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Volunteer Work in the Church Among Older Mexican Americans

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence the amount of volunteer work that older Mexican Americans perform in the place where they worship. The relationship between religion and volunteering is viewed from a social identity perspective. Data from a nationally representative sample of older Mexican Americans suggest that Evangelical/Pentecostal church members spend more time performing volunteer work at church than older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other denominations. Moreover, the findings indicate that the difference in the amount of volunteering between the two groups can largely be explained by differences in the nature of the spiritual support that Evangelical/Pentecostal receive from their fellow church members as well as depth of their commitment to their faith.

Keywords

volunteer work; Mexican Americans; religion

Researchers have devoted considerable time to the study of volunteer work in the United States (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Although it is difficult to find a definition of volunteering that is agreed upon by all investigators, the definition proposed by Musick and Wilson (2008) is used here. They maintain that "... volunteer work includes not only the unpaid provision of services directly to others in need, but also political activism and community representation on boards of various agencies" (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 26). A good deal of the research in this area has been concerned with identifying the individuals who are most likely to volunteer. Three trends that are especially relevant for the current study emerge from this literature. First, the findings indicate that older adults spend more hours performing volunteer work than young individuals (Van Willigen, 2000). Second, people who are more involved in religion tend to volunteer more often than individuals who are less involved in religion (Borogoni, 2008). Third, there are also variations in rates of volunteering by race, but these findings are more complicated. More specifically, the data suggest that Whites are more likely to volunteer than Blacks, but Blacks spend more hours performing volunteer activities than Whites (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

The purpose of the current study is to examine factors that influence whether older Mexican Americans engage in volunteer work at church. An effort is made to contribute to the literature in three potentially important ways. First, there has been very little research on volunteering among older Mexican Americans. And the few studies that focus on Mexican Americans are rather limited in the scope of volunteer activities that are examined. For example, Barreto and Munoz (2003) studied volunteering among Mexican Americans, but

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they were concerned solely with volunteering for political campaigns. Other studies focus on all Hispanics taken together, rather than just Mexican Americans. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) provides evidence that Hispanics volunteer less often than either Whites or Blacks. However, a number of different ethnic groups are subsumed under the broad Hispanic label, including people who trace their ancestry to Central American, Mexico, and Cuba. Folding such ethnically diverse people into a single group masks important cultural and historical variations among them.

Second, rather than merely documenting how often older Mexican Americans volunteer, an effort is made in the current study to examine the underlying factors that motivate them to perform volunteer work in the church. Denominational affiliation, social relationships in the church, and religious commitment play a key role in this respect. Research on these potentially influential factors is important because, as Musick and Wilson (2008) note, “The association between race and motivation for volunteering is an unexplored area” (p. 74).

Third, in order to more thoroughly examine the variables that motivate older Mexican Americans to volunteer in the church we rely on an overlooked statistical procedure that makes it possible to tease out some of the fine nuances in the influence of factors like church-based social ties on volunteering: the demographic mean decomposition procedure (Iams & Thornton, 1975). However, before turning to this statistical procedure, it is important to probe more deeply into the factors that motivate older Mexican Americans to volunteer at church.

Religion and Volunteering Among Older Mexican Americans

Although people who are more involved in religion are more likely to volunteer, research further reveals that rates of volunteering vary by denominational preference. More specifically, research by Musick and Wilson (2008) suggests that Liberal Protestants are more likely to volunteer than Evangelicals and Evangelicals are, in turn, more likely to perform volunteer work than Catholics (see also Monsma, 2007). However, there do not appear to be any studies that examine the relationship between denominational preferences and volunteer work among older Mexican Americans. Research indicates that approximately 79 percent of Mexican Americans are Catholic, 14 percent identify with Evangelical or Pentecostal congregations, 4 percent are mainline Protestants, and 3 percent identify with other Protestant faith traditions (Espinosa, 2008). Simply put, most Mexican Americans are either Catholics or Evangelicals. Consequently, the purpose of the research that follows is to see whether Mexican American Evangelicals tend to volunteer more often than Mexican Americans of other faith traditions.

