

Attitudes Toward Marriage and Cohabitation among Working-Age Latinos: Does Religion Matter?\*

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### ABSTRACT

The burgeoning Latino population in the United States has renewed interest in Latino family research. It has often been assumed that Catholicism is a key factor influencing Latinos' attitudes toward family despite the fact that more than a third of Latinos are not Catholic. This paper uses data from the 2006 National Survey of Religion and Family Life, a survey of the working-age population in the lower 48 states, to explore the effects of religiosity—denomination, church attendance, and beliefs about the Bible—on Latinos' attitudes towards marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. We find that evangelical Protestants who attend church regularly have almost uniformly more conservative attitudes than do equally observant Catholics. These religious effects are just as potent as social, demographic, and economic factors in explaining family attitudes. Furthermore, belief in biblical literalism does not explain the relationship between denomination/attendance categories and family attitudes.

## INTRODUCTION

After a period of relative neglect, researchers are exploring the family patterns of United States Hispanics. Much of this new interest is presumably driven by demographic trends: Latinos have now surpassed African Americans as the largest ethnic minority population in America. Scholarship on Latino family life has long emphasized the role of distinctive cultural values, particularly "familism" and "machismo," in shaping family behaviors (Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970; Vega, 1990, Williams, 1990; Baca Zinn & Yok, 2002). In recent years investigators have come to question the importance of cultural factors, arguing instead that assimilation and socioeconomic gains are becoming increasingly important in shaping Latino marital and family behaviors (e.g., Raley, Durden, & Wildsmith, 2004; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). For the most part, these studies compare Latinos with non-Hispanic whites and African Americans. Their findings point to long-term convergence between some Latino subgroups, notably Mexican Americans, and non-Hispanic whites, on outcomes such as rates of marriage and divorce (Bean, Berg, & Van Hook, 1996; Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Raley et al., 2004; Landale & Oropesa, 2007).

Our study builds on these debates, but our approach differs in several ways. We explore attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation among working-age Latinos. Instead of comparing Latinos with African Americans and non-Hispanic whites, we seek to identify sources of intra-Latino variation in attitudes. Most importantly, we focus on a largely overlooked cultural factor in shaping Latino attitudes: religion. The neglect of potential religious influences is important for at least two reasons: (1) Although reliable data have been elusive, religious affiliation and devotion are believed to be relatively high among Latinos (e.g., Diaz-Stevens & Stevens-Arroyo, 1998), and researchers have long assumed that Latino Catholicism has been inextricably linked to familism, machismo, and other distinctive family beliefs and practices within this population; (2) Rates of

adherence to Protestantism—primarily its evangelical and charismatic variants—have been on the rise among U.S. Latinos (Greeley, 1994; Hunt, 1999), and indeed, throughout much of Latin America and the Caribbean (Stoll, 1990; Burnett, 1998; Steigenga & Cleary, 2007). Studies reveal that Latino evangelicals are, on average, more observant and devout than their Catholic counterparts, and that they hold highly conservative views on family-related public policy issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage (Ellison, Echevarria, & Smith, 2005; Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2010). Taken together, these patterns raise interesting questions about the role of religious factors in shaping attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and cohabitation among Latinos.

The remainder of our paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing recent trends in Latino family demography, focusing on marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing. Next we discuss emergent research on religion among Hispanics, with particular attention to the growth of Protestantism. We then test a series of hypotheses regarding religious differentials in marriage, divorce, and cohabitation attitudes using data on Latinos from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life (NSRFL), a national telephone survey of working-age U.S. adults with an over-sample of Latinos (n=801). The results confirm the existence of major religious differentials in family-related attitudes, with observant evangelical Protestants holding far more traditional attitudes than even their devout Catholic counterparts, often presumed to be the standard-bearers of Latino cultural conservatism. Study limitations are identified, and a number of implications and promising directions for future research are identified.

## Background

### 1) Recent Research on Latino Marriage and Cohabitation Patterns

A growing body of demographic research has assessed the distinctive family patterns of Latinos in the United States (Vega, 1990; Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Until recently, this work has typically treated Latinos (or Hispanics) as a unitary pan-ethnic category, or else has focused primarily on Mexican Americans, the largest single Latino national-origin group. Consequently, much more is known about Mexican Americans than other Latino subgroups, such as Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans. In addition, much of the existing work has compared Latinos to other racial-ethnic subgroups, primarily African Americans and non-Hispanic whites, with much less attention to intra-group variations in family-related attitudes and behaviors.

These caveats notwithstanding, several important patterns have emerged from recent research. First, several studies report that Latinos embrace comparatively strong pro-nuptial norms, tending to view marriage as far more desirable than being single. Marriage is seen as a lifetime commitment, more important than the autonomy of individual spouses (Oropesa, 1996; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000; Flores, Tschann, Marin, & Pantoja, 2004). Unmarried Latinos, especially women, tend to hold stronger marital aspirations than their counterparts from other racial-ethnic backgrounds (East, 1998). On closer inspection, these pro-nuptial patterns tend to characterize Mexican Americans—and to the extent that data permit reliable inference, Cuban Americans—more than Puerto Ricans. Such norms are also reflected in Latinos' actual behavior. Mexican Americans are more likely to marry than other racial-ethnic minorities, and as likely to marry as non-Hispanic whites, despite Latinos' relatively low average SES that might otherwise be expected to depress marriage rates (Oropesa, Lichter, & Anderson, 1994; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). In addition, marital stability has traditionally been higher among Latinos than other racial-ethnic populations with similar socioeconomic standing (Bean, Berg, & Van Hook, 1996).

