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The continuance of gender culture amid change in Mexican–American immigrant Catholic contexts

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ABSTRACT

The acceptance and implementation of Roman Catholic teachings on marriage, sexuality, and the family vary both at the individual and at the parish level. While overall, there is a dialectical relationship between gender and religion in the way they inform and mold each other, the majority of research has focused on how religion has shaped gender in communities. We use qualitative data from a Latino immigrant Catholic context in the United States to show the opposite movement: how a Mexican–American gender culture of *machismo* and *marianismo* shapes the religious culture in the arenas of marriage and religious authority. The process of incorporating immigrant Mexicans into the dominant culture of the United States takes place in part in these religious centers through the interaction and mixture of Latino gender norms with the therapeutic egalitarianism of the white middle class, through the mediation of priests. Through this, we suggest that there are contexts, times, and places where the gender culture of a community shapes the reception and practice of religion.

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Introduction

Although religious institutions have doctrines that make strong claims on the bodies of their adherents, the actual lived reality and practice depends on the gender culture and corresponding gender ideologies, norms as well as expectations of the local settings (Connell 2005, 186). The acceptance and incorporation of Roman Catholicism’s doctrinal teachings about the body, sexuality, and the family vary among Catholics in the United States (Greeley 2000, 55–88; D’Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier 2013, 29–46; Cooperman et al. 2014, 40–61, 103–109). Gender cultures are central to this variation, but often other factors, such as a Catholic “culture of choice” (Hoge et al. 2001, 3) or the symbolic politics of issues such as abortion, are used to explain the difference (Putnam, Campbell, and Garrett 2012, 302–303, 392–393; Hunter 1992, 277, 284–285; Ammerman and Roof 2014, 5–17).

These gender cultures are contextualized in particular local settings, such as parishes, that can foster differential acceptance of official teachings (Baggett 2006; Konieczny 2013, 234–250). In particular, the Mexican–American immigrant context in the United States shows the persistence of gender patterns originating in the country of origin and in the host country. Thus, local parishes are an appropriate context for identifying the cultural and gender ideals that shape the incorporation of religious institutions and practices in everyday life. This reveals social mechanisms that may be at work not only in this particular setting, but also across a variety of religious forms in the United States and globally, such as the development of cultural competencies through the imitation of others.

Thus we ask: how do the gender cultures present in particular class and ethnic groups shape the reception and selective incorporation of Catholic teachings about marriage, sexuality, and gender in local parishes? We examine this by looking at gender cultures of Mexican–American immigrant Catholics in the United States and by showing how these cultures shape the ways in which they understand and practise religious ideals of marriage and marital relations and respond to the religious authority of priests.

Our work engages the cultural norms underlying the way gender beliefs and practices have an impact on congregant responses to both religious demands for their marriage and an authority hierarchy. Through this, we are able to show how broader socio-cultural changes in gender relations in the US matter in the religious arena and have an impact on marriage and authority relations for people in crisis (Riesebrodt 2010, 65–68) and for immigrants (Mooney 2009, 1–32; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, 13–28).

Using 15 interviews and participant observation data collected at a predominantly first- and second-generation Latino immigrant parish we here refer to as St. Stanislaus, located in a large Midwestern city in the United States, we analyze how parishioners and priests negotiate marriage, gender roles, sexuality, and authority in light of Catholic teachings and ethnically and culturally dominant models of gender. We examine how they deal with troubled intimate relationships, in order to demonstrate diverse ways in which gender cultures have concrete effects on how religion is perceived, practised, and integrated into attempts to resolve family problems in religious communities.

We develop our argument as follows: we begin by establishing the theoretical background for our understanding of gender and authority relations among Catholics. We describe the gender models present and our working view of the relation between religion and gender cultures. We continue by describing our data and methods, which is followed by two sections that use our interview data to investigate marital gender relations

and views of priestly authority. Firstly, we demonstrate that immigrant parishioners' perceptions of readiness for sacramental or religious marriage are conditioned and assessed by norms and values of gender relations. Secondly, we show how authority relations between parishioners and priests result in an intertwining of traditional gender norms along with mainstream US therapeutic culture in efforts to solve marriage problems. We conclude by discussing how these perceptions of marriage readiness and authority relations relate to our theoretical framework, describe limitations of the project, and suggest avenues for future research.

Literature review: gender and authority among immigrant Latino Catholics

Gender cultures and religious cultures

Although we understand that there is a dialectical structure in the relationship between different spheres of life, such as gender culture and religious beliefs and practices (Giddens 1991, 25), there are certain contexts and times where we can analytically distinguish them. We follow Raewyn Connell and other scholars in conceptualizing gender cultures as the shared values, models, and ideologies of ideal and appropriate expressions of masculinity and femininity that particular groups of people use to orient their behavior (Connell 2005, 186; Pfau-Effinger 2004, 1).