In the analyses that follow, Mexican Americans who identify with Evangelical or Pentecostal congregations are placed in the same group. Although it may initially seem that there are significant differences between them, there are two reasons why the two are pooled together in the current study. First, as Woodberry and Smith (1998) argue, “... distinguishing fundamentalists, evangelicals, charismatics, and Pentecostals is complex ... They are better understood as loosely connected networks of ministerial, parachurch organizations, schools, seminaries ...” (p. 33). In fact, differentiating between the two may be especially difficult in the Mexican American community, as Sanchez Walsh (2003) points out: “The umbrella movement that Pentecostals have often reluctantly called home is a rather unwieldy network called evangelical Christianity” (p. 2).

We approach the study of volunteering among older Mexican Americans from a social identity perspective (Oyserman, 2007). According to this view, threats to self-esteem or well-being are alleviated by identifying with a group that conveys a higher status and offers more support (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Centuries of discrimination clearly pose a significant

threat to the self-worth and well-being of Mexican Americans. Rodriguez (1994) captures the essence of these historical experiences when she notes that Mexican Americans have been the victims of “psychological colonization”, which manifests itself in feelings of inferiority, lack of self-worth, apathy, and the lack of motivation to strive for the goals of the dominant society. Sanchez Walsh (2003) extends this line of thinking by arguing that this deep sense of alienation has created a quest for community that many Mexican Americans have been able to find in Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations. Cast within the context of social identity theory, one way that some Mexican Americans dealt with threats to their sense of self-worth involved becoming part of, and identifying with, Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations.

Oyserman (2007) argues that an individual may assume a number of different social identities. However, she goes on to point out that some identities play a greater role in shaping the self than others. There is good reason to believe that identifying with Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations sits atop this identity hierarchy for many Mexican Americans who affiliate with these faith traditions. Evidence for this assertion may be found in the work of Sanchez Walsh (2003), who reports that, “...Latino Pentecostals subsume their ethnic identity to their religious identity because of perceived biblical mandates which suggest that race and ethnicity are no longer important” (p. 71). But Latino Evangelical/Pentecostal identities are based upon, and reinforced by, more than these perceived biblical mandates. Research by Sanchez Walsh (2003) suggests that the sense of ingroup and outgroup distinctions are especially pronounced in Latino Pentecostal congregations because the participants in her study felt they were under attack by the media, public schools, and from the wider American culture as a whole. Vila (2005) traces these threats in Mexican American Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations to the belief that they are the personal work of the devil.

So if Evangelical/Pentecostal social identities are so firmly entrenched in the psyche of some Mexican Americans, then it is important to trace their impact on behavior, especially as it is manifest in terms of volunteering. As Musick and Wilson (2008) point out, one of the more obvious ways to determine why people volunteer has to do with assessing their underlying reasons or motivations for doing so. The notion of motivations is important because, as Oyserman (2007), maintains, motivation is identity based: “Individuals are motivated to pursue the goals that ingroup members pursue using the means in group members use” (p. 432). Since values shape goals (Higgins, 2007) and social identities motivate people to pursue goals, it follows that focusing on the core values of Mexican Americans who identify with Evangelical/Pentecostal faith traditions will help show why they are more likely to engage in volunteer work.

One of the core values in Latino Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations is captured by Sanchez Walsh (2003), who argues that, “What began as a private conversion becomes a public crusade because of the desire to see people convert and because of an understanding that the private behavioral transformation of church members can and should be transmitted to the larger society” (p. 127). Simply put, converting others on a one-on-one level is valued highly by Latino Evangelicals. And one mechanism for accomplishing the goal that is driven by these values involves performing volunteer work. Evidence of this may be found in the work of Ramirez (1999), who provides a detailed historical overview of the Mexican American Pentecostal Church. He points out that one of the major activities in these congregations involved performing volunteer work that was geared toward feeding and finding employment for undocumented immigrants. But he goes on to argue that ultimately, the goal was to recruit those who receive these goods and services into the faith: “A church of the poor and marginalized, they unconditionally received the fellow poor, shared their

‘good news’ with them, bound up their wounds, sheltered, fed, and oriented them, and invited them along in a pilgrimage laden with significance” (p. 589).

