

*Toward a Reconciliation of “Assimilation” and “Pluralism”: The Interplay of Acculturation and Ethnic Retention*¹

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The reconciliation between “assimilation” and “pluralism” is sought to help prevent further polarization among immigration researchers and is based mainly on two arguments. First, if assimilation and acculturation are distinguished, acculturation has proceeded more quickly than assimilation in both “old” and “new” immigrations. This reconciles traditional assimilationist theory with current pluralist – or ethnic retention – theory, which admits that acculturation (and accommodation) are occurring, but without assimilation. Second, the reconciliation can also be advanced by the recognition that the researchers of the old and new immigrations have studied different generations of newcomers and have approached their research with “outsider” and “insider” values, respectively.

For more than a generation now, sociologists of ethnicity and religion have been classified into two positions that are usually described as assimilationist or pluralist. The positions are, however, conceptually and otherwise defective in at least three ways.

First, the empirical researchers placed in one or the other positions are frequently conflated with the normative thinkers so that the former are then wrongly characterized as favoring that position. Sometimes empirical researchers are even being accused of hiding their norms behind empirical language. The solution, for which it is probably too late, is to use different concepts for empirical and normative purposes; however, I should make it clear that my purpose in writing this article is strictly empirical.

Second, even among empirical researchers, the discussion about whether the descendants of the now “old” European immigration and the members of today’s “new” mainly non-European immigration are assimilating socially, economically, and culturally or whether they are retaining significant ties to their ethnic heritage has become polar. As a result, what is in reality a range of adaptations is sometimes being turned into a dichotomy, and a moral one,

¹I am grateful to Richard Alba, Margaret Chin, Stephen Cornell, Jennifer Lee, and Roger Waldinger for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

with the alleged assimilationists, and particularly “straight-line theory,” becoming the villains in a researchers’ morality play.

Third, the labels attached to each position are themselves misleading, for the so-called assimilationists have actually been emphasizing acculturation (becoming American culturally but not necessarily socially), while pluralism has such a multiplicity of meanings so that it is no longer useful as an empirical concept. Consequently, I will call the people who avoid acculturation and instead retain their ethnic ties “ethnic retentionists” and shall hereafter write about acculturationists and retentionists.

When positions are polarized and start hardening into theoretical ones inured to further data, empirical research – and straight thinking with it – suffers. Before the study of the new immigration is distorted in this fashion, the either-or polarization should be put to rest as soon as possible.

Fortunately, the polarization is almost entirely unnecessary, and this article suggests a reconciliation between the two positions.² It does so by using two arguments. One argument is that if acculturation is distinguished from assimilation, it is clear that even when second and third generation ethnics may have become almost entirely acculturated, they still retain a significant number of ethnic social ties, particularly familial ones, and cannot be said to have assimilated. However, this is not at odds with ethnic retention theory, which mainly argues that ethnic social ties are being retained, but which pays less attention to ethnic cultural retention. Thus, the two positions differ less in empirical reality than in debate.

The other argument suggests that whatever empirical differences remain between the two empirical positions may be a result of differences both in the research and in the researchers. The original students of the European immigration who developed the acculturationist position obtained much of their data from second generation adults, while the data about the new immigration is coming mainly from first generation adults – and sometimes from 1.5 and second generation school children and teenagers who still live with and are under more retentionist pressures from their parents than they will be later.

Furthermore, the major researchers and theorists of the European immigration were, as Merton (1973) put it, outsiders who were neither members of, nor had any great personal interest in, the groups they studied. Many of their contemporary successors are, however, insiders who often come from the ethnic groups they are studying and are personally concerned with the survival of these groups. Thus, as a result of who was studied and of the perspectives of the two cohorts of researchers has come an overly acculturationist theory of the old immigration and an overly retentionist theory of the new immigration.

²An earlier version of this paper was partly inspired by the comprehensive analytic defense of assimilation by Alba and Nee (1996); this article remains indebted to it, although it disagrees with – and was partly written because of – Alba and Nee’s use of assimilation to cover both the cultural and social processes.

