

THE MODERATING ROLE OF CULTURAL ASSIMILATION FOR THE EFFECTS OF
MARRIAGE AMONG MEXICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT OFFENDERS

by

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ABSTRACT

CESAR VASQUEZ. The Moderating Role of Cultural Assimilation for the Effects of Marriage Among Hispanic Adolescent Offenders. (Under the direction of DR. SUNGIL HAN)

Many prior studies exist on the topic of marriage and crime which propose marriage is negatively associated with engagement in criminal behaviors. They attribute this phenomenon to the creation of adult social bond and infliction of social control upon individuals. Where research is lacking is on the topic of whether culture may play a role in this relationship. Marriage is viewed and functions quite differently when comparing different ethnic groups through the lens of culture. This study sought to test the theory that these intrinsic cultural differences surrounding marriage would influence marriage's ability to create social bond and inflict social control in a sample of high-risk Mexican American young adults. This is so important to understand in an increasingly ethnically diverse society such as that of American society. The findings show a statistically significant negative correlation with being married and criminal offending. Also included in the findings was a statistically significant negative correlation directly between cultural assimilation and criminal offending. Lastly, when applying cultural assimilation into an interaction model as a moderating variable, no support was found for the hypothesis that culture affected marriage's ability to create social bond, inflict social control, and in turn reduce criminal offending. In conclusion, this study provides important insight on culture and criminality. In addition, this study provides a framework for much needed future research on the topic.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is a plethora of criminological research that has come about throughout the years, most of which provide some sociological explanation for why some individuals engage in criminal behavior (Agnew, 1992; Akers et al., 1979; Hirschi, 1969), but not until relatively recently have researchers really made an attempt to observe why individuals move away from this criminal behavior. This movement started after the concept of the age-crime curve was introduced (Farrington, 1986). Over time, this age-crime curve has become one of the most widely understood, and accepted, phenomenon in criminological research. This phenomenon is defined as a steady increase in criminal activity throughout adolescence, spiking in young adulthood, and later a steady decrease throughout adulthood when looking at major populations at the macro level. The discovery of this trend changed the focus from not simply understanding why some individuals engage in criminal behavior, but to also understand why some offenders move away from crime when they do.

While this trend is important, only looking at the phenomenon is not sufficient in explaining why individuals move away from crime in adulthood, thus came the area of criminological research known as life-course criminology. This theoretical perspective built upon this information, along with Hirschi's (1969) social control theoretical perspective in order to find an explanation for this clearly evident movement away from crime in adulthood, also known as desistance. The basis for life-course criminology consists of what was referred to as adult social bonds being the main mechanism by which individuals desist from crime (Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2001). The strongest social bond for adult individuals was consistently found to be created by marriage, more specifically quality marriages (Forrest, 2014; Horney et al., 1995; Laub et al., 1998; Laub et al., 2006; Sampson and

Laub, 1993). This is a very simplistic way of explaining life-course criminology, and it will be further elaborated upon, but in order to introduce the study at hand one must have a basic understanding of this theoretical perspective.

While life-course criminology has seen some very prominent research, there is still room for further elaboration upon this perspective. In fact, there is limited research on how ethnicity and culture may play a role in marriage, and therefore desistence from crime, with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. This is unfortunate because research on this subject would provide valuable information for the United States which is a melting pot of a wide variety of ethnic groups. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2020 the United States is made up of about 57.8% Caucasian American, 18.7% Hispanic or Latino, 12.1% African American, and the remaining percentage points including other ethnic groups (Jenson et al., 2021). As can be observed, the United States is not just made up of one dominant ethnic group and criminological research must reflect this. This is especially true because this ethnic diversity is a growing trend as has been observed throughout the years (Jenson et al., 2021).

Within the literature that does exist on the topic, one finding was that different ethnic groups begin desistence at slightly different points throughout the life-course and desist at different rates proving that ethnicity and culture may have an effect on desistence (Bersani and DiPietro, 2016). The study at hand is based upon this information but will take a different approach. Instead of cross-referencing data on different ethnic groups to compare them, the current study seeks to look at one specific ethnic group, Mexican Americans in the United States. This ethnic group is a subset of the second most prevalent ethnic group in the United States according to the United States Census Bureau which is Hispanic Americans (Jenson et al., 2021). The analysis will be conducted by observing the effects of cultural assimilation, which is the

adjusting and adaptation to the dominant culture of an individual's area of residence. By doing this, this study may be able to provide further insight into the process of cultural assimilation as it relates to crime, fill in gaps in literature on marriage and parenthood, and lastly provide a framework for future studies that attempt to observe the effect of marriage and crime as it related to culture.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Bonds and Social Control

Criminological research has shown that criminal behaviors are not solely the result of biological or psychological factors, but instead largely the result of sociological influences which either deter or incentivize these behaviors (Hirschi, 1969). One theoretical perspective which has withstood the scrutiny of time has been Travis Hirschi's (1969) social control theory. Social control theory, mostly directed towards adolescent offenders, states that humans by nature are inherently predisposed to engaging in deviant or delinquent behaviors, which include what would be considered criminal behaviors. It is not until social control is inflicted upon individuals that these behaviors can be deterred. Social control is the state of restriction of behavior through both formal and informal controls so that behavior conforms to societal norms.

Social control works through social bond, social bond being an individual's tie to society (Hirschi, 1969). Social bonds are formed through four main behaviors or emotions. These include attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment, widely considered to have the strongest influence (Schroeder, 2014), appears as the formation of emotional relationships with other individuals whether it be peers, teachers, and most importantly parents. This functions to form social bonds and inflict social control through human nature where the opinions of others matter, fear of disappointment exists, and fear of disruption or even loss of these relationships exist. Commitment appears as life goals, or in other words, the investment individuals make to society. The mechanism by which commitment functions to form social bond and inflict social control is by human rational in weighing costs and benefits, along with their desires for success. Social control theory states that the fear of non-achievement by destructive deviant or delinquent behaviors has a strong influence on deterring such behaviors.

Involvement on the other hand appears as engagement in conventional and prosocial activities, that is, ones that are not delinquent or deviant in nature. An example could be an adolescent engaging in extracurricular activities such as a sport. Involvement functions through the mere truth that when an individual maintains a busy schedule, there is less opportunity to engage in delinquent or deviant behavior. Lastly, belief can be defined as agreement and trust with shared societal norms, values, and institutions. When an individual agrees with these norms, values, and institutions, mainly that they are right, they are more likely to abide by them. If social bond is weakened through low levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, or belief, then social control will be lost, and individuals will revert to their human instinct which predisposes them to engage in delinquent or deviant behaviors.

Once again, social control theory is one of those theories that have withstood the scrutiny of time, especially through empirical testing. Numerous studies have found support through empirical evidence for Hirschi's main propositions (Agnew, 1985; Castello and Vowell, 1999; Kempf, 1993; Krohn, 2000; Kubrin et al., 2009; Stewart, 2003). Where social control theory falls short is it does not address delinquent or deviant behaviors in adulthood. This is important because while it is true that many individuals engage in delinquent or deviant behaviors during adolescents (Farrington, 1986), that does not mean that adults do not commit crime also. It is of the utmost importance to criminological research that researchers not just study why some individuals commit crimes, but also study why some individuals move away from these behaviors in adulthood and others continue.

2.2 Marriage and Engagement in Criminal Behavior

This is where the ideas of Robert Sampson and John Laub's (1990; 1993; 2001) life course criminology become relevant. This reverts back to the idea that marriage, being an

important social institution for adults, can reduce engagement in deviant behaviors. This is the theoretical perspective for which this study is based upon. Life course criminology explains that individuals, regardless of their criminal background whether they were chronic offenders or individuals' who were only occasional offenders, all may experience some degree of desistance or movement away from crime over time. More specifically, this social phenomenon where individuals peak in criminal behavior in adolescence and move away from criminal behaviors in their twenties, is referred to as the age-crime curve (Farrington, 1986). Life course criminology attributes this societal phenomenon to adult social bonds, which is an expansion of Hirschi's (1969) social control theory. Now, while within life course criminological research there is a definite focus on longitudinal change in criminal behavior, this review of previous literature seeks to highlight mainly the mechanism by which this change happens which as was previously stated is through adult social bonds. In other words, it must be explained what exactly adult social bonds are, how marriage acts as a social bond, and why it is associated with less engagement in criminal behavior for individuals.

