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Publication Date

2020-09-14

March 2008

'I *Am* Somebody': Victory Outreach, Masculinity and Upward
Mobility in Low-Income Latino Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

Segmented assimilation theorists posit that second generation immigrants today are at risk of downward acculturation and socio-economic mobility, and that dense co-ethnic communities provide the greatest resistance. Drawing upon data from ethnographic interviews and non-participant observation at a Pentecostal church, this paper will suggest that American-origin religious institutions may provide shelter against downward mobility through 'religious optimism'. Using a race-gender framework to explain exit from gang lifestyle and acculturation into a group promoting mainstream American values, this paper will suggest that religious optimism may sometimes be infused with traditions from the black Protestant church, as well as inner-city stylistic expressions. Therefore, the first suggestion in this paper is that the segmented assimilation paradigm should not dichotomize the values of immigrant groups against those of native-born blacks and Latinos. The second suggestion in this paper is that segmented assimilation theorists should take into consideration that trajectories may shift in adulthood.

Introduction

This paper is an ethnography of what most would consider a contradiction: ex-gang member male Latinos who still look like gang members, but seek the American dream. These men have ambitions to get married, become fathers, work well-paying jobs, and own their own homes. To understand how such men persist with such a dream, not just in spite of- but perhaps even due to- Mexican-American subculture, we need to understand how religious participation underpins their everyday lives. This paper will look at Latinos' interactions in an urban-American religious institution, a site previously ignored in assimilation scholars' portraits of immigrant neighbourhoods.

I will begin by briefly reviewing literature relevant to one of the dominant theoretical paradigms in immigration studies: segmented assimilation theory. Next, I will describe the methods by which I collected my data. I will then paint the historical backdrop of Chicano 'oppositional' culture, as it pertains to segmented assimilation in East Los Angeles; I will also give a quick introduction to Victory Outreach, a Pentecostal church which draws upon inner-city style. In my findings, I will first illustrate the continuity in masculine identities between Latino gang members and Latino ex-gang members now in Victory Outreach. I will coin the term *reformed barrio masculinity* to describe Latinos who once endorsed and engaged in illegal activities such as gang membership and drug use, but who now condemn such behaviours- despite donning an oppositional style. Second, my findings will shed light on how

members use religious worship to contest dominant society's implicitly racist/sexist claims about inner-city ex- gang members and drug addicts. Third, I will analyse how engagement in Victory Outreach activities re-orients men towards the household, and ultimately transforms members' gendered socio-economic behaviour, from downwardly-mobile deviant barrio masculinity, to reformed barrio masculinity. I will finish with two recommendations for segmented assimilation theory. First, native-born blacks and Latinos should not be used as a homogenous baseline for measuring second-generation immigrants' socio-economic outcomes. Second, segmented assimilation theory needs to account for acculturation and socio-economic mobility throughout adulthood.

Literature Review

Contemporary assimilation theorists argue that modern-day second-generation immigrants are exposed to cultural values and practices not present during European immigration of the early 20th century. Today, immigrants tend to settle in hyper-segregated urban neighbourhoods disproportionately affected by declining wages and employment in manufacturing and an hourglass economy; some scholars suggest a web of social pathologies emerges in these neighbourhoods (Wilson 1987). Furthermore, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) claim that native-born minority youth encourage their racially-similar peers to reject the dominant values of a historically racist nation, through an 'oppositional culture'. As a result, segmented assimilation theorists claim that contemporary first-generation immigrants must level ethnic community resources to protect

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their children from the anti-education/ anti-occupational attainment message projected by native-born members of lower-income blacks and Latinos, or risk losing their children to that class (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Segmented assimilation theorists posit three general trajectories for second-generation immigrants.

One is classical assimilation into a white mainstream. In immigrant families, this occurs through 'consonant acculturation', or the same-rate acculturation of first generation immigrants and their children. The romanticized myth of the American 'melting pot' and early 20th century European immigrant assimilation best fits this concept. This type of assimilation is complicated by racial difference for black and Latino second-generation immigrants in urban, low-income neighbourhoods, as barriers often block the assimilation of these immigrants into mainstream America.

In a second path, Black and Latino immigrants begin to realize their grim prospects in an economically and racially stratified society, and they acculturate into black American and US-Latino 'oppositional' groups. This occurs through 'dissonant acculturation', the more rapid acculturation of second generation immigrant children than their first generation parents. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), 'oppositional groups' are best illustrated by native-born Mexican-Americans who identify as 'Chicanos'. Such groups may reject the means of upward mobility provided by mainstream America, such as the educational system, instead engaging in gang activity and drug use. Using data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey (CILS), Portes and

Rumbaut (2006 [1990]) reveal that, by 2003, one in five male second-generation Latinos in Southern California had been incarcerated. The average age of respondents in the CILS is only 24, and Portes and Rumbaut call this 'the most tangible evidence of downward assimilation available to date' (Portes and Rumbaut 2006[1990], p. 280).