ACCULTURATION AND ASSIMILATION

My distinction between acculturation and assimilation is hardly original; it was conventional usage at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s, *i.e.*, in the generation before Milton Gordon (1964) developed his seven types of assimilation. The distinction is based on the difference between culture and society and, accordingly, acculturation refers mainly to the newcomers' adoption of the culture (*i.e.*, behavior patterns, values, rules, symbols etc.) of the host society (or rather an overly homogenized and reified conception of it). Assimilation, on the other hand, refers to the newcomers' move out of formal and informal ethnic associations and other social institutions into the nonethnic equivalents accessible to them in that same host society.³

The original Chicago distinction is particularly useful because empirical research using it has shown many times that immigrants begin to acculturate fairly quickly, sometimes even in the first generation, but that they assimilate much more slowly (Rosenthal, 1960). By the third generation, the descendants of the newcomers are almost entirely American and often lack interest in or even knowledge of their ancestors' origins. Still, the opportunity for any but the most formal or superficial assimilation may not even become available until the third generation.

Two reasons explain why acculturation is always a faster process than assimilation. American culture is a powerfully attractive force for immigrants – already powerful even when mass media came in the form of silent movies. Therefore, it easily entices the children of most immigrants, particularly those coming from societies that lack their own commercial popular cultures. Indeed, historically few ethnic cultures have been able to compete with American popular culture, and even religious groups that keep their young people separate from it, like the Amish and Chassidim, must provide some form of substitute. This may be changing, for today's immigrants come from countries with their own commercial popular cultures, although for the

³Although I was a graduate student at the university in the late 1940s, I do not know the origin of the distinction. Robert Park had already distinguished between the two terms 25 years earlier, but saw both as referring to culture, pointing out that "ethnologists" used acculturation for "primitive societies" while sociologists, who studied "historical peoples," used the term assimilation. (Park and Burgess, 1921:771). They even indicated briefly that "social structure changes more slowly than material culture, "but illustrated their thesis with examples from preindustrial societies. (Op. cit., 749–750). Perhaps the coteaching among the university's sociologists and cultural anthropologists that began in the mid-1940s, as well as the empirical recognition that the descendants of the European immigrants were becoming American culturally but were not yet able or willing to enter non ethnic social institutions, produced the distinction that I was taught. However, the earliest publication using it that I could find was Rosenthal (1960), who had also been a teacher of mine in the 1940s.

moment, most of the world's popular cultures are still young enough to be influenced by, or to be imitations of, American popular culture.⁴

Second, ethnics can acculturate on their own, but they cannot assimilate unless they are given permission to enter the "American" group or institution (*see also* Lieberman, 1961). Since discrimination and other reasons often lead to denial of that permission to the immigrant and even the second generation, assimilation will always be slower than acculturation.⁵

If the assimilation-acculturation distinction is used in research, researchers will discover the virtually inevitable lag of assimilation behind acculturation. In that case, however, the empirical differences between the acculturationists and retentionists begin to shrink, particularly those retentionists who are more concerned with the survival of the ethnic community than of the ethnic culture. All other things being equal, and when personal values do not influence data collection, empirically inclined retentionists should come up with virtually the same results as their acculturationist peers: that little assimilation is taking place even as the old country culture erodes.

Retentionist studies also point to the retention of cultural practices, but many of these are intrinsic to ethnic institutions, especially the family and other primary groups, and therefore cannot be ended without virtually destroying these. For example, if members of the second generation remain loyal to the immigrant family and honor the obligations it demands, these members must also retain some cultural practices they might otherwise give up. Thus, the second generation may retain the ethnic language because this is how they communicate with the parent generation.

If ethnic researchers did not rely so often on overly simple survey research, however, and if the bilingual second generation were asked questions such as whether it retained bilingualism voluntarily or involuntarily, the researchers might discover that language retention is not a rejection of acculturation but a prerequisite for maintaining familial relations. If researchers were to ask second generation ethnics what they would do if given a choice, many might indicate that they would abandon the ethnic language, as well as "boring" and to them often meaningless family practices that were brought over from the old country.