Furthermore, in order to understand the mechanism by which marriage functions to reduce criminal behavior for individuals, one must first understand fundamentally what exactly adult social bonds are and make the distinction between social bonds for adults and for adolescents. In studies based upon the theoretical perspective of social control theory for which the main focus is on adolescents, it is expected that the foundation for social bonds would be based upon social institutions relevant to that age group including family (mainly parents), peers, teachers, school, extracurricular activities, etc. (Stewart, 2003). In life course criminology, the focus shifts to institutions more relevant to the age group, which can include marriage, jobs,

church, etc. (Nader and Davies Robinson, 2023). This is what gives these social bonds the label of adult social bonds.

A key component to the study of life course criminology has been the study of marriage and crime. This is because marriage has consistently been found to be the social institution which forms the strongest social bond and inflict the largest amount of social control therefore having the largest negative effect on engagement in criminal behavior (Skardhamar et al., 2015). When thought of in terms of social bonds, marriage fits all of the criteria (Nader and Davies Robinson, 2023). Within a marriage there is attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Nader and Davies Robinson, 2023). Attachment is evident through the fear of loss of that romantic relationship and the opinion of a spouse. Marriage and the formation of a family in of itself is a goal for many, and therefore fits the criteria for commitment. Marriage involves the maintenance of a household, employment in order to provide, and requires time dedicated to spouses therefore also fitting the criteria for involvement. It is even associated with less free time, less time spent with peers, and therefore less engagement in criminal behavior (Warr, 1998). Lastly, marriage requires trust and an overall belief by individuals as a social institution. Most importantly, marriage appears to inflict significant social control upon individuals (King et al., 2007; McGloin et al., 2011; Nader and Davies Robinson, 2023; Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2001; Sampson et al., 2006; Warr, 1998). In conclusion, marriage as a social institution has been a consistent factor explaining desistance from crime for the adult population and social control theory is expected to explain the mechanism of how marriage can help individual desist from criminal behavior.

2.3 Quality of Marriages and the Strengthening of Adult Social Bond

Many studies examining the effects of marriage also highlighted the importance of good or quality marriages. This is, marriages that contain no significant sources of conflict between the spouses, that are long-lasting, with spouses that are not inductive to or accepting of criminal behavior, where spouses are cohabitants, and ones that the sole purpose of their existence is not only because of the presence of a child or multiple children (Forrest, 2014; Horney et al., 1995; Laub et al., 1998; Laub et al., 2006; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Much like how desistance in adulthood is a gradual process, marriages are also built over time and become quality over time, meaning that it is something developed and strengthened over numerous years (Laub et al., 1998). This means in order for the marriage to be effective in creating social bond, it must be quality which is a timely process. When a marriage is considered a good or a quality marriage, the negative effect on engagement in criminal behavior is clearly enhanced, whereas, when a marriage is not good or quality, this desistance effect is lessened or nonexistent (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Horney et al., 1995; Laub et al., 1998; Laub et al., 2006; Forrest, 2014). This concept is consistent with the ideas of social control theory and the study of marriage because they both discuss the strength of social bonds (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2001). Social bonds can be weak or strong, with weakening social bonds leading to less social control and more deviant behavior, and with strong social bonds leading to more social control and less deviant behavior (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2001). A marriage that is not quality will not produce significant enough attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief to inflict social control and reduce crime. Since marriage is the main source of adult social bond (Skardhamar et al., 2015), it is theoretically consistent that it this would reduce marriages effect on criminality if there is not enough time for the marriage to develop and strengthen. Though

quality of marriages is not the focus of this study, it is important to understanding to understanding how marriages function to reduce crime, and how the strengthening of this social bond is a lengthy process.

2.4 Parenthood

Another component of the study of marriage is the existence of children within marriages. As was previously discussed, one of the key functions of marriage in society is the formation of the family unit (Warr, 1998). For this fact, studying this component of marriages' effect on desistence cannot be forgotten. Within the study of marriage and engagement in criminal behavior, the consensus has been that having children within a marriage, meaning they were conceived and raised while two individuals were legally married and cohabitants, it negatively effects levels of criminal behavior in adults (Datchi, 2017; Warr, 1998). Even when not focusing on marriage, parenthood has been found to be a strong enough life-altering event in the life-course that could lead to reductions in criminal behavior, though results are more mixed when marriage is not included (Boonstoppel, 2019; Datchi, 2017; Stone and Rydeberg, 2019). In other words, individuals' having children within the bounds of marriage actually strengthens the adult social bond of marriage, and therefore increases desistence or movement away from criminal behavior (Craig, 2014). This is no surprise as it would make sense that children come with a great deal of responsibility for individuals, is extremely time consuming, cause a strong emotional tie between members of the family unit, and strengthen the bond between spouses in their partnership of parenting. In other words, it would significantly increase attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief therefore strengthening the social control inflicted upon individuals who are married.

2.5 Cultural Assimilation

Cultural assimilation, an important aspect of the study at hand, is the process by which an immigrant group or minority group become accustomed to every aspect of life including the culture, behaviors, values, and beliefs of the majority group of their area of residence (Rumbaut, 2015). In a world which now experiences incredible amounts of movement of ethnic groups, this concept has become increasingly more relevant. This is especially true in the United States where the ethnic breakup of the country consists of about 13.7% foreign-born individuals as of 2020, a drastic increase from about 4.7 percent in 1970 (Budiman, 2020). And, this is just foreign-born individuals or first-generation immigrants, this does not include later generation immigrants who were born in the United States but still belong to these distinct ethnic groups. In the United States the ethnic breakup consists of about 57.8% Caucasian Americans, 18.7% Hispanic or Latinos, 12.1% African Americans, and the remaining percentage points other ethnic groups (Jenson et al., 2021). As can be seen, The United States is an extremely diverse country consisting of many different cultural backgrounds where much cultural assimilation takes place. While there is research on the effects of cultural assimilation, it is still something that could be considered as understudied, especially when it comes to criminological research, and even more within the topic of marriage and crime.

For immigrant groups, cultural assimilation is a necessary experience in order to adapt to their new area of residence and live a successful life. Immigrants who assimilate successfully to the culture of the area of residence experience higher levels of economic success, overall health, societal participation, and life-satisfaction (Arcia et al., 2001; Smith, 2003; Dato-on et al., 2006; Wadsworth and Kubrin, 2007; Piracha et al., 2023). When significant cultural assimilation does not take place, individuals who are immigrants tend to be much less successful in all areas of life (Arcia et al., 2001; Smith, 2003; Dato-on et al., 2006; Wadsworth and Kubrin, 2007; Piracha et

al., 2023). More specifically, they tend to be less educated, experience more unemployment, and had lower wages (Abamitzky et al., 2016). This can be attributed to the differing amounts of acceptance and discrimination in immigrants' area of residence (Rumbaut, 2015). When observed, there is significant empirical evidence that Hispanic American Immigrants, Mexican Americans included, tend to assimilate worse than European immigrants (Reitz and Sklar, 1997). This is relevant to the study at hand in order to understand, first, what cultural assimilation looks like for the Mexican American immigrant population, and second, the importance of Mexican American immigrants to undergo this process.

Now, to bring this review of prior literature to cultural assimilation and crime, first it must be explained how cultural assimilation has been observed traditionally in previous criminological research. Previous research has observed immigrant populations through generations. This is because different generations of immigrants experience differing levels of cultural assimilation. (Abamitzky et al., 2016; Rumbaut, 2015). First generation immigrants experience little to no cultural assimilation, whereas second generation immigrants experience more (Abamitzky et al., 2016; Rumbaut, 2015). Even later generation immigrants experience so much that they tend to resemble more the dominant culture in their area of residence than their own culture (Abamitzky et al., 2016; Rumbaut, 2015). This phenomenon can be seen with the Hispanic American population including Mexican Americans (Vega, 1990). Because of this, criminological research has been able to observe the effects of cultural assimilation on criminality. What has consistently been found is that later generations of immigrants, those who were more culturally assimilated to American culture, appeared to engage in much more criminal behavior than first- and even second-generation immigrants (Alvarez- Rivera, 2014; Bersani et al., 2014; Bersani and DiPietro, 2016; Craig et al., 2020). What this tells researchers is that out

of every area of life where success is measurable, engagement in criminal behavior is the only are where more cultural assimilation is associated with less success, or more criminality. A number of these studies were even able to look at this phenomenon through the lens of marriages effect on criminal behavior, and what was found is that more cultural assimilation greatly reduced desistence through marriage (Bersani and DiPietro, 2016; Bersani et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2020). This then raises the question, is American culture intrinsically criminogenic, or in other words, does American culture incentivize criminal behaviors? And to expand on this, does it also reduce marriage's ability to form a social bond and inflict social control? These are significant gaps in the literature. Results found in previous research suggest this may just be the case (Bersani and DiPietro, 2016; Bersani et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2020). Nonetheless, this study seeks to investigate just this, but through a different method of measuring cultural assimilation.

