Cultural Attachment and Remittance Behavior among US Latinos

Cultural attachment is a complex phenomenon that involves both strong, positive attitudes about a particular people or place and a set of behaviors that reinforces those attitudes. It is the result of prolonged and cumulative exposure to traditions, attitudes, practices, and myths associated with a culture or subculture. In the small body of work on the concept (Burtonwood 1996, Carr 2000, Howell 2003), there is agreement that cultural attachment is, in part, place-based: it cannot be wholly separated from the land of a person or a person's ancestors.

Although not commonly used and only vaguely defined in the sociological literature (James Kent Associates 2005), cultural attachment is useful for explaining cross-cultural immigrant behavior like sending money to family and friends in other countries. Although the act of sending remittances is a social support function, it also has a symbolic meaning that is ethnically defined. Billings (1986: 154) argues that "exchange between families…reveals a deep cultural attachment to kinship and neighborhood ties and to a spirit of mutual cooperation." From this perspective, remittance sending is a tangible expression of cultural attachment to one's country of origin or country of ancestry, in which a person who is culturally attached is, by definition, fundamentally committed to kin.

For Latinos in the United States, cultural attachment can be bi-directional. On the one hand, Latinos may be culturally attached to the United States as country of birth and/or residence. This attachment may express itself through practices such as speaking English and through holding orientations, such as thinking of oneself as an American, and interests, such as following US news. On the other hand, Latinos may be culturally attached to their country of origin or ancestry or even to a pan-ethnic "Latino" culture. This attachment may also express itself in language (usually, speaking Spanish), religion (Catholicism), or behaviors (marrying other Latinos or visiting the country of ancestry). Clearly, these attachments are not mutually exclusive. A person can be strongly attached to more than one culture, just as one would equally love two very different offspring. These divided attachments persist for both immigrant and non-immigrant Latinos, although the two-way pull may be stronger for immigrants because they are more conscious of living in the intersection of two cultures (see Suarez-Orozco and Paez 2002)

We test the hypotheses that attachment to US culture deters the sending of remittances, while attachment to various Latin American cultures should encourage the sending of remittances. In our paper, we test the premises by examining the impact of various expressions of cultural attachment on the probability of sending remittances to Latin America among Latinos born in the fifty states, Puerto Rico, and abroad.

Remittances to Latin America

In 2005, at least $232 billion dollars transferred between countries in the form of remittances (Ratha 2005). In that same year, Mexicans received an estimated $13 billion dollars from US residents (Zamoro 2005), and Costa Rica officially declared the US dollar as legal tender (Orozco 2002). For many poor countries, remittances now exceed foreign aid and are a primary source of exchange capital (Kapur and McHale 2003).

Despite the importance of remittances in both volume and impact (see Taylor, Arrango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Massey and Pellegrino 1996), and the fact that US residents are particularly likely to send remittances abroad (Zamoro 2005), there is little research on the micro-level factors that affect remittance sending behavior among US residents. Instead, most of the published literature in this area focuses on the impact of remittances on receivers and receiving societies (Eloundou-Enyegue and Calves 2006, Itzigsohn 1995, Lianos 1997). Indeed, the bulk of remittance research centers on remittance sending as a macro-level process that aids or impedes development, dependency, and inequality (Stark, Taylor, and Yitzhaki 1986, Keely and Tran 1989, Orozco 2002, Kapur and McHale 2003), with little attention paid to the micro-level processes that prompt remittance sending.

Arguably, the lack of research on remittance sending behavior is the result of a dearth of data. Few cross-sectional, multi-ethnic datasets are available to examine the phenomenon. The Mexican Migration Project (MMP) and Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) are the exception. Using MMP (and, to a lesser extent LAMP) data, researchers have been able to assert a great deal about the demographic factors that predict various types of remittance behavior among Mexican and other Latin American immigrants to the United States (see, for example, Amuedo-Dorantes and Bansak 2006, DeSipio 2002, Massey and Basem 1992, Massey and Parrado 1994, Sana 2005). A limitation to this data is that it is limited only to first-generation immigrants. Broader definitions of remittance sending (see Alfieri, Havinga and Hvidsten 2005) suggest the possibility that second generation immigrants and certain ethnic minorities may also send money to extended family and friends in their country of ancestry.