Scholars have shown that elements of broader cultures of societies in which religion is embedded can shape religion—we see this with the varieties of Catholicism that are forged in diverse areas (Orsi 2013, 177–205)—but the notion that *gender* cultures shape religion has not received as much attention. However, there is work moving in this direction: scholars have noted how gender ideologies have an impact on and direct the action and cognition of religious communities in the United States. For instance, scholars have shown how therapeutic egalitarianism has shaped the patriarchal traditionalism of Evangelical Protestant communities (Stacey 1990, 54; Wilcox 2004, 33–35; Griffith 1997, 34–35). Even when there are official doctrinal stances on gender, culture shapes how those religious beliefs are articulated in practice (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 211).

Machismo and marianismo

Machismo and *marianismo* are complementary gender ideologies originating in Latin America as distinct understandings of categorical difference and inequality based on gender dimorphism (Stevens 1973,

58). These concepts, born out of the natural sciences in the 1800s (Spencer-Wood 2006, 62–66), were shaped through the Catholic Church and the model of the Virgin Mary, became quasi-independent from their moorings and subsequently have had an impact on, shaped, and directed religious contexts (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, 385–408; Johnson 2014, 231, 241–251). *Machismo* (and the related terms *machista* and *macho*) was used colloquially by our respondents to describe men in their lives and is thus both an analytical term and a category of everyday social organization.

In the literature, scholars have shown that *machismo* is a multi-dimensional construct. José Torres, Scott Solberg, and Aaron Carlstrom found that a traditional definition of *machismo*, according to which men were authoritarian, emotionally restricted to avoid ‘feminine’ responses or reactions, and controlling, only describes a small minority of Latino men and is more commonly manifested as assertiveness and a responsibility to provide for one’s family (Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom 2002, 163–170).¹ However, respondents in our study and other literature commonly referred to the traditional view, suggesting that the idea of a controlling man was present in the gender cultures studied (Hirsch 2003, 128–134).

Marianismo is the other half of this gender dichotomy and rewards women who are modest, submissive, and self-sacrificing by placing them as spiritually superior to men. This can be conceptualized as a reflection of hegemonic masculinity and its counterpart of emphasized femininity (Connell 2003, 183–191). Like *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, a Latin American representation of the Virgin Mary,² women are considered capable of enduring much suffering, which allows them to gain respect and admiration from others (Stevens and Pescatello 1973, 58–63).

As with all gender ideologies, there are local variations in the connotations and manifestations of *machismo* and *marianismo*; therefore, researchers must be careful not to essentialize or oversimplify complex and nuanced gender relations (Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom 2002, 174–179; Ehlers 1991, 12–14). Broad variations can still be seen, especially when viewing immigrant parishes, where cultural differences come to the fore (Matovina 2011, 43, 67).

Therapeutic egalitarianism

Mexican–American immigrant gender ideologies shape certain religious contexts in the United States, but in many cases the priests at these churches are embedded in an alternative gender ideology—that of therapeutic egalitarianism. This gender culture rose to prominence among middle-class Americans in the second half of the twentieth century (Chodorow 1999, 211–220; Cancian 1990, 15–58) and has become rooted not only in the culture writ large (depending especially

on the class context), but also in churches (Jenkins 2005, 39; Konieczny 2013, 234–250). Where *machismo* and *marianismo* dichotomize gendered expectations,³ therapeutic egalitarianism minimizes these differences. This culture privileges self-growth and therapeutic expression through equal sharing between men and women (Swidler 2013, 143). It combines feminized notions of love as expression with masculine assumptions about self-development, in a more androgynous style (Cancian 1990, 15–29, 69–80). When present in churches, this means that priests are not only mediators of church doctrine, but may also come from a cultural background that is distinct from their Latino parishioners.

In religious contexts, the authority of male priests is augmented in settings where the masculine roles of protector and provider achieve hegemonic status, being privileged and sustained above other forms of masculinity (Welland and Ribner 2008, 58; Brenneman 2011, 217–234).⁴ In non-Latino parishes, priests may rely on professionalism and therapeutic approaches rather than traditional sources of authority (Giddens 1991, 179–180) because training, credentials, and professionalism are more important than being a male authority figure (Freidson 2001, 17–36).