2.6 Culture and Marriage

Now that cultural assimilation has been discussed in relation to crime, the underlying differences in marriage for the Mexican American population must be discussed in order to understand why it may be that their culture is more inducive to stronger social bonds through marriage. When it comes to observing marriage in regard to culture, culture seems to play a significant role in marriages. When comparing different ethnic groups, there seems to be significant differences between distinct ethnic groups when it comes to observing marriage. For example, one significant difference seems to be the age that spouses tend to get married (Raley et al., 2015). Those of a more western ethnic background tend to get married much later than those of other ethnic backgrounds including Hispanic Americans which Mexican Americans would fall under (Levine et al., 1995). This is relevant because according to the literature on life-course

criminology, overtime marriages become strengthened gradually and therefore cause desistence (Laub et al., 1998). If certain ethnic groups such as Hispanic American marry at younger ages, this could affect positively the quality of the marriage over time and the development of that social bond, meaning that the marriage can develop faster at a younger age for these ethnic groups. If one were to take into account previous literature on the study of marriage and crime, than you could expect to see desistence begin earlier in Mexican Americans.

Another significant difference between ethnic groups regarding culture and marriage is that individuals of non-western ethnic backgrounds, which includes Mexican Americans, tended to prioritize other factors such as socio-economic status and parental approval when choosing their spouses whereas those of western cultural backgrounds prioritized love for the most part (Levine et al., 1995). This distinct cultural difference in which theory could be something that affects the strength of the social bond created by marriage. We know the importance of especially attachment to parents in the creation of social bonds (Hirschi, 1969). If Mexican Americans place more importance on parental approval of their spouse, one would expect to see stronger social bond through the marriages of this population and less engagement in criminal behavior. Furthermore, if Hispanic Americans also prioritized socio-economic status in their marriages, one would also expect to see enhanced commitment towards life goals regarding success as an attempt to appeal to one's spouse throughout a marriage. This would be consistent with the concept of commitment in social control theory (Hirschi, 1969).

The concept of quality marriages can also be applied to cultural differences in marriage. In fact, it has been found that culture significantly affects marriage trajectories, such that some ethnic groups saw higher levels of divorce rates than others (Raley et al., 2015). More specifically, those of western ethnic backgrounds saw much higher divorce rates than those of

other ethnic backgrounds (Levine et al., 1995), which included Mexican Americans. If Western cultures, which includes American culture, produces more divorce rates, then this could be an indication that American culture produces fewer quality marriages too. A Mexican American more assimilated to American culture could experience the same phenomenon too which could explain why those immigrants who experience more cultural assimilation tend to experience a lessened marriage effect regarding crime.

One last large difference between different ethnic groups, especially with the Hispanic culture including Mexican American, is with the role of the man within a marriage and as the father in the family unit. Western cultures highlight men and women's roles in marriage and parenthood as equal, whereas other cultures tend to highlight the distinct differences between gender roles. Some cultures, especially Hispanic culture, put the man's role as the protector, provider, and disciplinarian for children in a household (Vega, 1990). On the other hand, women in Hispanic cultures tend to fall into the role of a homemaker and highlight their maternal role as a caretaker (Vega, 1990). This is often referred to as "machismo" or "marianismo" (Vega, 1990). When observing the effects of this distinct cultural difference on deviant behaviors outside of the context of marriage, it has been found that this cultural difference can be actually harmful. It has been found that with Hispanic American men, this male dominant culture tends to create "gender-role conflict", which in turn predisposes them to engage in more harmful and/or dangerous behaviors, even those violent in nature (Casas, 1994; Eisler and Skidmore, 1987; Pleck, 1981). This is due to the need to show supposed masculinity, dominance, control, and a lack of willingness to show emotions or weakness. In the context of marriage though, there is little to no literature on how this effect marriage and crime for Hispanic American males. What is known is that men taking up the role of a husband in a marriage greatly strengthens the social

bond marriage creates (King et al., 2007; McGloin et al., 2011; Nader and Davies Robinson, 2023; Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998; Sampson et al., 2006) and the quality of a marriage (Forrest, 2014; Horney et al., 1995; Laub et al., 1998; Laub et al., 2006; Sampson and Laub, 1993). It is also known that fatherhood within a marriage has the same effect of strengthening that social bond (Datchi, 2017; Warr, 1998). One could argue that the way Mexican American culture highlights the role of a husband and father could strengthen that social bond despite being harmful to those individuals who are not married. This proposition would not be inconsistent with research on marriage and crime that states even chronic offenders who are unmarried do experience at least reduced levels of engagement in criminal behaviors if not total absence of these behaviors after marriage (Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2001).

CHAPTER 3: THE CURRENT STUDY

3.1 Description of the Study

The purpose of this study is to make the connection between culture, marriage, and desistence in an ever culturally diverse society in the United States. Research has shown that first, marriage is associated with desistence, second, there are distinct marital differences within different cultures, and third, that these distinct culture differences surrounding marriage may in fact influence desistence. For this reason, there are three research questions for which this study is based on. The first research question is, whether being married is associated with a decrease in criminal behaviors within a sample of Mexican American men? (**RQ1**) From here, the study will move on to look at how culture is associated with criminal behavior. The research question that would address this subject is, will orientation towards American culture be associated with more criminal behavior? (**RQ2**) Lastly, this study will investigate whether culture could be used as a moderating variable for the social bond that is marriage. More specifically, will cultural orientation towards American culture and away from Mexican American culture change the effect of marriage on criminal behavior in any way? (**RQ3**)

3.2 Hypotheses

There are four main hypotheses that this study will investigate, all of which will address the three research questions mentioned in the previous subsection. The first hypothesis will address marriage and criminal behavior.

H1. *Being married will be negatively associated with engagement in criminal behavior.*

This hypothesis is supported by prior literature for which most find that this statement holds true (King et al., 2007; McGloin et al., 2011; Nader and Davies Robinson, 2023; Sampson

and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson et al., 2006; Warr, 1998). The second hypothesis will address parenthood and criminal behavior. It will do this by looking at whether an individual was a parent or not for an independent variable and predicting how it may affect the dependent variable.

H2. *Having children will be negatively associated with engagement in criminal behavior.*

This hypothesis is based upon previous literature which conclude that having children may decrease engagement in criminal behavior (Boonstoppel, 2019; Datchi, 2017; Stone and Rydeberg, 2019). Prior literature also says that this is especially evident in those individuals who are married (Warr, 1998).

The third hypothesis will address cultural assimilation and criminal behavior. This is supported by previous literature, where it can be observed that orientation towards American culture is associated with more criminal behavior (Alvarez- Rivera, 2014; Bersani and DiPietro, 2016; Bersani et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2020).

H3. *More orientation towards American culture will be positively associated with engagement in criminal behavior.*

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis will address cultural orientation as a moderating variable, where marriage as a social bond works through culture to affect criminal behavior.

H4. *More orientation towards American culture will condition the effect marriages have on engagement in criminal behavior.*

As was previously discussed, prior literature shows us that marriages effect on criminal behavior is negative in nature (King et al., 2007; McGloin et al., 2011; Nader and Davies

Robinson, 2023; Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson et al., 2006; Warr, 1998). What can also be seen in prior literature is that movement towards American culture in immigrant populations may be criminogenic (Alvarez- Rivera, 2014; Bersani and DiPietro, 2016; Bersani et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2020), therefore this study seeks to investigate if this phenomenon works through marriage while measuring cultural assimilation through a different method than previously used.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Data

This study used the data titled Pathways to Desistance: A Study of Serious Adolescent Offenders as they Transition to Adulthood and Out of Crime (ICPSR 36800). This dataset is a longitudinal dataset for which data was collected between the years 2000 and 2010. Participants were enrolled between the years 2000 and 2003, then participated for seven years post enrollment. Data was collected in eleven waves over this seven-year period. This collection was conducted in two separate locations which include Maricopa County, Arizona and Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. In total, there were 1,354 participants, all of which were youth between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who were adjudicated in juvenile or adult court system and found guilty of a serious offense. In other words, purposive sampling was employed in order to select high risk youth who have been adjudicated on at least one felony charge. This dataset has proved to be one of the most comprehensive longitudinal datasets in criminological research. This is because not only for the relatively longer period for which it was conducted, but also because of the wide range of questions that were asked. This data asked questions on background characteristics, employment, education, substance use, mental and physical health, psychosocial attitudes, family context, personal relationships, community context, and engagement in deviant behaviors. Every piece of information gathered by this study is valuable information for criminological research, though this study will be using the questions on engagement in deviant behaviors, psychosocial attitudes, and family context.

