CHAPTER 8

Latino Crime and Delinquency in the United States

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INTRODUCTION

There are considerable race and ethnic disparities in violence across the nation. Public health data illustrate that Latinos were three times *more* likely than non-Latino Whites to be a victim of homicide but almost three times *less* likely than Blacks to be killed (Keppel, Pearcy, & Wagenar, 2002). More recent national crime victimization surveys indicate that Latinos and Blacks were victims of robbery at similarly high rates, but Latinos were victims of aggravated assault at a level comparable to that of Whites and Blacks (Catalano, 2006). These differences remind us that social science research on racial/ethnic variations in crime must incorporate Latinos and consider variations within Latino groups in order to fully understand group differences in criminal and delinquent behavior.

Indeed, research on Latinos and violent crime has been lagging behind that of Black or White violent crime even in the face of long-held beliefs and stereotypes about crime-prone Latinos by some politicians and the mass media (for details, see Martinez, 2002, 2006). A recent search of citations in *Social Science Full Text* produced 80 journal articles on Latinos/Hispanics and crime. In contrast, there were almost 700 journal articles on African Americans/Blacks and crime over the 1990–2006 period. The lack of criminological research on the Latino population limits our understanding of the sources and extent of racial and ethnic disparities in violent crime and serious delinquency research (Morenoff, 2005; Peterson & Krivo, 2005).

In this chapter, the key findings on Latinos and criminal or serious delinquent behavior in the United States are reviewed. The chapter begins by outlining the shape of ethnic disparities in violent crime and serious delinquent behavior; that is, Latino criminal activity relative to Whites,

Blacks, and "Other" race and within Latino groups from two major self-report surveys of victimization and offending. This is done to draw from some of the most extensive national sources of crime and delinquency while directing attention to Latinos in general and Latino groups specifically. This is followed by a discussion of the quantitative analyses that has focused on Latino or ethnic group comparisons because most of the work on ethnicity and violent crime directs attention to the impact of economic disadvantage or deprivation in Latino areas rather than individual level studies (Peterson & Krivo, 2005). Although qualitative and ethnographic studies are important to consider, they remain limited in number relative to quantitative studies on Latinos and crime (see Dohan, 2003, and Kil & Menjívar, 2006, for exceptions). The final section considers some initial results from an ongoing analysis of nonlethal violence reported to the police in two cities—Houston and Miami—and highlights findings on ethnic disparities in delinquent behavior among youths in Chicago neighborhoods. I close by highlighting the importance of policy and addressing issues for future research as well.

NATIONAL VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

The primary source of survey-based crime data in the United States is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a nationally representative study of person and household victimization administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. Unlike the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), which is regarded as the primary source of official crime data in the United States,[1] the NCVS records the race (White, Black, or Other) and "Hispanic" origin of the victim (Hispanic or non-Hispanic). The incorporation of ethnicity in the NCVS that permits estimates of both racial and ethnic differences[2] in crime or criminal victimization probably makes this survey the leading source of Hispanic/Latino crime across the United States.

Table 1 summarizes violent crime rates based on the 2005 NCVS. Other researchers have noted that racial and ethnic disparities are usually not as heightened in the NCVS as they are in official police crime or arrest statistics, and that is probably the case for most types of criminal victimization, but attention here is directed to violence because the literature on Latinos and property or minor crimes is almost nonexistent (Morenoff, 2005). African Americans, or Blacks, are more likely than Whites to be victims of crime and, this difference is greater for violent crimes than it is for property crimes. Similar to the UCR police data, racial differences in the

Table 1. NCVS Rates of Violent Crime by Race and Ethnicity, 2005

	Victim race			Victim ethnicity	
	White	Black	Other	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
All violent	20.1	27.0	13.9	25.0	20.6
Rape/sexual assault	0.6	1.8	0.5	1.1	0.7
Robbery	2.2	4.6	3.0	4.0	2.4
All assaults	17.2	20.6	10.4	19.9	17.5
Aggravated assault	3.8	7.6	2.5	5.9	4.1
Simple assault	13.4	13.0	7.9	14.0	13.4

Note: Victim rates for violent crimes are per 1,000 persons age 12 years or older.
Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 2005 (Catalano, 2006).