In the third trajectory, the immigrant co-ethnic community provides a protective influence. This is guided by 'selective acculturation', which involves acculturation only insofar as it is necessary to succeed in America. Margaret Gibson's (1988) study best illustrates this trajectory; Punjabi Sikhs in a central California high school acculturated to practices necessary for educational attainment in America, but did not acculturate into the peer group cultures surrounding them at school. In sum, immigrant parents must draw upon their own capital, or social capital from an immigrant co-ethnic community, in order to protect their children from the negative influence of native-born black and Latino cultures.

Segmented assimilation theorists contend that the ethnic church is a major site where immigrants can build co-ethnic communities, sheltering their children from the influence of an 'oppositional culture'. Scholars of religion and immigration have long debated whether churches which intensify ethnic identification have beneficial effects upon the lives of their congregants (i.e. Greeley 1972; Barton 1975; Smith 1978). Bankston and Zhou (1996) respond to this debate by portraying the Vietnamese Catholic church as a site sheltering second-generation urban youths from assimilating into American 'oppositional

culture'. Further research on immigration and religion suggested this, though focusing on middle-class Asian-American and Indian immigrants (Chai 1998; Chong 1998; Busto 1999; Yang 1999; Kurien 1999). Most recently, Cao (2005) investigated such processes among working-class Chinese immigrant youth in New York, and found that such religious participation re-oriented immigrant youth from an oppositional culture to mainstream America.

What happens when we look at an evangelical church which *draws upon* style associated with 'oppositional culture'? I challenge segmented assimilation's dichotomization of traditional ethnic churches and inner-city, native-born minority cultures. Whereas other authors have argued that oppositional culture may simply be symbolic (Kasinitz et al., 2004), I will explore how Victory Outreach serves as an exit strategy from gang affiliation. Neckerman et al. (1999) have argued that minority cultures do indeed provide upward socio-economic trajectories, though this research focused on the middle-class. My research is situated at a church associated with the 'urban underclass'.

Victory Outreach is a Pentecostal sect of Christianity, founded in 1961 by the charismatic Sonny Arguinzoni and expanding to over 600 worldwide churches by 2007. At Victory Outreach, members preach the idea that 'all things are possible with God' (Leon 1998). Victory Outreach members are overwhelmingly Latina/o, many of them ex-gang members or ex-drug addicts with incarceration records, who believe that Christian conversion is the key to spiritual change and material wealth (Sanchez-Walsh, 2006). Victory

Outreach's evangelist efforts are at the crossroads of what scholars call 'the borderlands,' settings where raced/gendered identities are highly in flux (Leon, 1998). Rather than being an extension of the immigrant Latino community, Victory Outreach members wear clothes and speak slang characteristic of a US-origin Mexican-American style, 'Chicano' style. In this paper I will explore how Victory Outreach members endorse mainstream American values, through the guise of a Chicano style which Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have deemed 'oppositional'. In this paper, I will use the word 'style' to refer to the aesthetic characteristics which identify someone or something with Chicano culture, such as dress or speech. I will use the word 'values' to refer to the moral codes which guide Pentecostal asceticism, such as abstention from substance abuse or extra-marital affairs.

Second generation immigrant mobility is a gendered process. Second-generation Latina and Black women generally have higher average educational attainment and socio-economic prestige than second-generation men (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Fuligni, 1997; Rumbaut, 1997; Feliciano and Rumbaut, 2005). Some scholars (i.e. Lopez, 2003; Tafoya-Estrada, 2004) claim that the gender gap among second generation immigrants' educational outcomes is partly the result of parenting practices that expose males and females to different barriers and opportunities. While immigrant parents are more likely to police their daughters and confine them to the house, immigrant parents' lack of regulation of second-generation boys' behaviour leaves those boys prone to acculturate into the low-income neighbourhood (Waters 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001;

Smith 2006). Masculine behaviour, among lower-income adolescents, is often tied to displays of defiance towards authority that often lead to educational under-performance (Willis, 1977; Gibson, 1991; Macleod, 1995). Robert Courtney Smith (2006), in his ethnography of a transnational Mexican-American community in New York, found that some second-generation Mexican-American males experienced downward mobility by being socialized into an urban American 'rapper masculinity'. Conversely, they were sheltered by a co-ethnic community that facilitated return visits to Mexico and socialization into 'ranchero masculinity'.

