

THE RELATION BETWEEN CRIME AND ACCULTURATION IN LATINO YOUTH
AND THE PROTECTIVE EFFECTS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUALITY
AND RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE

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THE RELATION BETWEEN CRIME AND ACCULTURATION IN LATINO YOUTH
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who have supported me through each of my educational endeavors. Also, to my friends, boyfriend, and cohort buddies who have encouraged me to keep pushing when the process felt too challenging. Lastly, this work is dedicated to my mentor, Dr. Amanda Venta, who was patient and supportive. I am eternally grateful for her guidance, which allowed me to complete this project.

ABSTRACT

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As the Latino population in the United States (U.S.) increases, so does attention to unique predictors of crime in this ethnic group. Increased acculturation to the U.S. has been found to have adverse effects on Latinos, with one such effect including increased delinquency and crime. The importance of spirituality and religious attendance have been investigated as potential protective effects against crime, but past research is limited by inadequate measurement, including measuring only one single dimension of religiosity or spirituality, such as importance of religion or religious service attendance, at a time, neglecting to include both aspects. This study aimed to, first, identify whether a positive relation exists between acculturation and crime in Latino youth and, second, if examine if importance of spirituality and/or religious attendance serve as moderators of this relation. This study used data from the study *Pathways to Desistance* in order to explore this hypothesis longitudinally at 12 months and 24 months. A binary logistic regression was used to find if (1) there was a relation between acculturation and crime and (2) if religious attendance and importance of spirituality could each moderate this relation. Age at first offense remained as a main effect at 12 and 24 months, while acculturation exerted a main effect only at 24 months. Attending church sporadically (one to two times a month) emerged as a risk factor for recidivism in bicultural and Mexican-oriented youth (in interaction with acculturation), while never attending church actually predicted less offending.

KEY WORDS: Acculturation, Latino youth, Recidivism, Religious attendance, Spirituality, Religiosity, Importance of religion, Importance of spirituality, Adolescent, crime

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In recent decades, the number of people of Latino origin in the United States (U.S.) has increased and is projected to continue to grow. In 2016, it was estimated that there were 58 million Latinos in the U.S. (Flores, 2017), where Latinos were the largest minority. Latinos who were born in the U.S. have been found to have higher arrest rates than foreign-born Latinos (Tapia, 2015). In the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (2018) uniform crime report, Latinos were reported to commit about 10% of the crimes committed in 2017 (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2018). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017) estimated that about 22 percent of the prison population were Latinos in 2017, while Latino adolescents made up about 18 percent of the juvenile population in correctional facilities (Puzzanchera, Sladky, & Kang, 2018). Furthermore, Latino youth are about 1.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than their non-Hispanic White peers in the U.S. (Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016). Against this background, it is important to understand how the unique cultural context of Latinos in the U.S. might relate to crime. Specifically, this study examined how acculturation to the U.S. relates to crime among Latino youth and if religious attendance and the importance of spirituality could act as moderators.

Acculturation

Acculturation is the result of continuous interaction between groups of different cultures; it includes changes of the cultural patterns of one group or both (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936). Rather than being a single event, acculturation is described as a process (Thurnwald, 1932). It tends to occur more in one of the groups,

which is then referred as the acculturation group, with the other group sometimes referred to as the host culture (Berry, 1997). Although acculturation was previously thought to be a unidimensional construct, researchers have described it as a multidimensional and bilinear process in which an individual is transformed with respect to both the host culture and the culture of origin regarding different aspects including language, cultural identity, behavior, values, and knowledge (Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003). Berry's four acculturation strategies, which include assimilation, marginalization, integration, and separation, describe an individual's multidimensional acculturation process (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2012). Assimilation involves an individual's high interaction with the host culture and less with their culture of origin. Separation constitutes the individual retaining their culture of origin and not identifying with the host culture. Integration is the action of adopting and being involved in both cultures. Lastly, marginalization occurs when an individual does not maintain their culture nor adopts the host culture. Berry's acculturation strategies have been widely adopted and have been used by Cuellar, Arnold, and Maldonado (1995), with a focus on the integration and assimilation strategies, for the construction of the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II), one of the most widely used acculturation measures and the acculturation measure used in this study.

Acculturation and Crime

Acculturation has been linked to negative effects in Latinos, including increased crime. For instance, high acculturation has been linked to consequences such as higher levels of driving under the influence in moderate to highly acculturated Mexican-Americans (Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Rodriguez, 2008) and delinquency in Latino

youth (Frazer, Rubens, Johnson-Motoyama, DiPierro, & Fite, 2016). Evidence supporting a link between acculturation and crime can also be found in literature that compares first-generation immigrants, who are less acculturated to the U.S., to second- or third-generation immigrants, who tend to be more acculturated. A study by Alvarez-Rivera, Nobles, and Lersch (2014) found that Latinos who were more acculturated were more likely to be arrested and convicted. In a sample of Latino immigrants of various generations, where first-generation immigrants were youth who were born outside of the U.S., second-generation immigrants were youth who were born in the U.S. with foreign-born parents, and third-generation immigrants were youth with foreign-born grandparents, the second generation endorsed more externalizing symptoms (i.e., aggression and rule breaking) than the other two generation groups (Cervantes, Padilla, Napper, & Goldbach, 2013). Other studies have found higher reporting of externalizing symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Conduct Disorder (CD), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD; Atherton, Ferrer, & Robins, 2018) and higher occurrence of injurious physical attacks, theft, drug selling, carrying a handgun, binge drinking, marijuana use, and other illicit drug use in later generation Latino youth (Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Schwartz, & Cordova, 2016). Another study with foreign-born mothers and their adolescent children, found that a high orientation to their culture of origin was linked to less externalizing symptoms in the children (Gonzales et al., 2008). These findings indicate that higher acculturation to the U.S. in Latino youth could be tied to aggression, rule breaking, violence, and delinquency.