In what follows we investigate the impact of gender cultures on religious settings in two ways. Firstly, previous research has shown that in cultures where poverty makes it difficult to support a family, people often live together instead of getting married (Edin and Reed 2005, 122–123; Brown 2001, 134–139), but extant literature on Latinos does not address how gender ideologies in religious contexts may shape relational patterns in cohabitation. However, crucially, as we show below, gender ideologies clearly shape the interpretations and implementations of religious doctrine and generally explain low-income Latino immigrant experiences such as cohabitation before marriage. Secondly, we investigate the ways in which priests may find that the confluence of US and Latino gender cultures necessitates that they negotiate not only what their expectations of families are, but also how their authority is viewed and legitimized.

Data and methods

The data used in this article are drawn from the “Marriage and Divorce: Conflict and Faith Study”, which consists of a sample of 26 congregations drawn purposively from the population compiled by the Northern Indiana Congregations Study (NICS) (Snell et al. 2009, 23–26). Our sample explores patterned variation in congregational cultures of marriage. The church we analyze here, St. Stanislaus, is the only majority Latino Roman Catholic parish in the NICS. Our 15 interviews (see details below) involve first-generation Mexican-Americans and two pastors—one white and one bicultural, with a Mexican mother and an American father.

Immigrant Latino Catholic parishes are an appropriate empirical location to study the impact of gender culture on religious practices, for several reasons. Firstly, they are a sizeable portion of US Catholics: 40% of US Catholics are Latinos, accounting for 71% of the growth of the Catholic population in the US since 1960 (Ospino 2014, 5–7). Secondly, in contrast to the pre-1965 Catholicisms of European origin,⁵ Latin American Catholicisms have a *mestizaje* (*mestizo*) or a ‘mixed’ heritage of Iberian, African, and indigenous cultures (Deck 1995, 90). Catholic churches are continuously incorporating new arrivals who also provide fresh energy to gender ideologies from Latin America (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 98–100), thus forcing those in religious contexts to respond to these ideologies.⁶

Latino immigrant contexts also reveal gender culture having an impact on religion because of the role of the Church in issues such as marriage. More than white parishes, Latino churches are often in working-class and resource-poor neighborhoods (Ospino 2014, 42) and the parish becomes the primary site of integration into society (Appleby 1989, 83). The needs of the community transform parish ministry from something specifically religious to more general issues. In our study case, our respondent Father Tom identified these needs as “immigration, domestic violence, alcohol addiction, and complex family relationships” (personal interview, 3 December 2009).

Situated in a lower-income, resource-poor neighborhood, St. Stanislaus is the main Spanish-speaking Catholic church in Carton, a mid-size post-industrial town in the Midwest, counting around 100,000 people. Although not a gateway city for Latinos in the United States, the Latino and Mexican immigrant population of 13,000 has doubled since 2000 and quadrupled since the early 1990s (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011, 11–12).

Interviewees were recommended by the church office and tended to be people involved in the church or parochial school and those who had previously been helped by the priests or church.⁷ We acknowledge that we might find differences in other Latino settings where people have different cultural origins, different lengths of residence or different ages, but what we show here constitutes the dominant representative experiences that we see in this cultural setting.

The data were analyzed with the software Atlas.ti, using grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 101–114). Primary coding consisted of keywords related to themes of family and church life; secondary coding looked at gender ideologies and views of authority. We iterated this layered coding with theoretical approaches to analysis, allowing us to construct a picture of the gender cultures at work (Pugh 2013, 49–51; Reed 2008, 121–123).

Findings and Discussion

We present two related analyses of how gender cultures have an impact on religious settings, particularly in the way congregants interpret church teachings about marriage and interact with church authority. We show how the gender cultures of *machismo* and *marianismo* are central to the shape of religious life. We first examine how Mexican–American couples interpret prerequisites for civil and sacramental marriage in the light of dominant patterns of *machismo* entitlement and *marianismo* compliance. The second analysis explores the limits of priestly authority based on masculinity.

Getting married in the church: trust and respect in Mexican–American couples

The Roman Catholic Church requests that its members adhere to certain sexual ethics, including not living together outside marriage (Catholic Church 1983, 1055–1162). Catholics who have formed families without the blessing of the Church are excluded from religious rituals such as receiving the Eucharist (Synod of Bishops 2015). Even though the Church remains an important part of family life and personal identity among first-generation Mexican–American immigrants (Cooperman et al. 2014, 29), gender relations and expectations condition *how* the Church is incorporated.