Yet the focus on marriage does not necessarily rule out tolerance of cohabitation. Rates of cohabitation for Puerto Ricans are comparably high as those of African Americans, while Mexican Americans and non-Hispanic whites cohabit at similar rates (Smock, 2000; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Indeed, Mexican Americans are not necessarily opposed to cohabitation, especially if it eventually leads to marriage. For Latinos, several patterns are clear: (a) rates of childbearing to cohabiting are higher than for other population groups, as roughly 25% of all Latino children are born to cohabiting couples (Landale & Oropesa, 2007); (b) these births are more likely to be planned than are births to cohabiting couples from other racial or ethnic backgrounds (Manning, 2001; Musick, 2002); (c) Latino cohabiting relationships involving children are less likely to dissolve than are comparable unions from other racial-ethnic backgrounds (Manning, 2004; Wildsmith & Raley, 2006).

Although some research confirms Latino demographic characteristics as potentially reflecting the influence of cultural values (e.g., East, 1998; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000; Manning, 2001), a prominent theme of recent research on Latino marriage and family has been the *de-emphasis* of cultural factors (e.g., familism, machismo) as explanations for Hispanic family trends (Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Instead, researchers have drawn attention to the role of structural factors, such as SES, nativity and generation, and assimilation in explaining differences between Latinos and others, and in moderating observed patterns of Latino family distinctiveness. For example, Bean and colleagues (1996) report that apparent Mexican American advantages in marital stability—to the extent they exist at all—are confined to the first generation, and diminish with greater exposure to American culture. Similarly, Puerto Ricans with the least exposure to the U.S. have the greatest marital stability (Landale & Ogbena, 1995). In addition, the U.S.-born Mexican American population has lower marriage rates than non-Hispanic whites once

family background characteristics associated with early marriage are controlled, and the two groups are equally likely to marry in response to a pregnancy (Raley et al., 2004). These and other studies reveal that group-level differences are contingent upon nativity, generation, and SES factors, particularly education (Wildsmith & Raley, 2006; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Taken together, these findings lead many investigators to discount the importance of cultural influences, especially those like machismo and familism that have been widely invoked to characterize the Latino population (or Mexican Americans in particular) (Oropesa & Landale, 2004).

## 2) The Role of Religion

Although some cultural factors, notably machismo and familism, have been widely discussed in the literature on Latino family life, the role of religion as a potential source of intra-group variation within this population has been woefully neglected. This seems to be an important oversight for several reasons. First, interest in the religion-family connection is presently enjoying a resurgence (Wilcox, 2005; Mahoney, 2010). A particularly rich body of recent work links aspects of religion and spirituality with marital processes and outcomes (Waite & Lehrer, 2003). For example, recent studies have demonstrated noteworthy associations between religious factors and: marital expectations and aspirations (Ellison, Burdette, & Glenn, 2010); entry into marriage (Xu, Hudspeth, & Bartkowski, 2005; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007); marital commitment and dependence (Wilson & Musick, 1996); relationship satisfaction and happiness (Myers, 2006; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008; Wolfinger & Wilcox 2008; Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010; Wolfinger, Wilcox, & Hernandez, 2010); conflict and domestic violence (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Curtis & Ellison, 2002); sexual infidelity (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat, & Gore, 2007); attitudes toward divorce (Stokes & Ellison, 2010), and marital stability (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993;

Call & Heaton, 1997; Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009). Several of these studies have focused on religion and marital issues among "fragile families," i.e., low-SES, urban, predominantly race-ethnic minority couples (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007, 2008; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). However, only a handful of studies explore racial or ethnic variation in the links between religion and marriage (e.g., Brown, Orbuch, & Bauermeister, 2008; Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010), while very few focus squarely on the role of religion within specific minority populations, such as Latinos (Wolfinger, Wilcox, & Hernandez, 2010).

Among U.S. Latinos, Catholicism has traditionally been the dominant faith tradition. Currently an estimated 70% or more of U.S. Latinos identify as Catholics (Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2005; Perl, Greely, & Gray, 2006), and many researchers argue that Catholicism has long exerted a wide influence over Latino culture and family life (e.g., Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970; Williams, 1990; Diaz-Stevens, 1994). Indeed, Espin (1994) goes so far as to assert that "... popular Catholicism is the key matrix of all Hispanic cultures" and that "the study of this religion is crucial for an understanding of all Hispanic peoples" (p. 313). Catholicism embraces distinctive teachings regarding family life. In particular, Catholic doctrine holds marriage to be a Holy Sacrament. Catholic tradition also strongly discourages divorce among the faithful, and divorced persons are precluded from remarrying within the Church, although in recent years the Catholic Church has dealt with historically high divorce rates by expanding access to annulments (Wilde, 2001).

In her detailed ethnographic study of Mexican American family life, Williams (1990) observed a strong linkage between family patterns, life-cycle rituals, and Catholic religion. For example, with regard to marriage, Williams (1990) concluded:

It was taken for granted that all men and women would marry and have children, and many did so in their teens. This was reinforced by the beliefs of the Catholic Church, where marriage and childbearing are considered to be part of God's plan for human beings. Marriage was vital, for homemaking and the bearing and rearing of children were considered the ultimate fulfillment of a woman's life in this world (p. 27).

Williams (1990) further elaborated on the distinctive Mexican American wedding ceremony:

*Arras* are thirteen coins that were blessed by the priest during the ceremony. They symbolized the fact that the husband would be the provider (though there are other interpretations, such as that the *Arras* would bring the bride and groom good luck during the marriage or serve as an assurance that the couple would never be without money). The *Lazo*, a rosary placed around the bride and groom at a certain point during the ceremony, symbolized the marital bond or the union of the two persons into one. The wedding cushions were used by the bride and groom to kneel on while they received communion during the wedding ceremony. The cushions and the rosary served to reinforce the deeply religious significance of the wedding bond (p. 31).