NCVS victimization rates are greatest for robbery, followed by aggravated assault. The Black robbery victim rate (7.2 black robberies per 1,000 black persons) is much higher than the White robbery victim rate (2.7 white robberies per 1,000 white persons) and the Hispanic/Latino robbery rate (5.0 Hispanic robberies per 1,000 Hispanics) is in between both groups. Put another way, Latinos[3] are 1.7 times more likely to be victims of robbery than non-Hispanics, and the Black robbery victim rate is in line with that of Hispanics (4.6 to 4.0). Victimization differences between Latinos and other racial/ethnic group members for other types of violent crime are usually minor, but Latinos are 1.6 times more likely to be victims of aggravated assault than Whites.

Information regarding gender disparities in Latino crime is scarce and violent crime research on Latinas is in even more short supply, but the NCVS has demonstrated that some gender differences in violence exist. There are obvious disparities between Latino male and female victimization, but that difference varies by type of violence and even the relationship between victim and offender. For example, Latino male youths encounter significantly higher risks of stranger violence than Latina youths (Lauritsen, 2003). This finding is not surprising, given traditionally high levels of violence among young males in violent crime studies. In contrast, levels of nonstranger violence were similar among Latino and Latina youths; this is an interesting finding probably linked to protective factors at home or some other influence not included in the survey (Lauritsen, 2003). This area requires more research and should attract more attention in the future.

The NCVS has also collected race and ethnicity information since, at least, 1993, allowing the examination of changes over time in violent crime victimization. The overall violent victimization rate among Latinos has declined dramatically, in fact by almost 55%, between 1993 and 2005 (see Catalano, 2006). This decline, however, was consistent across all racial and ethnic groups: Whites declined by 58%, Blacks by 59.9%, other race respondents by 65.1%t, and non-Hispanics by 58.4%. Thus, Latinos appear equally likely to have experienced similar declines in violent crime victimization as other racial/ethnic group members. This finding is important because it counters beliefs by immigrant opponents in the popular media who contend that immigrants have "contributed" to crime rates in their local areas. It goes without saying that these are incorrect assumptions, and ideas regarding high crime rates among Latino immigrants by extension are fatally flawed. Latinos, legality aside, as a whole have long had the same levels of violent crime as Whites and Blacks, and violent crime victimization has declined among all groups even in an era of intense immigration (Martinez, 2002, 2006).

NATIONAL SELF-REPORT SURVEYS

There are a few national studies that gather self-report of delinquency, risk, and health-related behaviors. These include Monitoring the Future, an annual national survey of secondary school students conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research or the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, which is a biannual school-based survey of representative samples of high school students (Morenoff, 2005). However, most of these studies have traditionally focused on Black or White delinquency, avoiding Latinos, or have a limited set of questions on delinquency and risk-taking behavior such as illegal substance use.

Another national survey of self-reported delinquent behavior and exposure to violence is the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a study that initially explored the causes of health-related behaviors in a nationally representative sample of adolescents in

grades 7 through 12 in the United States in the 1994–1995 school year. The Add Health survey seeks to examine the impact of various types of social context (families, friends, peers, schools, neighborhoods, and communities) on adolescents' health and risk behaviors. Data at the individual, family, school, and community levels were collected in two waves between 1994 and 1996, and later, in 2001 and 2002, respondents were reinterviewed in a third wave to investigate the influence that adolescence has on young adulthood. Unlike most of the other national surveys, the Add Health asks the respondents to provide detailed information on Latino background—Mexican, Chicano, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central American, and Other Latino (heavily South American)—which provides a unique opportunity to examine the range of groups that comprise the Latino population.

The self-report of delinquent behavior[4] within the Latino population is summarized in Table 2. A couple of points are worth noting. First, attention is directed in Table 2 to variations *within* Latino groups, thus Blacks and Whites are not included as reference categories. Second, the 12-month counts of self-reported delinquency are recoded so "Yes" equals at least one or more times the following happened in the past 12 months or "No," which means it did not happen. The recoding allowed us to create proportions (or percentages when multiplied by 100), which facilitates the presentation and compresses the findings into a readable format. For most of the self-reported behaviors, Latino group variations are relatively minor, but in the cases where differences exist, there are some interesting findings that should be examined in more detail in the future. Respondents who identify themselves as Chicano or Puerto Rican are usually more likely than Mexican, Cuban, Central American, or Other Latinos to have seen a shooting or stabbing, had a knife or gun pulled out on them, or involved in a physical fight. In two of those self-reported behaviors, the percentages were highest among Chicano respondents, and in the other, Chicano and Puerto Rican youths had equal proportions (27%) exposed to viewing a shooting or stabbing.

