

# Evidence-Based Parenting

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## **The established consensus in 1964: encourage immigrant children to assimilate**

**as soon as possible.** For the scholarship underlying this consensus, see Milton Gordon's monograph *Assimilation in American Life: the role of race, religion, and national origins*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Because of this long-held consensus, the more recent finding that immigrant children now do better than American-born children is regarded as evidence of a "paradox." Scroll to the bottom of this document for citations documenting the immigrant paradox. Disclaimers: I am not endorsing Dr. Gordon's recommendations. 1964 was not the good old days; that era was much more racist and sexist than our own. Every era has its challenges.

For an overview of the immigrant paradox, please see my 2021 essay for the Institute for Family Studies, "The Immigrant Paradox: why are the children of immigrants doing better [than the children of parents born and raised in the United States]?" online at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-immigrant-paradox-why-are-children-of-immigrants-doing-better>. Scroll to the bottom of this document for additional citations documenting the immigrant paradox.

The first graphs I showed – demonstrating a marked increase in the proportion of people reporting either a major depressive episode, or serious psychological distress – with that rise seen among adolescents age 12 to 17, and young adults age 18 to 25, but *not* in older age groups – is taken from the paper by Jean Twenge and colleagues, "Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005 – 2017," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, April 2019, full text online at <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-12578-001>, and also from the comprehensive review of current scholarly literature documenting a recent rise in

adolescent mood disorders, co-edited by Professor Twenge, is online at <https://tinyurl.com/TeenMentalHealthReview>.

**The prioritizing of peer relationships over the parent-child relationship.** In the 1960s, James Coleman found that the majority of American teens valued their parents' opinion more than the combined opinion of all their friends. (He reported his findings in his monograph *The Adolescent Society*.) That's no longer the case today. But peer relations are contingent and ephemeral. When peers matter more than parents, kids become anxious and fragile.

**The culture of disrespect.** The opening chapter of my book *The Collapse of Parenting* is titled "The Culture of Disrespect" – which is a fair summary of contemporary American popular culture, as experienced by children and teenagers. TV shows like *Modern Family* illustrate the culture of disrespect. The Disney Channel exemplifies the culture of disrespect, with shows such as *Dog with a Blog* and *Jessie* and *Liv and Maddie*.

American popular culture now has toxic elements. Cardi B's August 2020 video "WAP" broke records for the most streams in one week (93 million streams) and reached #1 on the Billboard Top 100. See my article "Why WAP Matters" <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/08/70643/>.

Bruno Mars won six Grammys, including the Grammy for Best Song, for his song "That's What I Like." The song begins with these lyrics:

*I got a condo in Manhattan  
Baby girl, what's hatnin'?  
You and your a-- invited  
So gon' and get to clappin'  
Go pop it for a player, pop-pop it for me  
Turn around and drop it for a player, drop-drop it for me*

For more about Bruno Mars and his Grammy for Best Song, please see my essay "You and Your [Expletive] Invited," online at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sax-sex/201802/you-and-your-expletive-invited>.

There is good and bad in contemporary American culture. The analogy to the big city. A big city has many great things: a beautiful art museum, a great science museum, a museum of history. But a big city also has dangerous, high-crime neighborhoods. You wouldn't let your kid loose in a big city without adult guidance. By the same token, you shouldn't let your kid loose on the Internet without setting some limits.

### **COVID-19 → rise in depression**

For the April 2019 baseline rate of 6.5% of adult Americans experiencing symptoms of depression, see <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/ERmentalhealth-508.pdf>.

For the rates as of October 11 2021, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>. Under "Select Indicator", click on "Symptoms of depressive disorder". (You will find a similar explosion in symptoms if you click on "symptoms of anxiety disorder".)