Religiosity/Spirituality in Latinos

A possible explanation for how increased acculturation confers risk for externalizing behavior problems is that increased acculturation reflects decreased alliance with cultural values that previously acted as protective factors. In Latino immigrants, religion may play one such role. Indeed, according to a report from the Pew Research Center (2014), 81 percent of Latinos in the U.S. reported a religious affiliation (i.e., Catholicism, Protestantism, etc.), though specific religious affiliation seems to vary across nationalities or country of origin, with individuals from Mexico and the Dominican Republic reporting being affiliated to Catholicism more than other religions. Importantly, religious commitment varies across age group and immigrant generation with older Latinos and foreign-born Latinos reporting religion as being important to their lives. Additionally, a higher level of participation in a religious or church community was reported more in foreign-born Latinos than in U.S.-born Latinos (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Religious affiliation, however, is distinct from religiosity, which pertains to the adherence of a system of beliefs and participation in religious behaviors and/or practices that include both social relationships and interactions pertaining to involvement in a religious community or institution (Moreno & Cardemil, 2018). While religiosity is seen as a more social and institutionalized construct, spirituality is defined as a more intrinsic and individualized construct; however, both constructs often overlap (Nadal, Hardy, & Barry, 2018). Indeed, Nadal, Hardy, and Barry (2018) investigated religiosity and spirituality (R/S) and found that describing participant profiles as *low R/S*, *moderate R/S*, and *high R/S* in the sample was more accurate than separating participants into four

different categories that separated religiosity and spirituality: *religious and spiritual*, *spiritual but not religious*, *neither religious nor spiritual*, and *religious but not spiritual*. They also found that the majority of the sample were either *religious and spiritual* or *neither religious nor spiritual* categories, indicating that most individuals identify as both religious and spiritual simultaneously or neither at all. Adding further complexity to the measurement of religiosity/spirituality, Cornwall and Albrecht (1986) stated that a majority of studies researching spirituality and religiosity actually assess religious participation, which encompasses church attendance and involvement and may actually reflect a different construct. Indeed, the researchers described that this element of spirituality and religiosity is commitment, specifically, spiritual commitment and church commitment. The Pew Research Center (2014) further described religious commitment as having three dimensions which were derived from religiosity, such that commitment involves the importance of religion, the frequency of worship service attendance, and the frequency of prayer outside of worship services. In this study, importance of spirituality is the value spiritual beliefs has in an individual's life. Religious attendance is an individual's participation in organizations, such as a church or synagogue.

Acculturation and the Importance of Spirituality and Religious Attendance

Existing research suggests that religiosity and acculturation shift together among Latino immigrants. For instance, Cavalcanti and Schlee (2005) found that nonreligious Latinos were the most acculturated (i.e., assimilated and integrated) into the dominant culture in the U.S., while their religious counterparts reported less assimilation and integration. The researchers' findings were in accordance with the fact that immigrants in the past have experienced religious institutions as a place in a new culture (i.e., country)

where they are able to retain their ethnic identity (Cavalcanti and Schleef, 2005).

Similarly, Jeong (2014) found that Latinos who attended church with a Latino congregation were more oriented to the Latino ethnic identity. When churches have large Latino membership, operate in Spanish, and are less integrated, Latinos had increased interactions and contact with other Latinos and were more likely to identify with Latinos (Jeong, 2014). However, when the church Latinos attend is more integrated with members of other cultures and is a part of the dominant culture, Latinos were found to have acculturated more to the host culture (Steffen & Merrill, 2011).

Crime and the Importance of Spirituality and Religious Attendance

Because religion may promote self-control through practices and principles, an individual's commitment to religion may guide their life choices and act as a protective factor (Smith, 2003). Greater self-control and compassion have been found to be associated with religious commitment and, in turn, less indirect and direct aggression (Shepperd, Miller, & Smith, 2015). Since prayer is central to many religions, Bremner, Koole, and Bushman (2011) examined the effects prayer had on people after being provoked and found that prayer reduced anger and aggressive behavior. Juvenile offenders desisted from crime and drug use as a result of increasing religiosity over a seven-year period more so than their peers who did not experience an increase in religiosity (Jang, 2017). Jang (2017) attributed this finding to the possibility of greater impulse control and suppression of aggression. Another study found that delinquency in youth decreased when the youth and their mothers were both equally religious (score was comprised of religious participation and importance of religion) but increased when there was a discrepancy in the level of religiousness between the mother and adolescent

(Pearce & Haynie, 2004). Religious commitment has also been linked, negatively, to aggression and positively related to empathy due to the individual's perception of themselves as a moral individual (i.e., moral identity; Hardy & Walker, 2012). Because of religious commitment's buffering effect on aggression and anger, it may also have a protective effect on crime in Latino youth.

Limitations in the Current Research

Past studies have investigated the link between acculturation and religion; however, none have yet investigated if the link between acculturation and crime is moderated by either both or religious attendance and importance of spirituality. That is, does the link between increased acculturation and increased crime depend on the individual's importance of spirituality and/or their religious attendance? Though this question has not been explicitly tested or answered in previous research, existing literature supports the hypotheses of the current study. Jankowski, Meca, Lui, and Zamboanga (2018) explored the link between acculturative stress and hazardous alcohol use and tested the effect religious salience and involvement may have on that relationship. They found that high religious involvement and a low orientation to the U.S. culture paired with high religious salience and high heritage culture orientation was related to acculturative stress and hazardous alcohol use. The researchers proposed that this effect could be due to the stress experienced from an incongruence between the heritage culture and the host culture. Additionally, continuous contact with an ethnic religious community could contribute to the incongruent relationship between host and heritage culture orientation. Furthermore, another study on alcohol use and acculturation found that positive religious coping, or the use of religiosity and/or spirituality to reframe

or find meaning in stressful situations, decreased alcohol-use behaviors in Latino immigrants (Sanchez, Dillon, Concha, & De La Rosa, 2015). However, they also found that those who used more negative religious coping, or the use of religiosity and/or spirituality that frames negative events as a punishment from a higher power, had higher levels of alcohol use when experiencing acculturative stress. Da Silva, Dillon, Verdejo, Sanchez, and De La Rosa (2017) investigated the interaction between acculturation and psychological distress and the effect religious coping on this interaction and found that negative religious coping (or struggling with faith) exacerbated the positive relation between acculturative stress and psychological distress. However, no research to date has investigated if the importance of spirituality and/or religious attendance has an impact on the link between acculturation and crime; specifically investigating whether the importance of spirituality and/or religious attendance can moderate a possible positive relation between crime and acculturation.