4.2 Sample

As was previously stated, the data consists of participants who were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen at the start. They were then followed for seven years, data being collected in eleven total waves. This means by the final wave, participants were between the ages of twenty one and twenty five. Since the aim of the study is to examine the effects of marriage on criminal behavior of respondents, this study will only be observing the last five waves. This is because during these waves, enough participants would have been of age to be married in order to conduct the analysis whereas in earlier waves many of the participants are still adolescents and most likely not be married. In order to do this, a panel dataset for the last five waves was created. The total number of cases for this panel dataset is 1,399. In addition, because this study seeks to observe the effects of cultural assimilation on marriage and criminal behavior, not to compare different ethnic groups, the sample that will be included in the analysis of this study is specifically those participants who were Mexican American. In order to do this, participants who were of any other ethnicity will be excluded from the analysis. There were 334 participants who fell under this category of Mexican American. Lastly, female respondents were also excluded from the analysis. Because most literature on marriage and crime has focused on men (Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2001), this study will do the same. It is also important to note that the dataset used does not include a significant enough number of female respondents who were Mexican American to be able to assess the meaningful difference between male and female respondents. In total, when excluding individuals who were female, not Mexican American, and with missing data, there were a total of 288 individuals in wave 7. Lastly, it is imperative to determine how many respondents married during the study's duration. In wave 7, there were only 2 married individuals in the sample and by the final wave, wave 11, there were 23 married individuals. This can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. Number of Married Individuals for Each Wave

Wave	7	8	9	10	11
Number of Married Individuals	2	10	12	20	23

4.3 Measures: Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, consistent with past life course criminological research (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Laub and Sampson, 2001), is self-reported offending. Self-reported offending is defined as offenses an individual committed and they themselves reported to researchers. Within the dataset, these are offenses that were committed by participants in the past six months, and then reported directly to researchers. Participants were asked whether they have committed a certain offense in the past six months. This captured completely the concept of self-reported offenses and successfully operationalizes it. Also, by using this self-reported data, this study can maximize accuracy and precision of responses by taking away or at least reducing significantly the error produced by the fact that not all offenses a participant commits are known by officials of the criminal justice system. In other words, the information is coming straight from the offender, not through a third party in the courts or law enforcement.

More specifically though, this study used a score to measure the number of types of crime an individual had engaged in in the last six months. When one observes the number of types of crimes offenders engage in, one gets a better picture of the severity and extent of their offending (Han et al., 2023). In other words, this provides insight to the nature of crimes individuals engage in. This is compared to simply just measuring the quantity of crimes an individual engaged in, which while important in its own way, it does not provide as much insight into the severity of offending. This variable was a ratio level variable, where the range of responses were

between 0 and 1. The closer this value was to 1, the more types of crime an individual engaged in throughout the six months prior to the reporting of that wave. When there was a value of 0, no crimes were committed in the prior sixth months. There were 24 total types of offenses that observed which included whether individual destroyed/damaged property, set fire, broke in to steal, shoplifted, bought/received/sold stolen property, used check or credit card illegally, stole a vehicle, sold marijuana, sold other drugs, carjacked, drove intoxicated, been paid by someone for sex, forced someone to have sex, killed someone, shot someone hitting them, shot at someone without hitting them, robbed with a weapon, robbed without a weapon, beat up someone, got in a fight, beat someone as part of a gang, carried a gun, broke into a car to steal, went joyriding. In reality though, the score was only produced from 22 types of crime. Two types of crime were purposely excluded including whether an individual killed someone or forced someone to have sex. This data was removed from public use of the dataset for privacy reasons protecting the participants.

4.4 Measures: Independent Variables

For the independent variables, there are two variables that were included in this study. The first is for marriage, more specifically whether that individual is married or not. Consistent with previous literature on marriage and engagement in criminal behavior, a marriage is when an individual is married legally through the state (Sampson and Laub, 1993). The same holds true for this study and the dataset. The dataset does contain data on romantic relationships outside of marriage, such as a boyfriend and girlfriend, but this data will not be used. Once again, this study is only concerned with official marriage. This is a dichotomous nominal level variable meaning there are only two outcomes, whether a person is currently married or not. The data is recoded where “0 = not married” and “1 = married”.

The second independent variable for this study is parenthood. This variable consists of dichotomous nominal level data. This means the only result for this variable can be whether an individual had a child or not. Data is recoded where “0 = not a parent” and “1 = is a parent”. Parenthood has proven to be an important turning point in the life course (Boonstoppel, 2019; Datchi, 2017; Stone and Rydeberg, 2019), especially under the context of a formalized marriage (Craig, 2014; Warr, 1998), and therefore this study will include it.

4.5 Measures: Moderating Variable

In this study, there is a moderating variable. The moderating variable is orientation towards American culture, which could also be referred to as the amount of cultural assimilation an individual has experienced. The dataset captures cultural assimilation by a variable referred to as the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ICPSR 36800; Cuéllar et al., 1995). There are measures for both a participant’s orientation towards Mexican culture and for Anglo culture. This study is concerned with orientation towards Anglo culture. The questions asked what language participants speak, what music they listened to, what culture their friends identify with, and more are employed. This differs from much of the previous literature in that most studies looked at cultural assimilation through the lens of immigrant generations (Bersani and DiPietro, 2016), whereas this study uses a score produced from a series of questions. In total, there were 48 questions the dataset used of which produced responses on a five-point Likert Scale. The mean of all 48 responses was used as the assimilation score. This cumulative score indicates that a higher score meant greater orientation towards American culture or Anglo culture as referred to by the dataset. Being a ratio level variable, all values fell between 1 and 5.

4.6 Measures: Control Variables

Within this study, there are four main control variables. The first control variable is age which is a ratio level variable meaning it is continuous. This variable was included because all participants at the start of the data collection were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. For this dataset, which was a panel dataset, meaning it contained data from multiple waves, the range of age throughout for all cases was from 17 to 25.

The next two control variables are all directed for controlling other sources of adult social bond. These include school importance and job importance. For the first of these two social bond control variables, school importance, it can be seen in prior literature how this variable proves to be a significant source of social bond. More specifically, prior literature states that those individuals who see school as more important tend not to engage in as much criminal behavior (Hirschi, 1969; Stewart, 2003). This is an ordinal level variable coded on a five-point Likert scale. More specifically, this variable was coded where “1 = Not at all import”, “2 = Not too important”, “3 = Somewhat important”, “4 = Pretty important”, and “5 = Very important”.

For the second of the social bond control variables, job importance, there are many similarities with the first. Previous literature on employment and engagement in criminal behavior have also shown that employment can be another source of social bond and social control (Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993). This is that same negative association produced by significant social control being inflicted on individuals. It is also an ordinal level variable measured on the same five-point Likert scale as school importance. These two control variables are important to be included in the analysis because this study is attempting to isolate the effects of marriage on crime. The only way to do so is to control for other sources of social bond.

The last of the four control variable is for the wave. Once again, the data being used is a panel dataset which includes cases from multiple waves of data. There are individuals that have up to five responses in the dataset due to two responding all five of the last five waves. This means that the study must control for what wave each case came from to consider possible nested effects within respondents. The wave variable was a categorical level variable which simply stated the wave number ranging from 7 through 11.

4.7 Analytic Approach

The analytic approach for this study can be explained in four steps. First, univariate descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables will be used to describe the characteristics of the sample group. Additionally, bivariate correlation analysis will be conducted to assess the relationship between two variables. The results of these correlation tests will help identify possible associations between variables and guide the testing of the study's hypotheses. Next, a set of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses will be implemented to evaluate the relationship between the variables while accounting for the effects of control variables. Four hypotheses regarding the effects of marriage and cultural assimilation will be tested using OLS analysis. In addition, the nature of the panel data, which measures the same individuals over time, raises concerns about the violation of respondent independence. Although not the best solution, creating Wave variables and incorporating them into the analysis model is a minimal approach to account for time effects. Lastly, to examine the moderating effects of cultural assimilation on the relationship between marriage and crime, the study will create an interaction term by multiplying the marriage variable by the cultural assimilation variable. Including this interaction term in the model will reveal whether respondents with different levels of cultural assimilation experience varying effects of marriage on crime.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

For the first part of the analysis in this study, the univariate descriptive statistics for each dependent and independent variable will be presented. This can be seen in Table 2. Descriptive statistics include the mean, standard deviation, and range for ratio and ordinal level variables. For nominal level variables, frequencies and the percentage will be presented. First, the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable will be stated. According to the analysis of the dependent variable, which is the types of crime score, the mean score was 0.06 for all cases in the sample with a standard deviation of 0.11. The maximum score was 0.77 in the sample and the minimum was 0.00.