This characterization of competing masculinities among racial minority, downwardly mobile, second-generation males, dovetails with Alfredo Mirande's (1997) and Elizabeth Brusco's (1995) distinction between *machismo* (or the person who acts it out, who is a *machista*) and *macho*. Mirandé's research (1998) suggests that both foreign-born and US-born Latinos perceive *macho* and machista as different masculinities; machismo is egoistic behaviour, while being macho requires abiding by codes of honour, as well as being openly affectionate to women and children. Although Brusco (1995) focuses in evangelical conversion among Colombians, she too defines machismo different than male dominance or patriarchy; the fundamental attribute of machismo is non-domestic involvement, often characterized by drinking, smoking and romantic affairs. However, Brusco (1995) found that the values of Pentecostal Christianity reformed Colombian men's masculine behaviour from machismo to macho. The ascetic codes of evangelical Pentecostalism:

Ascetic codes forbid much of the behavior associated with the machismo complex: men can no longer drink, smoke, or have women outside of their marriage. A man's social world becomes transformed also, from the male public world to a redefined private world where the family is the central focus (Brusco 1995, p. 125).

Brusco claims that such a shift in gendered practices re-orients the flow of capital back towards the house, with the effect of stimulating consumption habits that influence the likelihood of upward mobility.

Household consumption can include income-generating purchases, such as real estate (houses or land, urban and rural), live-stock, a car or truck, and of course education for children. It is important to note that such investment is distinct from individual entrepreneurship because it is strategically linked to consumption and it is household based (Brusco 1995, p. 125).

Although Brusco focuses on the Colombian case, I will base my analysis on Brusco's framework, as Mirandé did not touch upon the concepts of socio-economic mobility or religious participation.

The topic of second generation immigrants' experiences as adults has recently entered the segmented assimilation debate. Herbert Gans (2007) recently argued that segmented assimilation theorists examined the concept of 'second generation decline' by disproportionately focusing their research on adolescence, when acculturation and assimilation are processes that occur throughout the life course. Gans (2007) claims that, for example, a manual

labourer who is downsized at a manufacturing plant experiences a type of acculturation. Rumbaut (2005) uncovered quantitative evidence from the CILS suggesting that education, incarceration and early child-bearing have negative consequences for adult second generation immigrants' socio-economic trajectories. In early adulthood, such processes accumulate to make upward mobility more difficult. However, this does not mean such mobility is impossible. I would like to ask 'what about the adult acculturation of Chicano men who were previously downwardly mobile but no longer wish to be?'

In sum, I would like to point out two caveats between segmented assimilation theory, as popularly used, and the way I will use segmented assimilation theory to frame my study of ex-transitioning gang members. First, second generation immigrants' acculturation and socio-economic trajectories are gendered. Second, acculturation occurs throughout the life course. In this study, I will seek to answer four questions. 'How are Victory Outreach symbols and messages received by ex-/transitioning gang members? How are these symbols and messages meaningful?' 'How do former and transitioning gang members in Victory Outreach explain and narrate their departure from gang life?' And, 'how do ex-/transitioning gang members use the outreach activities to transition out of gang life?'

Data and Methods

Interviews and non-participant observation at Victory Outreach events, at two sites in the eastern part of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, constitute the data

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for this study. Both fieldwork sites were similar in most aspects but size. Victory Outreach- Dos Robles offered services to anywhere from 150-230 persons in attendance. Victory Outreach- El Valle offered services to anywhere from forty to eighty persons in attendance. Both churches were composed of roughly equal parts male and female. Victory Outreach- Dos Robles' congregation would typically be about four-fifths adults, while Victory Outreach- El Valle's congregation typically had roughly equal parts of adults and children. I noted that children had usually been introduced to the church by their parents, although I did not focus on this aspect of the church's social interactions. Both churches were both composed predominantly of non-immigrants, although, in my estimates, about one-fourth of Victory Outreach- El Valle's congregation and two-fifths of Victory Outreach- Dos Robles' congregation were second-generation. And lastly, at least among males, pastors anecdotally mentioned that many, but not all, had been prior gang members. Those who were not prior gang members were usually ex- drug addicts; although the segmented assimilation paradigm *would* classify drug users who act out an oppositional style as downwardly mobile, I excluded such persons from my interviews for the sake of conceptual clarity.

I took notes of social interactions and speeches, while observing stage-play performances and religious activities. Non-participant observation was a key component of this project, as I spent fifty-five hours at field sites taking notes. I explained the purpose of this project as one in which I sought to learn more about the meaning of faith-based outreach to transitioning gang members,

