

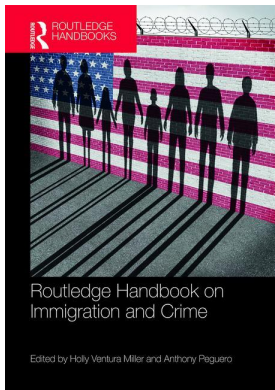
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Holly Ventura Miller, Anthony Peguero

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Charis E. Kubrin, Michelle D. Mioduszewski

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMMIGRATION-CRIME RELATIONSHIP

Charis E. Kubrin and Michelle D. Mioduszewski

Introduction

Today, there are over 42 million immigrants in the U.S., which represent just over 13 percent of the U.S. population (Zong & Batalova, 2016). The U.S.-born children of immigrants, the second generation, represent another 37 million people, or 12 percent of the population. Taken together, the first and second generations account for one out of four members of the U.S. population. Such figures raise important questions about whether immigrants and their children are successfully integrating into U.S. society and whether or not current policies and practices facilitate their integration. Also of interest are questions related to how U.S. society may be transformed by the millions of immigrants who have arrived in recent decades.

Answers to these questions can be found in a new report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2015) entitled, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*. The 458-page report, collectively authored by many of the leading immigration scholars in the country, summarizes what we know about how immigrants and their descendants are faring in a range of areas such as education, occupations, health, and language. Chapter 7, in particular, considers the social and cultural dimensions of immigration focusing on popular fears and concerns such as, for example, that immigrants are more crime prone than their native-born counterparts and that immigration is associated with increased crime. Along these lines, the report reviews the vast literature that empirically examines both whether immigrants offend at a higher rate than the native-born and whether immigration to an area increases crime rates in that area. The authors foreshadow the results of their investigation in the opening sentences of the chapter by noting:

Americans have longed believed that immigrants are more likely than natives to commit crimes and that rising immigration leads to rising crime . . . This belief is remarkably resilient to the contrary evidence that immigrants are in fact much *less likely* than natives to commit crimes.

(p. 326, emphasis in original)

Indeed, there is a growing awareness among scholars that immigration and crime do not go hand in hand. Consider the vast body of research conducted at the individual level, which examines whether immigrants have higher offending, arrest, and incarceration rates than the native-born. Findings from this literature reveal the answer to this question is no (Bersani, 2014; Butcher & Piehl, 1998b, p. 654;

Hagan & Palloni, 1999, p. 629; MacDonald & Saunders, 2012; Martínez, 2002; Martínez & Lee, 2000; McCord, 1995; Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzine, & Corzine, 2009; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005; Tonry, 1997). In fact, in an extensive review of the literature, Martínez and Lee (2000) conclude that: “the major finding of a century of research on immigration and crime is that immigrants . . . nearly always exhibit lower crime rates than native groups” (p. 496).

A related observation from this research, however, is that the individual-level link between immigrants and crime appears to wane across generations. That is, the children of immigrants who are born in the U.S. exhibit higher offending rates than their parents (Lopez & Miller, 2011; Morenoff & Astor, 2006, p. 36; Rumbaut, Gonzales, Komaie, Morgan, & Tafoya-Estrada, 2006, p. 72; Sampson et al., 2005; Taft, 1933; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Research also finds that assimilated immigrants have higher rates of criminal involvement compared to unassimilated immigrants (Alvarez-Rivera, Nobles, & Lersch, 2014; Bersani, Loughran, & Piquero, 2014; Lee, 1998; Morenoff & Astor, 2006, p. 47; Zhou & Bankston, 2006, p. 124). For example, Rumbaut and Ewing (2007) show that the risk of incarceration is higher not only for the children of immigrants but for immigrants themselves the longer they reside in the U.S. (p. 11). Likewise, Butcher and Piehl (1998a) find that in both 1980 and 1990, those immigrants who arrived earlier were more likely to be institutionalized than were more recent entrants (p. 659). Findings such as these have led scholars to describe an “assimilation paradox” (Rumbaut and Ewing, 2007, p. 2) where the crime problem reflects “not the foreign born but their children” (Tonry, 1997, p. 20).