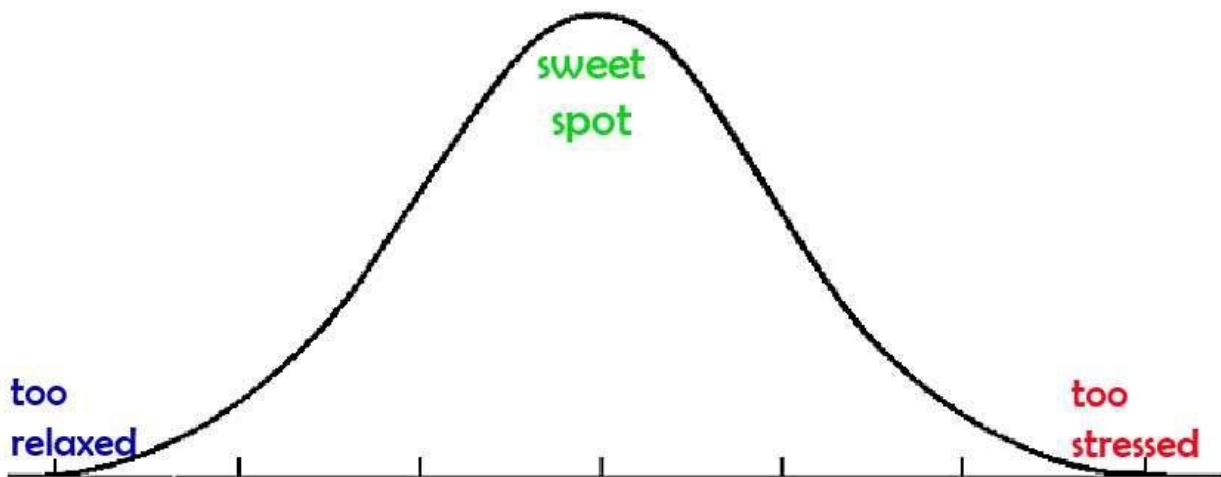
Here is the age breakdown:

- 👤👤 18 – 29 years of age: 36.0% reported symptoms of depressive disorder
- 👤👤 30 – 39 years: 25.7%
- 👤👤 40 – 49 years: 23.9%
- 👤👤 50 – 59 years: 20.3%
- 👤👤 60 – 69 years: 15.1%
- 👤👤 70 – 79 years: 10.5%
- 👤👤 80 years and older: 12.5%

Jean Twenge led a survey of 1,523 middle-school and high-school students during the pandemic. For the full survey, go to <https://ifstudies.org/ifs-admin/resources/final-teenquarantine2020.pdf>. For Professor Twenge's interpretation of the findings, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/10/how-teens-handled-quarantine/616695/>.

Michel de Montaigne wrote to the Lady Diane de Foix, advising her to bring up her son "roughly and dangerously . . . on a fractious horse . . . against a tough opponent sword in hand." That quote comes from his essay *On Education*, which originated as a letter to the Lady Diane de Foix, written in 1580.

The Yerkes-Dodson curve (my rendering):



Visintainer, Volpicelli, and Seligman, “Tumor rejection in rats after inescapable or escapable shock,” *Science*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7200261>. 54% of controls (no shock) rejected the tumor. Only 27% of “helpless” rats rejected the tumor. 63% of “master” rats rejected the tumor.

Justin Bieber had a big hit with his song “Born to be Somebody”: *“I’ll light up the sky like lightning / this world will belong to me / I was born to stand tall”*

Micah 6:8: what does the Lord require of you? To walk HUMBLY . . . What does humility mean? One definition: being as interested in other people as you are in yourself.

Do not confuse being humble with being timid. Do not confuse self-esteem with courage. Simplest strategy to teach humility: household chores.

**UCLA study: shift from community to individual.** From 1967 through 1997, the most popular TV shows emphasized *community* values, doing the right thing, being a good friend. In 2007 and in 2017, the most popular TV shows – especially reality TV shows – emphasized *individual* values, with a focus on fame, fortune, and winning. See “The Rise of Fame: An historical content analysis,” online at <http://www.cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2011061601> and the update to 2017 at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XwBbghx1fqU\\_97aYWRoD-SptVeOD74sq/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XwBbghx1fqU_97aYWRoD-SptVeOD74sq/view).

Bloated self-esteem leads to narcissism and to resentment. If I'm so great, how come I have to work so hard for not much money?

Enlightened humility – founded in a genuine interest in other people – is more likely leads to contentment and happiness.