This paper examines remittances from this broader perspective. Using data from the 2006 National Survey of Latinos, we examine differences in the probability of sending remittances to Latin America among a sample of *all* adult Latinos living in the United States, both immigrants and natives, focusing on the impact of attachment to both US and various Latin American cultures.

Data and Methods

Data for our study are taken from the 2006 National Survey of Latinos: The Immigration Debate (NSL). The NSL is a national telephone survey of 2000 Latinos residing in the continental United States, age 18 or over, conducted between June 5 and July 3, 2006. In the NSL, respondents were asked a variety of questions about their practices and beliefs, particularly those related to immigration and Latino ethnic cultures. Many questions posed to the responded were tailored specifically to the country from which the respondent immigrated. If the respondent was not an immigrant immigrants, questions were tailed toward their country of ancestry. For those who indicated their ethnic origin as a more generic "Hispanic or Latino," the term "Latin America" was used instead of a specific country of origin. For example, our dependent variable is taken from the question, "Have you sent money to anyone in (country) in the past year?" with *country* changing depending on the ethnic/national origin of the respondent. We limit our sample to the 1867 respondents who gave a valid response to that question,

Our variables of interest are several measures of cultural attachment. Because there is little work on cultural attachment to guide us, we included variables that had face validity as measures of attachment to either US or Latino ethnic cultures. Some questions appropriate for measuring cultural attachment (such as frequency of phoning people in the country of origin and belonging to an ethnic club, organization or sports team) were asked only of immigrants and were included in an immigrant-only model. Because we lacked a good model of attachment, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis to examine underlying data structures. The results indicated that our variables measured seven underlying constructs (eigenvalues greater than one). Unfortunately, only one had at least four variables that loaded highly on the same construct (the amount needed to insure validity). Exploratory analysis of the six components with three or fewer high loading indicators each yielded alpha reliability scores of .4 or lower, indicating that scaling them was unreasonable. For the seventh component, nine indicators measured a single underlying construct, with each of them loading on that component at .6 or higher. Labeling that construct *US attachment*, we created a standardized scale from these nine indicators which included respondent's preference to be interviewed in English (versus Spanish) and the language the interview was completed in, whether or not the respondent is a US citizen, whether or not the respondent generally refers to him/herself as an American, whether or not the respondent gets all of his/her news in English, ability to speak and read English and language usually spoken at home and at work (α=.89). Highest values were given to those who completed tasks in English, referred to themselves generally as American, and were US citizens, indicating high levels of attachment to US culture.

Our six measures of attachment to Latin American cultures are as follows: 1) ability to speak Spanish (which, interestingly, did not load with the other language variables), 2) membership in the Catholic church, 3) frequency of talking on the phone to people in the respondent's country of ethnicity (for immigrants only), 4) months since last visit to the country of origin or ancestry (coded as months of age for those who have never visited), 5) whether or not the respondent has a Latino spouse or partner, and 6) membership in or affiliation with an ethnic club, organization, or sports team (for immigrants only). We control for region of birth, ethnic origin, employment status, educational attainment, age, and income. Some potential covariates (i.e., sex, marital status, number of children, and having a bank account) are associated with certain types of remittance behavior, but not the specific behavior—probability of sending—that we tested. They showed no influence on the model and were dropped to maintain parsimony. For the analysis limited to immigrants, we also control for years in the United States, owning a business, land, or house in the country of origin and intent to move back to the country of origin.

Due to a high number of missing cases for age (6.48 percent) and income (26.46 percent), we adjusted the data using a multiple imputation procedure in STATA where missing cases were imputed based on the control variables, after dropping one cases for non-response to the place of birth question. Weighted logistic regression models were then conducted to determine the log odds of sending remittances. The resultant sample sizes are 1,867 for the full model, 341 for the states-born model, 116 for the Puerto Rican model, and 1,409 for the immigrant model.

Preliminary Findings
Below we present two sets of preliminary findings. In Table 1, we display the odds ratios calculated from log odds coefficients for bivariate measures of cultural attachment against the likelihood of sending remittances. For the full sample, all of the variables are significant and in the direction we would anticipate. For the subsamples, attachment to US culture and months since last visit, only, are significant in the expected direction for those born in the continental United States. For the foreign-born, all measures except ability to speak English and being Catholic are significant in the expected direction.