Mexican–Americans at St. Stanislaus told us that they hesitated to formalize their relationship as a marriage, for several reasons, including their understandings about men as *machista* that allow, or even valorize, behaviors that are inimical to family life, which women must endure. When women were afraid that their husbands would continue womanizing, drinking, being irresponsible with money, and being domestically abusive, their eagerness to form a religiously bound commitment was lessened. One female respondent said: “Before, I did not want [to get married]. [...] Some men are *machistas*, some are possessive.” Another woman said that, when she was originally getting married, more than a decade prior, she was told that “the woman had to deserve [*merecer*] the man, and [the marriage] is a contract as long as that is the case”. In these responses, we see aspects of both a masculinity that promotes male dominance in a relationship and a femininity that reinforces female submission and quiet endurance.

Parishioners at St. Stanislaus viewed their religious ideals in terms of a reality where the dominant pattern was for couples to marry civilly, which was often precipitated by pregnancy, then to delay the religious ceremony until there was enough confidence that the relationship would

stand the test of time. This pattern and the role of gender culture in religion can be clearly seen in the relationship between Lydia Ramirez and her husband Eduardo Gonzalez.⁸ At the time of our interviews, Lydia and Eduardo had been together for over 20 years. They both credited the priests at St. Stanislaus for helping them improve their relationship and staying together. However, their understandings of masculine and feminine roles remained highly significant for the way they interpreted their religious lives. Lydia and Eduardo are both first-generation immigrants, coming to Carton from central Mexico, and have elementary school education. They worked long hours with discordant schedules at local factories in order to make ends meet in their new US context. They met in the United States where Eduardo had previously fixed his immigration status and were married civilly when their first child was on the way.

Although they had been raised as Catholics, they had avoided the sacrament of marriage for many years because they did not believe they were ready for that commitment. Lydia said that she resisted getting formally married to Eduardo, even though they were raising children together, because “I was not persuaded that our relationship was ready”. Instead, she lived with Eduardo for 14 years before getting married in the church. Looking back at her mindset before she was married in the church, she described how she saw civil marriage as safeguarding a way out of a difficult relationship, even though this was not in accordance with religious beliefs:

In a civil marriage, you do not have God in mind. It is before men; it is not valid, nothing more than a signed piece of paper. Sometimes people get [civilly] married thinking that they can get divorced in the future. (Personal interview, 25 July 2011)

Lydia was staying in an unhappy relationship, to a large extent, she said, for the sake of their children. Although she spoke in the third person, Lydia indicated in the interview that she included herself in the thinking that civil marriage would provide a way out, should things get too unbearable. Looking at it after she had been married in the church, she rejected this mindset. Civil marriage was ‘not valid’ in that it did not have the sacred qualities found in the marriages that were blessed in a church.

For his part, Eduardo echoed this position on marriage and separation by remembering the suffering that his actions caused his wife and the connection between this suffering and divorce:

When the man is too *macho*, sometimes we do not pay attention to our partner. We are drunks, and we go out, and much of it [the suffering] is our fault. [...] Our church tells us that once we are married in the church we cannot get divorced. [...]

[The Church] asks us to fight against everything so that our marriage continues with the help of our Lord. (Personal interview, 10 June 2013)

From his perspective, divorce was preferable to enduring and suffering in a difficult relationship, but divorce was not permitted when a couple had been married in the church. Instead, a couple was asked to ‘fight against everything’ in order to help their relationship endure.

The prospect of divorce was not something that Lydia and Eduardo held in their pockets or used to lord over their partner, but it was a real issue as their relationship deteriorated. Their work schedules, with one working from the early morning until noon and the other from the afternoon until late at night, meant that they were rarely able to connect. Eduardo started drinking heavily with friends and would spend nights away from home. Lydia responded to his drinking not by seeking a divorce, but by moving away in their intimate life:

To have [sexual] relations, you have to both agree. The man cannot force her if the woman is not in a place where she wants [to have sex] . . . We had a lot of problems and I began to refuse my husband completely. I would not let him touch me. But there were days when he forced me. (Personal interview, 25 July 2011)

Their problems reached a crisis point when Lydia discovered that Eduardo had failed to pay taxes on the house and that they were at risk of losing everything. Lydia was at the point of leaving him, but she found herself pregnant:⁹

He [Eduardo] had been drinking a lot and would not come home at night. It turned out that I was pregnant. I did not want any more children. I was really frustrated with him. But he changed so much. He left his friends, stopped drinking, and became very dedicated to us. The change was like that [she snaps with her fingers], very fast. The baby boy had a bad heart and we went to [a well-known regional children’s hospital]. We did not know what it was, but it was the artery. He was a little infant, only two weeks old. It was a big test. God helped us to keep going. It was a big change. There were difficult things that we have had to learn to face with our family, our home, in our religion, and as we mature. (Personal interview, 25 July 2011)

Willing to try to work something out rather than end their relationship, they turned to the church and had many conversations with the marriage group leaders, the pastors, and other mediators and counselors.