⁴As a result, some researchers of the new immigration argue that many of today's newcomers become transcultural, seeing their old country popular culture on foreign TV channels or on tape as well as becoming audiences for American popular culture. Conversely, other researchers suggest that the newcomers are already somewhat familiar with American culture before they come. Once the empirical studies are done probably both hypotheses will turn out to be true, perhaps for different immigrant groups.

⁵When newcomers are denied assimilation for a long time, ethnic and racial minorities often set up parallel institutions that are similar to those that have rejected them, for example country clubs, debutante balls, and other organizations and activities that help to demarcate high status.

In other words, involuntary retention of the ethnic language is an indicator of ethnic retention only if interviewees indicate they would also retain it voluntarily; otherwise, involuntary retention should be coded as an indicator and correlate of family obligations.⁶ Likewise, young second generation women who honor the parental taboo against outmarriage have to give up involuntarily some acculturative practices, such as American dating habits that they might choose if free to do so. However, there is some impressionistic evidence from South Asian teenagers in New York that they can enjoy the social hangouts, as well as the musical and other popular culture preferences of other American teenagers, if they can assure parents that they will not marry them (Sengupta, 1996).

One of the unknowns in this situation is the set of processes that encourage and discourage family loyalty and obligations to maintain family practices, a subject that so far has not been studied sufficiently. Whether the explanation is community integration (Zhou and Bankston, 1994) or a less general factor remains to be seen, but class position probably makes a difference. Given the ravages of poverty on family stability among immigrants as well as native-born Americans, poor members of the second generation may establish gangs that can perform some surrogate familial functions, or they may join multi-ethnic neighborhood ones – and this seems to be the case whether the poor youngsters are Vietnamese (Zhou and Bankston, 1994) or Haitian (Woldemikael, 1989).

One reason students of ethnicity may not have been concerned with the voluntary-involuntary distinction in the retention of culture as with ethnic attachments may lie in the failure of existing theories to encourage such a distinction. The theorizing of the acculturationists has not made much room for motive or intent of any kind, mainly because the Chicago school from which they are descended has thought in terms of impersonal processes rather than of human choices. In addition, the early researchers who were consciously or unconsciously in favor of “Americanization” (which sometimes included both acculturation and assimilation) probably assumed that immigrants and their descendants wanted to become Americans as quickly and completely as possible – an assumption that may have been justified among many of the people to whom researchers from this school had access. Many of those uninterested in Americanization were not available for study because they did not speak English or went back to their country of origin.

The retentionists, past and present, have had no interest in whether cultural retention is voluntary because their assumption, and their normative predisposition, is that retention continues to exist. Thus, they would not be inclined to ask how many second generation youngsters endured immigrant cultural practices mainly so as not to dishonor or annoy parents/grandparents.

⁶Other involuntary factors, such as ethnic segregation and economic and ecological conditions in the host society, are brought to attention by Hurh and Kim, 1967:27.

The same kinds of questions can be raised about the school performance studies that now still dominate investigative examination of the second generation. Some of these studies indicate that youngsters who are integrated into the ethnic community, or continue to speak the immigrant language, often do better in American schools than their less integrated or less bilingual peers (Portes and Schauffler, 1994; Rumbaut, 1994, 1995; Zhou and Bankston, 1994). Still, no one can yet tell whether their bilingualism is voluntary, although they may be too young to have a choice between voluntary and involuntary bilingualism, especially in immigrant groups that harbor hopes of returning to the old country. Moreover, since much of the evidence of school performance comes from a mixture of school grade reports and survey data using single indicators, it is too early to determine conclusively that bilingualism, other kinds of cultural retention, or community integration are significant causes of better school performance. Other correlated variables may be at play, and, besides, studies of second generation youngsters can never fully determine how much their performance is a result of parental pressure to achieve family upward mobility that the immigrants themselves could not achieve. The fact that school performance declines with the third generation (Rumbaut, 1990) suggests once more that immigrants may be different from their American descendants.