Our preliminary multivariate model findings for the full sample (presented in Table 2) indicate that when other factors are controlled, some cultural attachment measures remain significant predictors of the log odds of sending remittances. Those who are more strongly attached to US culture are 55% less likely to send remittances ($p<.001$), while those who have a Latino partner and those who have visited their country of origin/ancestry most recently are more likely to send remittances ($p<.10$ and $p<.01$, respectively). All other measures of attachment to Latin American cultures became non-significant with the addition of the control variables.

The analysis of the subsamples shows a slightly different pattern. First, the Puerto Rican model appears to be mispecified (likelihood chi-square is non-significant). For those Latino born in the continental United States, attachment to US culture is the only attachment variable that is significant at the $p<.05$ level. Those who are more strongly attached to US culture are 72% more likely to send remittances. Interestingly, for the foreign born, attachment to US culture is non-significant, while months since last visit and phone contact with friends and family are significant predictors (although, the effect size for visiting is very small). To the extent that these variable measure attachment to Latino cultures, we conclude that attachment to Latino culture matters for immigrants, while attachment to US culture matters for the US-born with regard to sending remittances. Arguably, those variables of interest that significantly predict remittance sending for immigrants may be measuring the presence of close friends or family members in the country of origin rather than attachment to culture *per se*. This will require further exploration. We would additionally like to examine the impact of cultural attachment on the amount of remittances sent where we can also control for the relationship to the person to whom remittances are sent.

Table 1. Bivariate Logistic Regression Results for Measures of Cultural Attachment (odds ratios shown)

	Full Sample	US-Born	P. Rican-born	Foreign-born
Attachment to American culture	0.35***	0.32**	0.90	0.61**
Ability to speak Spanish:				
Very well	ref	ref	---	ref
Pretty well	0.27**	0.76	---	0.28
Just a little	0.32**	0.87	0.73	0.83
Not at all	0.09**	0.26	---	0.19
Catholic	1.45*	1.21	1.19	1.20
Partner is Latino	2.03***	1.72	2.36	1.45*
Months since last visit to (country)	0.98***	0.98*	0.99	0.99*
Frequency of phoning (country)	---	---	---	1.74***
Belongs to (country) organization	---	---	---	2.26**
n for each model	1867	341	116	1409

(Country depends on ethnicity/national origin of respondent.) *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 2. Odds Ratios of Sending Remittances in the Last Year

	Full Sample	US-Born	P. Rican-born	Foreign-born
Attachment to American culture	0.45***	0.28**	3.58	1.02
Ability to speak Spanish				
Very well	ref	ref	---	ref
Pretty well	1.05	1.74	---	0.55
Just a little	1.71	2.78†	0.22	0.85
Not at all	0.53	1.09	---	0.34
Catholic	1.05	0.96	2.13	0.96
Partner is Latino	1.35†	1.62	4.48**	1.13
Months since last visit to (country)	1.00**	1.00	1.00	1.00*
Frequency of phoning (country)	---	---	---	1.57***
Belongs to (country) organization	---	---	---	1.53
Place of birth				
Continental United States	ref	---	---	---
Puerto Rico	0.87	---	---	---
Foreign country	1.43	---	---	---
Ethnicity				
Cuban	1.63	1.59	0.30	0.81
Dominican	1.40	1.24	0.56	1.10
Puerto Rican	0.98	0.89	0.27	1.17
Mexican	0.62†	1.42	---	0.57†
Central American	1.40	2.31	2.47	1.31
South American	1.33	0.93	0.87	1.07
Hispanic/Latino	ref	ref	ref	ref
Employed	1.28	0.72	0.94	1.63*
Educational attainment				
Less than high school	0.78	0.67	0.34	1.00
Some high school	0.90	0.62	0.28	1.18
High school graduate/equivalent	ref	ref	ref	ref
Some college	0.59*	0.42†	.024†	0.58†
College graduate	0.79	1.28	0.25	0.44**
Age				
18 to 34	1.02	1.50	0.11†	0.65†
35 to 54	ref	ref	ref	ref
55 and older	0.40**	1.81	0.85	0.48*
Income	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Years in the United States	---	---	---	0.98
Owns property in (country)	---	---	---	1.11
Intends to move back to (country)	---	---	---	0.88
Log pseudo-likelihood	-1023.69	-134.40	-52.85	-796.78
n	1866	341	109	1387

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001