In two other items, Chicano respondents had much higher proportions of violent activity than all other Latino groups. For example, almost one-third of Chicano respondents reported being jumped or assaulted, a level twice that of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Other Latinos, and Central Americans and almost three times that of Cubans. Although relatively low, about 14% of

TABLE 2. Latino Background Differences in Exposure to Physical Violence. (During the Past 12 Months, How Often Did the Following Things Happen?)

	Mexican	Chicano	Cuban	Puerto Rican	Central American	Other Latino
Saw shooting/stabbing of person	0.21	0.27	0.16	0.27	0.16	0.17
Had knife/gun pulled on you	0.19	0.30	0.11	0.20	0.15	0.13
Someone shot you	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01
Someone stabbed you	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.09
Got into a physical fight	0.35	0.52	0.27	0.42	0.32	0.35
Was jumped	0.17	0.33	0.12	0.17	0.15	0.16
Pulled a knife/gun on someone	0.06	0.14	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.04
Shot stabbed someone	0.03	0.07	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.02

Note: Delinquency items in percent. Descriptive statistics provided by Dr. Stephen Demuth.
Source: Add health data.

surveyed Chicano youths reported having pulled a knife/gun on someone, which was a level at least twice that of Other Latino respondents. For most of the remaining behaviors, all six groups are almost equally exposed to low levels (less than 10%) of being shot, stabbed, or actually shooting or stabbing someone. Still, at even such a low level, some Latino group variations emerged. Other Latinos (i.e., South Americans) were more likely to be stabbed than Puerto Ricans and Chicanos. Also, Chicanos were more likely to have been shot and much more likely to have shot or stabbed someone else.

As a whole, the comparison of racial/ethnic differences across various national data sources illustrates that the primary difference in violent crime victimization among Blacks, Whites, and Latinos appears sizable in the case of robbery and modest on other types of violent crime. When focusing on Latino youths, withinLatino-group disparities are greater for some types of violent activity, at least for Chicanos, and to a lesser extent for Puerto Ricans, when compared to Cubans, Mexicans, Central Americans, and Other Latinos. Perhaps the most important outcome of this section is that although reliable Latino crime data are rare, existing sources confirm that including Latinos and distinct Latino groups is important in the study of racial and ethnic disparities in crime. Regardless of the findings or the surveys, it is clear that researchers can no longer focus on racial dichotomies of Black or White when considering racial/ethnic disparities in crime.

CITY/COMMUNITY-LEVEL STUDIES

Much of the recent research on race/ethnicity and crime has been conducted at the aggregate level with official crime data (See Morenoff, 2005; Peterson & Krivo, 2005; Sampson & Bean, 2006). This literature does not ponder individual variations in propensity to engage in criminal offending but, instead, considers variations in violent crime victimization or offending across places such as metropolitan areas or cities (Morenoff, 2005). Ecological research on crime and violence also draws attention to the relationship between race/ethnicity and place, whether at the city, metropolitan, or community level, and proposes that racial disparities are linked to the varying social contexts in which population groups exist. A consistent finding in this literature is that violent crime rates, both offending and victimization, are higher in places with greater proportions of Blacks or African Americans, and this finding persists over time (Morenoff, 2005; Sampson & Bean, 2006). Most of these studies use homicide or violent crime rates or counts of racial/ethnic-specific violence as the dependent variable because homicides are routinely detected and reported to the police, but even these studies typically focus on Black or White crime differences (see Martinez, 1996, 2000, and Phillips, 2002, for exceptions).

