academic disparities between children's of immigrants and their US-born counterparts.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Parental Religious Involvement and Children's Educational Achievement*

A growing body of empirical research shows the positive effects of parents' religiosity on their children's grades, graduation rates, and school success.<sup>51</sup> Parental religious practices appear associated with family satisfaction and closer parent-child relationships. Religious participation of immigrants maintains ties to values from the culture of origin.<sup>52</sup> As for the Coptic community, the church serves not only as a place of worship, but also as a focal point of secular community activities.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, strong ties within the church, as an ethnic community, may play a vital role in influencing intergenerational relationships and friendship networks, and those factors mediate the association between church participation and children's school performance.<sup>54</sup> Researchers find that religious involvement promotes school success among Vietnamese adolescent immigrants in the US.<sup>55</sup> In their 1990 study, Woo Hurh and Kwang Kim emphasize not only the religious function of the Korean immigrant church, but the social, cultural, and

educational functions as well. The authors also highlight the emotionally supportive and helpful role of ethnic church, particularly for new comers.<sup>56</sup>

Past research illustrates the significant role participating in their ethnic community plays in successful immigrant assimilation. Religious institutions likely facilitate such participation. Intergenerational relationships between parents and children in an immigrant community reduce the stress between children's achievement and their familial obligation.<sup>57</sup> In addition, church as a religious organization creates social capital by providing norms, promoting valuable social sanctions, providing information channels, and allowing trust and obligations among its members that in turn facilitate different kinds of capital to children.<sup>58</sup> Although social capital, in the form of integration into the ethnic community, is important, in some cases it is more important than human capital for the process of assimilation of the second generation into the host community.<sup>59</sup> Church participation may form a type of social integration that strengthens values favorable to educational achievement/attainment.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, most religious organizations guide families with advice about marriage, parenting, and how to deal with their children. This promotes another form of social capital and enhances parent-child relationships.<sup>61</sup> Finally, intergenerational networks in church help parents to know their children's friends' parents and that promotes trustworthiness between parent and child. This, in turn, positively affects their children's success in school.

This research suggests a gap in empirical studies that explore the relationship between assimilation and educational success among Coptic Orthodox immigrants in the US. The current study expands previous literature on Coptic immigrants in the US by examining the influence of parents' involvement in school and ethnic church, on their children's educational achievement.

### *Data and Method: Sample and Data Collection*

This study draws on data from a unique sample of Coptic immigrant parents who participated in a cross-sectional web-based survey administered through Survey Monkey software in 2009. The target population was Coptic immigrant parents in four major cities in Texas (Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin), who have at least one child in grades one through twelve.

### *Procedures*

After obtaining approval from a university Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted, via email, the Coptic Orthodox priests in the four Texan cities to ask for voluntary participation from their church members. Then, the priests sent an email through the church's listserv, asking their church communities to participate in the research. Of the 311 emails sent to Coptic immigrant parents who showed their interest in participating in the study, eighty-three parents/mothers<sup>62</sup> responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 27 percent. All responses to survey questions were anonymous and participation was voluntary. Participants were told that they were free to refuse participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants did not receive any compensations for participating in the study.

Each participant had the ability to answer questions for up to seven children. Since some parents had multiple children, observations received included data for 106 children. The data collection occurred from May to June 2009. All of the questions asked as part of the survey were gleaned from established surveys that have been used throughout the US, some for more than twenty-five years and have demonstrated adequate validity and reliability.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, a pre-test of the survey was conducted to determine how participants understood survey questions and

assess their ability to provide valid and reliable answers to the questions. The survey contained twenty-nine questions. All the questions except two were closed-ended questions.

### *Measures*

Two questions measured the dependent variable, *children's educational achievement*. For children in grades one through six, respondents rated their children's school performance on a five-point scale, from near the bottom of the class (1) to one of the best in class (5). Those who had children in grades seven through twelve reported what range of grades their children receive. Responses ranged from mostly Fs (1) to mostly As (9). The study constructed a standardized scale, with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, by taking the arithmetic means of the two items.