The Current Study

The broad aim of the current study was to examine whether the importance of spirituality and/or religious attendance can act as protective factors for Latino youth, serving as two moderators for the link between acculturation and crime. Prior research indicates that the importance of spirituality and religious attendance can act as protective factors, generally, regarding the stress of acculturating to the dominant culture and, in samples not taking acculturation into account, these factors reduce delinquency (Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, Seffrin, 2008; Baier & Wright, 2008). However, the possibility that religious attendance and the importance of spirituality could act as protective factors, buffering the relation between acculturation and crime in Latino youth

has not been explored. The current study utilized the Pathway to Desistance study (Mulvey, 2000-2010) data, which measured acculturation, religious attendance, the importance of spirituality, and delinquency longitudinally in adjudicated youth, of whom a subsample (selected for examination in this study) identified as Mexican American. The proposed methodology improves upon several limitations noted in Johnson, De Li, Larson, and McCullough's (2000) systematic review of the religiosity and delinquency literature. Johnson et al. (2000) found that past research investigating religion and its moderating effects on delinquency has failed to use a validated instrument to measure religion, relying on only one or two items to measure religious orientation. Similarly, Benda and Corwyn (2001) reported that most research only uses one dimension of religion (i.e., attendance or importance) rather than a multi-dimensional instrument. In contrast, the current study assessed the potential protective effects of the importance of spirituality and religious attendance while also considering the role of acculturation, thereby appreciating the overlap between both constructs. The current study also sought to uncover how these effects affect the longitudinal course of crime. In this study, it was hypothesized that a significant, positive statistical relation between acculturation and crime would emerge overall. Further, importance of spirituality and religious attendance were tested as two moderators of this relation in Latino youth, with the hypothesis that the link between acculturation and crime would be significant only in the presence of low spiritual importance and low religious attendance.

Method

Participants

This study utilized data from the Pathways to Desistance study, a multi-site, longitudinal study that followed serious adolescent offenders of ages 14 to under 18 years of age into early adulthood for approximately 7 years (Mulvey, 2000-2010). Data were collected in Maricopa County in Phoenix, Arizona and Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. Most youths were found guilty of committing felonies, misdemeanor property offenses, sexual assault, or weapons offenses. For the purpose of this study, only participants who identified as Mexican American were included, due to the requirement of identifying as Mexican American to complete the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II) in the original study. Thus, the current sample included 334 of the original 1,354 participants.

Procedure

Trained interviewers assisted participants in completing interviews that took place in various locations, both private and public locations, by reading items aloud from a computer. In order to ensure confidentiality and promote honest responding, participants had the option to enter their responses with the keyboard and were guaranteed confidentiality protections by statute to the Department of Justice. Data were collected from a baseline interview, follow-up interviews every six months for 7 years after the baseline, and release interviews from 30 days or less from a stay in a residential facility. For the purpose of the study, the baseline, 12 months, and 24 months follow up data were used.

Measures

Crime. The measure used in this study was adapted from Huizinga, Esbensen, and Weiher's (1991) Self-Reported Offending (SRO) questionnaire. Although the final version of this measure in this study is 24 items, the researchers omitted two items ("Enter car to steal" and "Gone joyriding") for a large portion of participants in the beginning of the study. Additionally, murder and forcing someone to have sex were coded for confidentiality. Therefore, only 20 items were included in this study's analyses. The offenses listed vary from income offenses (i.e., stealing), aggressive offenses (i.e., fighting), and drug offenses (i.e., selling drugs). For the current study, a count variable reflecting frequency of offending in the past year was intended for use as the dependent variable. However, based on preliminary analyses, this variable was ultimately dichotomized for analysis. Data collected at 12-month and 24-month follow-up time points was gathered for this variable.

Acculturation. The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II; 1995) by Cuellar, Arnold, and Maldonado is one of the most frequently used measures of acculturation. The ARSMA-II is a 30-item scale used to measure cultural orientation toward the Mexican and Anglo cultures in Mexican American youth using a 5-point Likert scale. The adolescent's responses vary from "Not at all" to "Extremely often or almost always," with higher scores indicating a higher orientation to the Anglo culture. The previous version of this scale did not detect those who identify with both of the cultures and are "bicultural" due to its linear model of acculturation. However, this revised version of the scale is orthogonal, measuring each culture independently. The scale's two subscales, the Anglo Orientation Subscale (AOS) and the

Mexican Orientation Subscale (MOS), measures the assimilation and integration acculturation strategies from Berry's Model of Acculturation. In the original study by Cuellar et al. (1995), the AOS and the MOS subscales had relatively fair reliability coefficients of .77 and .84, respectively. Each cultural orientation is measured by affiliation (e.g., "I associate with Mexicans and/or Mexican Americans), cultural preferences (e.g., "I enjoy listening to English language music"), and language (e.g., "I speak Spanish), giving the ARSMA-II six total subscales. Once the acculturation scores were computed in this study, participants were then assigned to three different acculturation levels: Mexican-oriented, bicultural, and Anglo-oriented. The Mexican-orientation subscale had a reliability coefficient of .85 and was used at baseline to serve as an independent variable in this study.