Despite the possible waning of such traditions in some quarters, this longstanding connection between Catholic religion and marital life suggests that contemporary Latino Catholics—especially observant Catholics, i.e., those who attend services regularly—will hold relatively conservative views about marriage, sexuality, cohabitation, and divorce.

Although Catholicism remains the dominant religious tradition among Latinos, recent years have witnessed the significant expansion of Protestantism throughout Latin America (e.g. Steigenga & Cleary, 2007), and among U.S. Latinos (Greeley, 1994; Diaz-Stevens & Stevens-Arroyo, 1998). The most reliable sources now estimate that 20-25% of U.S. Latinos are Protestant

(Espinosa et al., 2005; Perl et al., 2006), and with few exceptions (e.g., Hunt, 1999), researchers have concluded that the vast majority of Protestant growth is accruing to evangelical and charismatic groups rather than mainline—moderate or liberal—variants of Protestantism (Greeley, 1994). This is an important development for a number of reasons. Compared with other Latinos, evangelical Protestants tend to hold extremely conservative views on family-related policy matters, such as abortion rights (Ellison, Echevarria, & Smith, 2005) and same-sex marriage (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2010). They are also more likely to back political candidates who endorse these views (Lee & Pachon, 2007). These patterns could imply similarly conservative normative positions regarding marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and related issues, although to date these issues have not been carefully investigated.

Many evangelical Protestants hold strong convictions about marital and other family matters. Such attitudes are thought to be rooted in a core tenet of evangelical theology: the view that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it is without error and contains necessary and sufficient information to guide most human affairs, especially those involving faith and family (Hempel & Bartkowski, 2008). Many evangelicals contend that the Bible—or at least significant portions of it—should be interpreted literally. However, it should be kept in mind that specific scriptural interpretations are not simply the product of individual readings of religious texts. Rather, these are often generated via interpretive communities, or networks of theologians, scholars, and pastors, and subsequently spread among rank-and-file laypersons (Boone, 1989; Malley, 2004). Because the Bible, like any text, is complex and multi-vocal, interpretive communities both select and (re)construct meanings about key issues, emphasizing some themes and passages (e.g., those dealing with nuclear family arrangements, sexuality, and so forth.) while downplaying others (e.g., those dealing with social justice and economic equity).

With regard to marriage, divorce, and cohabitation, evangelical leaders and communities typically emphasize Jesus' famous statement, included in many religious wedding ceremonies, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6, New International Version). On the basis of such teachings, many evangelicals conclude that divorce is a sin, and only permissible if a spouse is unfaithful, via adultery or abuse (Stokes & Ellison, 2010). Furthermore, some evangelical churches do not allow divorced or remarried congregants to hold key leadership posts (Adams, 1986). Evangelical elites have led the way in advocating public policies that promote marriage and marital stability, sometimes endorsing more restrictive laws on divorce (Stokes & Ellison, 2010) and advocating for the option of "covenant" marriage in a number of states (Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2008). Although evangelical Protestants hold a range of views concerning sexuality and fertility (e.g., Regnerus, 2007), a significant segment of the evangelical community views marriage as the only honorable context for sexual activity. Indeed, for some religious conservatives, the most important purpose—indeed, perhaps the only purpose—of sexual activity is procreation (e.g., Ellison & Goodson, 1997). Taken together, these arguments suggest that evangelical Protestants, and especially those who attend services regularly, will embrace conservative views of marriage, divorce, and cohabitation.

It is important to note that cohabitation is a complex issue for Latinos. On the one hand, Catholic and perhaps especially evangelical religious cultures tend to oppose sex outside of marriage. In the general population, religiousness reduces the odds of cohabitation and the experience of cohabitation reduces subsequent religious involvement (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992). On the other hand, as noted earlier, approval or at least tolerance of cohabitation appears to be widespread among most Latinos, and this is particularly the case if the cohabiting unions are stable and involve childbearing (Manning, 2001, 2004). The issue of cohabitation is further

complicated by the fact that many Latin American societies have longstanding traditions of consensual unions, which function very much like cohabiting unions in the U.S. (Castro Martin, 2002; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). For these reasons, the link between religion and attitudes toward cohabitation may be less straightforward among Latinos than among non-Hispanic whites in the U.S.

### The Present Study

This study adds to the literature on religion and family among U.S. Latinos in several ways. First, we examine attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and cohabitation among working-age Latinos, focusing on differences between Catholics and evangelical Protestants. We expect that denominational variation in attitudes may be most evident among regular attendees for two reasons: (a) they are arguably the most committed to their faith; and (b) they are likely to be exposed to doctrinal tenets and group subcultures on a regular basis. Therefore, like other recent studies (Ellison, Echevarria, & Smith, 2005; Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2010), we create a measure of religiosity that encompasses both denomination and church attendance. Second, we examine the links between biblical literalism and these attitudes among Latinos, and we also explore whether literalism helps to explain any observed attitudinal differences among the denomination/attendance categories described above.

## METHODS

### Data

We use data from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life (NSRFL), a 2006 telephone survey of working-age adults (ages 18–59) in the contiguous United States. The NSRFL contains extensive data on religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices, as well as detailed information on attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. Households were selected to participate in the

survey using random-digit dialing (RDD), with one respondent randomly chosen to participate from each household. African Americans and Hispanics were over-sampled by dialing into area codes containing at least 10% concentrations of those racial and ethnic subgroups. The overall response rate for the NSRFL was 36%. Although this figure is low by traditional standards, it compares favorably with most recent national surveys based on RDD (Council on Market and Opinion Research 2003), and it is consistent with the response rates of other telephone surveys upon which significant social science studies have been based (e.g., Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010). More important, studies show few differences between government surveys with high response rates (e.g., the Current Population Survey) and RDD-based surveys with lower response rates (Keeter et al., 2000; Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2004). On average, the survey took 30 minutes to complete. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, a notable strength of the NSRFL.