Next, the descriptive statistics for the independent variables will be presented. The first of these independent variables was marital status. What was observed is that the vast majority of cases in the sample showed individuals who were not married, more specifically, just over 95 percent (1332 cases). That means just under 5 percent (67 cases) of individuals in the sample were married. For the second dependent variable, the variable for parental status, the distribution was not quite so uneven. Just over 37 percent of cases (521 cases) were individuals who were parents. Just under 63 percent of cases (878 cases) showed individuals who were not parents.

The fourth descriptive statistic presented is for the moderating variable. The moderating variable was the assimilation score measuring how oriented individuals were to American culture. The mean assimilation score for the sample was 4.07 showing a majority of individuals had been highly assimilated towards American culture. The standard deviation was 0.548. Lastly, the range for this variable had a minimum of 1.000 and a maximum of 5.000.

Now the descriptive statistics for the control variables will be listed. There are three control variables listed in the descriptive statistics. The first is age which is a ratio level variable. The other two control variables, the two focused on social bond, are ordinal level variables. These two variables ordinal level variables are treated as continuous in the analysis much like the ratio level variables. For the variable for age, the mean for all cases in the sample was 20.92. This came with a standard deviation of 1.787 and range with a minimum of 17 and a maximum of 25. Now for the first of the social bond control variables, school importance. School importance had a mean of 3.489. The standard deviation was 1.475. For school importance, as with the other social bond control variable for job importance, had a range with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 5. The last of the control variables, job importance saw a mean of 4.686. This is much higher than the mean for school importance meaning a majority of the sample saw more importance in having a job than attending some type of schooling. The standard deviation was 0.683 and as was previously stated, this variable had the same range as the other social bond control variable for school importance.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Pooled Sample (N=1399)

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Types of Crimes Score	0.062	0.11	0	0.77
Marital Status (No)	1322	95.213%	-----	-----
Marital Status (Yes)	67	4.787%	-----	-----
Parental Status (No)	878	62.741%	-----	-----
Parental Status (Yes)	521	37.259%	-----	-----
Assimilation Score	4.07	0.548	1	5
Age	20.911	1.787	17	25
School Importance	3.489	1.475	1	5
Job Importance	4.686	0.683	1	5

Before moving on to the bivariate correlations, one last note must be made. There was an additional control variable included in the analysis. This was the variable for wave. The wave variable was not presented in the descriptive statistic table because it was a fixed control variable where the values were expected to not see much change from wave to wave. Nonetheless, when observing the variable for wave, just over 20 percent of cases were from both waves 7 (288 cases), 8 (288 cases), and 9 (281 cases). Just under 20 percent of cases were from wave 10 (279 cases). Lastly, just under 19 percent of cases were from wave 11 (263 cases). Here, it can be seen that there was very little drop off of participants between waves. The largest drop off between waves was between waves 10 and 11 which showed a drop off of 16 cases, a significant increase than between prior waves.

5.2 Mean Comparison Tests and Bivariate Correlations

The next part of this analysis will consist of observing the individual bivariate relationships between the independent variables, moderating variable, control variables, and the dependent variable. The first independent variable to observe as it relates to the dependent variable, the types of crime score, is marital status. As was discussed in the methods section, a mean comparison test or t-test was run first. This can be seen in table 3. When conducting the mean comparison test, the mean for the types of crime score for unmarried individuals was 0.063. For married individuals, the mean score was 0.035. This is a 0.028 difference in the mean score between the two groups showing a clear negative relationship between being married and how many types of crimes individuals engaged in. The mean comparison test also confirmed that this relationship was statistically significant at 95 percent confidence with a t-value of 2.802. The results of the mean comparison test or t-test were then conformed by the bivariate correlation table. This can be seen in table 5. In the bivariate correlation table, it can be seen that there was a correlation between marriage and the types of crime score used as the dependent variable in this study. The r score value for this relationship was -0.075, showing a negative correlation. This relationship was also found to be statistically significant by the bivariate correlation analysis at a significance level (α) of 0.05.

Table 3. Mean Comparison Test for Marital Status and Types of Crime Score

	Not Married	Married	Difference
Mean	0.063	0.035	0.028
t-value	2.802*		

Note. * $p < .05$

The next bivariate relationship that was observed was for the independent variable for parental status and the dependent variable for the types of crime score. As was done for the previous independent variable, a mean comparison test or t-test was conducted first. This can be seen in table 4. What was found is that the mean types of crime score for individuals who were not a parent was 0.062. For those who were a parent, the mean score was 0.061. This means that the difference between the two groups was 0.001. What this shows is that the independent variable of parental status had little to no effect on the types of crime score for individuals. This relationship was also found to not be statistically significant with 95 percent confidence and a t-value of 0.098 in the mean comparison test. Now when looking at table 5, or the bivariate correlation matrix, what can be seen is that the results of the mean comparison test or t-test were confirmed. Parental status had little to no effect on the types of crime score for individuals with an r score of less than 0.001. This relationship was also not found to be statistically significant at any significance (α) level.

Table 4. Mean Comparison Test for Parental Status and Types of Crime Score

	Not Parent	Parent	Difference
Mean	0.062	0.061	0.001
t-value	0.098		

Note. * $p < .05$

The third bivariate relationship to be observed was between the moderating variable, or the cultural assimilation score as it related to the dependent variable for types of crime score. Obviously, in a bivariate relationship this variable was not acting as a moderating variable, but simple as an independent variable. What can be seen in table 5 is that the r score for this

bivariate correlation was -0.074. This shows significantly more strength to the relationship than the previous variable for parental status. In fact, this variable was more comparable to the effect marital status had on the types of crime score showing a strong negative correlation.

Furthermore, this relationship also proved to be statistically significant at a significance level (α) of 0.01. This means that this relationship was more statistically significant than even the bivariate relationship between marital status and the types of crime score.

Now, when observing the first bivariate relationship between the control variables and dependent variable, it can be seen that age presented an r score of -0.026. Here a slight negative correlation between age and the types of crime score can be seen. Despite this though, this bivariate relationship was not found to be statistically significant at any significance level (α) as can be seen in table 5.

The next control variable was school importance, which was one of the control variables for social bond. When observing the bivariate relationship between school importance and the types of crime score, it is evident that there is a strong negative correlation. This can be seen in the r score of -0.07 in table 5. This bivariate correlation was also found to be statistically significant at a significance level (α) of 0.05.

The last control variable for this part of the analysis and second of the social bond control variables was for job importance, more specifically the relationship between job importance and the types of crime score. What was found is that this variable was also negatively correlated with the types of crime score. This can be seen in table 5 where an r score of -0.091 was presented for this bivariate relationship. And, unlike for all other variables in this study, this bivariate correlation was found to be statistically significant at a 0.001 significance level (α).

Table 5. Bivariate Correlation Statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Types of Crime Score	-						
2. Marital Status	-0.075*	-					
3. Parental Status	0.000	0.101***	-				
4. Assimilation Score	-0.074**	0.003	-0.015	-			
5. Age	-0.026	0.194***	0.179***	0.069**	-		
6. School Importance	-0.070*	-0.005	-0.093***	0.198***	-0.009	-	
7. Job Importance	-0.091 ***	0.051*	0.045	0.175***	0.034	0.314***	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5.3 Multivariate Regression Model

For the third portion of the analysis, an ordinary least squares (OLS) model was used. This means that this model was a multivariate regression model used to see how all the variables including both independent variables, the moderating variable, and the control variables correlated with the dependent variable all together. This model did not contain the interaction term for the moderating variable, or the cultural assimilation score, therefore in this model this variable acted as just another independent variable. In table 6, the results of running this model can be observed.

The first result, for the variable of marital status, the coefficient was -0.037. Therefore, according to the model, when an individual was married, on average, their types of crime score was decreased by 0.037 when other variables are constant. For this relationship in the model, there was a standard error value of 0.014. The standardized coefficient for marital status in this model was -0.07. Standardized coefficient can be defined as a standardized measure of the effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable taking into account different levels of

measurement for all variables in the model. Lastly, the effect of marriage on the types of crime score was found to be statistically significant in the model at a significance level (α) of 0.05 with a t-value of -2.567.