Religious Attendance and the Importance of Spirituality. Maton's (1989)

Importance of Spirituality was assessed using a three-item instrument which measures a person's spiritual salience. Mulvey (2000-2010) added two additional items for the purpose of the Pathways study to encapsulate the multidimensional aspects of religion (i.e., attendance, importance). The original items by Maton (1989) are intended to measure how the participant's religiosity and belief in God has influenced their actions, which the participants will answer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all true" to "Completely true" (e.g., "I experience God's love and caring on a daily basis," "I experience a close personal relationship to God," and "Religion helps me to deal with my problems"). The two additional items added by Mulvey (2000-2010) intended to measure the participant's religious service attendance (e.g., "During the past year, how often did you attend church, synagogue, or other religious service?") and the importance

the participant assigns to religion (e.g., “How important has religion been in your life?”). The religious attendance item was responded to on the same Likert scale as the three previous items, but the item pertaining to religious importance was answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Several times a week.” For this study Maton’s (1998) three items were combined with Mulvey’s (2000-2010) importance of spirituality item. The 4-item scale had a coefficient alpha of .88. Religious attendance was measured separately with 1 item (“During the past year, how often did you attend church, synagogue, or other religious service?”). The two scores from these two scales were used as moderators for the relation between acculturation and crime.

Data Analysis Plan

In this study, acculturation to the U.S. (independent variable) was hypothesized to be positively, significantly related to crime in Latino youth (dependent variable) and the importance of spirituality and religious attendance were expected to moderate this relation such that it would be significant only in the presence of low spiritual importance and religious attendance. To test this interaction and possible moderation, the PROCESS Macro by Hayes software for SPSS was intended for use and confirmatory hypotheses and data analyses were pre-registered. However, preliminary analyses revealed problematic non-normality in the self-reported offending variable that could not be corrected through transformation or fitting of Poisson or Negative Binomial models. Thus, the outcome variable was dichotomized and binary logistic regression models were undertaken. First, acculturation to the U.S. at baseline served as the independent variable with 12-month follow-up self-reported offending (dichotomized) serving as the dependent variable and importance of spirituality and religious attendance at baseline serving as two moderators. Second, 24-month follow-up self-reported offending was utilized as the dichotomous dependent variable. Potential confounds including gender and age at first offense were examined and entered as covariates.

CHAPTER II

Results

For the purpose of this study, only participants who completed the ARSMA-II were included in the sample. Of the original sample of 1,354, only 334 were administered the ARSMA-II due to the requirement of participants having to identify as Mexican-American to be administered this measure. Due to additional information missing from participants, such as no data from one time point (12 months or 24 months), failing to indicate if they did or did not reoffend, or not reporting an age at first offense, the final sample size included 295 participants. Although there are five acculturation levels in the ARSMA-II, due to the small sample size when broken into five groups, participants were separated into three acculturation groups: Mexican-oriented, bicultural, and Anglo-oriented (see Table 1).

Preliminary Analyses

Frequencies for all categorical variables (gender, religious attendance, self-reported offending, and acculturation) are reported in Table 1. Notably, descriptive statistics indicated problematic skewness and kurtosis for all SRO continuous variables. Further, Poisson and Negative Binomial models demonstrated poor fit and thus, planned (pre-registered) analyses could not be conducted. Thus, SRO data was dichotomized for all subsequent analyses and exploratory analyses were conducted. Regarding dichotomized SRO, the following percentage of participants endorsed reoffending at each timepoint: 55.3% at 12 months and 44.1% at 24 months.

An independent samples t-tests was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in age at which a first offense was reported and whether or not a

subject reoffended at each time point. There was a significant difference in age between those who recidivated ($M=10.17$, $SD=1.611$) and those that did not ($M=11.26$, $SD=2.153$) at 12 months; $t(237.394)=4.833$, $p<.001$. At 24 months, there was also a significant difference in age at first offense (Recidivated: $M=9.89$, $SD=1.432$; Did not recidivate: $M=11.25$, $SD=2.088$; $t(287.821)=6.631$, $p<.001$). At both timepoints, younger age at first offense was linked to recidivism.

Independent samples t-tests did not indicate that importance of spirituality at baseline was significantly related to SRO at 12 months (Recidivated : $M=12.71$, $SD=4.31$; Did not recidivate: $M=12.22$, $SD=4.28$; $t(291)=.997$, $p=.319$), but provided evidence that it was related to SRO at 24 months (Recidivated: $M=12.32$, $SD=4.41$; Did not recidivate: $M=13.43$, $SD=4.15$; $t(291)=2.220$, $p=.027$), such that those who reported spirituality as more important to them reoffended less. Pearson's chi-square tests indicated that SRO was marginally related to gender at 12 months ($\chi^2(1, N=295)=p=.048$), but not at 24 months ($\chi^2(1, N=295)=p=.060$). At 12 months, females were less likely to report reoffending than males did. Chi-square analyses did not indicate that SRO was significantly related to acculturation at 12 months ($\chi^2(2, N=295)=p=.832$) nor at 24 months ($\chi^2(2, N=295)=p=.365$). A relation between religious attendance at baseline and SRO at 12 months approached significance ($\chi^2(4, N=295)=p=.052$). The relation between religious attendance at baseline and SRO at 24 months was statistically significant ($\chi^2(4, N=295)=p=.029$), such that recidivism decreased as religious attendance increased. Indeed, 35.4% of youth who reported never attending church in the past 12 months reoffended, while 6.9% of those who went to church several times per week reoffended.

Table 1

Frequencies Summary

		n	%
Religious attendance in past year	Never	102	34.6%
	Several times a year	78	26.4%
	Once or twice per month	50	16.9%
	Once a week	45	15.3%
	Several times per week	20	6.8%
Self-reported offending at 12 months	No	132	44.7%
	Yes	163	55.3%
Self-reported offending at 24 months	No	165	55.9%
	Yes	130	44.1%
Gender	Male	266	90.2%
	Female	29	9.8%
Acculturation level	Mexican oriented	86	29.2%
	Bicultural	151	51.2%
	Anglo oriented	58	19.7%

Exploratory Analyses

Binary logistic regression was used to test moderation in two separate models. In each model, the independent variable was acculturation in Step 1. In Step 2, interaction terms were introduced to test moderation: acculturation*religious attendance and acculturation*importance of spirituality. Dichotomized SRO was entered as a dependent variable in separate models (i.e., 12 and 24 months).