and asked some subjects if they were willing to be interviewed. Despite the fact that I am not an ex- drug addict or gang member, there was little discomfort for either subjects or myself, when interviews were carried out. Victory Outreach is an evangelist organization, and members dedicate much of their free time meeting new persons, sharing their stories, and trying to foster relationships with some persons who have never even been drug addicts or gang members; after interviews many respondents smiled and said a few positive words about the experience. I conducted and recorded semi-structured interviews with twenty male Latino ex-/transitioning gang members. Most had criminal records and had previously been incarcerated. Regarding the origins of my respondents, ten of my respondents could reasonably be classified as second-generation immigrants, as they were all native-born but for two brought to the US at an age of six months; of these, eight were of Mexican descent and two of Salvadoran descent. In addition, one of my subjects could reasonably be classified as 1.5 generation; Mario who was brought to the US at the age of thirteen, but not before joining a transnational street gang in El Salvador. Nine of my subjects were third-generation-plus Mexican-Americans. My sample of 1.5 and second generation immigrant Latinos, which I will refer to from here on as second-generation, is drawn upon to best illustrate the concepts I use in relation to segmented assimilation theory. However, the processes I will describe affected third-generation-plus respondents in a way indistinguishable from second-generation immigrant respondents. This falls in line with Gans' (2007) re-conceptualization of acculturation and mobility as processes not limited to

immigrants. Lastly, the men ranged in age from nineteen to seventy-two, but only four were older than forty-three.

I followed the extended case method in the process of collecting data and writing analyses (Burawoy et al. 1991). I sought to integrate anomalous cases of Latinos who promote mainstream values, through a barrio style, into segmented assimilation theory, which tends to conflate socio-economic trajectories with cultural influences. I also sought to integrate the experiences of my previously downwardly mobile subjects into segmented assimilation theory, which assumes adolescent acculturation is a significant predictor of socio-economic mobility in adulthood.

Findings

Values, Style and Masculinity

Victory Outreach makes use of cultural styles found among low-income urban Latinos in order to gain and maintain membership (Leon 2004; Sanchez-Walsh 2003). I found this to be true in my research. Barrio symbols were visible on flyers that are handed out, with air-brush artwork and low-riders promoting church events. Many if not all male members groomed themselves and wore clothes according to what was popular in the barrio. Such a style included thick moustaches, shaved heads, old gang tattoos, plaid shirts, white shirts, Raiders and USC jerseys, loose-fitting jeans, or pleated khakis with white sneakers. Men in Victory Outreach also spoke using east Los Angeles barrio slang such as, *heina* (girlfriend), *homeboy* (close male friend), or *ranking out*

(deciding to not participate in something after committing to it); male members spread the message of God to gang members on the street, by speaking with local language familiar to gang members and drug addicts from such neighbourhoods. Lastly, Pastors drew upon life in the barrio in order to give examples for lessons during sermon.

I found that the codes of ex-gang members who had converted to Pentecostal evangelism, through Victory Outreach, contrasted with those of their past. These ex-gang members once condoned activities, such as drug use and violence, that were legally reprehensible, as well as behaviours that caused stress and suffering to family members, such as marital affairs or lack of emotional involvement in family members' lives. However, at a Sunday worship service at Victory Outreach- El Valle, Pastor David said, 'Now, a lot of people might think, yeah, but they used to be smokin' dope and tryin' to get with each other. But we ain't the same anymore'. Members in the congregation affirmed the statement with 'Amen'. This resonated with Brusco's (1995) work on masculinity and reformed behaviour among Colombian men. However, the cultural symbols and institutionalized social relations giving life to machista-oriented gang-member masculinity had been planted deep in the roots of East Los Angeles since Depression-era zoot suit culture. For this reason I will conceptualize East Los Angeles male Latino gang lifestyle as a particularly American-based masculine identity, rather than a continuation of the cultural patterns found in my second-generation respondents' countries of origin. This specific US-Latino type of masculinity I will label *deviant barrio masculinity*,

due to the types of neighbourhoods such behaviour flourishes in (lower-income Latina/o neighbourhoods, or *barrios*) and the pronounced oppositional nature that characterizes it.

In contrast to gang members in Latino-dominant neighbourhoods, men who express what I term *reformed barrio masculinity* still fashion much of the style from deviant barrio masculinity, but now promote mainstream values. These men value non-criminal behaviour, legitimate employment, and being emotionally supportive of family members. These men express reformed barrio masculinity, as opposed to a mainstream masculinity for two reasons. First, they voice their values in contrast to deviant barrio masculinity: they were once engaged in such behaviours, were not happy with their lives, decided to change, and are now satisfied. Second, barrio cultural style, such as clothing and speech, colour the expressions of reformed barrio masculinity.

Aside from flyers, church decorations and informal social interactions, pastors commonly draw upon life in the barrio to illustrate examples in their sermons. A pastor once used the examples of helping out during weight-lifting, serving *burritos* to visitors in one's house, and taking *chiles rellenos* to a church function, in order to deliver a sermon concerning the importance of thoughtfulness in practicing Christian servitude. During another sermon a member talked about early days in Victory Outreach when he would run from a pastor 'like a probation officer'. And on another occasion, a reverend talked about trials that build character. He said, 'We need a crisis, we need a trial. I hear someone in the back saying, "we're done with trials". But this is a

different form of trial, not the type in front of a judge'. In all examples, persons in the congregation laughed at jokes, a sign that church leaders reached the congregation by reference to life in east Los Angeles barrios.