The key independent variables are *parental religious involvement* and *parental school involvement*. Six items measured *parental religious involvement*. Respondents reported how often, in a typical month, they (1) attend church services, (2) attended church activities outside of services, and (3) attended formal Bible study organized by the church. The same questions were asked about children's fathers. Responses ranged from never (1) to once a week or more (5). Item responses were recoded to: (3) never, less than once a month, and once a month, (4) two or three times a month, and (5) once a week or more. An index<sup>64</sup> that combined the six items for mothers and fathers measured parental religious involvement. The mean was 4.09 (alpha 0.94), suggesting that they are intensively participate in their ethnic church/community.

Fourteen items measured *parental school involvement*. For the first three items, respondents reported how often, in a typical month, (1) they attended school functions or events, (2) attended meetings with teachers, and (3) volunteered for the school. Responses ranged from never (1) to once a week or more (6). In the next four items, they were asked how often, in a

typical week, (4) they took at least one child to afterschool activities, (5) helped with school work or a school project, (6) read to or with children, and (7) discussed what happened in school that day. These items were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from never (1) to very often (5). The study posed the same questions about children's fathers. The responses of the first three items were re-coded into three categories: (3) never, once a year, once a semester, (4) once a month, (5) two-to-three times a month and once a week or more. Responses to the other four questions were also re-coded into three categories: (3) never, rarely, and sometimes, (4) often, and (5) very often. An index of parental school involvement combined the fourteen items, resulting in a mean of 3.72 and a Cronbach alpha score of 0.79, although lower than parental religious involvements, it still well above the normal threshold for valid indexes.

Control variables include a variety of measures previously linked to children's educational achievement, such as parenting and childhood activities, number of children's friends' parents know, parental networks, parents highest level of education, where they obtained their highest level of education, length of stay in the US, annual income, parents' age, and their work status.

*Parenting and childhood activities (5 items).* Respondents were asked how often they do the following parenting-related activities: (1) read books about children, (2) read books about parenting, (3) attend classes on parenting, (4) talk to professionals about parenting, and (5) read books about education. Respondents chose from a 5-point scale ranged from never (1) to very often (5). An index of the 5 items revealed a mean of 2.88 (alpha 0.85). Respondents chose from a 4-point scale ranging from none (1) to all (4), the *number of their children's friends they know (1 item)*. Dichotomized responses were other=0 and all =1.

*Parental networks (3 items)*. Respondents were asked, on a scale of 5, how often, in a typical month, they share the following activities with one or more of their children's friends' parents: (1) get together for social event, (2) meet at church, and (3) talk to each other on the phone or through emails (alpha 0.78).

Respondents also reported *their highest level of education (2 items)*. Responses ranged from less than high school (1) to professional degree (7). The same question was asked about children's fathers. An index of the parent's highest level of education obtained a mean of 5.51. This means that, on average, half of the Coptic Orthodox immigrant parents, in this sample, have at least a Bachelor's degree (alpha 0.60). In addition, participants were asked *where they obtained their highest level of education (2 items)*. The options were: (1) in the US, (2) abroad, (3) mixed (some education completed in the US and some completed abroad). A constructed index dichotomized responses as in the US=1, others=0 (alpha 0.92).

Respondents chose from a five-point scale, *how long they have been living in the US (2 items)* and with five intervals, ranging from less than 5 years (1) to 21 years or more (5). An index combined the two variables, getting a mean of 3.83 (alpha 0.80). They reported their household *annual income* for last year as it fell within seven intervals that ranged from under \$40,000 to over \$150,000. The mean was 4.75, indicating that, on average, the household annual income of the Coptic families in Texas ranged from \$80,000 to \$100,000. According to census data, the median annual household income in Texas in 2007 was \$47,563. This finding suggests that Coptic immigrant families in Texas have a much higher household income than the Texas average.