The literature that has been reviewed up to this point suggests that Evangelical/Pentecostal social identities are a powerful motivating force in the lives of many Mexican Americans and these motives are manifest in a range of community outreach (i.e., volunteer) programs. Based on these insights, it is hypothesized in the current study that older Mexican Americans who affiliate with Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations will be more likely to engage in church-based volunteer work than older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other faith traditions.

However, merely evaluating this hypothesis does not go far enough because it is not clear how the motives, values, and goals that are part of the Evangelical/Pentecostal social identity are transmitted to the faithful. Two primary ways are compared and contrasted below. The first involves formal church activities (i.e., attendance at worship services) while the second has to do with the influence of informal social relationships that arise within the church.

Formal worship services in the church constitute one of the primary ways in which specific religious values and precepts are transmitted to the faithful. Religious precepts are typically transmitted and reinforced through sermons, hymns, and group prayers. Referring to religious beliefs and teachings as “religious explanations”, Stark and Finke (2000) argue that, “Confidence in religious explanations increases to the extent that people participate in religious rituals” (p. 107). So if Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches in the Mexican American community value volunteer work highly and if values are transmitted through attendance at worship services, then it follows that more frequent church attendance should be associated with more volunteer work.

Although participating in formal worship services is a key mechanism for transmitting religious percepts, researchers have known for some time that the informal social networks that arise in places of worship play an important role in this process, as well (Krause, 2008). Evidence of this may be found in the work of Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman (2010), who maintain that religious social identities, and the self-concepts that arise from them, are maintained and reinforced by members of the religious community. Krause’s (2008) notion of informal spiritual support suggests one way in which this might be accomplished. Spiritual support is defined as assistance that is specifically intended to increase the religious commitment, beliefs, and behaviors of a fellow church member. There are a number of ways in which church members may exchange spiritual support. For example, they may share their own religious experiences with a coreligionist, they may show them how to apply their religious beliefs in daily life, or they may help them find solutions to problems they encounter by turning to the Bible. So if Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations in the Mexican American community encourage volunteer and community outreach activities, then one way these teachings may be transmitted is through informal encouragement (i.e., spiritual support) that is exchanged among fellow church members. The third goal of the current study is to examine this issue.

Although attendance at formal worship services and spiritual support are both conduits for the transmission of religious principles and values, there is no guarantee that a person who is exposed to these messages will ultimately adopt or internalize them. As research on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness reveals, people may attend worship services without genuinely subscribing to the specific religious beliefs that are espoused there (Alport, 1950). Something more is needed to determine whether religious beliefs that encountered at church are actually put into practice. As discussed earlier, the more strongly

a person subscribes to a social identity, the greater the effect that identity will have on motivating an adherent to engage in ingroup behavior (Oyserman, 2007). One way to evaluate this core tenet of social identity theory involves assessing how deeply older Mexican Americans are committed to implementing their religious beliefs in daily life. It is for this reason that an effort is made to examine the influence of religious commitment in the current study. Viewed in a more general way, religious commitment is a portal through which religious beliefs from either formal or informal sources in the church are translated into action. The fourth and final goal of the current study is to assess whether religious commitment explain why Evangelical/Pentecostal Mexican Americans are more likely to engage in church-based volunteer work than older Mexican Americans who embrace other faith traditions.

Methods

Sample

The population for this study was defined as all Mexican Americans age 66 and over who were retired (i.e., not working for pay), not institutionalized, and who speak either English or Spanish. The sampling frame consisted of all eligible study participants who resided in counties in the following five-state area: Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The sampling strategy that was used for the widely-cited Hispanic Established Population for Epidemiological Study (HEPESE) (Markides, 2003) was adopted for the current study (see Markides, 2003, for a detailed discussion of the steps that were followed). All interviews were conducted by Harris Interactive (New York). The interviews were administered face-to-face in the homes of the older study participants. All interviewers were bilingual and study participants were offered to be interviewed in either English or Spanish. The wide majority of interviews (84%) were conducted entirely in Spanish. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants. A total of 1,005 interviews were completed successfully. The response rate was 52%.