Be that as it may, however, the ethnic retention of the first generation can be reconciled with whatever acculturation takes place at the same time; in fact, they can probably be shown to take place concurrently if researchers ask questions about both.⁷ Even in the second generation, when acculturation usually increases, ethnic retention will still exist – some of it voluntary and probably more involuntary. The two approaches can still be reconciled in the third generation, for even if its members should repeat the experience of the European immigrants and begin to assimilate, they will retain a number of ethnic relationships and some associated ethnic practices. Furthermore, since so many members of the new immigration are nonwhite, the grandchildren, particularly of black immigrants, will likely still suffer from racial discrimination and are thus sure to retain yet other ethnic relationships and practices even if not always voluntarily. The extent to which this will happen depends on the state of future American race relations or lack of same.

ETHNIC RECONSTRUCTION AND INVENTION

The reconciliation of acculturationists and retentionists can also be extended to what might be called the postacculturationist school of ethnic reconstructers and inventors. That school, as typified by Yancey and associates (1976) and Conzen and associates (1992) (*see also* Sollors, 1989), participated in a

⁷This is a good example of where polarization can hurt research, since generally each “side” is likely to ask only questions reflecting its own hypotheses.

debate over the later generations of the old immigration before the new immigration became visible to researchers and so far has not yet extended its observations to the new one. Nonetheless, the same debate may someday be revived among the descendants of the new immigrants to argue that ethnic culture does not become a victim of acculturation but is reconstructed or invented anew all the time.

The proposed reconciliation would begin by criticizing the assumption of the original ethnic researchers that immigrants come to America with an old country culture which is so homogenous and holistic that it could be codified in a textbook. In reality, however, there is no textbook or even an oral version thereof, and every immigrant family comes with its own ethnic practices, which are most likely a mix of handed-down remembered family, community and regional practices. These the family then adapts to America, negotiating with advocates of traditionalism and change in the family and in the (American) community. Indeed, holding the loyalty of the young in the second generation, and even more so in later ones, is apt to require not negotiation but the very reconstruction and invention that Yancey, Conzen, Sollors, and their colleagues proposed.

Even so, what families and other groups carrying out ethnic practices reconstruct and invent begins with what the older people know and what the younger ones objecting to the old country practices are willing to accept, the latter usually being more American, modern, or prestigious.

As a result, what looks like reconstruction or invention to one school, including reconstruction for the sake of ethnic retention, may not always be very different than what looks like acculturation to the acculturationists, particularly those whose preference for macrosociological analysis blinds them to the microsocial bits and pieces that actually go into macrosociological processes. For example, *bas mitzvah*, the Jewish initiation rite for 13-year-old girls – invented in America to celebrate the role of women in the Jewish community – was also an instance of acculturation away from the traditional patriarchal inequality of European Jewish Orthodox religious practices. My favorite secular example I take from the second generation Italian Americans I studied in Boston (Gans, 1962), who invented their own Italian Thanksgiving dinner by combining turkey with pasta dishes, concurrently adding a very American food and holiday to their list of old country dishes and celebrations.

IDENTITY AS ACCULTURATION OR RETENTION

One of the current buzzwords in immigration and ethnic research (and politics) is identity, which is often assumed to be an automatic instance of retention. Systematic research into identity, ethnic and racial, among members of the new

immigration is just beginning, and operational and other definitions of the term remain scarce (*see* Alba and Nee, 1995:93; Yinger, 1994:156–157). I would prefer to limit identity to strongly held feelings and associated actions concerning some aspect of ethnicity, but most studies so far have looked at identity as less intense feelings or practices, such as self-naming (Alba, 1990; *see also* Waters, 1990) or self-identification (*e.g.*, Rumbaut, 1994).⁸ Consequently, no one yet knows either whether personal or group identity is associated with retention or acculturation, not to mention assimilation.

The development of identity feelings and actions that began in the 1980s among the new immigrants has been most visible on university campuses. Indeed, it could be an aftermath of student versions of the African-American Black Power movement of the 1960s, or perhaps also of an emerging identity movement among intellectuals, artists, and academics from European ethnic groups that same decade, which was popularly but incorrectly interpreted as a larger ethnic revival among “white ethnics” (Gans, 1979). However, what today might be called identity has long expressed itself on a small scale on factory floors and other workplaces where minor conflicts of various kinds have often been displaced on ethnic joking (Halle, 1984:181). Overt ethnic conflicts, including violent ones, in which ethnic identity also plays a role, have been part of American history for a long time.