Regression findings are fully depicted in Table 2 and Table 3. In the first regression, with 12-month SRO as a dependent variable, the overall model fit in Step 1 was appropriate ($\chi^2[4, N = 295] = 26.214, p < .001$). The Cox and Snell R^2 and the Nagelkerke R^2 indicated that the independent variables accounted for 8.5% to 11.4% of the variance, respectively. Age at first offense emerged as a main effect in Step 1 ($\beta = -.305; SE = .070; p < .001$), where younger age at first offense was associated with greater

likelihood of reoffending. Acculturation level and gender did not arise as main effects. In Step 2, the overall model fit remained appropriate ($\chi^2[32, N = 295] = 50.120, p = .002$). In Step 2, the independent variables accounted for 12.6% to 16.8% of the variance. In Step 2, age at first offense remained a significant main effect and one significant interaction effect (acculturation*religious attendance) emerged, with the Mexican-oriented acculturation level as the reference group for acculturation and the “never” attending church as the reference group for religious attendance ($\beta = 1.269; SE = .626; p = .043$). Indeed, among bicultural youth 71.4% of those who attended church once or twice a month reoffended compared to 48.9% who never attended church; in Mexican-oriented youth, 61.9% of those who attended church once or twice a month reoffended compared to 52.2% of those who never attended church. While this interaction was only marginally significant ($p = .043$), it suggests that sporadic church attendance—once or twice a month—may possibly act as a risk factor for reoffending in both Mexican and bicultural adolescents, with a greater effect in bicultural youth.

In the second regression, with 24-month SRO as the dependent variable, the model fit remained appropriate at Step 1 ($\chi^2[4, N = 295] = 45.148, p < .001$). The Cox and Snell R^2 and Nagelkerke R^2 indicated that the independent variables in the model accounted for 14.3% to 19.1% of the variance. In Step 1, age at first offense emerged as a main effect, such that subjects who reported offending at a younger age were more likely to reoffend ($\beta = -.441, SE = .079, p < .001$). Acculturation also emerged as a main effect, where subjects who were Anglo-oriented ($\beta = .815, SE = .378, p = .031$) were more likely to reoffend than Mexican-oriented subjects. Where 50% of Anglo-oriented individuals reported reoffending at 24 months, only 38% of Mexican-oriented individuals reported

reoffending. In Step 2, the model fit remained appropriate ($\chi^2[14, N = 295] = 63.583, p < .001$) and the independent variables accounted for 19.5% to 26.1% of the variance. In Step 2, age at first offense ($\beta = -.453, SE = .084, p < .001$) and acculturation ($\beta = 2.364, SE = .938, p = .012$) remained as main effects. A significant interaction between acculturation and religious attendance was found when the Mexican-oriented acculturation level and never attending church were the reference groups for acculturation and religious attendance ($\beta = 1.345, SE = .625, p = .031$). Indeed, at 24-months, among bicultural youth, 66.7% of individuals who reported attending church one to two times a month reported reoffending compared to 42.2% who never attended. Among Mexican-oriented youth, 52.4% of those who reported attending church one to two times a month reoffended compared with 30.4% of those who never attended church in the past year. Replicating findings at 12 months, attending church one to two times appeared to act as a risk factor for recidivism, with a greater effect in bicultural youth. However, given that the sample size is small and there are several categorical variables, confidence in these findings is diminished and results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 2

Binary Logistic Regression, 12-month SRO

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>P</i>
<i>Block 1</i>				
Age at first offense	-.290	.066	.749	<.001*
Gender	-.695	.418	.499	.096
Acculturation				
Mexican-oriented (MO)	-	-	-	.974
Bicultural (B)	.063	.284	1.065	.825
Anglo-oriented (AO)	.020	.359	1.020	.956
<i>Block 2</i>				
Age at first offense	-.278	.069	.758	<.001*
Gender	-.815	.435	.443	.061
Acculturation				
Mexican-oriented (MO)	-	-	-	.726
Bicultural (B)	.501	.772	1.650	.517
Anglo-oriented (AO)	.423	.820	1.527	.606
Acculturation*religious attendance				
MO * Never	-	-	-	.688
B * Several times per year	.209	.430	1.233	.626
B * Once or twice per month	1.185	.607	3.271	.051*
B * Once a week	.322	.543	1.380	.553
B * Several times per week	1.612	1.151	5.013	.161
AO * Several times per year	.340	.834	1.404	.684
AO * Once or twice per month	-.001	.823	.999	.999
AO * Once a week	-.307	1.055	.735	.771
AO * Several times per week	21.33	40192.97	1.84E+9	1.00
Acculturation*IOS				
Mexican-Oriented	-	-	-	.411
Bicultural	-.061	.052	.940	.236
Anglo-Oriented	-.056	.092	.945	.542

Table 3

Binary Logistic Regression, 24-month SRO

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>P</i>
<i>Block 1</i>				
Age at first offense	-.441	.079	.644	<.001*
Gender	-.724	.468	.485	.121
Acculturation				
Mexican-oriented (MO)	-	-	-	.097
Bicultural (B)	.348	.294	1.416	.237
Anglo-oriented (AO)	.815	.378	2.260	.031*
<i>Block 2</i>				
Age at first offense	-.453	.084	.635	<.001*
Gender	-.798	.488	.450	.102
Acculturation				
Mexican-oriented (MO)	-	-	-	.041*
Bicultural	.328	.786	1.388	.677
Anglo-oriented (AO)	2.364	.938	10.631	.012*
Acculturation * religious attendance				
MO * Never	-	-	-	.158
B * Several times per year	.136	.445	1.146	.759
B * Once or twice per month	1.345	.625	3.837	.031*
B * Once a week	-2.32	.574	.793	.685
B * Several times per week	-1.042	.917	.353	.256
AO * Several times per year	-1.463	.996	.232	.142
AO * Once or twice per month	.528	.913	1.695	.563
AO * Once a week	-1.664	1.335	.189	.212
AO * Several times per week	21.69	40192.97	2.62E+9	1.00
Acculturation * IOS				
Mexican-oriented	-	-	-	.294
Bicultural	-.009	.052	.991	.866
Anglo-oriented	-.162	.104	.850	.120