Anthropologist Karen Hirsch describes the change in gender relations as a movement from respect to *confianza* or trust and a companionate marriage (Hirsch 2003, 1–18). Studying Mexican families and Mexican–American immigrant families, Hirsch describes these affective goals of marriage as a desire to build a modern identity that contrasts with tradition in order to build a ‘better’ relationship (Hirsch 2003, 12–17). While our interviews with Eduardo and Lydia do show the movement from a relationship of respect to

one built more on trust and mutual sharing, we extend Hirsch's analysis by showing that religiously based marriages of *confianza* come out of the gender culture which is already in place.

After turning to the church, Lydia and Eduardo retained their gender culture, albeit with some changes. Theirs is a story of diminishing respect, diminishing love, and diminishing returns in their relationship. At their lowest point they rethink *how* they want to remain together and in the church they start thinking about respect but within the framework of *machismo* and *marianismo*. At their lowest point, Lydia found that she could not respect her husband any more. He mistreated her and misused their funds. However, "the church taught [me] that [I] should trust Eduardo". Eduardo now laments many of his previous actions. He defers to his wife sexually but is still the initiator, only waiting until she is "willing". He likes to take his wife out for meals and to buy her things when they have time off together, but this outward romancing and chivalry masks continuing inequality. Lydia said that getting married in the church "felt like a new life" and that they now knew that they "should be equal . . . and in agreement". This change in their relationship does not undo many of their gendered patterns of relating to one another and ultimately she said she could not trust her husband absolutely and that they had separated funds in order to prevent future financial problems. She is still the "suffering partner" and the one who endures through the continued "sad times" and feelings that she is not living up to her duty as a wife or mother. Words like 'equality' and 'trust' may capture a sense of the change that is happening as Mexicans modernize, but we found that there is both equality and inequality and both trust and distrust in Mexican–American immigrant marriages.¹⁰

In sum, in the example of Eduardo and Lydia, we can see the dynamics of *machismo* and *marianismo* that make them reluctant to marry in the church in the first place and that endure, with modification, in their new relationship, even after they received religious support and advice. The gender culture has shaped not only their initial reluctance to invite the church into their marriage, but also how they incorporated religious teachings after their crisis. The particular configuration of hegemonic masculinity has shifted, yet Eduardo has retained his privilege as Lydia endures in a marriage without respect and continuing sadness. The new configurations in the marriage have allowed Eduardo to save face as the gender culture is affirmed.

Priestly authority

In the case of immigrant Catholic churches in the past, migrating communities brought with them their own priests and set up parishes in

the United States (Dolan 2011, 158–194). Among Spanish-speaking Latino congregations in the contemporary United States, Catholics from Latin America join existing churches (Matovina 2011, 132–161). In these cases, the balance of priestly authority does not only depend on the priests' hierarchical position, but also on various other characteristics, such as their cultural fluency.

Masculinity is one factor that reinforces religious authority in Catholic churches, but as a broker for authority, masculinity has its limits. Power relations between parishioners and priests depend on the intersection between gender and ethnicity. At St. Stanislaus, there are two priests: Father Michael, who is White, and Father Tom, who is bicultural, with a white father from the US and a Mexican mother. Both Father Michael and Father Tom believe that their ethnic differences play a role in the ways that their congregants respond to them. Because of Father Tom's cultural background, he is able to push on some things in a way that Father Michael declines to engage with.

Father Tom develops his reputation in part because of his bicultural background. New congregants see his white features and think he is, as he put it, “yet another gringo come in to patronize them”. Yet when he “opens his mouth” and starts to speak in an accent familiar to Mexican–American immigrants, with turns of phrases and idiomatic expressions, they see a cultural insider and recognize a religious authority that stems from ethnicity as well as masculinity. Father Tom leverages this recognition by demanding high standards:

One of my biggest complaints is how they [the congregants] exercise no discipline over their children. As a consequence, our masses with the Hispanic community are utter chaos, just chaos. [...] I am not afraid to tell them, “Not good enough!” They can try their excuses that Father Michael buys [saying they're] “Poor, poor”. Don't give me that. I've seen poorer. They're rich compared to their cousins in Mexico and this sort of stuff doesn't fly with me. (Personal interview, 3 December 2009)