To be successful in life, you must be willing to move from one failure to the next with no loss of enthusiasm.

**Parental monitoring apps:** I recommend that parents deploy programs such as NetNanny, MyMobileWatchdog, TeenSafe, or mSpy. “mSpy” is a terrible name, because you are NOT spying: you TELL your child that it is your job to know what they are doing online. You explain that **it is the parent's job** to be aware of how much time their kids are spending online, and which sites they are visiting.

**2021 update:** NetNanny and MyMobileWatchdog have significantly DECREASED the power of their apps. They no longer enable monitoring of photos taken with the phone, and they do not allow monitoring of SnapChat and similar apps where photos “vanish.” MSpy **does** allow monitoring of photos and “ephemeral” apps such as SnapChat. For more information, see <https://www.mspy.com/>.

Many of the apps listed below are NOT stable on the iPhone. They can be uninstalled without the parent knowing – then reinstalled, so the parent doesn't know what happened while the app was off the phone. Some of the apps listed below say that they work on the iPhone. I hear different reports from parents: some say it works on the iPhone, others say it can be uninstalled without their knowledge. If you are concerned, **switch from Apple (iPhone) to Android (most other phones)**. I have no affiliation with Apple or Android or Samsung or anybody else.

Here are apps which parents have found useful:

**Bark:** monitors text messages, YouTube, and other social networks. Works on Apple and Android. <https://www.bark.us/>.

**Screentime:** <https://screentimelabs.com/>. Works on Apple and Android.

**Circle:** manages connected devices wherever they are. Works on Apple and Android. <https://meetcircle.com>.

**Eset parental control:** monitors content and limits screen time. Works only on Android. <https://www.eset.com/us/>.

**Qustodio:** monitors content including YouTube, limits screen time, easy-to-use dashboard from your own laptop. This is one of the few apps which works both on smartphones and on tablets and laptops. <https://www.qustodio.com/en/>

No devices in the bedroom! – i.e. phones, and no UNSUPERVISED Internet access. Here is the American Academy of Pediatrics announcement of the guidelines: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/pages/media-and-children.aspx>. The full text of the AAP guidelines, as published in the journal *Pediatrics*, is available at no charge at this link: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/5/e20162592.full.pdf>.

Here's a link from the AAP to create a "family contract" for kids' use of media: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>.

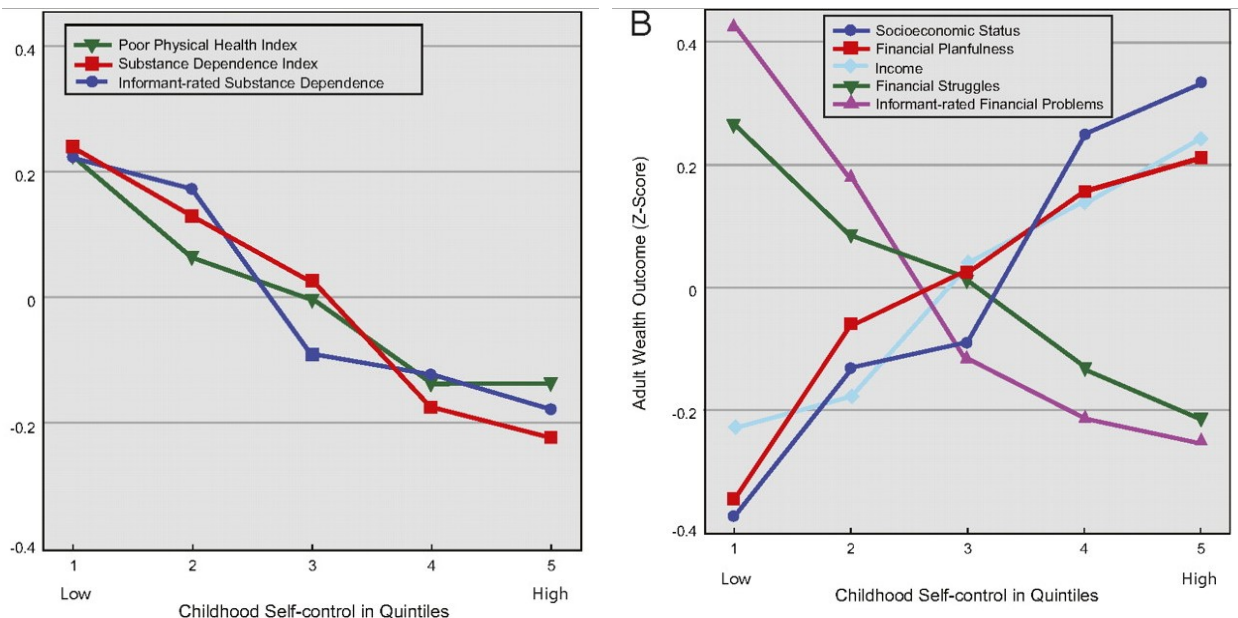
Transforming the relationship: once the fun is there, the relationship becomes loving. Once the relationship is loving, parenting is easy. You must prioritize time to have FUN with your kid. See the chapter titled "Enjoy" in *The Collapse of Parenting*.