Due to the over-sampling, the NSRFL contains roughly equal numbers of African American, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White respondents. We analyze only the Hispanics (N = 801). After listwise deletion for missing data (see Allison, 2001), we have sample sizes of 682 to 693. The only variable in our analysis with substantial missing data is income (N = 76). For this item we include an additional dummy for missing data. More sophisticated means of handling missing data, such as multiple imputation, do not perform appreciably better (Paul et al., 2008).

### Variables

We use five dependent variables that tap various attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation. These variables measure respondent agreement with the following statements:

- “Casual sex is OK”

- “When married people realize that they no longer love each other, they should get a divorce”
- “A single mother can bring up her child as well as a married couple”
- “Marriage is an unbreakable vow before God”
- “Living together outside of marriage is morally wrong”

Agreement with each of these statements was scored with a five point scale: Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree. We dichotomize each variable so that an affirmative value represents respondents who strongly or somewhat agree with the statement in question. Exploratory analysis based on the original variables using ordered logistic regression produced virtually identical results.

Our primary independent variable is a nominal measure that combines denomination and religious attendance. We use regularly-attending (several times a month or more) Catholics as the comparison group given the received wisdom that Catholics are the core culturally conservative constituency among Latinos. The other categories are: (a) regularly-attending evangelical Protestants; (b) sporadically-attending evangelical Protestants; (c) sporadically-attending Catholics; (d) religiously unaffiliated individuals. The small number of affiliated respondents who are neither Catholics nor evangelical protestants are omitted from the analysis (N = 36).

Another of our primary questions is the extent to which differences in attitudes can be attributed to mainly religious doctrine—specifically, beliefs about the nature of the Bible—or, alternately, to institutional subcultures. Accordingly we seek to determine the extent to which religious group differences may reflect variations in belief regarding biblical literalism. Respondents were asked about their agreement with the following statement: “The Bible is the literal Word of God and a true guide to faith and morality.” Response categories are Strongly

Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. For the purposes of this study, responses were collapsed into a dichotomous variable (Strongly or Somewhat Agree vs. all others).

We use a variety of social, demographic, and economic measures to assess the relative contribution of religiosity, as well as to account for spuriousness in the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation. Three items tap potential cultural differences between respondents. These include dummy variables measuring whether respondents completed the NSRFL interview in English or Spanish, are U.S. citizens, and whether respondents are of Mexican descent. Sample size considerations preclude further differentiation of national background. Three items explore respondents' demographic attributes. These include age, a continuous variable, and dummy variables for sex and whether respondents are parents. Current relationship status has four categories: married (the reference category), cohabiting, formerly married, and never married. Finally, two sets of dummy variables tap socioeconomic status, measured using education and income. Education has four categories: not a high school graduate (the reference category), high school graduate, some college, and college graduate. Income has five categories: less than \$25,000 (the reference category), \$25,000-\$50,000, \$50,000-\$85,000, over \$85,000, and data missing. Descriptive statistics on all variables used in this study are presented in the appendix.

### Analysis

Two models are estimated for each of our five dependent variables. We begin with a baseline model that includes only demographic, cultural, and socioeconomic independent variables. Next we add the variable measuring denomination and attendance, as well as the item measuring biblical literalism. All dependent variables are dichotomous, so logistic regression is used.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the factors that predict agreement with the statement that “Casual sex is OK.” Consistent with our expectations, Protestants who attend services regularly are much less likely (OR=.39,  $p<.01$ ) than even devout Catholics to approve of casual sex. There are no other differences among religious groups, and somewhat surprisingly, endorsement of the doctrine of biblical literalism does not predict attitude toward casual sex. Among the secular variables included in our models, only three factors predict views on this topic. Not surprisingly, men are much more favorable toward casual sex than women (OR=2.42,  $p<.001$ ), while each additional year of age is associated with a 5% decline in approval of casual sex (OR=.95,  $p<.001$ ). The estimated net effect of educational attainment is weaker, but there is a general tendency for respondents with less than a high school degree to hold more favorable views of casual sex, and those with at least some college education to be more disapproving. No other secular cultural or structural variables emerged as significant predictors of this outcome.

Table 2 explores attitudes toward divorce. Our analysis considers the predictors of an affirmative response to the statement, “When married people realize that they no longer love each other, they should get a divorce.” As we anticipated, regularly attending Protestants are much less tolerant of divorce than their regularly attending Catholic counterparts (OR=.33,  $p<.001$ ). Furthermore, it appears that even less-committed Protestants hold more conservative attitudes about divorce than devout Catholics (OR=.62,  $p<.05$ ). On the other hand, it is not surprising that Catholics who do not attend services regularly tend to hold more relaxed views on divorce than their more devout coreligionists (OR=1.68,  $p<.01$ ). Contrary to our expectations, we actually find that biblical literalists are actually more accepting of divorce when partners no longer love one another as compared with non-literalists (OR=2.27,  $p<.01$ ). This result differs sharply from the

thrust of recent studies of attitudes toward divorce that have used general population samples (e.g., Stokes & Ellison, 2010). The reasons for this counterintuitive finding are unclear. One possibility is that variations in the wording and interpretation of the literalism item are partly responsible for this discrepancy. We also note that biblical literalists in this sample are slightly more likely to be divorced or cohabiting, and speculate that perhaps their own experiences with non-traditional family forms lead them to be more approving of divorce. We return to this issue in the discussion section of the paper.