Now, the result for the second independent variable in this model will be discussed. This is, for the variable of parental status. For parental status, the coefficient in this model was 0.002. What this tells us is that when an individual was a parent in this model, on average, their types of crime score was increased by 0.002 when other variables are constant. With this information, it was observed this variable had little effect on the types of crime score. There was also a value of 0.006 for the standard error and a value of 0.009 for the standardized coefficient. Lastly, this variables effect on the types of crime score was found to be not statistically significant with a t-value of 0.336.

Next, the results for the variable of cultural assimilation score will be discussed. When looking at the results from the model, it can be observed that the cultural assimilation score had a coefficient of -0.01. In other words, when an individual's cultural assimilation score was increased, their types of crime score decreased when other variables are constant. This variable also saw a value of 0.006 for standard error and a value of -0.051 for the standardized coefficient. This variables influence on the dependent variable in this model though was not statistically significant with a t-value of -1.852.

Next comes the first of the control variables, the variable for age. When observing the influence of age in the multivariate model, it can be seen that there is a coefficient of 0.001. This means that for every year older an individual was, there was an increase of 0.001 in the types of crime score on average when other variables are constant. There was a standard error value of

0.003 and a standardized coefficient of 0.008 for this variable. The influence of age was not found to be statistically significant in this model either with a t-value of 0.185.

School importance, one of the control variables for social bond, saw a coefficient of -0.003 in the model. This means that when school was more important to an individual, on average, this decreased their types of crime score by 0.003 when other variables are constant. Once again, this is yet another variable that did not have much of an influence on the dependent variable in the model. It had a standard error value of 0.002 and a standardized coefficient of -0.038. This variable's influence on the dependent variable was also found to not be statistically significant with a t-value of -1.314.

Job importance, the other control variable for social bond, saw a much different result though. For this variable, there was a coefficient of -0.011. This explains that when an individual saw having a job as more important, on average, their types of crime score decreased by 0.011 when other variables are constant. This is a much more significant influence than our other social bond control variable, school importance. This variable had a value of 0.005 for standard error and a value of -0.066 for the standardized coefficient. Its influence on the dependent variable was also found to be statistically significant at a significance level (α) of 0.05 and a t-value of -2.323.

Now for the last control variable, the variable for what wave cases were from. Because a panel dataset was used which contained data from multiple waves of the Pathways to Desistance data, this was an important control variable to include in the model. When observing the effect of wave, we see for wave 8 there was an increase of 0.01 on average in the type of crime score for individuals. For wave 9, there was also an increase, more specifically, of 0.018 on average. Waves 10 and 11 though saw decreases. For wave 10, there was a decrease in the types of crime

score by 0.001 on average. Lastly, for wave 11, the decrease was by 0.004 on average. These results were of course for when other variables are constant. The standard error values for each wave consisted of 0.01 for wave 8, 0.011 for wave 9, 0.012 for wave 10, and 0.014 for wave 11. The standardized coefficients were 0.036 for wave 8, 0.066 for wave 9, -0.004 for wave 10, and -0.013 for wave 11. Lastly, none of the waves effect on the dependent variable in the model were statistically significant.

Now, for the last part of explaining the results of this model, the overall performance of the model as a whole must be described. For this model, there was an R^2 value of 0.023 and an adjusted R^2 value of 0.016. This means that the model explained about 2.3 percent of the variance for the types of crime score. Along with this, the model was statistically significant with a F-value of 3.286. This confirms that the model did explain some of variance in the types of crime score.

Table 6. Multivariate Regression Model for Types of Crime

Variables	<i>b</i>	SE	beta	t
(Intercept)	0.149	0.059	-----	2.508*
Marital Status (1)	-0.037	0.014	-0.070	-2.567*
Parental Status (1)	0.002	0.006	0.009	0.336
Assimilation Score	-0.010	0.006	-0.051	-1.852
Age	0.001	0.003	0.008	0.185
School Importance	-0.003	0.002	-0.038	-1.314
Job Importance	-0.011	0.005	-0.066	-2.323*
Wave (8)	0.010	0.010	0.036	1.034
Wave (9)	0.018	0.011	0.066	1.691
Wave (10)	-0.001	0.012	-0.004	-0.097
Wave (11)	-0.004	0.014	-0.013	-0.258
R ² (adj)	0.023(0.016)			
F Value	3.286***			

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5.4 Interaction Model

For the last part of the analysis, the model was run with the interaction of the moderating variable. This can be seen in table 7. Along with the interaction, all independent and control variables were included in the model. When looking at the results, it can first be observed that the variable for marital status, the coefficient is -0.086. This means that when an individual was married, on average, they saw a decrease in the type of crime score by 0.086. The value for standard error was 0.109. The standardized coefficient was -0.165. Lastly, this variable's influence was not found to be statistically significant in this model with a t-value of -0.79.

The second variable, parental status, had a very small effect on the types of crime score. More specifically, the coefficient was 0.002. This means that in this model when an individual was a parent, on average, the types of crime score was increased by 0.002. The standard error for this variable was 0.006. The standardized coefficient was 0.009. This variable was also found not to be statistically significant with a t-value of 0.323.

The third variable, the cultural assimilation score, had a coefficient of -0.011. In other words, when an individual's cultural assimilation score was higher, their types of crimes score decreased slightly. The standard error was 0.006 and the standardized coefficient was -0.054. This variable was not found to be statistically significant either in this model.

For the variable of age, the first of the control variables, the coefficient was 0.001. This is the smallest of the effects on the dependent variable. What this explains is that for every year older an individual was, there was only about a 0.001 increase in the type of crime score. As can be seen in the model, the standard error value was 0.003. The standardized coefficient was 0.009. There was also no statistical significance of this variables influence in the model with a t-value of 0.21.

The first of the two control variables for social bond, school importance, showed a small influence on the dependent variable in the model. The coefficient was -0.003 which means that on average, when an individual saw school as more important, there was a slight decrease in the type of crime score by 0.003. The standard error for this variable was 0.002 and the standardized coefficient was -0.037. This variable was not found to have a statistically significant influence on the dependent variable with a t-value of -1.295.

The second of these two control variables for social bond, job importance, proved to be the only significant variable in this model. The coefficient was -0.011. This means that when holding a job was more important for an individual, on average, their types of crime score decreased by 0.011. Along with this, there was a standard error of 0.005. The standardized coefficient was -0.066 for this variable. Lastly, once again, this variable was statistically significant at a significance level (α) of 0.05 with a t-value of -2.331.

For the last of all the control, the wave variable, it can be observed that the coefficients were 0.01 for wave 8, 0.018 for wave 9, -0.001 for wave 10, and -0.004 for wave 11. This means that for cases that fell under wave 8 and 9, there were slight increases on average in the types of crime score. The opposite was true for waves 10 and 11 where there were slight decreases in the types of crime score on average. The standard error for each wave consisted of 0.01 for wave 8, 0.011 for wave 9, 0.012 for wave 10, and 0.014 for wave 11. The standardized coefficients in this same order were 0.036, 0.066, -0.005, and -0.014. Lastly, neither of these four waves proved to have a statistically significant influence on the dependent variable. The t-value were 1.026, 1.674, -0.104, and -0.270. In conclusion, for the control variables for the interaction model, all variables kept similar effects and significance.

Now the interaction variable will be discussed. This is the moderating interaction between marital status and cultural assimilation score variables. It can be observed that this variable had a coefficient of 0.012. From this value, it is evident that the influence of the interaction variable on the dependent variable is minute. The standard error is 0.027 for this variable. The standardized coefficient is 0.095. When it comes to the statistical significance of the interactions influence on the dependent variable, there was none at any significance level.

The t-value was 0.458. This means that there was no moderating effect between marriage and cultural assimilation on the types of crime an offender engaged in.

The last portion of this analysis is on the interaction models performance as a whole. It was observed that the R^2 value was 0.024 and the adjusted R^2 value was 0.016. This means that the interaction model only explained about 2.4 percent of the variance in types of crime. The F-value was 3.004 and the model was found to be statistically significant. This means that the model did have at least one variable in the model had an influence on the dependent variable, or the types of crime score.