The continuity between deviant barrio masculinity and reformed barrio masculinity provides a bridge for youth who have acculturated into gangs but now seek to achieve the patriarchal American Dream: to maintain a stable job, get married and have kids. This goal implicitly requires avoiding confrontations with the legal system. Jaime, a thirty-two year-old second-generation Mexican-American, recalls the first time he tried to look for change in his life, away from gangs. Jaime saw gang members on a flyer advertising a Victory Outreach performance and attended without knowing it was a spiritual event.

> My role model was a gang member, all tattoos, coming out of prison, being buff, having all kinds of women, that's what I wanted to grow up to be. So I seen all that in the play, I see nothing but homeys with big ole' whips, tattoos, in the play talking about God, and that they're not using drugs, and they're not in prison no more, and I say, "ey, cool".

Jaime's attitude, and that of other Victory Outreach members, suggests that reformed barrio masculinity challenges segmented assimilation's conflation of oppositional style and values; an oppositional style is not necessarily synonymous with anti-mainstream values. Mario, a twenty-eight year-old El Salvadoran immigrant that came to the US at the age of thirteen, had joined a major transnational gang in El Salvador. Despite being from a different

country, Mario's perceptions of and relations with Victory Outreach ex- gang members were almost identical to Jaime's.

> I was messing with them too, like, "Man, you're Spider, the one from [the Mexican-American movie] Blood in/ Blood out". ...[T]hey get along with me because I came from their background... we relate, you know? I know exactly what they were talking about, their words, and the meaning of the words, and then they start talking to me about God.

Thus, the segmented assimilation model (i.e. Portes and Rubmaut, 2001; Zhou and Bankston, 1998) should take into consideration that Chicano identity and American-based religious institutions can also attempt to shelter second-generation immigrants against downward mobility. In such a setting, 'oppositional' identity is not merely symbolic as Kasinitz et al. (2004) suggest, but instrumental. The following section will describe how members use Chicano identity, together with an institutionalized form of worship influenced by the black Protestant church, to challenge stereotypes.

Religious Optimism

> My fiancée came to me one day and said, "They were like... [Mario's] not gonna change"... [W]hen she said that, right away, a scripture came to my mind. It's gonna be a lot of people talking about you... don't worry about it because they hate [God] first... we believe in what we believe. We believe in God. And

that's it. - Mario

Victory Outreach is a space where raced/gendered stereotypes in dominant society are challenged. The quote above reveals how Mario used biblical scripture to combat the dominant belief that inner-city, male, gang members cannot change. During worship services at Victory Outreach, members' personal relationships with God are 'magnified and exalted'. Loud, well-rehearsed music is played while some persons move to the music in their seats or standing up. Some simply clap, and yet others hardly move- focused deeply in a profound prayer. It is at this point that one can look around and see many men with plaid shirts, oversized clothes, pleated khakis and white sneakers, or shaved heads. Worship styles are diffuse; as one member raises his/her hand high to pray, another might be holding both hands with palms out, and yet another may be doing nothing at all. Here, one may notice hands and arms, amongst the crowd, still revealing the stamp of an old gang. A karaoke screen guides the congregation with song lyrics, and after a few songs to start off a worship service the pastor begins his sermon.

Sermons are often powerful and sensational. At the climax of any given sermon is pronounced participation from the part of the congregation, very much like call-and response as described by Patricia Hill Collins (1990). 'Call-and-response,' in its strict definition, is a form of congregation participation in black Protestant churches. However, Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) describes call-and-response as more than simply a form of spiritual worship; call-and-response validates knowledge claims rooted in the local knowledge of black churches. I

find that, just as a black-oriented world view is dialogued and expressed through interactions within a black church, so too is a Latino-oriented world view dialogued and expressed through interactions in Victory Outreach churches. Victory Outreach congregation members used call-and-response reactions to help shape the intensity of messages sent by Pastors during services- although not to the same degree one might expect in a very participatory black Protestant church. Messages from the Gospel are embedded in stream-of-thought prayers, songs, and sermons, challenging dominant perceptions of barrio gang members and drug addicts as lacking compassion and lacking the ability to change.

Reverend Ernest at VO- Dos Robles once gave a sermon which referenced his own prior gang affiliation, in order to deliver a message about using spirituality in order to forgive and receive forgiveness. Ernest asked, 'How many of us have partners that are impossible?' Several people said, 'Amen'. Ernest said, 'But that was once us'. The woman next to me nodded her head and said, 'uh-huh, Amen'. Ernest said, 'When I first got saved I was scaring everyone away'. A few people in the audience laugh. Ernest said,

But I still didn't trust nobody. It wasn't until I built relationship

with God. You need to learn to forgive, because you've been

forgiven. I have heart for everyone now, and that's how it

started with me. I don't deserve it, I should be 6 feet under, like

many of you here, but somebody saw something in me.