It is too early to tell what forms today’s major expressions of identity – personal, group, or both – will take among the new immigrants and the second generation since most members of the latter are still too young for college or the workplace – and also because identities may change in the passage from adolescence to adulthood. Perhaps some of these expressions will be associated with cultural retention and an effort to resist the temptations of assimilation that are sometimes available to nonwhite second generation college students heading for white campuses. Moreover, identities can also be reactions to events in the larger society, for example in the resurgence of ethnic identity feelings among California Mexicans, immigrant and native born, as a response to that state’s anti-immigrant politics (Rumbaut, 1997).

Alba (1990) and Waters (1990) had already indicated that ethnic self-naming or self-identification is usually accompanied by continued acculturation and assimilation, including intermarriage. Nonetheless, the more intense search for personal identity, either at the level of feelings or action, can also be an accompaniment to acculturation and perhaps even assimilation, with identity becoming an actual or symbolic substitute for ethnic cultural practices. In fact, sometimes developing an identity or getting involved in identity groups can be easier, especially for the second generation, than trying to fight the temptations of

⁸I would also want to distinguish what people name themselves for outside consumption, *e.g.*, if asked while performing a variety of roles in the larger society, and for inside consumption, how they would describe or name their in-group identity.

acculturation or retaining “boring” ethnic practices. In any case, there need be no inherent contradiction between identity and acculturation, and the two processes can operate independently.

Moreover, the history of the European immigrants suggests that identity is more apt to develop among ethnics living amidst nonethnics, as on college campuses, or in ethnic areas fighting an external threat. Conversely, people who are embedded in homogeneous ethnic neighborhoods or organizations and have little to do with nonethnics need not even be aware of their identity. A good example is New York City’s socialist movement which was so heavily Jewish that immigrants and second generation Jews in it had no reason to pay attention to – or as sociologists, deny – their ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity is even compatible with assimilation. For example, ethnic group leaders may lead public lives in the ethnic community while devoting part of their private lives to assimilatory activities. Furthermore, since part of their ethnic leadership requires them to associate with leaders from the dominant groups in society, they may even be participating in some on-the-job assimilation, voluntary and involuntary, if only to be able to work with leaders of dominant groups (*e.g.*, Kasinitz, 1992).

Racial minorities diverge in these respects from ethnic groups, because racial identity, or at least racial pride, is almost always required to fuel the struggles against the white majority. Immigrants who are also members of racial minorities may be shedding their old-country cultures, but whatever their ethnic identity, the racial identity they had to develop in the United States may have unexpected implications for their ethnic identity (*e.g.*, Rumbaut, 1997).

Since immigrants and the next generation are apt to be involved in future conflicts over multiculturalism, culture wars, and identity politics, researchers will have many opportunities to chart the connections between these activities, acculturation and ethnic retention, and to observe whether and how seemingly dissimilar reactions can occur concurrently.

IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC RESEARCHERS

A final way of approaching the reconciliation of the acculturationists and retentionists involves the researchers themselves. We, the people who are doing the actual research, are often left out of the analysis because the field still retains remnants of the inhuman positivism, once dominant in the social sciences, which tried to ignore the fact that human beings were doing the research. The moment the researchers are brought in, however, and those concerned with the European immigration and today’s newcomers are compared, two differences that affect their findings become apparent, and thus also their respective positions.

First, the two sets of researchers have studied different immigrants; and second, they are themselves different kinds of people. The researchers who studied the European immigrants did not really begin their empirical research until the 1920s, at least 40 years after the first Eastern and Southern Europeans arrived in large numbers. The major empirical study of the Chicago school, Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto*, was published in 1928; the Yankee City Studies of W. Lloyd Warner and his associates were conducted in the middle 1930s and the major ethnic volume, by Warner and Srole, appeared in 1945. The first major sociological study of Italians in America was by Ware in 1935; the second, by Child, appeared in 1943.⁹

Moreover, only a few of the sociologists spoke the immigrant languages. As a result, the researchers probably got most of their data from the second generation, including much of what they learned about the immigrants. Consequently, the picture of a homogeneous and holistic immigrant culture was probably in part the result of nostalgic recall.