At the same time, a rapidly growing body of research that considers the immigration-crime nexus across place consistently finds that areas, and especially neighborhoods, with greater concentrations of immigrants have lower rates of crime and violence, controlling on a range of factors associated with crime rates (Akins, Rumbaut, & Stansfield, 2009; Butcher & Piehl, 1998a; Chavez & Griffiths, 2009; Desmond & Kubrin, 2009; Feldmeyer & Steffensmeier, 2009; Graif & Sampson, 2009; Kubrin & Ishizawa, 2012; Lee & Martínez, 2002; Lee, Martínez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; MacDonald, Hipp, & Gill, 2013; Martínez, 2000; Martínez, Lee, & Nielsen, 2004; Martínez, Stowell & Cancino, 2008; Martínez, Stowell & Lee, 2010; Nielsen & Martínez, 2009; Nielsen, Lee, & Martínez, 2005; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009; Reid, Weiss, Adelman, & Jaret, 2005; Stowell, 2007; Stowell & Martínez, 2007, 2009; Stowell, Messner, McGeever, & Raffalovich, 2009; Velez, 2009; Wadsworth, 2010). This consistency in findings suggests that immigrant neighborhoods are some of the “safest places around” (Kubrin & Ishizawa, 2012, p. 148) and that “The relationship between immigrants and violence is not always definitive but . . . when this connection is directly examined with empirical data there is typically a negative relationship or no association” (Martínez, 2006, p. 12). Indeed, a review of the literature throughout the 20th century concluded, “Recent research has become substantially more sophisticated in terms of analytical methods, including multivariate modeling and statistically grounded mapping techniques. But the conclusion remains largely the same . . . immigration generally does not increase crime and often suppresses it” (Lee & Martínez, 2009, p. 3).

Assessments such as these recently received a critical stamp of approval, which came in the form of findings from a meta-analysis on the immigration-crime relationship conducted by Ousey and Kubrin (2018). In their study, Ousey and Kubrin (2018) sought to improve clarity and understanding of the immigration-crime relationship both across and within macro-social (i.e., geospatial) units such as census tracts, cities, counties, and metropolitan areas. Toward that end, they employed meta-analytic methods to systematically and quantitatively assess available evidence on the direction, magnitude, and variability in the relationship between immigration and crime. Examining over 500 effect size estimates from more than 50 U.S.-based macro-level studies published between 1994 and 2014, their analysis of the literature reveals that overall, the immigration-crime association is negative—but *very weak*. Indeed, for the full sample of effect size estimates, significant negative effects were found to be 2.5 times as common as significant positive effects, but null effects were by far the most common result reported in prior studies.

Although for many it is unfathomable that immigrants could commit less crime than the native-born and that increased immigration to an area is either associated with lower crime rates or is not associated with crime at all, in fact, scholars offer several theoretical explanations to account for such findings. In this chapter, we review the most prominent of these theoretical arguments, including explanations related to *self-selection* (Kubrin & Ishizawa, 2012, p. 150; Stowell et al., 2009; Tonry, 1997), *ethnic enclaves* (Bailey & Waldinger, 1991; Guest & Wierzbicki, 1999, p. 109; Waters & Eschbach, 1995, pp. 437–438), the *immigration revitalization thesis* (Lee & Martínez, 2002, p. 376; Lee et al., 2001, p. 564; Portes & Stepick, 1993; Ramey, 2013; Reid et al., 2005, p. 762), and *family structure* (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009). In our discussion, we provide overviews of these perspectives as well as describe key studies that have sought to empirically evaluate them. At the same time, in light of a sizeable literature at the individual level, which finds that the children of immigrants who are born in the U.S. exhibit higher offending rates than their parents and that assimilated immigrants have higher rates of criminal involvement compared to unassimilated immigrants, in this chapter, we also review a theoretical framework that attempts to explain these findings—*downward* or *segmented assimilation* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut et al., 2006, p. 73). Our aim in this chapter is to introduce readers to some of the leading theoretical explanations on the immigration-crime nexus.