Many in the congregation clapped and cheered loudly, validating his claim that one can change from expressing a deviant barrio masculinity to a reformed

barrio masculinity.

Members contest dominant perceptions of gang members and drug addicts in more staunch terms as well. The following occurred at a Victory Outreach- El Valle service. Pastor David said, 'I want you to turn to somebody and say, "I AM somebody!" ' The congregation replied, 'I am somebody'. The pastor followed with, 'Yes I am! Yes I am! You ARE somebody! You've been washed in his blood! You've been smothered in his love! You are a child of the most high king!'

After every phrase members in the congregation repeated the pastor. A minute later the Pastor said, 'Whether you're Latino... or you're black... or you're white... or you're Indian... or you're from El Valle and your name is Shotgun'. A couple members in the congregation exuberantly responded with, 'Amen'. Pastor David shortly thereafter brought the congregation's emotions down to a relaxed tone, calmly, slowly stating, 'I am worth more than who I am on the outside'. One person quietly said, 'Amen'. The rest of the congregation sat in complete silence. Pastor David then continued his sermon with more call-and-response interactions.

The participatory-oriented nature of formal worship services creates a sense of belonging for members. This is not new. Black Protestant churches have had a long history of resisting racial oppression in America, through socially-cohesive and highly personal religious ceremonies. Church leaders drew upon traditions from the black Protestant church, such as Reverend Jesse Jackson's phrase ('I *am* somebody') and call-and-response, in order to proclaim

the quintessential characteristic of mainstream America: an optimistic belief in free will. Pentecostalism generally promotes Protestant America's 'health and wealth gospel' (Miller and Yamamori, 2007). To the extent that Victory Outreach uses black Protestant traditions to sponsor the optimistic American belief in free will, we can say that second-generation Latino immigrants in Victory Outreach are acculturating into a segment of American society influenced by black Protestantism and religious optimism. Where immigration scholars, such as Kao and Tienda (1995), have used the term *immigrant optimism* to describe immigrants with 3rd world origins, disciplined work ethic and lofty goals, I will coin the term *religious optimism* to describe both low-income non-immigrants and second-generation immigrants with disadvantaged origins, disciplined work ethic and lofty goals. The following characterizes the nature of religious optimism,

> I know it's something that's gonna seem impossible. Sometimes we might be, "Man, I'm gonna go out there, get my big house"... We might be going out there for one, two, three, four years, and we might still be living in an apartment... But I know we still got that communication with God... I mean, what else is gonna happen? You know?- Mario

Thus, persons who survive the most negative aspects of a disadvantaged upbringing, such as growing up in the inner-city, may actually later feel hope in becoming upwardly mobile. In the next section I will discuss how members' gendered behaviours were reformed in such a way to maximize their

contributions to the household, sheltering themselves against downward mobility and influencing the probability of upward mobility for them and their families.

Reformed Barrio Masculine Acculturation and Upward Mobility

Christian Asceticism in Victory Outreach

Men in Victory Outreach gave testimonies of engaging in substance abuse and extra-marital affairs prior to Christian conversion, yet reforming their behaviour in a way that indirectly led to capital accumulation. Reformed gang members I interviewed told stories of how they are now using their income to buy a home or enrol their children in a private school, and oftentimes at services members gave testimonies of being given a van by the church for their ongoing involvement in ministry activities. In this section I will argue, just as in Brusco's (1995) study, that the values of Pentecostal evangelicalism indirectly influenced capital accumulation and induced upward mobility for members and their families.

Household Relationships

Established members role modelled appropriate behaviour for newer members. For example, Pastor Steve taught Rudy, a third-plus generation Mexican-American in his late twenties, not to have extra-marital affairs. The gospel reference for this lesson was the classic 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Rudy said,

When I came into the church ... my wife was pregnant and I was

still being with other women ...the leadership of this church, Pastor Phillip... told me that... "What if she was to do that to you? How would you feel?" I wouldn't like it, you see? You know, do to others what you would like done to you.

To the degree that this lesson was imparted successfully upon Rudy, the time and money that normally would have been spent on extra-marital affairs could hypothetically be redirected towards the household. Arturo, a second-generation Mexican-American in his late thirties, also shared a similar story of following in the footsteps of another member.

I remember one of the pastors that came to speak at our church... [H]is son came and testified... how his dad was very affectionate to him, how his dad never missed one of his games or practices, and that influenced me too when I started having kids... [T]here's very few times that me as a father hasn't been to his practices or been to one of [my son's] games.