These aggregate-level studies have been valuable because they demonstrate the need to consider racial disparities in crime and, in some cases, to encourage scholars to push conceptions of race and crime to include Latino composition in crime studies (Peterson & Krivo, 2005). Unfortunately, this literature has, until very recently, rarely considered the level of Latino crime or compared Latinos to other ethnic minority groups largely due to official crime data limitations.[5] This omission, in part, has led some researchers to revisit the long tradition of research on communities and crime, a tradition in criminology that dates back to the founding of American criminology[6] (Sampson & Bean, 2006).

Most of the handful of early ethnicity and crime studies focused on European immigrants in Chicago. A notable exception to this pattern is *Mexican Labor in the United States, Volume II* (Taylor, 1932/1970), which is perhaps the earliest quantitative study on Mexican immigration to the United States. In this study, Taylor described the labor market, educational, criminal justice, and fertility experiences of Mexican-origin persons in Chicago. By explicitly linking

arrest statistics (felonies and misdemeanors) to local population sizes, he was able to compare White and Mexican criminal activities. Although Mexicans were arrested at a percentage two to three times their population size, most of the arrests were not related to violence but were for property- and alcohol-related offenses, a finding that Taylor linked to the high number of single males in the population. Regarding violence, Taylor (1932/1970) noted that "The offenses of Mexicans are concentrated much more than average in these two groups of charges, probably mainly because of the very abnormal age and sex composition of the Mexican population in Chicago" (p. 147). This is important to highlight because patterns of criminal involvement were shaped by social factors, including neighborhood poverty and the age and sex distributions of the immigrant population, not the inherent criminality of immigrant Latinos.

Few pioneering scholars, however, acknowledged the presence of Latino or non-European immigrants. This was probably due to the passage of restrictionist national-origin quota laws in the 1920s and assimilation campaigns that gradually rendered the study of the immigrant European experience obsolete and forced scholars to focus on race or "Black versus White" crime. The emphasis on Blacks and Whites is now changing. For at least 10 years, scholars have been examining violent crime counts across census tracts within a city with varying levels of racial and ethnic composition.[7] Some compare and contrast the characteristics of Black, White, and Latino homicides in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and Miami (Martinez, 2003; Riedel, 2003; Titterington & Damphousse, 2003) or control for social and economic determinants of crime thought to shape racial/ethnic disparities across neighborhoods (Lee, Martinez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; Morenoff & Sampson, 1997). None have found evidence that more immigration means more homicides in a given area (Martinez, 2002, 2006).

This body of work is important because there is a strong relationship among economic disadvantage, affluence, and violent crime, and this connection has received a great deal of attention given the racial/ethnic differences in the strength of the association between crime and socioeconomic context at the community level. To a large extent, this notion is rooted in the claim by Sampson and Wilson (1995) that the "sources of violent crime appear to be remarkably invariant across race and rooted instead in the structural differences across communities, cities, and states in economic and family organization" (p. 41), which helps explain the racial/ethnic differences in violence. Thus, as Sampson and Bean (2006:8) noted, the premise is that community-level patterns of racial inequality give rise to the social isolation and ecological concentration of the truly disadvantaged, which, in turn, leads to structural barriers and cultural adaptations that undermine social organization and, in turn, shape crime. Therefore, "race" is not a cause of violence but, rather, a marker deriving from a set of social contexts reflecting racial disparity in U.S. society. This thesis has become known as the "racial invariance" in the fundamental causes of violent crime. Still, the racial invariance thesis has rarely been applied to ethnicity and crime and this issue is discussed in the next section (Sampson & Bean, 2006). Although other conceptual or theoretical overviews on Latino crime and delinquency exist (see Morenoff, 2005), attention is directed to macro-level approaches because this is where the bulk of Latino violence research is located (Peterson & Krivo, 2005).

LATINOS AND IMMIGRATION

Sampson and Wilson (1995) were concerned about explaining crime differences between Blacks and Whites when applying their "racial invariance" thesis and did not focus on ethnicity and crime. This seemed logical at the time because most of the race and violence research stemmed from observations about the deep-rooted social and economic divisions between

Blacks and Whites in urban America, especially in areas where the loss of manufacturing jobs devastated the local economy. However, historical peaks of immigration have transformed the ethnic composition across the nation, and Latinos have emerged as the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Sampson & Bean, 2006). Latinos now comprise about 14% of the population and most migrated from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. Some scholars have started to address the compelling issue of what does or does not influence Latino violence and have begun to push research on violent crime beyond Blacks and Whites, particularly toward analyses of Latinos.