Father Tom believes that a strong man is one who is a good father and a good provider for the family, leading to a strong marital relationship: “She would see him exerting himself, working by the sweat of his brow, and she would crave him. [...] The Bible said she would.” (Personal interview, 3 December 2009)

As he continued, Father Tom acknowledged some gender struggles he sees in the parish, when men, instead of being strong, are selfish:

When the husband is selfish—and a lot of our men are—she's not gonna wanna [have sex] and so, if I [am only talking to] the woman, I basically say, “You know what, you're totally within your right.” Because a Mexican woman may have been taught by her mother that it's her obligation to satisfy her husband's needs. And I'm like, “You're not under any obligation.” If they tell me that they think he's gonna

then run and get satisfaction elsewhere, then I say, “Then your marriage has much more severe problems than the fact that he wants sex all the time.” [...] And he needs to earn your sexual intimacy. [...] So make him live up to it; that’s your job, [it] is to make him live up to his vow.” And one of the ways that often men do respond well to, well both, they will respond in kind. If you honor and respect him, he’ll honor and respect you. (Personal interview, 3 December 2009)

Father Tom wants to see a particular kind of strength in the men in his parish, but he points out the problems inherent with strong men who also believe that they deserve or are entitled to particular sexual treatment from their wives. He acknowledges a particular gendered relationship with a negotiation of what it means to be a *macho* man and at the same time he holds up women’s spiritual superiority when he tells them that it is the wives’ responsibility to ‘make him live up to his vow’.

The solution, as Father Tom sees it, in crises of sexual intimacy between partners, is for the woman to retain the moral high ground, respecting both herself and her husband and thus raising her husband’s awareness of the problem. In addressing problems of *machismo*, Father Tom draws on the powerful feminine morality that is seen in *marianismo*. He rejects the woman’s need to suffer and comply, but articulates his religious beliefs in a way that fits within a cultural understanding of gender.

Father Michael, on the other hand, does not have the same cultural legitimacy and takes a different route when trying to help parishioners with their marriages, incorporating a more therapeutic approach to the problems. *Machismo* and *marianismo* require him to interpret both the religious doctrines and the legal system for the people at St. Stanislaus. The priests sometimes find themselves in the position of social workers and social advocates as well as religious authorities. In an immigrant setting, they have to help their parishioners adapt to the expectations of their host setting. Priests have a church-mandated responsibility to get help for couples in need. Vatican II called for churches and priests to use knowledge and understandings from social science in pastoral care (D’Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier 2013, 72). In the following retelling, Father Michael describes how he navigated a culturally sensitive issue of domestic violence. We can see how he considers the existing cultural gendered family relations and church teachings alongside legal and therapeutic considerations:

We had [a guy], born in east Los Angeles, married [to] a woman from Mexico. He was involved early on in ... some pretty substantial violence perpetrated against others as a consequence of being in [a] gang. [...] Physically he’s solidly built, not tall, not particularly big, but you look at him and ... [there’s a] tough, strong, strong current of anger running through him. But [he’s] also a man, like, “God wants me to live a different life and I’m trying to do that”. His wife is a fighter [and] also tough.

I remember one time though where she had some really nasty shiners, she was wearing sunglasses to avoid it. [...] They were getting some support from the leaders of [a marriage ministry group at our parish] who were very clear to him, as was I, that you can't do that. (Personal interview, 29 July 2009)

Although this couple was committed to living a religious life, they struggled with anger and violence. The pastor and the marriage ministers in the church made clear the legal expectations, re-socializing an ex-gang banger and his wife to a respectable, religious life.

Once a destructive behavior was pointed out, the priests said, many immigrant Latino Catholics still resisted making a therapeutic change and desired to change a behavior through force of will. One way that these conflicts were addressed was by making *juramentos*, promises made by a man to the priest that he would refrain from a particular behavior, such as drinking or violent aggression, for a period of time. Father Michael explained that, instead of a twelve-step process, *juramentos* relied on strength of will. The man who took the oath would often refrain from drinking, drugs or womanizing for the full length of the pledged time, but on the day it ended, he would be just as badly off as he was before:

There are culturally different ways of trying to deal with addiction. I think that the twelve steps are very effective; I think that they've been founded on solid fundamental principles and yet, by and large, Mexicans just don't buy into it. They have a very different mentality around this. So what happens is, typically, husband ties one on [drinking while still hung over from the previous day] and next day the wife drags him in to see the priest and says, "Father, he wants to do a *juramento!*" [...] And so he'll say, "I'd like to give up alcohol for six months." The priest's job is to basically double whatever he says. So if he says six months, it's a year. [...] For these folks, the place of will-power in this is extraordinary. Because they do give up alcohol for 365 days. Now, [day] 366 is as bad as before, so they're a dry drunk for a whole year in terms of our therapeutic mentality of thinking about it, but they gave it up for a year. And if they come back to renew it and say, "Well, my year is up, but I want to continue", so they do go seeking out support in that and they take it very seriously. It is not something done lightly and breaking a *juramento* is exceptionally rare. (Personal interview, 29 July 2009)

Juramentos are a valuable tool for priests in their parishes and Father Michael incorporates a therapeutic lesson into the underlying hegemonic masculinity of these vows.