Table 7. Multivariate Regression Model for Types of Crime with Interaction Term

Variables	<i>b</i>	SE	beta	t
(Intercept)	0.150	0.059	-----	2.522*
Marital Status (1)	-0.086	0.109	-0.165	-0.790
Parental Status (1)	0.002	0.006	0.009	0.323
Assimilation Score	-0.011	0.006	-0.054	-1.907
Age	0.001	0.003	0.009	0.210
School Importance	-0.003	0.002	-0.037	-1.295
Job Importance	-0.011	0.005	-0.066	-2.331*
Wave (8)	0.010	0.010	0.036	1.026
Wave (9)	0.018	0.011	0.066	1.674
Wave (10)	-0.001	0.012	-0.005	-0.104
Wave (11)	-0.004	0.014	-0.014	-0.270
Interaction Term	0.012	0.027	0.095	0.458
R^2 (adj)		0.024(0.016)		
F Value		3.004***		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Marriage and Crime

Now that the results of this study's analysis have been presented, they must be discussed now. In the discussion section, the first four subsections will consist of how the results relate to the hypotheses, prior literature, and the theoretical perspectives of which this study is based on. After that, policy implications, ideas for future research, and the limitations will be discussed. The first topic for discussion is the relationship between marriage and criminal offending. It was hypothesized that being married would be negatively associated with engagement in criminal behavior (**H1**). The results from the bivariate correlation matrix, mean comparison test, and multivariate regression model support this hypothesis. All three parts to the analysis show a strong and statistically significant negative association with being married and engaging in crime. Those Mexican American individuals who were married engaged in less types of crime than their unmarried counterparts.

When discussing this result in the context of prior literature, this was the hypothesis most expected to be supported empirically. This is mainly because of the sheer amount of prior literature also supporting this hypothesis. Sampson and Laub (1990; 1993), the two criminologists responsible for the creation of the life-course criminology perspective, were the first to theorize about adult social bond and provide empirical evidence for the negative association between marriage and desistance. They were the first to present empirical evidence for this negative association. More specifically, they proposed that marriage creates adult social bond which then inflicts social control on individuals, and eventually leads to desistance or movement away from crime (Sampson and Laub, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Later studies further supported this hypothesis (Warr, 1998; Sampson et al., 2006; King et al. 2007; McGloin

et al., 2011; Skardhamar et al., 2015; Nader and Davies, 2023). The results of this study concur with this prior research and the overall arguments of life-course criminology. In the sample of Mexican American individuals for those who were married, this clear negative association may be attributed to social bond being created through marriage, inflicting social control, and in turn reducing engagement in criminal behavior as theorized by Sampson and Laub (1990).

6.2 Parenthood and Crime

When looking at the results for the relationship between parental status and criminal behavior, what can be seen by the models in this study is that there is no significant relationship between parental status and criminal behavior. There is no substantive increase or decrease in the number of types of different crimes that individuals engaged in. Not in the bivariate correlation matrix, nor the mean comparison test, or even the multivariate regression model. This means that the second hypothesis, that having children will be negatively associated with engagement in criminal behavior (**H2**), was not supported by the results.

This is somewhat contrary to the prior literature on the subject. Numerous studies have found that parenthood alone was a sufficient enough life altering turning point to decrease engagement in criminal behavior (Datchi, 2017; Boonstoppel, 2019; Stone and Rydeburg, 2019). Once again though, in this study this was not the case. There was no significant negative association between parenthood and engagement in criminal behavior. Why this result was referred to as only somewhat contrary to prior literature though may be because parenthood was only significant in reducing criminal behavior in the context of marriage (Warr, 1998). More specifically, having a child or multiple children may not be a source of or reinforce existing social bond when an individual is not formally married with the mother of the child. If this social bond is not created, then social control will not be inflicted leading to a continuance in

criminality such as was seen with many of the Mexican American parents in this sample. One could also assume that many of these individuals were not living with their children, which would then remove these individuals from the responsibilities and experiences of parenthood on a day-to-day basis at least, if not completely. Within the sample used to conduct the analysis, only 67 cases showed responses of yes to married. This is a relatively small number of cases where the individual was actually married. When observing the number of cases that showed responses of yes to whether they had a child though, the number was 521. This is a significantly larger number meaning that many individuals in the dataset had children outside of marriage, most likely with romantic partners they were not formally married to or ex romantic partners. One could then make the case that this is the reason for the nonsignificant result. Parenthood, outside of the context of marriage, is an area of research where there are not consistent results. The results of this study just confirm the complexity of this topic.

6.3 Cultural Assimilation and Crime

On the other hand, cultural assimilation, unlike parental status, did show significant results in the analysis for this study. This is, when looking at the bivariate relationship between cultural assimilation and engagement in criminal behavior. What was found was that the more assimilated an individual was to American culture, the less they tended to offend. That result was contrary to the hypothesis which stated that more orientation towards American culture will be positively associated with engagement in criminal behavior (**H3**). This was clearly not the case with this sample of Mexican American men, though it must be noted that in both the multivariate regression model and interaction model this relationship was not found to be significant.

When looking at this relationship in the context of prior literature, the results are contrary to the prior literature. Prior literature states that American culture may be to some degree criminogenic, or in other words cultural assimilation towards American culture is positively associated with crime (Alvarez-Rivera, 2014; Bersani et al., 2014; Bersani and DiPietro, 2016; Craig et al., 2020). These findings are intriguing though, because as was previously discussed in the literature review of this study, cultural assimilation had traditionally been associated with more success in other areas of life for immigrants in the United States (Arcia et al., 2001; Smith, 2003; Dato-on et al., 2006; Wadsworth and Kubrin, 2007; Piracha et al., 2023). What is referred to by this is that immigrants tend to do a lot better financially, in regard to their health, and just overall life satisfaction when they experience more cultural assimilation. That's why the findings of previous studies were intriguing, because then researchers must ask, why does more cultural assimilation better the lives of immigrants in every aspect except for when it comes to crime? The findings of this study may suggest otherwise though, that more cultural assimilation is associated with less offending. It may suggest that the overall benefits previously discussed of more cultural assimilation towards American culture may be negatively association with engagement in criminal behavior, and in turn, outweigh the criminogenic force of American culture more generally. Or it may be just that the hypotheses of these prior studies were wrong, that American culture is not criminogenic at all. This is a more nuanced topic which may prove to require more research to provide clarity.

There is one more point to make before moving on to the next relationship in the analysis, and that is on the method of measurement for cultural assimilation in this study. Cultural assimilation had traditionally been measured by what generation immigrants belonged to in criminological research. Prior literature states that the later generations of immigrants, third

and fourth generation immigrants for example, were more culturally assimilated on average than those who were first- or second-generation immigrants (Rumbaut, 2015; Abamitzky et al., 2016). When looking specifically at Mexican American immigrants, the difference even between just the first- and second-generation immigrants is significant (Vega, 1990). This study used a different method to measure cultural assimilation though, that was by providing an assimilation score produced by the responses of 48 questions. These questions asked about language, music preference, friends, etc. Then the means of the 48 responses were used to create a score. One must ask if this could this more nuanced method is better or worse in measuring cultural assimilation than that of previous studies? Another would be could this change in method have had an influence on the result? To answer the first question, there is an argument to made that yes, the method used in this study is better at measuring cultural assimilation because by asking those 48 questions, one can capture how culture influences the respondents day to day life and by doing so are able to measure more accurately how assimilated they are. This is, instead of just assuming that because an individual is a first-generation immigrant they aren't assimilated at all or that because they are a third-generation immigrant, they are very accustomed to American culture. Lastly, one can't associate this result with the change in methodology. What may carry more responsibility for the result is the fact that there was a relatively high mean for the assimilation score in the sample of Mexican American males. This means that the majority of the sample was highly assimilated towards American culture which may have skewed the result. If not that, then for the theoretical arguments presented previously in this section. What is conclusive is needed for further research on this topic, and in the subsection on future research, an argument will be made promoting such.

6.4 Cultural Assimilation as a Moderating Variable

Now, to discuss the results of cultural assimilation as a moderating variable, one must analyze the interaction model with the interaction term within this model. Here it could be seen that there was no statistical significance in this model, only with one of the control variables, that being job importance. This means that there was not a significant effect on the number of types of crime an individual committed by the interaction variable in the model. There was no evidence that substantiated the hypothesis of this study which stated that more orientation towards American culture will condition the effect marriages have on engagement in criminal behavior (**H4**). This was in fact not the case. Neither the direction nor the magnitude of the effect of marriage was changed in any significant way within the interaction model.

When talking about this result in the context of prior literature, it can be seen that the result was contrary to the prior literature. The prior literature of which this study is based on state that culture has a significant effect on marriage, both in how individuals viewed marriage and macro-level marital patterns such as age individuals got married and divorce rates (Levine et al., 1995; Raley et al., 2015). The basis upon which this study was set up was that these distinct marital differences surrounding culture would have an effect on how immigrant groups formed adult social bond through marriage, and therefore the magnitude of the marriage effect on crime. This was clearly disproven by the results of this study though, despite theoretical support from prior literature (Bersani and DiPietro, 2016). A possible explanation for this is that cultures influence on marriage had no significant effect on the ability for social bond to be created by marriage, and in turn to inflict social control. This certainly was the case within this sample of Mexican American men.