CHAPTER III

Discussion

The broad aim of the current study was to examine whether the importance of spirituality and/or religious attendance can act as protective factors for Latino youth. Specifically, it was hypothesized that a significant, positive statistical relation between acculturation and crime would emerge overall but that this relation would be significant only in the presence of low spiritual importance and low religious attendance. In the present study, about 55.3% of participants reoffended at 12 months and 44.1% reoffended at 24 months. The largest acculturation group was the bicultural group (51.2%, $N = 151$), while the Anglo-oriented group was the smallest (19.7%, $N = 58$). When it came to the importance of spirituality, the minimum score was 4 (not important at all) and the maximum score was 20 (very important) with a mean of 12.93. For religious attendance, only 15.3% and 6.8% reported attending church once a week or several times per week, respectively. The majority reported low religious attendance, as follows: never attending church in the past year (34.6%), several times a year (26.4%), and once or twice per month (16.9%).

In partial support of the aforementioned link between acculturation and crime, a significant relation between acculturation and self-reported offending emerged only at the 24-month timepoint, but not at 12 months. In line with our hypothesis, Anglo-oriented Mexican-Americans reported reoffending more (50%) than bicultural (45%) and Mexican-oriented (38%) Mexican-Americans. This finding is consistent with prior research, suggesting that less acculturated Latinos and immigrants are less likely to commit crimes (Bersani, Loughran, & Piquero, 2014; Bui, 2009). Similarly, this finding

extends research demonstrating a relation between acculturation and externalizing problems, such as misbehaving at school (Peguro, 2011), fighting, delinquency, and substance use (Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Schwartz, & Cordova, 2016). Importantly, the current findings extend extant literature on acculturation and delinquency by demonstrating that even in a sample of serious juvenile offenders, increasing acculturation level confers risk for recidivism. It is unclear why this effect was present at the 24-month and not 12-month timepoint, and possibilities for future research should use longitudinal modeling techniques for further examination. For instance, acculturation is not a time invariant predictor and its lack of predictive power at the first time point (12 months) may reflect that it acts as a predictor of reoffending not initially, but with delay—a possibility best examined through longitudinal modeling. Similarly, it is possible that youth could have been placed on probation after adjudication at baseline and that probation acted differentially depending upon baseline acculturative level. Indeed, probation is not always effective at reducing recidivism and its effect has been known to depend on a variety of factors including the probation officer (Trotter, 2013).

Further, an interaction between acculturation and religious attendance was found, though it was opposite in direction to the hypothesis and contradictory to the relation found between religious attendance and offending. Specifically, sporadic church attendance (once or twice a month) was associated with increased reoffending in both Mexican-oriented and bi-cultural participants as compared to never attending church, but sporadic church attendance appeared to play a more significant role in risk of reoffending for bi-cultural youth. This effect was observed at 12 months and at 24 months, although it is important to note that the effect was only marginally significant at 12 months and was

detected among a large number of statistical tests. The direction of this effect—that some church attendance confers risk above never attending church—was contrary to the a priori hypothesis. When considering why attending church occasionally was worse for bicultural individuals than not attending at all, a possible explanation could be that the churches bicultural or more acculturated Latinos attend have a community that is most oriented to U.S. culture—which could contribute to increased acculturation, which was not accounted for in this study. Arredondo, Elder, Ayala, Campbell, and Baquero (2005) previously reported that Latina women who attended religious services were significantly more acculturated than those who did not, positing that this effect could be explained by Latinos being involved in religious communities that are more integrated into the dominant culture society. Further, their qualitative data showed that most of the Latinos who were more acculturated and were more involved in a religious organization attended churches that were English dominant and offered Spanish services, suggesting that they are attending church, and therefore, interacting with more acculturated Latino individuals. Ek's (2009) qualitative, longitudinal study that followed a girl from El Salvador for a period of eleven years provided anecdotal evidence of how churches with a more heterogenous community can keep immigrants linked to their native country through interactions with other people from similar backgrounds and the use of Spanish. These churches typically hold worship services in Spanish, have Hispanic clergy members, and have Hispanic attendants (Jeong, 2014). Rather than attending church sporadically being the risk factor for increased offending, it may be that the particular churches a bicultural individual attends may increase their level of acculturation, which in turn could increase recidivism. It is important to note that this interactive effect was

found between individuals who sporadically and never attended religious churches, suggesting that the risk conferral of church attendance in bicultural and Mexican-oriented youth may not be present at higher levels of religious attendance.

While multivariate analyses did not document a significant interactive effect for importance of spirituality, bivariate analyses provided some evidence in support of a hypothesized protective effect. At 24 months, participants who considered spirituality more important to them reported reoffending less than those who did not consider spirituality important to them. However, this relation did not transcend as a predictor in the binary logistic regression. This finding could be attributed to the fact that once the other variables were included in the model, importance of spirituality could not adequately predict decreased reoffending when compared to religious attendance and acculturation. Indeed, bivariate analyses indicated that religious attendance was related to a lower likelihood of reoffending, but multivariate analyses indicated that sporadic religious attendance in Mexican-oriented and bicultural youth was related to a higher likelihood of reoffending. Pirutinsky (2014) found that spirituality was a predictor for decreased recidivism across ethnic and racial groups using the Pathways to Desistance data, however, other research points to the fact that religious attendance and involvement may be a stronger predictor (Jang & Franzen, 2013).