More importantly, what was most visible to them among the second generation was its public acculturation rather than its more private ethnic retention. In addition, the researchers could not have met many of the most determined retentionists since these would have returned to the old country before World War I. However, they also saw no social assimilation, either because it did not exist sufficiently often, or because they failed to notice it, or both.¹⁰

It is no wonder, then, that the early researchers supported the assimilationist theory Robert Park first developed in the 1910s, although the fact that the next generation of ethnic researchers was influenced by Park – if not actual students of his – was surely relevant as well.

Furthermore, the European immigrants came to America at a time of rapid and almost continuous economic growth. While some worked in ethnic enclaves and never had to learn English, many were employed in the larger American economy. Economic growth encouraged movement out of the ethnic enclave, however, and that in turn encouraged acculturation. To be sure, the business cycle did not abate when the immigrants came, but no social scientists were around to study how the immigrants fared during the terrible depression of the 1890s, or even during the one that followed just after World War I. Admittedly, the Yankee City studies took place during the Great Depression,

⁹A third, Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, appeared the same year, but while the fieldwork was done in Boston's North End, Whyte took only limited note of the fact that all the major participants were second generation Italians. While this classic is still read a century later, it is not read as an ethnic study.

¹⁰They could of course have noticed it among the descendants of the earlier European immigration, from Ireland and Northern Europe, but the Chicago School was so concerned with studying the new immigrants that, for example, Park and Burgess (1921) never mentioned the earlier arrivals at all in their various lengthy discussions of assimilation and Americanization.

and no one has yet figured out how and why the ethnics of Newburyport, Massachusetts, hardly an affluent city even in better times, continued to acculturate and to provide one of the models for straight line theory.

The researchers who are now studying the new immigration have reported on a very different set of newcomers. For one thing, they began their research much more quickly than the earlier researchers and have obtained their data directly from the first generation. Moreover, that first generation is very different than the one studied indirectly by the researchers of the old European immigration. Not only are many of the new immigration non-white, but they are also middle class and often highly educated, especially among the Southeast Asian, South Asian and Caribbean immigrations – and all are very different than the almost entirely white, almost entirely poor and often illiterate immigrants that came from Europe a century or more ago.

Since today's researchers are studying the immigrants, they naturally see more retention than acculturation and, because so many are nonwhite, less social assimilation; also, since the economy is growing less slowly than a century ago, there is less economic assimilation too. In addition, they are obtaining more accurate pictures of the old country cultures (few as preindustrial as those left behind by the old European immigrants) than the museum-like versions the first ethnic researchers learned from the second generation they studied. But because today's researchers are seeing first generation life up close, they also see its dynamic qualities and the immigrants' need or temptation to change in unpredictable ways to respond to the opportunities or exigencies of the moment and to retreat to the bosom of the ethnic or racial group when dominant group politics turns against them or other disasters strike. Last but not least, the second generation they now see still lives largely at home, as noted earlier, and must obey ethnic and other parental dictates.

No wonder, then, that straight line theory makes little sense to today's researchers. They see little or no acculturation among the first generation, and even less assimilation. In the second generation, they are gathering evidence of ethnic retention, especially among middle-class youngsters (*e.g.*, Rumbaut, 1995), combined with the considerable assimilation of lower-class adolescents, particularly West Indians, who reject their old country origin to join (or try to join) native-born neighborhood gangs (Woldemikael, 1989; Zhou and Bankston, 1994).

All this contradicts what most of the findings and straight line theory reported about the earlier immigrants. While the researchers' rejection of straight line theory is understandable, it may also be somewhat premature, and it may yet be contradicted when today's second generation reaches the same life cycle position as the second generation studied by the researchers of the old immigration.

There is, however, yet another set of reasons why today's ethnic researchers see so much ethnic retention where their predecessors saw acculturation. The

first ethnic researchers were largely outsiders vis à vis the people they studied; today's are more often insiders, and that difference further helps to explain their divergent findings (*see* Merton, 1973).