Longitudinal cohort studies demonstrating the importance of Conscientiousness:

Brent W. Roberts and colleagues, "The Power of Personality: The Comparative Validity of Personality Traits, Socioeconomic Status, and Cognitive Ability for Predicting Important Life Outcomes," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2:313-345, 2007, full text at <http://classdat.appstate.edu/COB/MGT/VillanPD/OB%20Fall%202012/Unit%202/Personality%20Articles/The%20Power%20of%20Personality%202007.pdf>.

Terrie E. Moffitt and colleagues, "A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108: 2693 – 2698, 2011, full text online at <http://www.pnas.org/content/108/7/2693.full.pdf+html>.

These two graphs come from Moffitt et al. 2011:



Teaching self-control and virtue should be your top priority for your daughter or son. That's not a sermon; it's a robust empirical finding.

Jennifer Finney Boylan, "A Common Core for All of Us" *New York Times*, March 23 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/opinion/sunday/a-common-core-for-all-of-us.html>. She asserts that you should set your child free so they can discover their own right and wrong. For a rebuttal, including my exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:7, see *The Collapse of Parenting*, pp. 133 – 134.

There is a false dichotomy between the "Tiger Mom" and the "Irish Setter Dad." The Tiger Mom is all about achievement. The Irish Setter Dad just wants kids to have a good time. Both are mistaken. (I borrow the phrase "Irish Setter Dad" from P. J. O'Rourke's article "Irish Setter Dad," *The Weekly Standard*, April 4 2011, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/irish-setter-dad/article/555534>. I do not endorse O'Rourke's article.)

Why is human childhood so long? A four-year-old horse is a mature adult. A four-year-old child has a long way to go. For more citations on this point, see my book *The Collapse of Parenting*, pages 11 – 15.

For a teenager, having a meal with a parent greatly decreases the risk of problems, and improves life satisfaction, in a "dose-dependent" fashion from days 1 through 7 (there are 7 days in a week). See Frank Elgar, *Journal of Adolescent Health*. The graph I showed is Figure 1 from their paper. [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(12\)00317-5/abstract](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(12)00317-5/abstract).

**Ban the bedroom!** Kids should not spend their free time in the bedroom. They should spend their free time in a family room, even if they are not interacting with family. No screens in the bedroom. No TVs in the bedroom. No video game consoles in the bedroom.

No headsets in the car. No earbuds in the car. No screens in the car. When you are in the car, you should be listening to your son or to your daughter, and your daughter should be listening to you, not to Bruno Mars or Cardi B.

The search for meaning. Without meaning, life has no point. The result is anxiety, depression, and disengagement. Your job as a parent is to **educate desire**: to instill a longing for things higher and deeper. When I visited the Shore School in Australia, I met with Dr. Wright. I asked him: what is school for? He answered: it is preparation for life. I asked him: what is life for? He answered: life is for three things:

- **Meaningful work**
- **A person to love**
- **A cause to embrace**

I am not saying that Dr. Wright is the guru. You don't have to embrace his answers. But you must have an answer.