As discussed above, volunteer work in the church and spiritual support provided by fellow church members play a key role in the analyses presented below. When this study was being designed, the members of the research team felt that it did not make sense to ask study participants questions about performing volunteer work in the church or questions about receiving spiritual support from coreligionists if they either don't attend church at all or if they only go to church rarely. Consequently, questions on volunteering in the church and spiritual support were not administered to older study participants who indicated that they go to church services no more than once or twice a year. After deleting these study participants from the sample, the analyses presented below are based on the responses of 663 older Mexican Americans.

The EM algorithm was used to impute missing values in the data (Enders, 2010). Simulation studies suggest that the EM is preferable to listwise deletion because listwise deletion may produce biased estimates (Enders 2010). Moreover, the estimates that are derived by the EM procedure are comparable to those that are derived with more time-consuming procedures, such as multiple imputation.

Preliminary analyses reveal that the average age of the older Mexican Americans in this sample was 73.41 years ($SD = 6.22$ years), approximately 39% were older men, and the average number of years of schooling was 6.77 ($SD = 3.86$ years)

Measures

Table 1 contains the survey items that were used to assess the core constructs in the current study. The procedures that were used to code these measures are provided in the footnotes of this table.

Volunteer Work in the Church—The participants in this study were asked how often they spend time working in volunteer programs that are operated by the church they presently attend. This measure was taken from the work of Krause (2009). As shown in Table 1, the question on volunteering was carefully phrased to avoid confounding donations of money, food, or clothing with actual time spent volunteering. A high score on this item denotes more time spent volunteering. The mean score on the volunteering measure is 1.26 ($SD = .81$).

Evangelical/Pentecostal Affiliation—Nine questions were administered to determine the denominational affiliation of all study participants. Then, the comprehensive review of the literature by Smith (1990) was consulted to find out if these specific denominations were Evangelical or Pentecostal. This was possible because Smith (1990) provides classification schemes that were devised by a number of investigators. We included denominations in the Evangelical/Pentecostal category if they were so designated by one of these researchers.

The data suggest that 21.56 percent affiliate with Evangelical/Pentecostal denominations. This is nearly identical to the 22 percent estimate reported by Kelly and Kelly (2005). The data further reveal that 76.7 percent of the older Mexican Americans in this study are Catholic, while the rest (6.8%) affiliate with other Protestant denominations. Based on the theoretical rationale provided earlier, a simply binary variable was created that contrasts Evangelicals/Pentecostals (scored 1) with all others (scored 0).

Church Attendance—A widely used indicator was administered in the survey to determine how often study participants attend worship services. A high score denotes more frequent church attendance. The mean was 7.01 ($SD = 1.45$).

Spiritual Support—Four items were used to assess spiritual support. These measures were taken from the work of Krause (2008). The indicators in this brief composite assess whether fellow church members share their own religious experiences with study participants, whether they help study participants lead a better religious life, and whether they help study participants get to know God better. A high score on these items denotes more frequent spiritual support. The mean of this brief scale is 8.25 ($SD = 3.66$). The internal consistency reliability estimate for this short scale was .93.

In the process of developing the spiritual support items, it became evident that church members can provide spiritual support in two different settings. First, spiritual support can be provided informally in the process of interacting with fellow church members. This interaction may take place inside, as well as outside, the church. Second, as the work of Wuthnow (1994) reveals, people may also provide spiritual support in formal church settings, such as Bible study and prayer groups. Moreover, when the spiritual support items for this study were being developed (see Krause, 2002), a number of study participants indicated that they considered sermons delivered during formal worship services and congregational prayers to be a source of spiritual support. Expanding the scope of inquiry to include these formal settings tends to blur the boundaries between religious assistance that is obtained through formal worship services, spiritual guidance that is garnered through prayer, and spiritual sustenance that is provided informally by rank-and-file church members. In order to more clearly identify the underlying factors that motivate older Mexican Americans

to become involved in volunteer work, participants in the current study were instructed to exclude spiritual assistance they may have received in Bible study groups, prayer groups, and formal worship services when answering the spiritual support questions.

Religious Commitment—The measure of religious commitment that is recommended by the Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group (1999) is used in the current study. A high score stands for a deeper commitment to one's religious faith. The mean on this brief composite was 9.95 ($SD = 1.58$). The reliability estimate was .90.