The distinction between insiders and outsiders is not as hard and fast as the two terms make it appear; accordingly, the terms are also not easily defined. For my purposes here, insiders and outsiders can be defined either by their ancestry, or their values, or by both criteria. If the definition emphasizes ancestry, the issue is whether or not the researchers share the ethnic, racial or other origins of the people they study. When the researchers cannot be asked directly, last names sometimes offer a clue to ancestry.

If the values criterion is applied, the issue is whether the researchers favor ethnic retention of or community survival by the groups they are studying. Empirically, this criterion is often fairly easy to apply, since retentionists often state their values openly. The task becomes more complicated when values have to be inferred from the theoretical and empirical questions researchers ask or the concepts and frames they use – and the task may be impossible if the researchers are detached or neutral.

The studies of researchers remain to be done, and what follows here is a set of hypotheses about the insider-outsider status of the two eras of immigrant researchers, with an emphasis on the sociologists among them who conducted empirical studies.

Most of the researchers who first studied the European immigration were outsiders – and for good reason: the European immigrant groups were so poor that it took most two or three generations to be able to pursue academic Ph.Ds. The pioneers – for example, Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, W. I. Thomas, Caroline Ware, and Lloyd Warner – were predominantly WASPs, although hardly upper-class ones. Almost all were also assimilationists but not necessarily deliberate ones. If they favored the Americanization of the immigrants, they unthinkingly reflected both the conventional wisdom and values of their era and their class, particularly in the decades when the retentionist alternative was virtually unknown in the social sciences. Rather, they were researchers who considered themselves value-neutral – even if too many sometimes used the racist language of the day – but they also reported the acculturative trends that were most visible among the white ethnics they studied.

A few of the first empirical researchers were insiders by background, for example Louis Wirth and Leo Srole who were Jewish, but both men were outsiders in terms of their values. After World War II, however, sociologists from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and mainly from the second generation undertook empirical research, continuing the prewar outsider values. Most wrote only a single book about their own group, but some moved into comparative ethnic research

– for example, Milton Gordon (1964) and Tamotsu Shibutani, and subsequently, Richard Alba (1990), Steven Steinberg (1989), and Mary Waters (1990, 1996). I doubt whether many held or hold acculturationist values.

Concurrently, however, other sociologists of ethnic origin from the same post-World War II cohorts have written as apparent or actual retentionists. Although they may report evidence of acculturation, they emphasize exceptions or accompany their findings with warnings that the ethnic community – or in the case of Jews, the religious one – must act to stop these trends. In the Jewish community, they have sometimes been described as survivalists (*e.g.*, Stephen Cohen, Nathan Glazer, and Egon Mayer). Like-minded researchers from other ethnic groups are, for example, Richard Gambino, Andrew Greeley, and Peter Kivisto.

The students of the new immigration seem to be following a speeded-up version of the pattern that developed among their European predecessors. Although the first researchers were rarely WASPs, they were outsiders, among them Philip Kasinitz, Roger Waldinger, and Mary Waters. However, the newcomers of middle-class origin often brought their own researchers or sent their young people, a few from the 1.5 generation, into graduate sociology programs. Many have come from Southeast Asian families, among them Won Moo Hurh, Illsoo Kim, Pyong Gap Min, and Min Zhou, although slowly but surely South Asian, Latino, Caribbean and African researchers are entering the field.

The immigrant or second generation newcomers are insiders by ancestry, but they often follow insider values as well. Whether or not they do, many begin by studying their own groups. As early as 1984, 86 percent of the references in a “Selected Bibliography on Korean-Americans” bore Korean or other Southeast Asian names (Hurh and Kim, 1984:259–271).

This pattern is continuing among new cohorts of young researchers in the 1990s. Thus, in a study of 138 researchers applying for grants (most for dissertations) to the Social Science Research Council’s Migration Division in 1997: 53 percent were studying their own groups; 18 percent were looking at groups other than their own; and 29 percent were writing on general or comparative topics.¹¹ However, among the 65 applicants whose racial or ethnic backgrounds suggested that they or their parents were newcomers, 80 percent were

¹¹The data on which this analysis is based come from the proposal titles and subtitles, as well as the ethnic/racial self-identifications, of the year’s 150 grant applicants, minus the 18 for which I was unable to determine whether they were studying individual groups or not. I am grateful to Josh DeWind, director of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Migration Division, who proposed analyzing the SSRC applicants, provided a first rough count, and made the data available for my analysis.

studying their own group, and 20 percent were writing on general topics.¹² No one was studying groups other than their own.