In this study, important relations were identified between reoffending and demographic variables. Indeed, the most salient predictor of reoffending was age at first offense, where the younger the age participants were at first offense, the more likely they were to reoffend over time. This finding is consistent with previous research that shows offenders who begin offending at a younger age are at a higher risk for recidivism

(Barret, Ju, Katsiyannis, & Zhang, 2015; Miner, 2002; Rice & Harris, 2014; Williams, LeCroy, & Vivian, 2014). This effect was detected across 12 and 24 months. Gender was found to be significantly related to reoffending at 12 months, but not at 24 months, such that females were less likely than males to commit another crime, reflecting the broader gender gap in crime (Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018).

Limitations

There were several limitations in the present study. The first of which concerns the method of reporting offending. Because the measure of offending is self-reported and retrospective, which requires respondents to recall if they have committed certain crimes in the time span of a year and the age at which they first committed each crime, the accuracy of reporting may be affected (Kazemian & Farrington, 2005). Another limitation of this study was the requirement of only allowing participants who self-identified as Mexican-American to complete the acculturation measure. Because Mexican-Americans are not the only Latino group in the sample, selecting this measure led to the exclusion of many Latinos on the basis of not being Mexican-American and limits generalizability. Another potential conflict is that a Mexican immigrant or a second-generation, or later generation, adolescent may not identify as Mexican-American; they may either identify only as Mexican or American, which could exclude those who are highly or lowly acculturated. Therefore, an acculturation scale that is more inclusive of other Latino groups, or other ethnicities, races, and cultures, would be ideal to measure acculturation in a larger subset of a sample.

Because only participants who identified as Mexican-American were administered the ARSMA-II, a large part of the sample size could not be included.

During analyses, the large number of interactions (based on categorical predictors) were tested in small sample sizes, which affected the power of the results. Additionally, the use of categorical predictors and a dichotomized outcome variable limited variability in this study. Next, because some offenses, such as murder, sexual assault, or joyriding, were either coded for confidentiality or not consistently included across time points it is unclear if having the information of these offenses could impact the results. Lastly, the sample was a group of juveniles who have already committed a prior offense and tended to not display high levels of spiritual importance nor religious attendance. With this consideration, the results may not be generalizable to a sample of Latino adolescents who have not committed a crime and have a higher level of spiritual importance and religious attendance.

Future Directions

Because the present study identified an interaction between religious attendance and the acculturation in predicting recidivism, studying the effects of the differences in which type of church Latinos attend is of interest. For example, are any specific dominations of Christianity associated with higher levels of acculturation? How do churches with predominantly Latino congregations versus ethnically and racially diverse congregations impact Latinos' acculturation levels? In recent years, Latinos have been moving away from Catholicism and toward evangelical Protestantism, making it important to start examining new religious affiliations in this population (Pew Research Center, 2014). Additionally, investigating what impact involvement in a religious community may have on various immigrant generations could be telling of the support religious organizations provide for immigrants in the United States and how that may

impact the acculturation process. Besides spiritual and moral support, churches often provide resources for immigrants such as assistance, protection, sanctuary, and legal aid, which may increase their involvement within the church once they become more established members over time (Menjívar, 2006). Recently, there has been increased interest in crime committed by immigrants, more specifically undocumented immigrants. Thus, it is important to investigate if this is true and what factors may be contributing to this relation. It is worth exploring if feeling supported by a church community can moderate offending. To measure how religion and spirituality may act as protective factors against committing crime for this population, a more comprehensive religious or spirituality measure is needed that can assess the various dimensions of religiosity and spirituality on both the individual and organizational levels.

It is recommended in future replications that researchers use a more inclusive acculturation measure, so that both immigrants and U.S.-born Latinos from various nationalities may be included. A good acculturation measure that has been shown to have good validity and reliability across ethnic groups is the Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale by Zea, Asner-Self, Birman & Buki (2003). The scale was developed with 15 diverse focus groups made up of Latinx college students, immigrants from Latin America, China, Vietnam, Nigeria, Germany, and Jamaica, as well as students with parents born in Latin America, England, France, Vietnam, and China. The original study had two samples of Latino participants and had strong internal consistency in both samples with Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from .83 to .97 (Zea et al., 2003).

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the current study is an important first step in examining the interplay between acculturation and religion in relation to crime among Latino juvenile offenders. The present study intended to find a relation between acculturation and crime, such that the more acculturated youth are, the higher the recidivism rate—such a relation was indeed documented at one time point, indicating that future research is warranted. Religious attendance and the importance of spirituality were expected to emerge as moderators, however, only religious attendance had a main effect, with sporadic religious attendance emerging as a risk factor for bicultural youth. This effect was only seen in bicultural youth who attended church one to two times per month, but this trend did not continue into the categories of more frequent religious attendance. It is hypothesized that these findings may be due to the church the youth attends, such that a church with a diverse congregation may further increase acculturation in youth and increase crime—an important direction for future research given concerns for recidivism among Latino youth. This finding should be carefully considered, given the small power and marginal significance level and future replications should aim to have a large sample to better test this interaction.

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Zea, M. C., Asner-Self, K. K., Birman, D., & Buki, L. P. (2003). The abbreviated multidimensional acculturation scale: Empirical validation with two Latino/Latina samples. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, (2). 107.

VITA

MELISSA BRIONES

EDUCATION

Sam Houston State University Aug. 2017-May 2019

M.A. in Clinical Psychology

Thesis: The Relation Between Crime and Acculturation in Latino Youth and the Protective Effects of the Importance of Spirituality and Religious Attendance

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Aug. 2015-May 2017

B.A. Psychology, minors in English and criminal justice; graduated cum laude

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Sam Houston State University Sept. 2017-Present

Youth & Family Studies Laboratory

Graduate Research Assistant (supervisor: Amanda Venta, Ph.D.)