Only two secular-cultural or demographic factors are associated with variations in attitudes toward divorce. First, we find that respondents who completed the NSRFL interview in English are far less likely to tolerate divorce ( $OR=.45, p<.01$ ), while currently cohabiting Latinos are more prone to approve of divorce than are married respondents; although the latter pattern is stronger in Model 1, it is reduced to marginal significance ( $OR=1.88, p<.10$ ) in Model 2, when religious variables are included. A marginally significant estimated effect of having completed some college in model 1 is eliminated when religious variables are added. Overall, factors such as SES, citizenship, national origin, employment status, and age, are unrelated to attitudes toward divorce.

Table 3 explores agreement with the belief that a single mother can bring up her child as well as a married couple. Compared with regularly attending Catholics, their regularly attending Protestant counterparts are more somewhat skeptical about this ( $OR=.57, p<.10$ ), although the effect is only marginally significant. No other religious variables emerge as predictors of attitudes about single motherhood. Still, it bears mentioning that the odds ratios for all religious comparisons are below 1.0, suggesting that devout Catholics have a relatively high tolerance for single motherhood. Among secular variables, only current relationship status and gender are associated with variations in opinions about single motherhood. Not surprisingly, formerly married

respondents (OR=2.14,  $p<.01$ ) and respondents who have never married (OR=2.12,  $p<.05$ ) hold much more favorable opinions about the abilities of single mothers to raise children as well as two-parent families than do married individuals. Men are less likely than women to agree with this statement as well. Although this gender difference remains potent in Model 2 (OR=.83,  $p<.01$ ), it is much stronger in Model 1, prior to the incorporation of religious variables.

In Table 4 we examine predictors of agreement with the statement that “marriage is an unbreakable vow before God.” Responses with no religious affiliation (OR=.21,  $p<.001$ ), as well as Catholics who attend services infrequently (OR=.55,  $p<.05$ ), are much less inclined to agree with this view of marriage than devout Catholics. There are no meaningful differences in agreement with this statement between devout Catholics and either regularly or irregularly attending Protestants. Here, in contrast to the results presented in Table 2, biblical literalists are vastly more likely than non-literalists (OR=3.12,  $p<.001$ ) to endorse conservative views about marriage . Secular variables do not predict agreement or disagreement with this item, with one powerful exception: Compared with working-age Latinos with less than a high school degree, college graduates are much less inclined to view marriage as an “unbreakable vow before God” (OR=.25,  $p<.01$ ). Although we detected a modest attitudinal difference between high school graduates and those persons without a high school degree in Model 1, this disappeared in Model 2.

Table 5 presents results for attitudes toward nonmarital cohabitation. Compared to their devout Catholic counterparts, regularly attending Protestants express much stronger opposition (OR=2.04,  $p<.01$ ) to cohabitation, while less-committed Catholics (OR=.66,  $p<.05$ ) and religiously unaffiliated persons (OR=.56,  $p<.10$ ) tend to hold more tolerant views on this issue. In addition, biblical literalists also tend to reject nonmarital cohabitation strongly (OR=2.66,  $p<.01$ ). Turning to the role of secular cultural and social factors in predicting attitudes on this topic, we find that only

two variables are associated with sentiments about cohabitation. Respondents who completed the interview in English tend to hold more relaxed views on cohabitation than those who completed Spanish-language interviews (OR=.48,  $p<.01$ ). To the extent that language of interview may serve as a proxy for cultural assimilation, this pattern is somewhat surprising in light of the literature on acceptability of alternative forms of domestic unions in some parts of Mexico and Latin America (e.g., Castro Martin, 2002). Second, college graduates are somewhat more tolerant of cohabitation than those Latinos with less than a high school degree (OR=.58,  $p<.10$ ), although this difference is only marginally statistically significant when religious predictors are included in Model 2. Although cohabiting respondents exhibit more relaxed attitudes on this issue in Model 1, the estimated net effect of relationship status disappears when religious predictors are entered in model 2.

## DISCUSSION

Animated partly by the dramatic growth of the Latino population in the United States, a burgeoning literature investigates the demography of Latino marital and family life. Much of this work emphasizes the influence of cultural and economic incorporation (e.g., generation and nativity status, acculturation, education) on Latino family attitudes and practices (e.g., Bean et al., 1996; Landale & Oropesa, 2007; Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Raley, Durden, & Wildsmith, 2004). Our work adds to this body of literature by exploring on the role of religion as a source of intra-Latino variation in attitudes about marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. Despite the expanded interest in research on religion and family in the U.S. (Mahoney, 2010), few studies in this area have focused on Latinos. It has been widely assumed that "traditional" Latino family values and characteristic behaviors (e.g., those associated with familism and machismo) have been bound up with Latino Catholic culture (e.g., Diaz-Stevens, 1994; Williams, 1990). Although Catholicism remains the

dominant faith among Latinos, evangelical Protestantism has been sharply on the rise in recent decades, and in the general U.S. population evangelicals tend to embrace particularly conservative attitudes and policy preferences when it comes to family-related matters (Woodberry & Smith, 1998; Wilcox, 2005). Taken together, these developments raise several important questions that have guided our research:

1. How important are religious factors relative to generation, nativity, acculturation, and SES in predicting individual-level variation in marital and family attitudes among U.S. Latinos?
2. Are there meaningful differences in marital and family values between Catholics and evangelical Protestants, and if so, which group holds more conservative views?
3. Are such differences especially evident among the most devout adherents of these faith traditions, in particular, among those persons who attend services religious services regularly?
4. Does the embrace of biblical literalism—an important marker of conservative Protestantism in the general U.S. population—predict more conservative family values?

Overall, religious factors clearly matter for the outcomes examined here. Our combined measure of attendance and denomination is often more predictive of attitudes regarding marriage, divorce, and cohabitation than are income, acculturation, citizenship status, and other demographic factors, including parenthood and current relationship status.