Demographic Control Measures—The relationships among the measures that are provided in Table 1 were evaluated after the effects of age, sex, and education were controlled statistically. Age and education were coded continuously in years. In contrast, a binary variable was used to assess sex (1 = men; 0 = women).

Data Analysis Procedure

Recall that the data in the current study will be analyzed with the demographic mean decomposition procedure (Iams & Thorton, 1975). Because this technique is not used widely, it is important to describe it and identify the insights that can be gleaned from it. This will be accomplished in this section by providing a verbal overview of the procedure and then presenting the formula that is used to derive the necessary estimates.

The first hypothesis in this study specifies that Evangelicals/Pentecostals will be more likely to perform volunteer work in the church than individuals who affiliate with other faith traditions. If this is true, then the mean volunteer score for Evangelicals/Pentecostals should be greater than the score for the others. The demographic mean decomposition procedure takes the mean difference in volunteering between these two groups and breaks it down into three components. In order to make it easier to grasp the nature of these components, it will be helpful to focus on just one of the factors that are thought to motivate greater volunteering among Evangelicals/Pentecostals: spiritual support from fellow church members. Assume that the data reveal that Evangelicals/Pentecostals volunteer more than others. Assume further that spiritual support spiritual support has something to do with it. There are three ways in which spiritual support may contribute to the observed mean difference between the two groups.

First, Evangelicals/Pentecostals may volunteer more often because they receive more spiritual support from their fellow church members than older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other faith traditions. If this is true, then this influence would be found by contrasting the mean spiritual support scores of Evangelicals/Pentecostals with the mean spiritual support scores of those who affiliate with other denominations. The difference between the two means would represent *differential exposure* to spiritual support across the two groups.

Second, a mean difference in volunteering might arise because the impact of spiritual support on volunteering is greater in one group than in another. This *differential impact* might arise because the nature, meaning, or function of spiritual support may differ across the two groups. This means, for example, that spiritual support might be taken more seriously or valued more highly in Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations. Moreover, as McFadden, Knepple, and Armstrong (2003) point out, people in Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations may be more receptive to, and less offended by, informal discussions of personal religious beliefs. To the extent that this is true, the difference in the nature and meaning of spiritual support should be reflected in the unstandardized regression coefficients that capture the relationship between spiritual support and volunteering within each group.

Third, the differential exposure and differential impact components are not mutually exclusive. This means that Evangelicals/Pentecostals may get more spiritual support from their fellow church members and the spiritual support they receive may have a greater impact on volunteering because it differs qualitatively from spiritual support that older Mexican Americans in other faith traditions receive. If this is true, the mean difference in volunteering should be captured by the interaction between differential exposure and the differential impact of spiritual support across groups.

Having provided a conceptual overview of the decomposition procedure, the formula provided in Equation 1 below shows how each of the three components is calculated. The components in the formula are obtained by estimating the means of all the study variables separately within each group and by estimating the relationships between the independent variables and volunteering separately within each group. In this equation, the subscript “e” refers to Evangelicals/Pentecostals while the subscript “ne” refers to older Mexican Americans who do not affiliate with an Evangelical or Pentecostal congregations. Moreover, the b_i are unstandardized regression coefficients, and the X_i are means.

$$Y_e - Y_{ne} = (b_{0e} - b_{0ne}) + \sum X_{ine} (b_{ie} - b_{ine}) + \sum b_{ine} (X_{ie} - X_{ine}) + \sum (X_{ie} - X_{ine})(b_{ie} - b_{ine}) \quad (1)$$

The first component ($Y_e - Y_{ne}$) is the mean difference in volunteering between Evangelicals/Pentecostals and people who affiliate with other denominations. The second component ($b_{0e} - b_{0ne}$) reflects the difference in the intercepts of the regression equations that are estimated with each group. The third component ($(\sum X_{ine} (b_{ie} - b_{ine}))$) denotes the differential impact of the independent variables. The fourth component ($(\sum b_{ine} (X_{ie} - X_{ine}))$) stands for differential exposure to the independent variables. And the fifth component ($(\sum (X_{ie} - X_{ine})(b_{ie} - b_{ine}))$) represents the interaction between the differential impact and differential exposure components. Summing the components on the right hand side of Equation 1 should (allowing for rounding) reproduce the observed mean difference between the two groups.