In general, researchers have evaluated whether the structural conditions relevant for Black and White violence also apply to Latinos (Peterson & Krivo, 2005). Martinez and colleagues have been at the vanguard of recent ecological analyses of Latino violence and provided results worth noting because they laid the groundwork for future research by suggesting the predictors of Latino violence or homicide are unique (Peterson & Krivo, 2005). Using homicide or violent crime data gathered directly from police departments and linked to census tracts that are widely used as proxies for communities, Martinez and colleagues in a series of articles analyzed Latino-specific homicide either alone or in comparison with models for native-born Blacks and Whites, and sometimes immigrant Haitians, Jamaicans, or Latino subpopulations (e.g., Mariel Cubans) (Lee, Martinez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; Martinez, 1996, 2003). They noted that Latinos usually follow the familiar pattern, as among Blacks and Whites, in terms of the all-encompassing effect of concentrated disadvantage even though some predictors of Latino homicide are, to some extent, distinct. Thus, the basic linkages among disadvantage and homicide hold for African Americans, Haitians, and Latinos in the city of Miami, and similar findings hold in other places for Blacks and Latinos, such as in the cities of San Diego and El Paso. For the most part, these studies support the racial/ethnic invariance hypothesis forwarded by Sampson and Wilson (1995), leading Martinez (2003) to conclude that "the basic links among deprivation, disorganization, and homicide are similar for all three ethnic groups [African Americans, Haitians, and Latinos]. Therefore it seems that the racial invariance thesis holds in the case of Latinos and might be extended to ethnic invariance in terms of community-level causes of violence, especially disadvantage" (p. 40).

One issue influencing Latinos much more so than Whites or Blacks is the impact of immigration on crime, in general, and Latino violence, specifically.[8] For example, some scholars have written about the "Latino Paradox" where Latinos, especially immigrants, do much better on certain indicators including violence than Blacks, and in some cases Whites, given relatively high levels of disadvantage (Sampson & Bean, 2006). Thus, Latinos have high levels of poverty but lower levels of homicide or violence than expected, given the power of economic disadvantage (or deprivation). The impact of recent immigration[9] and the role of immigrant concentration is one that appears to construct a different story with respect to violence than the concentration of African Americans in the race and crime literature (Sampson & Bean, 2006).

Martinez and colleagues have also been at the forefront of researchers debunking the popular notion that higher levels of immigration lead to increased violence and challenge the belief that more immigrants means more homicide (Peterson & Krivo, 2005; Sampson & Bean, 2006). In fact, it generally has no effect on violence contrary to expectations dating back to the turn of the last century that an influx of immigrants disrupts communities, creates neighborhood instability, and contributes to violent crime[10] (see Bursik, 2006). If immigration increases violent crime, it should do so among Latinos and in Latino communities because movement from abroad is heavily concentrated in Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latin American countries. Instead, the studies in this section support the finding that extreme disadvantage matters more for violence across

racial, ethnic and even immigrant groups than the presumed deleterious impact of immigration on violence forwarded by immigrant opponents (Martinez, 2006). Immigration policy makers should heed research that more immigrant Latinos usually means less violent crime. Still, future researchers should pay closer attention to potential variations across and within groups of various immigrant and ethnic variations, especially among Latino groups (see also Mears, 2001).

CURRENT PROJECTS ON CRIME IN IMMIGRATION COMMUNITIES

At least two important studies have extended these lines of inquiry. Recently, Stowell (2005) completed a comprehensive dissertation designed to build on the nascent body of research on immigration and crime. He used more specific measures of immigration containing information about both nativity and country of origin and included measures of official crime reported to the cities of Miami and Houston police departments: aggravated assault and armed robbery. This allows for a test of the degree to which the impact of immigration on violence varies across nonlethal violence at the census tract level in two immigrant destination places.