A six-point scale ranging from 21 years (1) to 65 and over (6) measured *parents' age (2 items)*. A combined variable of the parents' ages found a mean of 3.39 (alpha 0.80). *Parents'*

*work status* (2 items) was measured using a 7-point scale, from part-time (1) to other (7). The dichotomized responses were full-time= 1 (alpha 0.80). Participants also reported the *number of children* in the family/household. Responses ranged from 1 to 7 (mean=2.24). Finally, respondents provided the following information for each child: *children's gender* (female=1), *children's age* (mean=11.51), and *children's grade levels* (first through twelfth grade).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample (N=106)**

	Mean	SD
Children's educational achievement	0.03	0.96
Parental religious involvement	4.09	0.62
Parent school involvement	3.72	0.39
Parent's highest level of education	5.51	0.97
Parents obtained highest degree in the US	0.41	0.44
Parents' annual income	4.75	2.05
Parent's age	3.39	0.58
Parent's work status	0.08	0.21
Number of years in the US (parents)	3.83	1.19
Number of children in the household	2.24	0.66
Children's gender	0.52	0.50
Children's age	11.51	3.45
Children's grade level	6.10	3.24
Number of children's friends parents know	0.59	0.50
Parental networks	3.73	0.99
Parenting & childhood activities	2.88	0.95

### *Analytic Approach*

To analyze the data, this study used a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models, which were ideally suited for testing the influence of parental school involvement and parental religious involvement on their children's educational achievement among a sample of

Coptic Orthodox immigrants in Texas. Data analyses were conducted in SAS 9.2. Missing data were imputed using the mean scores. Thus, no data have missing values. The final analytic sample consists of observations for 106 children. Diagnostic tests reveal no issues with multicollinearity.

### Results

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations of all variables used in the analysis. Table 2 presents a series of Pearson correlations for all variables. Column 1, in this table, represents the relationship of each variable with children's educational achievement (the outcome variable). It shows that parental school involvement is significantly and positively correlated to children's educational achievement ( $r=0.35$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), which means that as parental school involvement increases, children's school performance also increases. Additionally, both income and number of children's friends parents know are significantly and positively correlated with children's school performance ( $r=0.25$  and  $0.29$ , respectively). On the other hand, there is no significant association between children's educational achievement and parental religious involvement.

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients, (N = 106)**

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Children's educational achievement	–				
2. Parental religious involvement	0.05	–			
3. Parent school involvement	0.35***	0.21*	–		
4. Parent's highest level of education	-0.03	0.26**	-0.06	–	
5. Parents obtained highest degree in US	0.10	-0.04	0.42***	0.19*	–
6. Parents' annual income	0.25*	0.03	0.32***	0.33***	0.45***
7. Parent's age	-0.28**	0.20*	-0.31**	0.32***	-0.30**
8. Parent's work status	-0.12	-0.14	-0.23*	0.06	-0.10
9. Number of years in the US (parents)	0.00	0.07	0.45***	0.04	0.63***

10. Number of children	0.12	0.09	0.20*	0.04	0.42***
11. Children's gender	0.04	0.03	0.11	-0.01	0.04
12. Children's age	-0.16	0.20*	-0.24*	0.22*	-0.11
13. Children's grade	-0.14	0.14	-0.30**	0.26**	-0.14
14. Children's friends parents know	0.29**	0.16†	0.35***	-0.02	0.09
15. Parental networks	0.14	0.40***	0.16†	0.07	0
16. Parenting & childhood activities	0.14	0.37***	0.50***	-0.04	0.19†

Significance: †p < .10; \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 2. (Continued)**