Why are kids in the United States today so much more likely to be anxious and disengaged compared with kids from the same demographic 30 years or even 10 years ago, and compared with young Australians or Swiss today? Here are my answers:

- The bonds across generations have been broken
- **You must restore them**
- We have allowed the same-age peer relations to displace the family
- **Prioritize the family. Cancel the playdate. Make a family date instead.**
- We have allowed screens to displace real-world experience
- **You must change that: limit, govern, and guide how your kids use social media and video games**
- American culture now prioritizes fame and wealth over virtue and character
- **You must challenge that. You can't change Hollywood. But you can create a culture of respect within your own home.**
- Many kids accept the contemporary American assumption, that professional success is the best road to happiness. You must model an alternative: that humility and contentment are the best road to happiness. That's what the research shows. For more on this point, see David Brook's essay "Five Lies Our Culture Tells," <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/15/opinion/cultural-revolution-meritocracy.html>.



Here are some comments about my books:

**Why Gender Matters** “. . . is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences.”

*New York Times*

**Boys Adrift** “. . . is powerfully and persuasively presented. . . Excellent and informative references and information are provided.”

*Journal of the American Medical Association*

**Boys Adrift:** “A must-read for any parent of boys. This is real science, and Dr. Sax thoroughly uncovers the important health issues that parents of boys need to be tuned into.”

*Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of “The Dr. Oz Show”*

**Girls on the Edge:** “Packed with advice and concrete suggestions for parents, *Girls on the Edge* is a treasure trove of rarely-seen research on girls, offering families guidance on some of the most pressing issues facing girls today. Dr Sax’s commitment to girls’ success comes through on every page.”

*Rachel Simmons, author of Odd Girl Out and The Curse of the Good Girl*

**Girls on the Edge:** “This is essential reading for parents and teachers, and one of the most thought-provoking books on teen development available.”

*Library Journal*

**Girls on the Edge:** “The best book about the current state of girls and young women in America . . . offers astonishing and troubling new insight . . .”

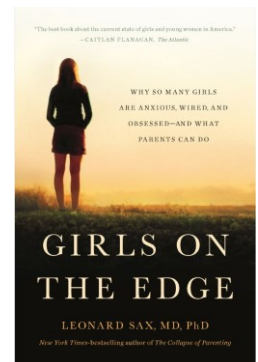
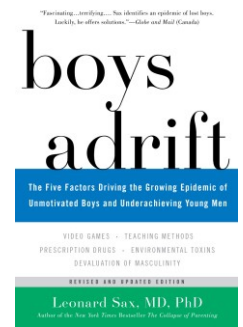
*The Atlantic*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “One of the premier experts on parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax brilliantly articulates the problems parents experience with their children, then gives solutions. **The Collapse of Parenting** is academic but practical, simple but deep. If you have time to read only one book this year, **read this one.**”

*Meg Meeker MD, author of Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters and Strong Mothers, Strong Sons*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “With years of experience and research working directly with parents and children, Dr. Leonard Sax provides an important glimpse into parenting in modern times, where it’s gone wrong, and how to fix it. Being a parent has never been more important and Dr. Sax explains how to avoid parenting pitfalls and raise your children well.”

*Bill Bennett PhD, former US Secretary of Education*

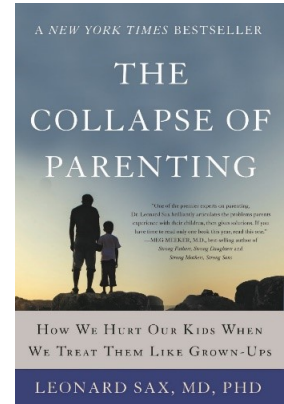


**The Collapse of Parenting:** “A comprehensive breakdown of where parents have gone awry and how they can get back on track to teach virtue and character to their children. . . .Sax provides a series of easy-to-follow solutions that help bring parents and children back to the same page, working toward a healthier, more respectful, and conscientious attitude. . . .With the author’s solid advice, parents have a good shot at achieving these goals.”