- Recruitment of immigrant youth and parents
- Administer questionnaires to clients and participants
- Follow up interviews
- Transcriptions of interviews
- Symposium, poster, and paper presentations at national and state conferences

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Aug. 2016-Dec. 2017

Clinical & Multicultural Lab

Undergraduate Research Assistant (supervisor: Alfonso Mercado, Ph.D.)

- Literature review for various research projects
- Poster and symposium presentations at local conferences
- Volunteer at the Humanitarian Respite Center
- Write mental health articles for Rgvision Magazine
- Administer questionnaires to participants

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Sam Houston State University Sept. 2017–Present

Youth & Family Studies Laboratory

Graduate Research Assistant (supervisor: Amanda Venta, Ph.D.)

- Shadowing Amanda Venta, Ph.D., during clinical assessments of referred patients
- Under the supervision of Amanda Venta, Ph.D., conduct clinical assessments and assist in case conceptualization of referred clients
- Write reports from clinical assessments

Harris County Juvenile Probation Department

Jan. 2019–Present

Practicum Student (supervisor: Nicole Dorsey, Ph.D.)

- Work with adolescents currently detained or on probation
- Perform psychological evaluations
- Write clinical reports

The Adolescent Center

Sept. 2018–Dec. 2018

Practicum Student (supervisor: Caryn Darwin, Ph.D.)

- Shadow clinical interview and IQ, achievement, and personality assessments
- Score assessment protocols

Sam Houston State University

Sept. 2018–Dec. 2018

Practicum Student (supervisor: Marsha Harman, Ph.D.)

- Counseling sessions with psychology undergraduate student participants

Hidalgo County Adult Probation

Jan. 2017 – May 2017

Intern (supervisor: Marta Kang, Ph.D.)

- Shadowing probation officers during misdemeanor and felony court, risk assessments, and intake
- Shadowing LCDs at Hidalgo County Probation both at the inpatient and outpatient facilities for treatment of substance abuse

SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPTS

Bailey, C. A., Galicia, B. E., Salinas, K. Z., **Briones, M.**, Hugo, S., Hunter, K., & Venta, A. C. Racial and gender disparities in probation conditions. Submitted, *Law and Human Behavior*.

MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION

Galicia, B.E., Bailey, C.A., Salinas, K.Z., & **Briones, M.** (2019). *Finding your own voice: Supervisees' experiences of clinical work with unauthorized Latinx immigrant minors*.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Bailey, C. A., Salinas, K. Z., **Briones, M.**, Galicia, B. E., Hugo, S., Hunter, K., Johnson, D., & Venta, A. C. (2019) *Racial and gender disparities in probation conditions*. Paper presented at the Annual American Psychology-Law Society Conference, Portland, Oregon.

Bailey, C. A., Galicia, B. E., **Briones, M.**, Salinas, K., & Venta, A. C. (2018, November). *Culture shock: How differences between Latino and U.S. care systems affect practice*. Symposium presentation at the Texas Psychological

- Association, annual convention in Frisco, Texas.
- Marshall, K., Abate, A., **Briones, M.**, & Venta, A. (2018, March). *The mediating role of hypermentalizing in the link between peer attachment and cyber aggression*. Poster presented at the annual convention of the American Psychology Law Society, Memphis.
- Mercado, A., Quijano, P., Nuñez-Saenz, A., **Briones, M.**, Torres, A., Villarreal-Sosa, A. (2017, August) *Trauma and health among recent refugees and immigrant adults and children from Central America*. Poster presented and first place winner at the Medical Symposium at the Doctor's Renaissance Hospital at Edinburg, TX.
- Briones, M.**, Garduño, M., Guerra, R., Hernandez, S., Mercado, A., Nuñez-Saenz, A. (2016, October) *A study exploring trauma and resiliency in Hispanic immigrant mothers and children*. Poster presented at Mindscape Behavioral Health Today at South Padre Island, TX.
- Quijano, P., **Briones, M.**, Nunez-Saenz, A., Torres, A., Villarreal-Sosa, A., and Mercado, A. (2017, April) *Voices of Latin America: A global engagement in restoring humanity*. Presented at the Engaged Scholar Symposium, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, Texas.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- Briones M.**, Nunez-Saenz, A., Torres A., Quijano, P., and Mercado, A. (Accepted) "Buscando Destino," In Voces Detenidas/Detained Voices: A Bilingual Anthology, Eds. M. Feu & A.Venta. *Macmillan Press*.
- Mercado, A., **Briones, M.**, Garduño, M., Guerra, R., Hernandez S., Nuñez-Saenz, A., Hinojosa, Y. (2017) *Combating depression in the workplace*. Retrieved from: <http://rgvisionmagazine.com/combating-depressionworkplace/>
- Mercado, A., Quijano, P., Martinez, C., **Briones, M.**, Nuñez, Saenz, A., Torres, A., Villareal-Sosa, A. (2017). *Immigration and mental health*. Retrieved from: <http://rgvisionmagazine.com/immigration-mental-health/>
- Mercado, A., Quijano, P., **Briones, M.**, Nuñez-Saenz, A., Torres, A., & Villareal-Sosa, A. (2017). *Children and Social Media: effective parenting strategies*. Retrieved from <http://rgvisionmagazine.com/children-social-media-effective-parenting-strategies/>
- Mercado, A., Quijano, P., **Briones, M.**, Nuñez-Saenz, A., Torres, A., Villareal-Sosa, A., & Ramirez, A. (2017). *Stress in college: Where it comes from, and how to manage it*. Retrieved from <http://rgvisionmagazine.com/stress-college-comes-manage/>
- Mercado, A., Quijano, P., **Briones, M.**, Nuñez-Saenz, A., Torres, A., Ramirez, A., Martinez, F., Villareal-Sosa, A. (2017). *Understanding autism, dyslexia, & adhd*. Retrieved from <http://rgvisionmagazine.com/understanding-autism-dyslexia-adhd/>