The main exception to the insider pattern described here is associated with poor or non-English speaking immigrant groups that have not yet produced social science researchers. Thus, among the earliest students of poor Southeast Asian groups have been Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, so far the most prolific comparative researchers of the new immigration, while the first writings about Russian newcomers have come from Nancy Foner and Steven Gold. Some groups have been studied by both fellow ethnics and demographic outsiders, for example, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, West Indians, and South Asians.

Since most of the newcomer studies are about the immigrants, research about them will necessarily yield a predominance of retentionist findings, since few newcomers, at least among the adults, will have had time for much acculturation or for getting into a position to be allowed to assimilate into American groups (Alba and Nee, 1995:58). That so many of the researchers are insiders only reinforces this pattern, especially if and when the insiders also adhere to retentionist values, although even outsiders who study the first generation are likely to find more retention than acculturation, not to mention assimilation.

Various other characteristics of the new immigration research can be explained by the fact that the subjects of study are immigrants. One is the emphasis on entrepreneurial activities, since immigrants with any kind of capital have traditionally turned to storekeeping or petty manufacturing, using their profits to educate their children for higher status jobs. They may also be more likely to be retentionists than people who go to seek their fortune in the larger economy.

The second generation, once grown into adulthood, will have some choice between various kinds of retention and acculturation, however. Those who intermarry, particularly with whites, can even achieve assimilationist goals.

Consequently, whether the researchers who study the second generation are outsiders or insiders, in background and/or values, will begin to matter, for they could use their values, theories, and concepts to produce findings that diverge at least to some extent from the behavior and values of the people they study. Still, what they could do in theory is no guide to what they do in practice, and it is also possible that the second generation of researchers who will begin to appear in visible numbers some time early in the twenty-first century will not consist of the same kinds of insiders and outsiders as today's researchers.

CONCLUSION

The study of the new immigration is only just beginning, and as already noted, most of the ideas about the second generation so far have been based on data

¹²I selected this group from SSRC grant applicants who identified themselves as Latino, Asian, Caribbean, and African. However, these data were also affected by applicants' disciplines, for only 37 percent of the political scientists who were newcomers but 96 percent of the sociologist newcomers were studying their own groups.

about school children. "So far" is an important qualifier, however, and as immigration research expands and the second and then the third generation grow to adulthood, studies of the new immigration are apt to come up with other findings than today's. Although we now know how much assimilation depends on economic and political processes that either make immigrants and their descendants attractive or threatening to other Americans, the findings about acculturation may not be very different in the longer run from those accumulated about the European immigration.

They cannot be the same findings because America and the world have changed drastically since the Europeans came to America. In addition, while the Europeans were also viewed as darker races when they arrived, they could become white far more easily than many of today's immigrants.

My personal hunch is that, in the long run, students of the new immigration will repeat many of the past findings of rapid acculturation and slower assimilation. However, as long as researchers are divided into insiders and outsiders, a modified version of the present division between acculturationists, value-neutrals, and retentionists will also continue.

Whatever the downsides of that tripartite division and the disagreements it generates, there are also advantages to such disagreements. Despite the wish of some sociologists for less "fragmentation," and the restoration of a "core," fields that are dominated by one paradigm or "school" or that compromise too much to achieve reconciliation and consensus are easily drained of vitality. There is little chance that immigration and ethnic researchers will soon become homogeneous and consensual, however. Instead, they must know how to understand their differences and understand also how much they themselves contribute to divergent findings and theories.

Consequently, the researchers must study their own research methods as well as themselves. If socially structured, such reflexivity will help make sure that differences of findings or perspectives do not turn into polarization and cast disagreeing researchers as enemies or villains. Fortunately, the research community has so far avoided such polarization, and there is reason to think it will always do so – if only because there will always be findings that cannot easily fit one theoretical position or another.

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