Self-Selection

One of the most commonly invoked explanations for why immigrants are found to be less crime prone than their native-born counterparts has to do with who emigrates to the U.S. It is noteworthy that immigrants do not reflect a general cross-section of the sending population. Rather, for the most part, they are a self-selected group. Most immigrants who come to the U.S. do so for the opportunity to work and improve their life chances (Van Hook & Bean, 2009). At the same time, gaining entry into the U.S. can be a challenging and strenuous process, one which requires grit, hard work, and sacrifice. For these and other reasons, immigrants are often highly motivated, hard-working, and goal-oriented, and thus, have strong incentives to remain law abiding and to avoid interactions with the criminal justice system, resulting in lower criminal propensities (Kubrin & Ishizawa, 2012, p. 150; Stowell et al., 2009). As Tonry (1997) explains:

[s]elf-selected economic migrants who braved an ocean voyage and left their home countries and families thousands of miles away came to America for economic opportunity and to improve their and their children's lives. More were hard-working, ready to defer gratification in the interest of longer-term advancement, and therefore likely to be conformist and to behave themselves.

(p. 21)

Relatedly, some suggest that the deterrent effect of the threat of deportation can make immigrants less likely to commit crime (Butcher & Piehl, 1998a, p. 672).

Support for these arguments is documented in research conducted by Butcher and Piehl (2007). Recognizing that immigrants have much lower incarceration rates than do the native-born (on the order of one-fifth the rate of natives), and that recently arrived immigrants have the lowest relative incarceration rates, Butcher and Piehl (2007) consider whether the improvement in immigrants' relative incarceration rates since the late 1980s is linked to increased deportation, immigrant self-selection, or deterrence. They find that deportation does not drive these patterns; rather their results suggest that the process of migration selects individuals who either have lower criminal propensities or are more responsive to deterrent effects than the average native, consistent with self-selection arguments.

Ethnic Enclaves

A second perspective to explain why immigrant concentration is found to be negatively associated with crime rates in communities (or not associated with crime at all) has to do with the presence of ethnic enclaves in some U.S. cities. This explanation, however, is neither uniform nor straightforward. There are, in fact, several competing arguments surrounding the definition of an ethnic enclave as well as debate regarding its effects on various outcomes such as educational attainment, socioeconomic mobility, and crime. The immigrant enclave theory (Portes, 1987; Portes & Bach, 1985) and the theory of labor market segmentation (Bates, 1987; Borjas, 1986; Reich, Gordon & Edwards, 1973), for example, take opposing standpoints concerning the benefits of ethnic enclaves for immigrant assimilation and economic advancement, with implications for crime. At the same time, immigrant enclave theory emphasizes the role of social networks while labor market segmentation theory underscores the importance of labor market segments and ethnic-owned firms.

Bohon (2001) defines an ethnic enclave as “a metropolitan area characterized by a concentration of businesses owned and operated by immigrants from the same country of origin, or their direct descendants” (p. 4). In the context of this definition, immigrant enclave theory argues that in comparison to participation in the general economy, ethnic enclaves pose several benefits for immigrants such as social networks, jobs, information, and credit and support for entrepreneurial activities that can lead to accelerated upward mobility without full assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Waters & Eschbach, 1995; Wilson & Portes, 1980; Zhou, 2010). In this framework, the ethnic enclave is considered to be a specific mode of incorporation or adaptation (Portes & Manning, 1986) that creates an alternative path toward success within the bifurcated labor market. Ethnic enclaves not only offer a means of adaptation for immigrants but are different from the mainstream economy due to “the co-ethnic nature of workplace relationships among employers, employees, and the self-employed” (Hum, 2002, p. 279). These critical relationships, it is argued, allow for informal training and continuous employment recruitment (Bailey & Waldinger, 1991). Ethnic economies also allow immigrants to foster meaningful and beneficial relationships that may help them to open their own businesses in the future.