Results

Table 2 contains the means of the study measures for Evangelicals/Pentecostals and (separately) older Mexican Americans of other faith traditions. Two important findings emerge from these data. First, the findings reveal that, as hypothesized, older Mexican American Evangelicals/Pentecostals perform volunteer work more frequently in the church than older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other faith traditions ($Y_e = 1.587$; $Y_{ne} = 1.172$; $p < .001$). Second, the results indicate that compared to older Mexican Americans in other denominations, Evangelicals/Pentecostals attend church more often ($X_e = 7.692$; $X_{ne} = 6.821$; $p < .001$), receive more spiritual support from their fellow church members ($X_e = 10.284$; $X_{ne} = 7.611$; $p < .001$), and are more deeply committed to their faith ($X_e = 10.764$; $X_{ne} = 9.724$; $p < .001$).

Table 3 contains the findings that reflect the influence of the study measures on volunteering within each group. Three main findings emerge from the data in this table. First, the results suggest that the frequency of church attendance is not significantly associated with volunteering in either the Evangelical/Pentecostal group ($b = .087$; *n.s.*) or the group that is comprised of older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other denominations ($b = .030$; *n.s.*). Second, and in contrast, the findings reveal that more spiritual support is associated with more volunteering in the Evangelical/Pentecostal group ($b = .063$; $p < .05$), but not in the group of older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other faith traditions ($b = .011$; *n.s.*). Third, the data indicate that greater religious commitment is associated with more

frequent church-based volunteering in both groups ($b_e = .163$; $p < .05$; $b_{ne} = .041$; $p < .05$). However, the relationship between religious commitment and volunteering is stronger in the Evangelical/Pentecostal group.¹

Although specific hypotheses were not provided for the influence of the demographic variables in Table 3 on volunteering, briefly reviewing some of the findings associated with these measures is helpful because so little is known about volunteering in Mexican American congregations. Within the Evangelical/Pentecostal group, the findings suggest that older Mexican American men are more likely to volunteer than older Mexican American women ($b = .446$; $p < .05$). However, comparable effects were not observed among older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other faith traditions ($b = -.103$; $n.s.$). This suggests that something about affiliating with Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations is especially empowering for older Mexican American men. The majority of men in the current cohort of older Mexican Americans were employed outside the home while most of the women worked inside the home. Perhaps older Mexican American men were exposed to more discrimination because of this traditional division of labor. To the extent this is true, perhaps identifying more closely with Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations provided a greater boost to the self-esteem of older Mexican American men, thereby differentially enhancing their motivation to adhere to the teachings of these faith traditions (i.e., engaging in volunteer work).

The data in Tables 2 and 3 present an interesting dilemma involving the interface between spiritual support, religious commitment, and volunteering in the two groups. More specifically, the means suggest that Evangelicals/Pentecostals receive more spiritual support and are more committed to their faith than others. Moreover, the regression coefficients indicate that the impact of spiritual support and religious commitment on volunteering is stronger in this group, as well. Based on these findings alone, it is not possible to tell if greater involvement in volunteer work is therefore due to mean differences in spiritual support and religious commitment across groups (i.e., differential exposure) or whether it may be attributed to differences in the relationship between spiritual support, religious commitment, and volunteering across the two groups (i.e., differential impact). It is precisely at this juncture that the utility of the demographic mean decomposition technique becomes evident.

Table 4 contains a complete decomposition of the mean differences in church-based volunteer work between Evangelicals/Pentecostals and older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other denominations. The findings involving spiritual support and religious commitment are both illuminating and consistent. The data suggest that the mean difference in volunteering across groups is due more to the differential impact of spiritual support (.396) than either differential exposure to spiritual support (.029) or the interaction between the two (.139). Similarly, the results reveal that the mean difference in volunteering across groups is more readily explained by the differential impact of religious commitment (1.186) than by either differential exposure to religious commitment (.043) or the interaction between the two (.127). Moreover, as the magnitude of the components reveals, the differential impact of religious commitment plays a larger role in explaining mean differences in volunteering than the differential impact of spiritual support.