6.5 Policy Implications

When one looks at the policy implications of this study, the main area where these results can be applied is in the rehabilitation of offenders. The criminal justice system as it is in present day has a plethora of options for programs geared towards the rehabilitation of criminal offenders. Some of the most common programs are focused on employment, rehabilitation for substance abusers, and cognitive behavioral intervention. The results of this study may suggest that there is yet another area the rehabilitation programs for criminal offenders may need to focus on. This is, a focus on therapy for romantic relationships, especially for offenders in formal marriages.

It has already been discussed how marriage is negatively associated with criminal offending, even in previously chronic offenders (Warr, 1998; Sampson et al., 2006; King et al. 2007; McGloin et al., 2011; Skardhamar et al., 2015; Nader and Davies, 2023). This means that if correctional facilities focused more on family therapy, most importantly with spouses, than there may be some substantive improvements in the rehabilitative outcomes of offenders. The reenforcing of family and marriages have been shown to be causal of less criminal outcomes for offenders (Kaslow, 1987; Datchi and Sexton, 2013; Kendler et al., 2017). While this approach seems more unconventional than others, it may prove to be just as effective if not more than those traditional approaches to rehabilitation. Not only that, but the results of this study and of many others before suggest the same, that family and/or spousal therapy could be beneficial in the rehabilitation process for criminal offenders.

Another concept to take into consideration for policy implications of this study is the idea that culture may play a role in how culture may play a role in marriage and criminal offending. While the results of this study may not suggest that a statistically significant relationship exists between marriage, culture, and criminality in a moderating relationship, there is evidence in this

study that cultural assimilation to American culture may be beneficial for immigrant populations. While this is contrary to prior literature that suggest cultural assimilation to American culture is positively associated with criminality (Rumbaut, 2015; Abamitzky et al., 2016), there is definitely a need to understand more how culture plays a role in criminal offending. This is especially because of the fact that the United States is an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse population. In conclusion on this topic, more research is needed in order to provide concrete solutions to rehabilitation that are oriented towards culture. In the next section, some recommendations will be made on what researchers should inquire about surrounding the topic of this study.

6.6 Future Research

It is incredibly important that research is built upon the literature made available in present day. The same can be said about this study. While there are some clear findings in the results of this study, other aspects of the study may need further clarification. One of these topics which need further clarification is the debate between which method of measurement for cultural assimilation is more effective. There are many options including language-based measurement, measurement through generations, and scales such as the one applied in this study. This can be tested by comparing the results of the relationship between engagement in criminal behaviors and culture through the various methods. This is important in order to clarify which method is more effective in conceptualizing and operationalizing cultural assimilation for future studies.

The second recommendation for future research that this study will provide is to inquire about how marriage quality may play a role in offending through the lens of culture. As was previously stated, this study was not able to include a variable for relationship quality due to

missing values in the data. This is unfortunate, because as can be seen in prior literature, marriage quality can provide important insight into the relationship between marriage and crime (Laub et al., 1998) and be used to test whether culture has an indirect impact on crime through marriage. Scientific inquiry is important and must be promoted in the never-ending quest for knowledge, especially in a field of study as complex as criminology. For this reason, these two recommendations have been provided for further research.

6.7 Limitations

Within this study, there were several limitations that must be discussed. The first of these limitations include the fact that the data from Pathways to Desistance: A Study of Serious Adolescent Offenders as they Transition to Adulthood and Out of Crime (ICPSR 36800) was only collected over a seven-year period post enrollment. This means that if participants were between the ages of 14 and 18 at enrollment, then by the final waves, participants were only in their early twenties, the oldest being 25 in the final wave. Where this becomes a serious limitation, especially when observing marriage and crime, is that it could be argued that this was not enough time to observe serious movement away from criminal behavior. A negative association was observed between marriage and engagement in criminal behavior, but one can't help but ask if this negative association could have been stronger if the data was collected over a longer period of time? Prior literature states that marriage takes time, even many years in cases, for significant social bond to be formed and movement away from crime to materialize (Laub et al., 1998). Additionally, the sheer number of participants who were married was quite low due to the respondents being so young. Once again, there were only 67 cases that showed responses of yes to whether that individual was married or not. That means the remaining 1322 respondents were not married, a vast majority of the cases. Also, another question that could be asked is,

could substantive changes in marriages' ability to create social bond by culture have been observed if data was collected over a larger period of time? If marriage takes time to build up social bond, it is possible that it takes time to break down too.

The second limitation to this study was the fact that a secondary dataset was used. This had a significant impact on the methodology and results of this study. The first issue this caused was that there was a variable proposed to be included in the analysis, but due to a large number of missing values, was not able to be included. This is the variable for marriage quality of course. Including a variable for marriage quality would have provided important insight on exactly how those individuals who were married viewed their marriages, whether they could be considered good or not. One can't go as far as to say that leaving this variable out skewed the results strongly in any direction, but it can be said that important information had to be left out. This unfortunately comes about when working with secondary data. One cannot hand pick variables such as would be done when working with one's own data. This brings us to the second part of this limitation because even for some variables that were included, more specifically marital status and parental status, the dataset did not contain these exact variables. Instead, during the data cleaning process the data had to be cleaned in a manner that this issue could be worked around. For example, for the variable of marriage, there was no variable that asked directly whether an individual was married or not. Instead, there was a variable that asked whether an individual's wife was pregnant. From having this information, one could assume that any value of 0 or 1 for "no" or "yes" was someone who was married responding, and any values of NA were those who were not married. A similar process was done for the parental status variable, but with a variable that asked whether an individual's first child was alive or not. One thing must be made clear, and that is that this process did not have an impact on the result as the same

information was present, but this process would not have had to been done if this was an original dataset.

The third and last limitation for this study is the intrinsic nested effect and issues of temporal order that come with using a panel dataset. In order to explain how these limitations may have affected this study, one must first define what exactly a nested effect and temporal order are. First, it should be acknowledged that a nested effect in the data is a result of using the responses of the same individuals' multiple times, where data may become inflated. In some studies, this may result in finding significant statistical relationships where they do not exist in reality. An attempt was made to control for the nested effect by creating a wave control variable. This could only partly control for this issue though, and there may still be, to some degree, a nested effect within the data. Temporal order on the other hand is the sequence in which events may occur over time. The acknowledgement of issues of temporal order within this study come from the fact that there is no for sure way to know that crimes did not occur before or after marriage in between any wave of this study. Because the variable for crime is reported for the prior six months to reporting at each wave and marital status is simply reported on the day of reporting, there is no way to know the sequence in which event occurred. Both are serious time related issues that come with this limitation.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In wrapping up this study, one first must discuss the results as they relate to the research questions. These research questions were the foundation for the creation of the study at hand. The first research question was whether being married would be associated with a decrease in criminal offending in a sample group of Mexican American immigrants? (**RQ1**) The answer to this question was unequivocally yes, there was a clear and significant negative association between marriage and criminal offending in this sample of Mexican American immigrants. While this is the case though, no such relationship was found with parenthood and criminal offending.

The second of the research questions upon which this study is based is whether there would be a positive association between more orientation towards American culture and criminal offending? (**RQ2**) Based off of the results of this study, the answer is no, there was no significant positive association between more orientation towards American culture and criminal offending. Instead, the opposite was true. A significant negative association was found between orientation towards American culture and criminal offending. In other words, when those Mexican American individuals in the sample were more oriented towards American culture, on average, they engaged in less criminal behavior.

Last but not least, the third research question was would more cultural orientation towards American culture change the effect of marriage on criminal offending? (**RQ3**) The answer to this question was no, there was no significant difference in the effect of marriage on criminal offending. If there was a significant difference, there would have been a change in the direction or at least magnitude of the relationship. This was not observed in the data though thus the reason for the answer of no for this research question.

The main purpose of this study was to first find the relationship between marriage and criminal behavior, and then through numerous tests inquire about the relationship between culture and these two variables. While not all of the hypotheses were proven to be true, one could state that this study was successful in its purpose. Policy implications and possible future research topics were also discussed as should be done with any research study. Culture as it relates to marriage and crime is not yet fully understood by criminologists, and requires further inquiry. Hopefully, this study was successful in providing a framework for just this.

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