Building on Wilson and Portes’ (1980) early work on the labor market experiences of Cubans in Miami, Bohon (2001) enumerates the expected benefits from ethnic enclaves: (1) English fluency is not necessary for employment and native language skills may actually improve employment chances; (2) “bounded solidarity” and “enforceable trust” create a sense of camaraderie that encourages employers to hire more co-ethnic employees and spurs employees to work harder for their employers; (3) cultural differences that would impede workforce integration into the mainstream economy are dampened; and (4) immigrants’ skills will be in high demand because the enclaves trade in ethnically defined goods.

Of course there is recognition that not all ethnic enclaves are created equal. One important feature of differentiation relates to levels of institutional completeness (Breton, 1964). Breton (1964) suggests that “institutional completeness would be at its extreme whenever the ethnic community could perform all the services required by its members” (p. 194). These services are generated by the presence of formal organizations in the ethnic enclave, or institutions with a formal structure that comprise the civic life of a neighborhood and keep immigrant social relations within its boundaries (Breton, 1964, p. 196). Examples include religious, educational, political, recreational, professional, welfare, mutual aid societies, and newspaper and periodical organizations.

The arguments laid out in immigrant enclave theory suggest that the immigration-crime association is likely to be negative, in large part because ethnic enclaves allow immigrants to find employment that yields better returns to their human capital than would be found in the secondary labor market outside of the area (Waters & Eschbach, 1995, p. 438). Although the jobs offered may be low wage, they still generate income and help offset poverty, a correlate of crime

(Desmond & Kubrin, 2009, p. 586). Yet ethnic enclave economies pose several non-economic benefits that may also serve to lessen crime. Both formal organizations and informal networks in enclaves are likely to strengthen neighborhood organization. Moreover, ethnic enclaves may also act as a buffer against youth participating in deviant subcultures, thus curbing crime and delinquency in many immigrant communities.

Immigration Revitalization Thesis

Another explanation to account for the finding that neighborhoods with greater concentrations of immigrants have lower rates of crime is related to a modernized version of social disorganization theory. As *traditionally* conceptualized, social disorganization theory maintains that crime rates will rise when rapid social change breaks down the social networks and institutions necessary for effective socialization and behavioral regulation. One change theorized to contribute to social disorganization is population instability. As a major driver of population change and residential turnover, immigration has long been regarded as a critical factor behind the breakdown of informal social control and associated increases in crime rates according to social disorganization theory (Bankston, 1998; Lee & Martínez, 2002, p. 366; Lee et al., 2001, p. 562; Mears, 2002, p. 284; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009, p. 449; Reid et al., 2005, p. 760).

Recently, however, scholars are challenging these claims, arguing instead that immigration can revitalize an area and, in fact, strengthen social control: “contemporary immigration may encourage new forms of social organization that mediate the potentially crime-producing effects of the deleterious social and economic conditions found in urban neighborhoods” (Lee & Martínez, 2002, p. 376). Referred to as the immigration revitalization thesis, this argument maintains that far from being a criminogenic force, immigration constitutes an essential ingredient to the continued viability of urban areas, especially areas that have experienced population decline and deindustrialization in previous decades (Lee et al., 2001, p. 564).

According to Velez (2009), immigrants help revitalize disadvantaged neighborhoods in three critical ways (pp. 327–328). First, immigrants often develop strong ties to family members and fellow residents including longer settled immigrants, as well as to non-familial residents like clergy, social service providers, and school officials. These relationships, in turn, create social support and secure financial resources for immigrants as well as generate neighborhood social control. Second, immigrants can help to reinvigorate an ethnic enclave economy, whereby immigrants with social capital create new opportunities for economic growth and an extensive ethnic division of labor. As discussed earlier, enclaves can provide social capital for residents by creating a context for widespread job opportunities and higher wages for immigrants and non-immigrants that are typically not available outside the enclave. And third, immigrants can expand and strengthen community institutions such as churches, schools, and immigrant-focused agencies like legal counseling and job placement, allowing them to more effectively serve as brokers on the community’s behalf. Neighborhood institutions are integral in helping to curb crime because they organize activities that create networks among residents, provide programming for community youth, help connect communities to mainstream individuals and institutions, and facilitate the recruitment of external resources for the community.

