



Social Control Across Immigrant Generations: Adolescent Violence at School and Examining the Immigrant Paradox

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ABSTRACT

Social control predicts adolescent violence; however, there is limited research about the extent to which social control explains adolescent violence across immigrant generations. Because it is estimated that one out of four children in the United States has at least one immigrant parent, understanding the correlates of violence for adolescents in immigrant families warrants investigation. This study explores whether and how the adolescent associations between social control (i.e., attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) and school-based misconduct and victimization vary across immigrant generations. Data are drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. Findings indicate important nuances related to immigrant generation in the conceptual links between social control and adolescent violence. For instance, attachment to school is linked to decreased misconduct for third-plus generation adolescents but a potential factor toward misconduct for first generation adolescents. The implications of the relationships between social control and adolescent violence across immigrant generations are discussed more generally.

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Introduction

The United States (U.S.) has approximately forty-three million foreign-born people, representing approximately thirteen percent of the U.S. population (United States Census Bureau, 2010). As a result, twenty-five percent of all youth in the U.S. have at least one immigrant parent and the proportion is expected to rise to thirty-three percent within thirty years (United States Census Bureau, 2010). A growing number of researchers have examined how adolescents in immigrant families are adapting to U.S. culture and society. What is emerging from this research is a phenomenon called the “immigrant paradox” — the counterintuitive finding that adapting to U.S. cultural and social norms may be resulting into detrimental outcomes. Studies reveal that assimilation for immigrants and their children is associated with increased psychological and health problems, educational failure, and violence (Bui, 2009; Desmond & Kubrin, 2009; DiPietro & McGloin, 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006; Sampson, 2008). Moreover, recent research suggests an immigrant paradox of violence is also evident within U.S. public schools.

Understanding the factors linked to school-based misconduct and victimization within school is vital because schools are institutions of education and socialization; however, these educational and socialization processes are only intensified for adolescents in immigrant families.

School is where adolescents from immigrant families not only learn about U.S. values, beliefs, and behaviors but also adapt to cultural and social expectations (Peguero, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). There is a growing amount of research indicating that as immigrants adapt to U.S. cultural and social values, the likelihood of violence and victimization increases within their communities and schools (DiPietro & McGloin, 2012; Jiang & Peterson, 2012; Peguero, 2009, 2011, 2013). Since adolescents in immigrant families are a rapidly growing segment of the population within the U.S., the need to understand the factors associated with school-based misconduct and victimization for this segment of the population is pressing. Limited studies have utilized criminological theories, such as social control for the purposes of this study, to investigate the pertinent factors associated with school-based misconduct and victimization immigrant paradox.

Hirschi's (1969) *social control* is one of the most frequently referenced theoretical frameworks in criminological research. Social control is conceptually founded on the connection between individuals and conventional social institutions, such as schools for example. This theoretical framework is often utilized to investigate, understand, and address adolescent violence. There is an abundant amount of research that has drawn from Hirschi's (1969) social control theory to understand how adolescents' attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief to schools are associated with misconduct and victimization (e.g., Jenkins, 1997; Payne, 2008; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2003; Popp & Peguero, 2012; Stewart, 2003; Welsh, 2001; Welsh, Greene, & Jenkins, 1999). In general, these studies find that adolescents' increased bond to their school should ameliorate their experiences with misconduct and victimization in their school. Some researchers,

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however, began to question if social control explained violence across distinct segments of the population because there is variation between how adolescents interact with the schools they attend. Thus, there is also research that investigates if social control explains the occurrence of violence across different segments of the adolescent population. There is some evidence indicating that race, ethnicity, and gender somewhat moderate the relationship between social control and adolescent violence at school (Booth, Farrell, & Varano, 2008; Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Peguero, Popp, Latimore, Shekarkhar, & Koo, 2011). In a recent study, Bui (2009) found that aspects of social control (i.e., attachment to family and attachment to commitment to school) did in part explain the immigrant paradox with self-reported substance use, property delinquency, and violent delinquency; however, Bui (2009) does not explore the roles of involvement and belief to school in her analysis as well as focused on adolescent violence and delinquency outcomes that occurred within the community. In another study, Jiang and Peterson (2012) also find that involvement with school also predicted, in part, an increase in adolescent violence across immigrant generations. What remains unknown is if and how each element of social control (i.e., attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief to school) explains school-based adolescent misconduct and victimization across immigrant generations.

This research extends the literature on social control by examining adolescent violence across immigrant generations. This study first presents a review of pertinent research and a conceptual argument that suggests that the links between social control, school-based misconduct and victimization, and immigrant generations. Data are drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS), a nationally representative, stratified sample of tenth grade public school students, and employs a multilevel analysis. Findings indicate that, in general, social control indeed explains adolescent school-based misconduct and victimization across immigrant generations; however, there are important and distinctive nuances presented. Finally, this study discusses the implications for future adolescent violence research and policy implementation in a nation with a rapidly growing population of adolescents within immigrant families.