	6	7	8	9	10
1. Children's educational achievement					
2. Parental religious involvement					
3. Parent school involvement					
4. parent's highest level of education					
5. parents obtained highest degree in the US					
6. Parents' annual Income	–				
7. Parent's age	-0.06	–			
8. Parent's work status	0.05	0.03	–		
9. Number of years in the US (parents)	0.49***	-0.07	-0.14	–	
10. Number of children	0.36***	-0.09	-0.12	0.26	–
11. Children's gender	0.02	-0.03	-0.08	0.11	-0.07
12. Children's age	0.00	0.57***	-0.06	0.16†	-0.10
13. Children's grade	-0.02	0.57***	0.00	0.12	-0.13
14. Children's friends parents know	0.20*	-0.23*	0.05	0.05	0.17†
15. Parental networks	0.20*	-0.07	0.05	0.06	0.17†
16. Parenting & childhood activities	0.24*	-0.24*	-0.14	0.36***	0.16

Significance: †p < .10; \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 2. (Continued)**

	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Children's educational achievement						
2. Parental religious involvement						
3. Parent school involvement						
4. parent's highest level of education						
5. parents obtained highest degree in the US						
6. Parents' annual Income						
7. Parent's age						
8. Parent's work status						
9. Number of years in the US (parents)						
10. Number of children						
11. Children's gender	–					
12. Children's age	0.09	–				
13. Children's grade	0.14	0.95	–			
14. Children's friends parents know	-0.04	-0.19	-0.19	–		
15. Parental networks	0.00	-0.03	-0.02	0.32	–	
16. Parenting & childhood activities	0.12	0.00	-0.04	0.19	0.24	–

Significance: † $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

As shown in column 2, parental religious involvement is significantly and positively, yet weakly, connected with parental school involvement ( $r=0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This variable is also significantly and positively correlated with parents' highest degree of education, parents' age, children's age, parental networks with their children's friends' parents, and parenting & childhood activities ( $r=0.26$ ,  $0.20$ ,  $0.20$ ,  $0.40$  and  $0.37$ , respectively). Column 3 demonstrates that parental school involvement is significantly and positively correlated to where parents obtained their highest degree, in the US versus others, with  $r=0.42$  ( $p < 0.0001$ ). This variable is also significantly and positively correlated with parent's annual income, number of years in the US, number of children in household, children's friends' parents know, and parenting &

childhood activities ( $r=0.32, 0.45, 0.20, 0.35,$  and  $0.50,$  respectively). Furthermore, parental school involvement is significantly but negatively correlated with several variables, such as parent's age ( $r=-0.31$ ), parent's work status ( $r=-0.23$ ), children's age ( $r=-0.24$ ), and children's grade ( $r=-0.30$ ). Table 2 summarizes the findings of the correlation analysis.

**Table 3. OLS Regression Models of Parental Religious Involvement and Parental School Involvement Predicating Children's Educational Achievement (N=106)**

	Model1	Model2	Model3
Parental religious involvement		.03 [.02]	.05 [.03]
Parental school involvement		.90** [.36]	.88** [.35]
Parent's highest education	-.07 [-.07]	-.07 [-.07]	-.07 [-.7]
Parent's annual income	.17** [-.37]	.15** [.32]	.15* [.31]
Parent's age	-.48* [-.29]	-.43* [-.26]	-.44* [-.26]
Parent's work status	-.71 [-.15]	-.40 [-.09]	-.46 [-.10]
Number of years in the US	-.19* [-.24]	-.30** [-.38]	-.28** [-.34]
Number of children	.02 [.01]	.03 [.02]	.01 [.01]
Children's gender	.06 [.03]	-.01 [0]	.01 [.01]
Children's grade levels	.02 [.07]	.05 [.19]	.06 [.20]
Number of children's friends parents know			.21 [.11]
Parental networks			.02 [.02]
Parenting & childhood activities			-.10 [-.10]
Intercept	1.78*	-1.50	-1.43
Adjusted R-square	.12	.19	.19