In sum, the immigration revitalization thesis challenges what many consider to be outdated arguments about how immigration to an area may impact neighborhood institutions and social organization, arguing instead that:

[l]arger immigrant populations in metropolitan areas may invigorate local economies leading to redevelopment of the stagnating economies of the urban core of metropolitan areas. The causal process by which the size of the immigrant population could lessen crime

is via job growth, both for immigrants and the native-born; business development in previously economically depressed areas; and the repopulation of the urban core.

(Reid et al., 2005, p. 762; see also Feldmeyer, 2009; Morenoff & Astor, 2006; Portes & Stepick, 1993)

Family Structure

A final perspective to account for why immigrants are less likely to engage in crime relative to the native-born and why immigration to an area may decrease crime rates focuses on family structure. Criminologists have long documented that single-parent households and areas with higher rates of single-parent families experience more crime and delinquency, presumably because the breakdown in traditional family structures can deplete social capital and attenuate socialization and informal social control processes (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009, p. 453; see also Land, McCall & Cohen, 1990; Ousey, 2000; Sampson, 1987; Shihadeh & Steffensmeier, 1994). Yet it is well-documented that, on average, immigrants have higher rates of marriage than do the native-born and, therefore, lower rates of divorce and single-parent families (Clark, Glick & Bures, 2009; Qian, 2013). Accounting for this difference, in part, is the fact that marriage is “not seen as a status symbol among immigrants, regardless of race/ethnicity and educational attainment. Less educated and racial/ethnic minorities married at the similar levels as their highly educated and white counterparts” (Qian, 2013, pp. 14, 26).

According to scholars, immigration alters family and household structures in ways that strengthen informal social control and impede crime (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009). In particular, they posit that many immigrant groups have a more familistic and pro-nuptial cultural orientation than the native-born (Fukuyama, 1993; Oropesa, 1996; Oropesa, Lichter, & Anderson, 1994; Vega, 1990, 1995; Wildsmith, 2004). Familistic values such as “normative beliefs that emphasize the centrality of the family unit and stress the obligations and support that family members owe to both nuclear and extended kin” reflect strong family cohesion (Germán, Gonzales & Dumka, 2009, p. 18). The presence of these values suggests that immigrant communities erect social networks that fortify traditional, intact (i.e., two parent) family structures and support the legitimacy of parental authority norms (Martínez et al., 2004; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009). For example, Germán et al. (2009) find that familistic values and familial networks offer protective effects against deviant peer influences and conduct problems in school for the children of Latino immigrants. To the extent that immigrants have greater intact family structures and pro-family cultural orientations, the foreign-born will be less likely to engage in crime compared to the native-born, and increased immigration to an area will result in lower crime rates (see Ousey & Kubrin, 2009).

At the same time, family values and their relationship to the immigration-crime nexus is not always so straightforward. Research has documented, for example, the prevalence of domestic violence among immigrant women (Erez, 2000; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002), a form of victimization that is much less likely to be reported. Immigrant women are especially unlikely to report domestic abuse due to language and cultural barriers as well as fear of deportation and losing custody of their children (Davis & Erez, 1998; Erez, Ammar & Orloff, 2003). Preserving familistic values like upholding traditional and gendered roles may influence victimization of women in the family: “Family disputes—between husbands and wives or parents and children—often occur when wives and children reject old world (mostly male) authority and attempt to exercise rights and freedom practiced by their counterparts in their new homeland” (Erez et al., 2003, p. 21). In light of this, it is critical to acknowledge the complex and nuanced role that family structure and values may play in the immigration-crime nexus.

The theoretical perspectives just reviewed, in one way or another, all attempt to explain why the foreign-born offend at lower levels than the native-born and why immigration to an area may decrease crime rates. In the remainder of this chapter, we review one theoretical perspective,

downward or segmented assimilation theory, that helps to account for why the children of immigrants who are born in the U.S. exhibit higher offending rates than their parents and why assimilated immigrants have higher rates of criminal involvement compared to unassimilated immigrants.