Social Control, Adolescent Violence, and the Potential Significance of Immigration

Hirschi's (1969) social control theory is based on bridging the link between individuals and conventional social institutions in order to explain in delinquent behavior. Social control theory postulates that individuals are inherently inclined to be deviant (Hirschi, 1969). Thus, it is the mechanisms that inhibit individuals from yielding to their deviant inclinations that warrant scrutiny. Hirschi argued that a strong social bond to social institutions, such as schools, promotes conformity to conventional norms. Individuals who possess weak or broken social bonds to conventional institutions are more likely to engage in deviant behavior and violence (Hirschi, 1969). According to Hirschi, an individual's bond to social institutions consists of four elements: emotional attachment to parents, peers, and conventional institutions, such as school and work; commitment to long-term educational, occupational, or other conventional goals; involvement in conventional activities such as work, homework, hobbies; and belief in the moral validity of the law. While these four elements of social control can independently inhibit engagement in deviance, the combined effect of the four elements of the social bond on is greater than the sum of their individual effects. As Hirschi suggested, "the more closely a person is tied to conventional society in any of these ways, the more closely [s/he] is likely to be tied in the other ways" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 27).

It is also evident that social control explains school-based misconduct and violence. Research repeatedly finds that weak social bonds to school are associated with an increase in adolescents' misconduct within school (Gottfredson, 2001; Jenkins, 1997; Payne, 2008; Peguero et al., 2011; Stewart, 2003; Welsh, 2001; Welsh et al., 1999). Welsh et al.

(1999) argue that adolescents who are well integrated and attached to school are more likely to follow and obey the rules. Jenkins (1997) suggests that adolescents' attachment and commitment to school are the most important elements of the social bond in terms of explaining school-based misconduct. Research finds that increased school attachment, commitment, and belief inhibit the occurrence of school misconduct (Payne, 2008; Stewart, 2003). Across this research literature, school involvement is consistently a weak or non-significant factor in explaining school misconduct (Jenkins, 1997; Payne, 2008; Stewart, 2003; Welsh, 2001; Welsh et al., 1999). Recent research by Popp and Peguero (2012) also demonstrate that there is a relationship between social control and school-based victimization. The association between school-based victimization and a weakened social bond is important because it suggests a causal mechanism through which victimization contributes to many of the negative consequences associated with it, such as school-based misconduct (Popp & Peguero, 2012). They find that increased attachment, commitment, and belief are indeed associated with lower odds of school-based adolescent victimization (Popp & Peguero, 2012).

Hirschi (1969) does not explicitly address factors associated with social inequality because he argues social control is invariant across social characteristics. According to Hirschi (1969), social control bonds should account for patterns of violence by focusing on the strength of social bonds and ties to conventional society. Research, however, has consistently shown that adolescents in immigrant families are more likely to reside in communities that are characterized by poverty, unemployment, social isolation, disparate treatment, and crime and violence (Aranda & Vaquera, 2011; Desmond & Kubrin, 2009; Lee, Martínez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; Martínez & Lee, 2000; Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001; Peterson, Krivo, & Hagan, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006; Sampson, 2008). Some of these aforementioned studies also indicate that the development of social bonds to conventional institutions and belief in conventional values become problematic for residents living in such communities. Because school characteristics reflect the communities to which they are embedded, researchers also suggest that adolescents in immigrant families attend schools with higher levels of poverty, disparate treatment, and crime and violence (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011; Kao, Vaquera, & Goyette, 2013; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Peguero, 2009, 2011, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). Therefore, drawing upon this body of work and using the logic of social bonds, these social conditions within communities, as well as schools that are situated in these communities, may impede the formation of strong attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in conventional institutions, such as schools.

According to social control theory, adaption to social and cultural expectations as well as their bond to conventional social institutions explains engagement in crime and delinquency; moreover, social control theory denotes a strong social bond to social institutions promote conformity to conventional norms (Hirschi, 1969). The adaption of immigrants to U.S. social and cultural norms is also expected from U.S. institutions, such as schools for example. It is argued that assimilation or adaptation to U.S. values and norms is perceived to be a fundamental process by school administrators, faculty, and staff for adolescents in immigrant families to have educational progress and success (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011; Kao et al., 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). Research also demonstrates variations in the association between the elements of social control, school-based adolescent violence, and assimilation (Ewert, 2009; Peguero, 2009, 2011, 2013). Therefore, this study will focus on the four elements of social control to explain school-based misconduct and victimization across immigrant generations: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.

Attachment

Of the limited studies that have explored school attachment for adolescents in immigrant families, findings suggest that aspects of school

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