Members' influence upon children was not limited to parenting. In immigrant households, older siblings often fulfill capacities traditionally associated with adult parenting (Thorne et al. 2003). Gustavo, a nineteen year-old second-generation El Salvadoran, quit street activity in order to set a better example for his younger siblings.

I did not wanna go to jail for twenty years, just for doing something stupid. ... Just doing nothing and being a bad habit to your mom. To your brothers. They're trying to follow in your

footsteps and, it's, it's, just not right.

Gustavo, desiring a positive influence that he can pass down to his siblings, now participates in church activities as opposed to gang activity.

Marcelo, a second-generation Mexican-American in his early 20s, had lost privileges to see his son years ago. I suspect this was tied to Marcelo's two-year addiction to crystal methamphetamine, the ensuing time he spent in juvenile hall, and the under-employment he experienced up until recently. However, he has been clean for about four years now, and has become more and more involved in church activities. Marcelo also landed a new job with higher pay and more hours, influencing the courts to grant him custody of his son on weekends.

Work

Two Victory Outreach members I interviewed, Gustavo and Marcelo, landed new jobs during the last month of my fieldwork. Gustavo landed a new job at a hotel, through in-laws that once attended Victory Outreach. This job was at a hotel in downtown Los Angeles, and paid above a living wage and offered benefits.

Marcelo landed a $10/hour fulltime job as a driver. In addition, due to his involvement in activities, Marcelo earned a free van from the church. After packing up from a tiny 'street evangelism' rally, Marcelo made the comment to Veronica, 'that's one of the reasons why I believe God gave me this free van'. The following week, at nearby housing development, Marcelo told me how Paul, a mid-30s second-generation Mexican-American member of Victory

Outreach, helped to get him hired. Paul was also going to try to get one more church member another job in the same company. Although Gustavo and Marcelo both made use of social networks at Victory Outreach for employment, Marcelo's experience best exemplifies the manner by which Christian ascetic codes can reform machista males' behaviour towards the household, leading to capital accumulation and upward mobility. Once a drug-user and absent from his son's life, Marcelo now is drug-free, owns a van, holds a full-time job, and is part of his son's life, due to his participation with church.

Rudy also experienced a shift from deviant barrio masculinity to reformed barrio masculinity, through labour market participation. Rudy was approached by male members of the church and told that he needed to make greater financial contributions to his household. In a machista-oriented relationship, a male frequently has few responsibilities in regards to his household, but this type of arrangement is strongly contested by men in Victory Outreach.

> Here comes Pastor Steve and the leadership of the church and they're trying to help me to direct me and to say, "You need to get a job to support your family. You can't just get responsibilities and then run from it, like you used to. ... You are the man and you need to go get a job. It doesn't matter if you start off at McDonald's".

Arturo, who now works a white collar job in 'purchasing' at a large corporation, agrees that he learned a particular work ethic from social interactions at Victory

Outreach. He said,

> Another principle that was taught to me was the principle of working, working a full-time job. I would go to work sites not wanting to work. ...Today I'm able to hold a job, I'm able to work for 8 hours plus, without being tempted to leave. Without you know, arguing with my boss, that I don't wanna do the work that I'm being asked to do.

The work ethic that established Victory Outreach members seek to impart upon newer members has positive effects upon their occupational and earnings attainment. Rudy, Arturo, Gustavo and Paul all now work jobs that pay above a living wage, and Marcelo comes close. However, even in Marcelo's case, participation in Victory Outreach activities prevented him from relapsing into street life, exposed him to social networks that facilitated a new employment opportunity, and offered him the resources necessary to meet the obligations of his new job. In relation to literature on segmented assimilation, these subjects do not appear to be truly upwardly mobile in the same way that other second-generation immigrants, such as the educated children of Indian doctors or Cuban businessmen, are. In fact, possessing few educational qualifications and an incarceration record, in an economy with a bi-furcating labour market, may prove to be a stagnant socio-economic trajectory in the long run (Western, 2002). However, the fact that Victory Outreach ex- gang members are now heavily sheltered against downward mobility, and groomed to contribute socially and economically to their households, suggests that the

socio-economic effect of conversion may resemble a gradual ripple effect, such as that described by Brusco (1995). For this reason, I focused on the effect that reformed barrio masculinity had upon male, adult Latino ex- gang members' broader household participation, as opposed to a gender-free analysis of individual experiences as segmented assimilation would have.