Several specific findings merit emphasis. First, regularly attending evangelical Protestants consistently endorse more conservative values than their devout Catholic counterparts. This pattern emerges with regard to four of our five outcome measures, including attitudes about the acceptability of casual sex, divorce, single motherhood, and cohabitation. Thus, even in comparison

with devout Catholics, presumably the standard-bearers of Latino cultural conservatism and traditional values, evangelicals are distinct in their views on these issues. For only one outcome, the belief that marriage is "an unbreakable vow before God", do devout evangelicals and devout Catholics hold similar positions: Latinos from both groups strongly embrace this conviction. Indeed, it has been observed that conservative views on the permanence of marriage, at least as an ideal, are widespread among Latinos (Oropesa & Gorman, 2000; Flores et al., 2004). Taken together, our results underscore the distinctively conservative values of Latino evangelicals, and raise noteworthy questions about the implications of continued evangelical growth for Latino family life and political engagement.

In contrast to the clear and consistent differences involving denomination and attendance, our findings regarding the role of biblical literalism vary considerably across the outcomes examined here. Although literalism is unrelated to attitudes regarding casual sex or single motherhood among Latinos, literalists are clearly less receptive to cohabitation. The latter pattern is highly consistent with findings based on general U.S. population samples. However, there is a curious inconsistency in literalists' views concerning marriage and divorce: On the one hand, literalists are much more likely than others to believe that marriage is an unbreakable vow before God; on the other hand, they appear more tolerant of divorce when spouses no longer love one another.

How might we interpret these relatively weak and inconsistent findings involving biblical literalism, in comparison with the strong findings involving regularly attending members of evangelical Protestant groups? In the general U.S. population, literalism often serves as a better marker of evangelicalism than denomination, due to a series of internal and environmental dynamics that have increased the heterogeneity of many predominantly European American

denominations (Gay, Ellison, & Powers, 1996; Wuthnow, 1988). Indeed, beliefs about the Bible are often more predictive of variations in family attitudes and practices than religious affiliation or participation patterns (e.g., Bartkowski & Ellison, 2009; Stokes & Ellison, 2010). By contrast, among Latinos, literalism—especially given the wording of the item used here (“a true guide for faith and morality”)—may measure religious belief and commitment more broadly, rather than tapping into a specific evangelical doctrinal belief system. Indeed, this interpretation is bolstered by the relatively high level of overall assent on this item (85% of the sample). For this reason, literalism may not be very useful in studies of religious variations in Latino attitudes concerning family life, public policy preferences, or other outcomes of interest. With respect to the puzzling findings concerning literalism and views about divorce, this is a place at which qualitative research could be especially helpful. Although researchers have used in-depth interviews and focus groups to investigate other facets of Latino religious belief and experience, to our knowledge no one has yet employed such approaches in studying the role of the bible in Latino life. Such approaches could be highly valuable in clarifying (a) what (if any) scriptural passages and readings may inform Latino views about marriage and its dissolution, and (b) how Latinos may negotiate the tension between religiously-influenced family ideals and real-world circumstances. In any event, however, the overall pattern of our results lead us to explain religious variations in family-related attitudes primarily in terms of distinctive religious subcultures of Latino evangelicalism, rather than the importance of specific doctrinal stances such as support for literalist or inerrant interpretations of the Bible.

Some of our other findings deserve mention. First, we observe surprisingly few differences between devout Catholics and irregularly attending evangelicals. Indeed, such differences surface for only one of the five outcomes, gauging the acceptability of single motherhood, and here the

evangelicals are more conservative than devout Catholics. This finding confirms the broad cultural valorization of two-parent families among evangelicals. Even the less observant evangelicals tend to reject the claim that "a single mother can bring up her child as well as a married couple." Second, as expected, devout Catholics express more conservative beliefs on three of the five outcomes studied here. Specifically, they are more likely to believe that marriage is an unbreakable vow before God, and less approving of both divorce and cohabitation. However, there are no differences in attitudes regarding casual sex or single motherhood. Third, Latinos with no religious identity are less conservative than devout Catholics with respect to the belief that marriage is an unbreakable vow, as well as cohabitation; otherwise these two groups do not differ significantly.

Finally, of the five outcome measures considered here, religious differences are perhaps most pronounced with regard to acceptance of cohabitation. Why might this be the case? Various types of alternative (i.e., non-marital) unions have long been practiced in parts of Mexico and throughout Latin America (e.g., Castro Martin, 2002). Some researchers have concluded that Mexican Americans are not necessarily opposed to cohabitation, especially if it eventually leads to marriage (Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Thus, one possibility is that these traditions have gained a degree of acceptance, or at least toleration, among many Catholic Latinos in our sample. This may help to explain the particularly wide gaps between Catholics and evangelical Protestants on this issue. However, this is an area that clearly warrants further investigation.

Our findings have a number of implications. First, additional research is needed on the extent to which the variations in family values observed here translate into differences in actual behaviors, e.g., cohabitation, likelihood and timing of marriage, childbearing patterns, marital stability and other important outcomes. Although several studies comparing Latinos with other racial-ethnic groups have included statistical controls for religious factors (e.g., Oropesa, 1996;

Oropesa & Gorman, 2000), we are aware of no studies that have examined religious affiliation, practice, and belief as sources of individual-level variation among Latinos. In particular, are evangelical Protestants—whose numbers appear to be growing—less prone to cohabit, and more likely to marry and to remain married? In addition, are there religious differences in childbearing and childrearing among Latinos, as there are among non-Hispanic white Americans (e.g., Bartkowski & Ellison, 2008; Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2008)? The answers to such questions could have broad implications for individual, family, and collective well-being among U.S. Latinos.