In Table 3, the descriptive statistics are included for both cities. The disparities in reported violent crime are evident and the average levels in Miami are more than twice as high as the corresponding levels in Houston. Although rates of violent crime are more prevalent in Miami, the relative proportion of robbery and aggravated assaults is similar in both cities. In Miami and Houston, aggravated assaults accounted for a larger share of the observed levels of violence, with robberies comprising less than half of the total.

Nearly 40% of the average neighborhood in Miami is composed of individuals born outside of the United States. On average, one-quarter of the neighborhood population in Miami were born in Cuba. The remaining three largest immigrant groups (Nicaraguans, Hondurans, and Haitians) represent much smaller shares of the total neighborhood populations. Approximately 12% of the average neighborhood in Houston is composed of individuals born in Mexico. Compared to Miami, the next three largest immigrant groups (Vietnamese, Salvadoran, and Chinese) represent less than 2% of the population in Houston. It is also clear that the average poverty rate in Miami neighborhoods is higher than in Houston (31.4% compared to 17.3%) and that

Table 3. Two City Descriptive Statistics of Crime and Latino Population

	Miami		Houston
Dependent variables			
Violent crime rate	108.03		41.04
Robbery	46.89		17.03
Aggravated assault	61.15		24.00
Immigration measures			
% Cuban	25.00	% Mexican	11.86
% Nicaraguan	6.25	% Chinese	0.63
% Honduran	4.15	% Vietnamese	1.20
% Haitian	5.42	% Salvadoran	1.70
Neighborhood measures			
% Poverty	31.37		17.13
Ethnic/RACIAL HETEROGENEITY	0.28		0.46

Source: Stowell (2005).

neighborhoods in Miami tend to be less racially/ethnically heterogeneous. The disparities in levels of unemployment also point to the relatively higher levels of economic disadvantage in Miami (12.3% compared to 7.8%). Although the average is slightly higher in Houston, neighborhoods in both cities have similar shares of young males (5.4% and 4.6%).

Based on the descriptive information, it is evident that average levels of neighborhood violence are higher in Miami than in Houston, a pattern that holds for each of the three dependent variables. More generally, these results illustrate the differences in the social structural contexts between these cities. In Miami neighborhoods, not only are immigrants a larger share of the overall neighborhood populations, but they also tend to be more economically distressed. Nevertheless, the Stowell regression results (not shown here) are consistent with prior research on immigration. With the inclusion of ethnic-specific measures of immigration, the findings yielded a combination of negative and null effects of the presence of foreign-born ethnic groups on violent crime. In other words, more immigrants in Houston or Miami neighborhoods means either less violent crime or no impact on violent crime, contrary to the popular impression that immigrant communities are crime-prone (Stowell, 2005; see also Martinez, 2002, 2006).

In an influential publication based on the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, a study designed to examine individual and neighborhood immigration status, along with ethnicity, in range of developmental outcomes including juvenile crime, Sampson and colleagues investigated delinquency among Chicago's Mexican-origin population (Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005). They reported that the lower rate of violence among the Mexican-origin groups, relative to Whites and Blacks, was explained by a combination of having married parents, living in an area with a high concentration of immigrants, and being an immigrant individual. Moreover, they found that first-generation immigrants have lower violence rates than second-generation immigrants, who, in turn, have lower rates of violence than third-generation Americans.

Thus, despite having lower levels of socioeconomic status than any racial/ethnic group in the Chicago study, the Mexican-origin population has the lowest levels of involvement in delinquent activity across a wide range of outcomes. Within the Mexican population, criminal activity increases across generations, even though there is a corresponding increase in socioeconomic status, suggesting that exposure to U.S. society or an "Americanization" effect is probably criminogenic or that recent Mexican immigrants differ from others in some other unmeasured attribute (see Morenoff, 2005). Yet again, immigrants, in general, and Mexican-origin population, specifically, are less violent, even more so when they live in heavily immigrant neighborhoods (Martinez, 2002, 2006).

MULTILEVEL STUDIES

The integration of macro-level structural factors into multilevel models of racial and ethnic differences in violence represents a growing research trend in criminology (Peterson & Krivo, 2005). Beyond the examples mentioned earlier by Sampson and colleagues in Chicago, others have also determined whether individual differences in violence, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, are explained by a host of individual and context factors (Lauritsen, 2003). Lauritsen (2003) discovered that concentrated disadvantage and individual factors explained most of the higher risks of nonlethal violent victimization among Blacks and Latinos relative to Whites. This study was noteworthy because census tract- or area-identified data were linked to individual NCVS data, permitting analysis of Black, White, and Latino male and female victimization risk.