*Kirkus Reviews*

*If you're going to read one book on parenting this year, make it **The Collapse of Parenting** by Leonard Sax. What makes a good nonfiction instructional book is an author who has extensive real world experience in the subject matter and who has the ability to write clearly. Leonard Sax has both.... This is quite simply a good book that is easily read and will provide sound advice for giving our children the best chance to succeed in life.*

*New York Journal of Books*



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### Documentation of the immigrant paradox:

Here are some citations demonstrating that girls and boys whose families have recently immigrated to North America are less likely to be anxious, or depressed, compared with girls and boys born and raised in North America:

- Margarita Alegria and colleagues, “Prevalence of mental illness in immigrant and non-immigrant Latino groups,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, volume 165, pp. 359 – 369, 2008, full text online at no charge at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2712949/>.
- Huong Nguyen, “Asians and the immigrant paradox,” in *Asian American and Pacific Islander Children and Mental Health*, edited by Frederick Leong and Linda Juang, volume 1, pp. 1 – 22, 2011.
- Liza Suárez and colleagues, “Prevalence and correlates of childhood-onset anxiety disorders among Latinos and non-Latino Whites in the United States,” *Psicologia Conductual / Behavioral Psychology*, volume 17, pp. 89 – 109, 2009, full text available online at no charge at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2800359/>.

- David Takeuchi and colleagues, “Immigration and mental health: diverse findings in Asian, Black, and Latino populations,” *American Journal of Public Health*, volume 97, pp. 11 – 12, 2007. This article is an introduction to a special issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* (AJPH) devoted to documenting and understanding the interaction between immigration status and mental health in the United States. Full text online at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1716240/>. From that special issue of AJPH, see for example “Immigration-related factors and mental disorders among Asian Americans,” *American Journal of Public Health*, volume 97, pp. 84 – 90, full text at <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2006.088401>. This article documents a peculiar gender quirk in the immigrant paradox: while the immigrant-paradox effect was generally stronger for females than for males (i.e. being born outside the U.S. was more protective for females than for males), English-language proficiency was a greater risk factor for males than for females. If you are male, and you were born in Asia, and you move to the United States, then mastering English puts you at greater risk of mental disorder; but that’s not true if you are female. Go figure.

Here is some of the evidence that girls and boys whose families have recently immigrated to the United States are less likely to engage in binge drinking or other forms of alcohol abuse, and/or substance abuse:

- Michele Allen and colleagues, “The relationship between Spanish language use and substance use behaviors among Latino youth,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, volume 43, pp. 372 – 379, 2008.
- Donald Hernandez and colleagues, “Children in immigrant families: demography, policy, and evidence for the immigrant paradox,” in Cynthia García Coll and Amy Kerivan Marks (editors), *The Immigrant Paradox in Children and Adolescents: is becoming American a developmental risk?* Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2011.
- Guillermo Prado and colleagues, “What accounts for differences in substance use among U.S.-born and immigrant Hispanic adolescents? Results from a longitudinal prospective cohort study.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, volume 45, pp. 118 – 125, 2009. Prado and his colleagues document that foreign-born Hispanic adolescents are significantly less likely to engage in drug abuse, compared with similarly-situated U.S.-born Hispanic adolescents. They conclude that the key difference is that the U.S.-born Hispanic teens are looking to their same-age peers for guidance, while the foreign-born Hispanic teens are looking to their parents and to other adults for guidance.

- William Armando Vega and colleagues, “Illicit drug use among Mexicans and Mexican Americans in California: the effects of gender and acculturation,” *Addiction*, volume 93, pp. 1839 – 1850, 1998.

For more documentation of the immigrant paradox with regard to adolescent sexuality, and intercourse before 15 years of age, see Marcela Raffaelli, Hyeyoung Kang, and Tristan Guarini, “Exploring the immigrant paradox in adolescent sexuality: an ecological perspective”, chapter 5 in Coll and Marks, *The Immigrant Paradox in Children and Adolescents: is becoming American a developmental risk?* See also Tristan Guarini and colleagues, “The immigrant paradox in sexual risk behavior among Latino adolescents: impact of immigrant generation and gender,” *Applied Developmental Science*, volume 15, pp. 201 – 209, 2011.