Second, religious differences in family behavior—should they indeed exist—could help to shape the future religious makeup of the overall U.S. population. For example, one recent forecast of the U.S. religious population to 2043 predicted that Catholicism, rather than fundamentalism or secularism, would become the most prominent faith tradition, due in significant part to the assumptions that Latino immigration (especially from Mexico) would continue at historically high levels, and that large majorities of migrants would have and retain Catholic identities (Skirbeckk, Kaufmann, & Gujon, 2010). However, among non-Hispanic whites at least, parental efforts at religious teaching and faith transmission tend to be more successful among evangelical Protestants than among Catholics (Smith & Denton, 2005). We also know that rates of religious involvement in general, and the intergenerational transmission of religion in particular, are more pronounced in intact, two-parent families (e.g., Zhai et al., 2007). Thus, if the attitudinal differences reported here are reflected in Latino family behaviors, it is possible that evangelical Protestant Latinos will enjoy a distinct advantage in the religious socialization of youth, which in turn could enhance their share of the population over the coming decades.

Third, the growth of evangelicalism, and the distinctiveness of evangelical attitudes, may have important implications in the political arena as the Latino proportion of the U.S. population continues to rise. Previous studies have called attention to the high salience of "moral" and "family values" issues among Latino evangelicals and their leaders, as well as their conservative public policy preferences on these issues, notably regarding abortion rights and same-sex marriage (Ellison, Echevarria, & Smith, 2005; Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2010). In addition, like their non-Hispanic white counterparts, Latino evangelicals increasingly identify and vote with the Republican party (Lee & Pachon, 2007). This suggests that the rise of Protestantism could be accompanied by further fragmentation of Latino political solidarity.

Our study has several limitations. As is often the case, our cross-sectional data make it impossible to establish the causal order among variables of interest. In addition, a larger sample would have been desirable. Although the size of the NSRFL Latino subsample is adequate for our purposes, it is too small to permit reliable investigation of subgroup variations. This might be especially important with regard to national-origin group, because the proportion of evangelical Protestants is highest among Puerto Ricans and Latinos of Central American descent (e.g., Diaz-Stevens & Stevens-Arroyo, 1998). In addition, support for marriage is thought to be stronger among Mexican Americans as compared with most other Latino subgroups (Landale & Oropesa, 2007; Oropesa, Lichter, & Anderson, 1994). The associations between religious variables and family attitudes might also vary according to generation/nativity status, SES, cohort, or other important dimensions of social location. Like most telephone surveys conducted in recent years (e.g., Edgell, Hartmann, & Gerteis, 2006), the NSRFL project had a relatively low response rate. As survey experts have demonstrated (e.g., Groves, 2006), this does not necessarily result in a biased sample. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that these remain matters of concern. It would also

be optimal to have better measures of some constructs, such as acculturation and generation and nativity status, which are measured rather crudely here, and to have multiple measures for our dependent variables.

Despite these limitations, we believe that this study contributes to the research literature by demonstrating substantial religious differences in attitudes toward marriage, cohabitation, and divorce among a sample of working-age Latinos in the United States. This line of inquiry is particularly important in light of (a) the growth of the U.S. Latino population; (b) the mounting interest in Latino family life; and (c) the religious ferment currently underway among U.S. Latinos. Given the results presented here, we believe that investigators might profitably incorporate the role of religious factors into analyses of Latino family behavior in the future. It is hoped that additional research along the lines sketched above will further enhance our understanding of the diversity and dynamics of Latino families in the United States.

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**Table 1: Odds ratios for net effects of religious variables and covariates on Latino toleration of causal sex.**

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic-low attendance	---	0.94
Protestant-low attendance	---	0.87
Protestant-high attendance	---	0.39**
None	---	1.05
Catholic-high attendance	---	---
<b>Biblical literalist</b>	---	0.93
<b>American citizen</b>	1.23	1.28
<b>English interview</b>	0.71	0.71
<b>Mexican origins</b>	1.18	1.17
<b>Employed</b>	1.53	1.5
<b>Male</b>	2.49***	2.42***
<b>Parent</b>	0.83	0.85
<b>Education</b>		
Not a high school graduate	---	---
High school graduate	0.68	0.68+
Some college	0.55*	0.55*
College graduate	0.60+	0.62
<b>Age</b>	0.95***	0.95***
<b>Marital status</b>		
Cohabiting	0.88	0.84
Formerly married	1.14	1.09
Never married	1.41	1.42
Married	---	---
<b>Income</b>		
< \$25,000	---	---
\$25,000-\$50,000	0.92	0.91
\$50,000-\$85,000	0.94	0.93
\$85,000+	0.83	0.78
Missing	0.78	0.84
Log likelihood	-410.86	-405.53
-2*Δ log-likelihood	---	10.66+
+p<.10 *p < .05 **p < .01 *** p < .001		

**Table 2: Odds ratios for net effects of religious variable and covariates on Latino approval of divorce when married people no longer love each other.**

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic-low attendance	---	1.68**
Protestant-low attendance	---	0.62*
Protestant-high attendance	---	0.33***
None	---	0.88
Catholic-high attendance	---	---
<b>Biblical literalist</b>	---	2.27**
<b>American citizen</b>	0.65	0.72
<b>English interview</b>	0.46**	0.45**
<b>Mexican origins</b>	1.11	1.04
<b>Employed</b>	1.17	1.17
<b>Male</b>	1.10	0.98
<b>Parent</b>	0.88	0.92
<b>Education</b>		
Not a high school graduate	---	---
High school graduate	1.11	1.20
Some college	0.60+	0.67
College graduate	0.81	1.01
<b>Age</b>	0.99	0.99
<b>Marital status</b>		
Cohabiting	2.07*	1.88+
Formerly married	1.36	1.38
Never married	1.28	1.39
Married	---	---
<b>Income</b>		
< \$25,000	---	---
\$25,000-\$50,000	0.77	0.67
\$50,000-\$85,000	0.92	0.85
\$85,000+	0.74	0.78
Missing	0.78	0.77
Log likelihood	-383.75	-362.59
-2*Δ log-likelihood	---	42.32***
+p<.10 *p < .05 **p < .01 *** p < .001		