Others have also reported that the effect of neighborhood-level disadvantage is similar among all racial and ethnic groups. While examining serious violence among Asian, Black,

Latino, White, and Native American youths, McNulty and Bellair (2003a, 2003b), in two different datasets, (Add Health and the National Educational Longitudinal Study or NELS) reported that individual and neighborhood disadvantage usually explained variations for violence across all groups. The exception was for Native Americans in the NELS data. McNulty and Bellair (2003a, 2003b) also discovered that the gaps between Blacks and White were influenced by variations in neighborhood disadvantage, but the Latino-to-White gap was more strongly influenced by individual level sources.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this chapter yields at least one clear conclusion: Studies of racial and ethnic disparities in violent crime must broaden their focus beyond Blacks and Whites to include Latinos and Latino groups whenever possible. The growth of Latinos across broad sectors of U.S. society requires a renewed focus on multiple racial/ethnic/immigrant groups when comparing levels of violence across a variety of communities and regions, some of which, until recently, rarely encountered Latinos (Martinez, 2002). The incorporation of Latinos will help scholars of violent crime and serious delinquency produce a broader understanding of the race/ethnic and violent crime linkages and expand our focus to include the diverse ecological contexts in which Blacks, Whites, and Latinos reside (Peterson & Krivo, 2005).

There are a number of important questions that should be addressed in the future. More data collection is necessary to answer important questions on Latino violence. For example, how does economic disadvantage operate to produce violence within and across Latino groups in similar communities? This issue has been directed to apparently comparable conditions related to Blacks and Latinos (Martinez, 2002). These groups have similar levels of disadvantage, but many Latino communities have higher levels of labor market attachment, even though typically it might mean employment in menial jobs, than found in many African American areas. This, of course, has a parallel in many Latino communities and more data should be collected on the country of origin as well to help us better understand complex neighborhood dynamics. As immigrant Latinos move into older Latino areas, should we expect more or less crime in places like Miami, where Cubans are replaced by Columbians or Nicaraguans? Or does Latino violence rise in cities like Los Angeles and Houston, where a dominant Mexican-origin population (native and foreign-born alike) resides when Salvadorans and other Latino group members move in? Perhaps it decreases over time, as suggested by some researchers. It is also possible that, as disadvantaged as conditions in U.S. barrios might be, immigrant Latinos might use their sending countries, with even worse economic and political conditions, as reference points when assessing their position relative to others, thus canceling out possible inequality effects.

There is also a need to conduct more qualitative and ethnographic research to provide important insights on emerging populations and broaden the portrait of Latino violence. At least two require attention. First, there are a number of ways that thorough and detailed qualitative case studies of Latino communities could be compared and contrasted to each other, to Black or Whites areas, and expanded to rural or suburban settings while considering immigrant status. For example, qualitative studies comparing the sources of violence in rural areas with new immigrant populations to those with little or no Latino influx would help expand research on Latino crime and delinquency. Studies examining the implications of Latino movement into formerly White suburban communities, if crime follows or not, would also help broaden our understanding of economic deprivation, affluence, and, of course, ethnicity and violence.

Second, it is also important to note that violence is shaped by gender, and the case of Latinas has been ignored in the social science literature. Research should explore a variety of issues: Little is known about the extent or sources of Latina victimization or offending; if Latina violence is shaped by interpersonal relations at home, work, school, or in the streets; and if immigrant status matters when Latinas report crime. These suggestions could be extended to include the comparison of Latinas to females of other racial/ethnic groups and in various neighborhood settings ranging from extremely poor to ethnically mixed middle communities and in heavily immigrant communities or primarily native-born ones to shed more light on Latina crime research. Future studies, moving beyond quantitative studies, should help us understand why Latinos are less crime-prone than expected in various settings and fill in the gap in the Latina violence literature.