Downward/Segmented Assimilation

Assimilation is a contested issue among scholars (Alba & Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 1997; Waters & Jiménez, 2005; Xie & Greenman, 2005). In the U.S. context, immigrant assimilation is commonly equated with “Americanization,” which may be defined along several dimensions (e.g., social, economic, cultural, structural, linguistic, etc.) (Gordon, 1964). Assimilation is generally defined as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences” (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 11), as the incorporation of immigrants and ethnic difference into their host societies (Rumbaut, 2005), or as “the differences or similarities immigrants exhibit to other Americans in terms of socioeconomic standing, residential segregation, language use and intermarriage” (Waters & Jiménez, 2005, p. 106). Theories of immigrant assimilation focus primarily on the behaviors and outcomes of immigrants and their children, and posit both a positive and negative relationship between immigration and crime (Morenoff & Astor, 2006; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

There are two main versions of immigrant assimilation theory—classic and segmented. Classic assimilation theory conceptualizes assimilation as a linear process whereby the immigrant sheds his/her ethnic identity, culture, and community, and adopts mainstream white middle-class values and norms (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Warner & Srole, 1945). Drawing on the experiences from earlier waves of European immigrants, classic assimilation theory argues that the socioeconomic success of immigrants increases over time and with successive generations (Morenoff & Astor, 2006; Rumbaut, 1997). This version of the theory posits that immigrants will be less likely to commit crime as they adopt mainstream norms and values and strive for upward mobility. However, as already noted earlier, research reveals that assimilated immigrants, in fact, have higher rates of criminal involvement compared to unassimilated immigrants (Alvarez-Rivera et al., 2014; Bersani et al., 2014; Lee, 1998; Morenoff & Astor, 2006, p. 47; Zhou & Bankston, 2006, p. 124).

After 1965, more recent waves of immigrants were characterized with increased diversity and assimilation experiences that diverged from the previously theorized linear trajectory (Morenoff & Astor, 2006). Portes and Zhou (1993) note that “instead of a relatively uniform mainstream whose mores and prejudices dictate a common path of integration, we observe today several distinct forms of adaptation” (p. 82). These divergent patterns of immigrant integration led to the creation of segmented assimilation theory (Portes, 2007; Portes & Zhou, 1993, 2005; Rumbaut, 1994; Xie & Greenman, 2005; Zhou, 1997). In addition to upward assimilation, segmented assimilation theory recognizes two additional pathways to assimilation: alternative upward assimilation and downward assimilation. These multiple paths reflect the fact that “second generation youths confront today a pluralistic, fragmented environment that offers simultaneously a wealth of opportunities and serious threats to successful adaptation” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 271). The path an immigrant takes is largely dependent on the characteristics of the broader context of reception including government immigration policies, the local economy and labor market, the level of discrimination against the particular group, and the co-ethnic community context (Morenoff & Astor, 2006; Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 83).

The path of alternative upward assimilation, also known as selective acculturation, describes children of immigrants who simultaneously assimilate to mainstream society without abandoning their parents’ language, culture, co-ethnic ties, and communities. Portes and Rumbaut (2014) explain this path: “In today’s context, many of these children face the paradox that assimilating to their American surroundings may compromise their successful adaptation, while remaining firmly

ensconced in their parents' immigrant communities and cultures may strengthen their chances" (pp. 262–263). Concerning crime, immigrants who assimilate along this path, it is argued, will exhibit lower offending levels because they benefit from parental and community social support networks while also striving toward upward mobility.

The path of downward assimilation is the product of larger structural inequalities present in disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, segregation, and underfunded schools (Massey & Denton, 1985; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Assimilation into this path is largely affected by the nature of the current labor market structure:

[w]hereas earlier European immigrants entered American cities at a time when manufacturing jobs were plentiful and provided a means of upward mobility, new immigrants must confront an "hourglass economy" that bifurcates opportunities for employment between menial low-wage jobs at the bottom and high-skill professional and technical jobs at the top and provides very limited opportunities for immigrants to advance beyond the bottom rung of the economic ladder without substantial investments in human capital and acquisition of requisite social networks.