Relationships between parishioners and priests can serve to bolster the commitments people make to each other. The wife, in the situation with the *juramento*, initiates the interaction. Her perceived moral superiority due to the influence of *marianismo* allows her, in times when the man's behaviors are out of hand, to redirect him. However, the husband does not make the promise to his wife, or to God, but to the masculine authority figure in the form of the priest. Similar to the distinction between religious and civil marriages, in which making a commitment in front of the priest—who is

standing in for God—and promising a change in behavior requires the couple to live up to a higher standard. They hand over, in a sense, the authority to God and to the priests as witnesses. *Juramento* culture is brought to Catholic parishes in the United States by immigrant Latinos who retain certain views about masculine self-control, about feminine mediation, and about priestly authority. In this way, pre-existing gender norms and culture shape religious life.

Parishioners at St. Stanislaus do not have strong understandings of therapeutic approaches to dealing with violence and conflict, nor do they broadly trust these approaches. Yet, through their religious education, the gendered difficulties in their families, such as an alcoholic husband or *machismo*, lean on external mediation for resolution. The role of the church, both institutionally and relationally through priests, is to solve the practical problems of broken marriages, alcoholic partners, and unequal gender roles. For most of the Latino congregants, Church doctrinal authority and Mexican–American standards were mediated through parishioner–priest relationships. This can be seen as distinct from authority relations at White Catholic churches, which are interwoven with the bureaucratic professionalism of the broader middle-class culture they inhabit (Konieczny 2013, 47–50). This culture of professionalism is gender-blind, therapeutic, and based on competence. Thus, when couples experience family or marriage distress, they are more likely to approach a counseling professional than a priest (Konieczny 2016, 155).

Both priests at St. Stanislaus are informed by therapeutic egalitarianism and beliefs about religious marriage, gender, and equality that they bring to their work with Mexican–American immigrant Catholics. They must communicate this in ways that are received by the Mexican–American couples as acceptable. While they are engaged in building trust or *confianza* in marriages at their church, they use therapeutic methods or try to move congregants in that direction when possible. Equality is a “matter of justice”, as Father Michael said. Gender relations are indicative of the power relationships present in marriages and can be critical for understanding broader power dynamics in a community. This is no less true when investigating immigrant Catholics and the way difficulties between men and women are seen by both those within couples and the priests from the outside.

Conclusion

In local settings, congregants and clergy incorporate and apply religious doctrines relating to family life and authority in ways that are shaped by their gender cultures. When congregants view gender relations in

particular ways, this has an impact on the way they make sense of religious teachings and apply these teachings in their own lives. In this article we have shown how the presence of *machismo* and *marianismo* gender ideologies contrast with middle-class US values of therapeutic egalitarianism in an immigrant Latino Catholic parish. In spite of Church teachings that living together outside marriage is not acceptable, many Latino immigrants, who strongly valued their Catholic identities, avoided a religious marriage because of uncertainty about whether their personal relationships would stand the test of time. Their gender norms shaped their perceptions of what it meant to be ready for the sacrament of marriage and led many to prefer a separation between civil and religious ceremonies in order to delay the spiritual commitment in cases of unstable relationships. The priests relied on masculine authority in order to negotiate therapeutic methods of communicating and improving marriage relationships among their parishioners. The priests in this immigrant Latino parish situated any therapeutic language regarding marriage in their paternal authority in a setting where hegemonic masculinity is dominant and privileged.

This research improves the state of the literature by detailing an intersection of gender cultures and their negotiation in local settings. Immigrant parishes require both parishioners and priests to grapple with varying expectations of how men and women should look and behave. Coming from locations in Mexico and Central America, many Latino immigrants bring with them gender relations where men who exhibit hegemonic masculinity are privileged, having assertiveness and control, and where women endure suffering because of their perceived spiritual superiority (Hirsch 2003, 23). This is a setting which is very different from other settings, such as the immigrant Italian parishes in New York around the turn of the twentieth century, where masculine authority was derived from fatherhood (Orsi 2010, 122) or where authority is derived from either following or negotiating tradition (Baggett 2008, 94–95). Situated in the United States, the priests in this immigrant Latino setting either consciously or inadvertently add a second gendered understanding: the therapeutic ethic of gender egalitarianism, privileging equal sharing between men and women and creating an androgynous style of love (Cancian 1990, 15–29, 69–80). What we see here is the intersection of diverse gender beliefs in a particular local religious culture.