Muscular Christianity

Victory Outreach's reformation of male behaviour is not the same as that which has occurred with other Christian-based men's movements. Historically, Christian-based American men's movements, such as the Promise Keepers, have targeted feminism and the feminisation of social spheres as responsible for emergent social problems (Messner, 2000). During my research on Victory Outreach I found no such indications. For example, at a Victory Outreach carwash, male members were excessively cheerful and humorous while working- despite the fact that a woman was responsible for collecting money and keeping track of members' duties. This is not to say that progressive understandings of sex and gender existed at Victory Outreach. The division of labour between Victory Outreach male and female members, with male pastors, female ushers and male security guards, reflects the sexual division of labour that feminists have so widely protested against in mainstream society. Arlene Sanchez-Walsh (2003) corroborates this facet of Victory Outreach. However, Victory Outreach is a patriarchal institution in which male leaders encourage male members to reflect upon the way in which their behaviour can be reformed for the social and economic benefit of themselves and their families. For

example, Mario said,

> Sometimes [women] go off, like, "Naw! You don't do nothing!"
>
> ...[Victory Outreach leaders] teach us to humble ourselves, to be
>
> quiet. Between all the words that they're throwing out, you're
>
> gonna be able to hear their need. You know, and you're gonna
>
> be able to capture what the problem is. And then you're gonna
>
> have to work on it, to fix the problem. Not bring more problems.

After Mario talked about the changes he is ready to make in his life to be ready for domestic responsibilities, I asked what he expects from his wife. Mario said, 'What I'm expecting from her? To be the way she is, all the way through.' Whereas 'Muscular Christianity' leaders sought to masculinise men and feared the femininisation of social spheres, Victory Outreach leaders sought to shape hyper-masculine men into persons more sensitive to social interactions- in a manner which brought them in line with broader American conventions of sex and gender.

Discussion

Although Chicano style helped to facilitate downwardly mobile values in adolescence, such a style is not synonymous with values that lead to downward mobility. Almost all respondents in my research reported that the cultural style of Victory Outreach drew them to the ministry before they realized it was a Christian organization. An intense, spiritual relationship with God, cloaked in an urban, masculine, barrio style, replaced the sense of belonging members once

experienced with gangs. Then, through social interactions with established male members, new male members' commitment to Christian asceticism deepened. Thus, Victory Outreach members drew upon a gendered cultural style to create a bridge between distinct socio-economic trajectories; as adults, members went from an oppositional, downwardly mobile socio-economic trajectory, embodied in deviant barrio masculinity, to a newer pathway emphasising domestic responsibilities and work ethic, embodied in reformed barrio masculinity. Paradoxically, fluidity in socio-economic trajectories actually hinged on the *continuity* of Chicano cultural style. Chicano dress and speech was key in creating a sense of belonging among men searching for and carrying out the American dream: to work a good job, buy a home, get married and have kids. This corroborates recent scholars' claims that acculturation and assimilation are gendered processes (Waters 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Lopez, 2003, Smith 2006), as well as Gans' (2007) claim that acculturation and assimilation occur throughout the life course.

Although the material resources for upward mobility were not apparent to members of Victory Outreach, hope in upward mobility became pronounced through spiritual worship. Call-and-response social interactions, drawn from the historically-resilient Black church and community, were used to challenge dominant society's racist/sexist perceptions of minorities, magnifying religious optimism. Thus, Victory Outreach's institutionalization of interactions fell into a broader religious tradition influenced by the black Protestant church. This has implications for segmented assimilation's depiction of socio-economic paths

among native-born groups.

Segmented assimilation scholars have conceptualized traditional ethnic religion as one mechanism sheltering second-generation immigrants' from downward mobility, assuming that exposure to such co-ethnic networks protects immigrants from assimilating into a native-born black and Latino –influenced oppositional culture (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Cao 2005). However, as this article suggested, there is not simply a homogenous and downwardly mobile native-born minority culture into which second-generation immigrants may acculturate. Second-generation immigrants in densely-populated native-born black and Latino neighbourhoods are exposed not just to a strand of urban culture which experiences marginalization and expresses frustration, but another strand which experiences gradual improvement and/or expresses hope. Non-immigrants and second-generation oppositional blacks and Latinos can be sheltered from downward mobility by drawing upon black influenced religious worship and barrio culture. To the extent that this is facilitated by religious institutions, we should term such a pathway 'religious optimism'. Zhou and Bankston's (1998) research on a community of Versailles residents, in a seminal piece of segmented assimilation research, suggested this; the southern black church has historically had very strong membership, and in Zhou and Bankston's (1998) research, New Orleans' blacks actually outperformed both Vietnamese and whites in educational attainment. The findings in this paper suggest a reformulation of segmented assimilation's conceptualization of the socio-economic pathways available to second-generation immigrants, so as to

include the beneficial effects of black American and US-Latino cultures. In contrast to segmented assimilation theory's homogenous depiction of the detrimental influences of Chicano and Black 'reactive ethnicity', this study suggests that Chicano and Black cultures may have positive effects upon the socio-economic well-being of second-generation immigrants.

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