(Morenoff & Astor, 2006, p. 38)

Combined with weak family and community ties, assimilation into this context may lead children of immigrants to adopt deviant inner-city values and pro-crime norms of native-born minorities such as the devaluation of education, drug use, and gangs (MacDonald & Saunders, 2012, p. 126; Martínez & Lee, 2000; Morenoff & Astor, 2006, p. 49; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Velez, 2009). The path of downward assimilation, it is argued, can lead immigrants to face experiences and obstacles similar to native-born African Americans or Latinos. Immigrants on this path are theorized to exhibit higher involvement in crime due to the adoption of non-mainstream values and alternative lifestyles that are conducive to crime.

A related set of explanations segue into a discussion regarding the role of culture (Lee et al., 2001, p. 562; Mears, 2002, p. 284; Reid et al., 2005, p. 760). Because immigrants, like ethnic minorities, are generally more likely than native-born whites to reside in areas where "structural conditions have altered the status systems away from idealized middle-class norms and toward a culture of opposition . . . cultural theories imply that immigrant communities should exhibit high rates of crime" (Lee et al., 2001, p. 562; see also Mears, 2002, p. 284; Reid et al., 2005, p. 760). Indeed, many areas of high immigrant concentration are segregated from mainstream society and experience poverty, joblessness, and other disadvantages (MacDonald & Saunders, 2012, p. 126; Martínez & Lee, 2000; Velez, 2009). As Glaser, Parker, and Li (2003) argue, these neighborhoods do not represent "communities of choice" but rather "ghettos of last resort" for immigrants and other residents (p. 526). As immigrants settle in and navigate these urban ghettos, they may feel pressured (or even obligated) to assume the tough, aggressive stances common when negotiating the streets (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 2003; Martínez et al., 2004; Tonry, 1997, pp. 21–22). Given that immigrants not only settle in disadvantaged neighborhoods but also can face language barriers and experience discrimination in housing and employment markets, they may be denied access to legitimate means to attain culturally prescribed goals of wealth and, therefore, may turn to crime (Lee et al., 2001, p. 561; Mears, 2002, p. 284; Reid et al., 2005, p. 759). For these reasons, one might expect a criminogenic street context, or street code (Anderson, 1999), to heighten crime rates in areas with high concentrations of immigrants.

In sum, segmented assimilation theory recognizes that assimilation may not always result in upward mobility for immigrants, which has implications for levels of offending among the foreign-born. While the findings in the literature reveal that, overall, immigrants engage in lower rates of offending than their native-born counterparts, downward or segmented assimilation theory

reminds us that the possibility of negative outcomes among some foreign-born residents remains. Assimilation may lead to less than desirable consequences, such as adopting deviant norms and increased offending, for those immigrants who do not have co-ethnic social support networks or resources.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to introduce readers to some of the field's most prominent theoretical explanations for explaining the immigration–crime relationship. Research on how immigration and crime are related has proliferated considerably since the 2000s, rendering claims such as “criminologists know relatively little about how crime in the U.S. might be affected by recent waves of immigrants and their descendants” (Morenoff & Astor, 2006, p. 36) less valid. And unlike in many other areas of research, there has been a remarkable consistency in findings. At the individual level, a firmly established finding in the literature is that immigrants are generally less crime prone than their native-born counterparts (even as the children of immigrants who are born in the U.S. exhibit higher offending rates than their parents and assimilated immigrants have higher rates of criminal involvement compared to unassimilated immigrants). At the aggregate level, areas, and especially neighborhoods, with greater concentrations of immigrants have lower rates of crime and violence, all else being equal. In short, scholars can now confidently answer critical questions such as, how are immigration and crime related?

At the same time, we know relatively little about why these findings occur. In other words, much less clear are the reasons behind these findings. This is due, in part, to the inability of researchers to capture the mechanisms by which immigrants are less criminally involved than their native-born counterparts and by which immigrant concentration leads to less crime in areas. Yet, as this chapter has revealed, social theory offers us a wide range of explanations to consider, including arguments related to self-selection, ethnic enclaves, the immigration revitalization thesis, family structure, and downward or segmented assimilation. In order to move beyond the “how” question and onto the important “why” question, future researchers must direct efforts toward empirically testing these varying theoretical explanations in their research on the immigration–crime nexus.

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