This chapter also serves as a reminder about the importance of sound immigration policy based on research, not political rhetoric. The growing ethnic diversity across the nation is renewing a focus on the assumed influence of immigration on criminal activity, which, according to long-held wisdom, means that Latinos have high rates of violence or that immigrants are crime-prone predators (for recent examples, see Martinez, 2006). These are long-held beliefs promoted by some self-styled populist commentators in the mass media or are stereotypes perpetuated by conservative politicians, rooted in anecdotes or impressions. These groups have ignored the broad reductions in violence simultaneous with increased Latino immigration over the last decade, the protective mechanism of concentrated immigration, and other aspects of the unique Latino experience articulated in this chapter and others in this volume. It is no longer reasonable to assume that immigration and immigrant Latinos have a deleterious impact on violent crime in contemporary U.S. society or that singling out Latinos with legislation to deter the movement of undocumented workers into communities will decrease crime, as some advocate in the current rabid anti-immigration climate. In fact, the opposite might occur as Latinos are targeted for selective enforcement of immigration laws and removed from communities, reducing neighborhood stability and setting the stage for more crime now and perhaps later among the children of immigrants stigmatized by mean-spirited legislation.

Finally, scholars should move beyond the contemporary time frame and examine changes over time in violent crime among racial and ethnic group members during an era of intense isolation and segregation. Going back in time will enable researchers to compare periods of high crime to low crime and permit the comparison in racially and ethnically diverse or homogenous communities. Given the growth of Latinos and the corresponding increase in ethnic diversity across the country, it is important to not only ask more questions about Latino violence and delinquency but also to answer them with more serious cutting-edge research studies on violence crossing theoretical and methodological approaches, academic disciplines, and data sources. This chapter highlights many studies focusing on Latinos that serve as starting points for future research, but much more work remains to help assess the powerful protective role of immigration in Latino communities and provide more meaningful context to explanations of ethnicity and crime.

NOTES

1. The UCR is a nationwide collection of police reports from most law enforcement agencies across the country. The UCR data includes information on victim and offender or arrestee race (i.e., White, Black, American Indian/Alaskan, or Asian/Pacific Islander), but it does not consistently contain information on offender ethnicity. The exclusion of ethnic identifiers in official data has probably been the primary contribution to the dearth of research on crime among Latinos.
2. The NCVS also asks victims about the characteristics of the offenders by whom they were victimized and includes a question about the victims' perception of the offender race (White or Black). Unfortunately a "Hispanic" category is not included as a choice and it is difficult to assess the extent of offending among Latinos.

3. In order to maintain consistency in the chapter, I use “Latino” to reflect activity among the total Latino population without referring to males and females.
4. I thank Dr. Stephen Demuth, Faculty Associate in the Center for Family and Demographic Research at Bowling Green State University, for his generous assistance in accessing these data.
5. For more on the methodological problems associated with “place-based disparities in crime,” see Morenoff (2005:152).
6. See Bursik (2006) for more on European immigrants and crime.
7. This is not to suggest that some studies did not include Latino composition or examine Latino violence, especially in cities such as Houston, Texas. For a succinct review of this literature, see Titterington and Damphousse (2003).
8. This potentially transcends race because the movement of Black immigrants into some communities has impacted notions of race and crime in many places, especially those with large Haitian and African communities (Nielsen & Martinez, 2006).
9. Some studies have also focused on the impact of immigration on Latino violence. Peterson and Krivo (2005:345) noted that immigration has been considered a source of violent crime by pioneering and contemporary scholars because (a) an influx of immigration into a community contributes to social disorganization by obstructing communication and cooperation among residents, (b) immigrants might turn to crime more than the native-born as a way of adjusting to blocked opportunities (i.e., strain), and (c) immigrants reside in areas where oppositional culture is evident (see Martinez & Lee, 2000, and Mears, 2001, for more detailed discussions of these arguments).
10. Research examining immigration and violence for cities in the southwestern United States (Hagan & Palloni, 1998) and metropolitan areas (Butcher & Piehl, 1998) also finds negligible influences of immigration on crime. Moreover, family and community characteristics at the census tract level were attached to NCVS data in a special release to examine factors shaping violent victimization (see Lauritsen, 2003). No relationship was found between percent foreign-born or percent Latino on the incidence of violent victimization (again, see Lauritsen, 2003).

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