Note: Unstandardized coefficients/ standard errors in parentheses

Significance: † $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Table 3 presents findings from the regression analyses. In Model 1, children's educational achievement is regressed on demographic (age, number of years in US, number of children, gender & grade level) and SES (education, income, and work status) variables to test if these variables directly contribute to children's educational achievement. This model has an adjusted R-Square of (0.12), meaning that this model accounts for 12 percent of the variance in children's educational achievement. Expectedly, parents' annual income is significantly and positively associated with children's educational achievement, meaning that the higher the income of Coptic immigrant parents, the higher their children's school performance. On the contrary, parents' age and length of stay in the US are significantly but negatively associated with children's educational achievement, meaning that the older the parents, the lower their children's school performance. This finding suggests that as parents age, they are less likely to participate in their children's school activities which, in turn, has a negative impact on their children's school performance. Further research is needed to examine this negative association between parents' age and children academic success. Also, children are less likely to do well in school, as the number of years their parents have been in the US increases. This finding may suggest that children gradually lose their achievement drive, as parents' length of stay in the US increases. Parents' work status also negatively but not significantly affects their children's educational achievement. The number of children in the family, children's gender, and children's grade levels have no significant effect on children's educational achievement among Coptic students in this sample.

Model 2 introduces the two main predictors, parental religious involvement and parental school involvement.<sup>65</sup> This model accounts for 19 percent of the variance in children's educational achievement. It suggests that school involvement of Coptic immigrant parents is

highly and significantly associated with their children's educational achievement. Surprisingly, this model shows no statistically significant relationship between parental religious involvement with their ethnic group and their children's educational achievement. The relationship between parents' annual income, parents' age, and number of years parents have been in the US remain significantly associated with children's educational achievement. Whereas these findings highlight the strong positive influence of parents' income on their children's school achievement, they underline that contradictory effect of parents' age and length of stay in the US on their children's academic achievement, suggesting that as parents age and the longer they stay in the US, the less they value their children's educational achievement. Children's gender, number of children in the family, and children's grade levels remain insignificantly linked with children's educational achievement. Although parents' work status stays non-significant, the inclusion of parental religious involvement and parental school involvement to the model attenuates the negative effect of parents' work status from (-.71) to (-.40).

Finally, in Model 3 (full model), three parental variables were added to Model 2: number of children's friends parents know, parental-networks, and parenting & childhood activities. Parental school involvement remains a significant and stable predictor of children's educational achievement. This model slightly attenuated the effect of parental school involvement; however, the reduction was very small. Parental religious involvement remains insignificant. Similar to Model 2, parents' annual income, parents' age, and number of years parents have been in the US remain statistically significant influencing children's educational achievement. Notably, children's gender, number of children in the family, and children's grade levels remain non-significant in all models. This model predicts almost 19 percent of the variance in children's school achievement.

Taken together, the results in Table 3 present strong evidence that parental school involvement is a relatively more important predictor of children's educational achievement than parental religious involvement.<sup>66</sup> Parental involvement in their children's school, as a form of assimilation into the mainstream society, helps promote their children's school achievement. This result answers the research question posted at the beginning of this paper. Although parental religious involvement, as a form of participation with the ethnic community, remains non-significant, one cannot say that parental religious involvement is not important. It has been shown to be highly associated with children's health, behavior, well-being, and school success.<sup>67</sup>

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

This study examines the influence of parental school involvement and parental religious involvement on children's educational achievement among a sample of Coptic immigrants in Texas. Several noteworthy findings emerge from this study. Expectedly, parental school involvement significantly and positively contributes to their children's educational achievement. This finding aligns with different scholars who argued that the key for immigrants' and their children's success is to assimilate into the mainstream society.<sup>68</sup> This finding also suggests that by involving in their children's school, Coptic immigrants follow the first path of the segmented assimilation theory, which leads to upwardly mobile assimilation into the American mainstream society. Contrary to the hypothesis, no statistically significant relationship is revealed between parental religious involvement and their children's educational achievement. This finding is also contrary to other research that found that parents' religiosity is associated with students' chances of finishing high school and positively linked to various educational outcomes.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, this finding does not support Zhou and Bankston and Portes and Rumbaut who suggest that maintaining some ties to one's ethnic community promotes educational success.