We need to know more about gender cultures in parishes like St. Stanislaus which has a growing Latino population; our analysis here is a small portion of what can be investigated. Gender expectations transform the immigrants' new settings at the same time that priests use their authoritative position within a culture of hegemonic masculinity to

encourage integration. As we have shown, the relationship between priest and congregants has implications for the way gender ideology in marriage and marital distress are played out. Comparing immigrant and non-immigrant contexts displays both dynamics of change and stability and thus how newer waves of Latino immigrants diverge from previous European immigrant trajectories is a rich site of further study.

Future research could benefit from a comparison of Latinos of different heritages and from investigation of Catholics at the margins of the Church, rather than of those closer to the center of Church activity. As scholars have pointed out (Badillo 2006, xvi–xix), there is no one overarching ‘Latino Experience’—it is a combination of things such as religious tradition, city, and ethnic identity. We have been able to explore and theorize the relationship between Mexican–American Latino immigrant Catholics and their priests regarding issues of family and marriage and to contrast this with non-Latino Catholics in the same mid-size Midwestern US city, but these findings may not be generalizable to other Latino groups such as Puerto Ricans and Cubans and may look different in larger urban areas.

Notes

1. Scholars point out that ethnic stereotyping leads to a monolithic impression of *machismo* and a negative connotation of these characteristics when applied to Latino men, but to more nuance and a more positive connotation when applied to White or European men (Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom 2002, 164; Nencel 1996, 58–60). To avoid essentializing *machismo*, it is thus important to acknowledge that a variety of traits associated with *machismo* can lead to gender role conflict and personal stress (Good and Mintz 1990). However, often, these traits, which include forcefulness of personality, strength of will, daring, autonomy, being romantic, commitment, responsibility, self-assertiveness, and self-confidence are versatile and can be used to have a positive impact on family relations (Mirandé 1997, 67–75).
2. Although the schema of *marianismo* relies on religious imagery, it is not a religious term used by the church; rather it is a concept developed through the anthropological literature to describe the observed behavior of Latinas in Latino society (Loue and Sajatovic 2004, 385–386; Stevens 1973, 58–60).
3. Many other gender cultures also dichotomize expectations of men’s and women’s behavior, including American Catholicism. What this article explores are dominant and diffused gender cultures and we choose two very different cultures and investigate their confluence in a particular religious setting.
4. Religious authority can be seen specifically as a form of traditional authority, which rests in the common belief that it is valid (Weber 1994, 31). However, the legitimation of this authority, as it manifests in particular relationships between parishioners and priests, is a bond between unequal people (Sennet 1993, 10).
5. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act changed the immigration patterns of Mexicans, Central Americans, and South Americans to the United States, decreasing

the circular migration common before this date and resulting in the formation of longer-lasting communities (Fry et al. 2015, 115).

6. In cases of immigration, interpretation of *machismo* and *marianismo* shapes Latinos not only in Catholic settings, as we show here, but also in Protestant communities (Michalka 2017, 98–100).
7. Interviewing congregants who had been helped in this way allowed us to collect accounts of family crises that revealed clashes between gender culture and religion and the ways that religion accommodates gender culture. All interviews, conducted between July 2009 and June 2013, took place at a neutral setting, such as a library, or in a setting of the respondents' choosing, such as a restaurant or their home. They lasted between 45 and 120 minutes, with an average of 75 minutes, and were conducted in the respondents' preferred language. Interviews in Spanish were first transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English.
8. We interviewed each spouse, Lydia and Eduardo, separately. Their names, like all the names of respondents in this article, are pseudonyms to protect individuals' identities. Interviews with Lydia and Eduardo and other parishioners were conducted in Spanish and translated into English by the authors. At St. Stanislaus, we interviewed eight women and four men. Interviews with the bilingual priests, Father Tom and Father Michael, were conducted in English.
9. Repeatedly in our interviews, pregnancy was a catalyst for family formation or for increased efforts to improve the family relationship.
10. Although we highlight Eduardo and Lydia's example, they were by no means the only respondents revealing this pattern. Their experience was a clear example of the processes that appeared at work in the lives of many immigrant Mexicans at St. Stanislaus.

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