**Table 3: Odds ratios for net effects of religious variable and covariates on Latino approval of single motherhood.**

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic-low attendance	---	0.70
Protestant-low attendance	---	0.46
Protestant-high attendance	---	0.57+
None	---	0.74
Catholic-high attendance	---	---
<b>Biblical literalist</b>	---	0.66
<b>American citizen</b>	0.97	0.97
<b>English interview</b>	0.9	0.95
<b>Mexican origins</b>	1.26	1.26
<b>Employed</b>	1.21	1.20
<b>Male</b>	0.52***	0.83**
<b>Parent</b>	0.82	0.83
<b>Education</b>		
Not a high school graduate	---	---
High school graduate	1.44	1.47
Some college	1.17	1.18
College graduate	0.91	0.81
<b>Age</b>	0.99	0.99
<b>Marital status</b>		
Cohabiting	1.45	1.51
Formerly married	2.11**	2.14**
Never married	2.08*	2.12*
Married	---	---
<b>Income</b>		
< \$25,000	---	---
\$25,000-\$50,000	1.05	1.06
\$50,000-\$85,000	0.87	0.83
\$85,000+	0.90	0.82
Missing	0.83	0.87
Log likelihood	-395.66	-390.98
-2*Δ log-likelihood	---	9.36+
+p<.10 *p < .05 **p < .01 *** p < .001		

**Table 4: Odds ratios for net effects of religious variable and covariates on Latino attitudes towards marriage as unbreakable vow before God.**

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic-low attendance	---	0.55*
Protestant-low attendance	---	0.54
Protestant-high attendance	---	1.18
None	---	0.21***
Catholic-high attendance	---	---
<b>Biblical literalist</b>	---	3.11**
<b>American citizen</b>	1.12	1.42
<b>English interview</b>	0.72	0.62
<b>Mexican origins</b>	1.10	1.00
<b>Employed</b>	0.92	0.74
<b>Male</b>	0.73	0.86
<b>Parent</b>	0.88	0.73
<b>Education</b>		
Not a high school graduate	---	---
High school graduate	0.52*	0.50
Some college	0.73	0.81
College graduate	0.23***	0.25**
<b>Age</b>	1.00	0.99
<b>Marital status</b>		
Cohabiting	0.80	0.89
Formerly married	1.10	1.35
Never married	0.76	0.79
Married	---	---
<b>Income</b>		
< \$25,000	---	---
\$25,000-\$50,000	0.67	0.66
\$50,000-\$85,000	0.98	0.94
\$85,000+	0.99	1.49
Missing	1.09	0.90
< \$25,000		
Log likelihood	-301.03	-276.09
-2*Δ log-likelihood	---	49.88***

+p<.10 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

**Table 5: Odds ratios for net effects of religious variable and covariates on Latino disapproval of cohabitation.**

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic-low attendance	---	0.66*
Protestant-low attendance	---	0.89
Protestant-high attendance	---	2.04**
None	---	0.56+
Catholic-high attendance	---	---
<b>Biblical literalist</b>	---	2.66**
<b>American citizen</b>	1.12	1.12
<b>English interview</b>	0.50**	0.48**
<b>Mexican origins</b>	0.91	0.89
<b>Employed</b>	0.87	0.86
<b>Male</b>	1.06	1.19
<b>Parent</b>	1.31	1.27
<b>Education</b>		
Not a high school graduate	---	---
High school graduate	0.75	0.73
Some college	0.76	0.76
College graduate	0.55*	0.58+
<b>Age</b>	1.01+	1.00
<b>Marital status</b>		
Cohabiting	0.55*	0.57
Formerly married	1.16	1.24
Never married	0.68	0.68
Married	---	---
<b>Income</b>		
< \$25,000	---	---
\$25,000-\$50,000	1.34	1.40
\$50,000-\$85,000	1.23	1.24
\$85,000+	1.31	1.61
Missing	1.30	1.17
Log likelihood	-444.35	-424.20
-2*Δ log-likelihood	---	40.30***

+p<.10 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

**Appendix: Summary statistics.**

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<b>Religion</b>	
Catholic-low attendance	41%
Protestant-low attendance	27
Protestant-high attendance	9
None	12
Catholic-high attendance	11
<b>Biblical literalist</b>	0.85
<b>American citizen</b>	0.44
<b>English interview</b>	0.50
<b>Mexican origins</b>	0.66
<b>Employed</b>	0.93
<b>Male</b>	0.33
<b>Parent</b>	0.69
<b>Education</b>	
Not a high school graduate	28%
High school graduate	32
Some college	20
College graduate	20
<b>Age</b>	37 (11)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Cohabiting	10%
Formerly married	15
Never married	18
Married	57
<b>Income</b>	
< \$25,000	37%
\$25,000-\$50,000	26
\$50,000-\$85,000	16
\$85,000+	11
Missing	11
<b>Dependent variables</b>	
Casual sex is OK	0.43
Divorce acceptable when partners don't love each other	0.70
Single mothers just as good as two married parents	0.71
Marriage is an unbreakable vow before God	0.82
Cohabitation is morally wrong	0.43

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Notes: Number in parentheses is standard deviation. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding error.