There are several possible explanations for why parental religious involvement failed to explain children's educational achievement. First, prior studies such those of Crosnoe, Zhou and Bankston and Portes and Rumbaut, focused on immigrant groups of lower SES origins. However, Coptic immigrant parents in this sample are considered to be of high SES. Another possible explanation could be the lack of variation in religious involvement among Coptic parents in the sample. By nature of the sampling design, all the participants registered with a Coptic church, which already suggests that they all have a certain level of baseline religiosity. Also, as noted above, this variable is an index of 17 items; a better measurement of parental religious involvement could be used by adding different patterns of questions.

Findings in this study need to be viewed in light of several limitations. First, this study used cross-sectional data which does not permit causal inferences. Second, it is worth noting that this sample might be biased since it excludes Coptic participants who do not have valid email addresses, former church members, and those not registered with a Coptic church. Another limitation was that this survey was only available in English, thus participants not fluent in English would have been unable to complete it. It is also possible that the limited geographic area from which participants were selected may have impacted the results of the current study. That is, due to the uniqueness of the sample—Coptic immigrants in Texas—heterogeneity is limited. Most of the participants have professional career jobs, are highly educated, and belong to the upper-middle class strata. Research from more balanced samples from other areas may broaden our understanding of the association between parental school and religious involvements and their children's academic success among Coptic population in the US. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing these results to the larger population of Coptic Orthodox immigrants living in the US. Finally, data collection occurred in 2009, the demographic

characteristics of Coptic immigrants have significantly changed since then, especially after the 2011 Egyptian revolution, with immigrants fleeing the Middle East region to seek refuge and asylum. Thus, these findings may not be generalized to Coptic immigrants today.

Despite these limitations, results from the current study showed that Coptic Orthodox immigrants follow upward mobility assimilation to the American mainstream society. This finding supports immigrant literature that shows that the social mobility trajectories of the second generation of immigrants depend on the origins of their immigrant parents. Thus, children of Coptic immigrants benefit from their parents' high SES origins. Therefore, the new generation is affected by the human and financial capitals of their immigrant parents, which strongly shapes their trajectories.<sup>70</sup> This finding also aligns with Brinkerhoff's study, which found that Coptic immigrants in diaspora follow upward mobility assimilation into the mainstream society.<sup>71</sup> Although Coptic immigrant parents may appear to be experiencing "selective acculturation" by intensively participating in their ethnic church/community, their religious participation does not have a statistically significant influence on their children's school achievement. Nonetheless, this may suggest that their high involvement in their ethnic church/community does not hinder their upward mobility to the American mainstream society.<sup>72</sup> Future research should take a better approach to further investigate this relationship.

This study suggests that further research on Coptic immigrants in the US is necessary. Future work on Coptic immigrants may rely on the theory of social capital in explaining relationship between parents' religiosity and their children's academic success. The current study suggests that further attention to the issues discussed above can enhance our understanding of the influence of parental involvement into the mainstream society on their children's academic success. Also, future studies should attempt to better address the intersection between religion

and various educational outcomes using a larger representative sample of Coptic immigrants in the US.

Overall, this study has helped bridge the gap in the extant literature on Coptic immigrants in the US. This study also grapples with an important question regarding assimilation patterns, parents' school involvement, and children's educational achievement, particularly as it pertains to an ethno-religious immigrant community. This study provides a more nuanced understanding of the influence of parental school involvement of Coptic immigrant parents on their children's school achievement. Although this research showed that most Coptic immigrant parents intensively participate in their ethnic church, their participation with their ethnic group does not have a significant effect on their children's academic achievement. Yet, their participation with their children's school has a significant and positive effect on their children's educational achievement.

## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>65</sup> Initially, this study ran two models introducing the two predictors separately but found no significantly different results than that introduced in model 2, introducing the two predictors in the same model.

<sup>66</sup> This study also executed a non-linearity test to examine the non-linearity relationship between the parent's religiosity variables and the outcome variable. No significant relationship was found between the outcome variable and the parent's religiosity variable.

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