¹The following procedure was used to verify the claim that the effects of religious commitment were stronger in the Evangelical/Pentecostal group. The data for Evangelicals/Pentecostals and older Mexican Americans with other denominational affiliations was pooled to form a single group. Then a test was conducted for a statistical interaction between Evangelical/Pentecostal affiliation and religious commitment on volunteering. This test revealed that the interaction term was statistically significant ($p < .01$). Further post hoc probing revealed that the coefficient for the relationship between religious commitment and volunteer work is significantly larger in the Evangelical/Pentecostal group.

Conclusions

Musick and Wilson (2008) review several longitudinal studies which indicate that people who perform volunteer work tend to enjoy better physical and mental health than individuals who do not engage in volunteer activities. However, these studies are based on survey research designs and as a result, it cannot be conclusively stated that volunteering “causes” better health. Even so, if these findings ultimately prove to be valid, then researchers will have found an important way to improve the Nation’s health. This may be especially important for older minority group members, who are especially at risk for adverse health events (Anderson, Bulatao, & Cohen, 2004). However, before effective interventions can be designed to promote volunteering, researchers need to know a good deal more about the factors that motivate older people of color to participate in this type of activity. The purpose of the current study was to address this issue in an especially overlooked ethnic group: older Mexican Americans. Very little is known about the factors that motivate older Mexican Americans to engage in volunteer work. The findings from the current study suggest that involvement in religion may have something to do with it. But instead of merely assessing the relationship between the frequency of church attendance and volunteering, as many studies have done (see Musick & Wilson, 2008, for a review of this research), an effort was made to delve more deeply into the formal and informal processes in the church that may encourage older Mexican Americans to perform volunteer work.

The findings from the current study suggest that greater involvement in church-based volunteer work may be found by focusing on the intersection between denominational preference, spiritual support from fellow church members, and religious commitment. More specifically, the results reveal that Evangelicals/Pentecostals tend to perform volunteer work in the church more often than older Mexican Americans who affiliate with other denominations. Moreover, the data suggest that greater involvement in volunteering among Evangelicals/Pentecostals can be traced to the spiritual support they receive from their fellow church members as well as the extent of their commitment to their faith. In the process, the demographic mean decomposition technique was used to obtain a more precise understanding of how the influence of spiritual support and religious commitment operate. The findings reveal that even though Evangelicals/Pentecostals receive more spiritual support from their fellow church members and even though they are more committed to their faith, these mean differences (i.e., differential exposure) alone do not explain the observed difference in volunteering across groups. Instead, the data indicate that Evangelicals/Pentecostals volunteer more often because spiritual support and religious commitment have a greater effect (i.e., differential impact) on how often they perform volunteer work.

It is important to note that the magnitude of the differential impact of religious commitment on volunteering was greater than the magnitude of the differential impact of spiritual support. This finding is consistent with one of the core tenets of social identity theory, which states that motivation is identity based (Oyserman, 2007). Although social support plays a role in social identity theory as well (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010), a greater emphasis in this theoretical perspective appears to be placed on motivation. Consistent with this interpretation, the data indicate that compared to spiritual support, motivation (i.e., commitment) explains a greater part of the mean difference in volunteering between Mexican American Evangelicals/Pentecostals and Mexican Americans who affiliate with other faith traditions.

As noted earlier, research reviewed by Musick and Wilson (2008) indicates that Blacks perform more hours of volunteer work than Whites. These investigators go on to point out that this is true only when volunteering takes place within the church and not when it takes

place in other venues, such as schools. This is noteworthy for the following reason. Historically, the church was the only institution in the Black community that was wholly owned and operated by Blacks (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). To a certain extent, a similar situation is found in Evangelical/Pentecostal Mexican American congregations. Historically, the Catholic Church in the Mexican American community was owned and operated by Whites (Fernandez, 2007). For example, all Catholic priests were initially all White. But the same is not true with respect to Evangelical/Pentecostal congregations (Sanchez Walsh, 2003). Cast within the context of social identity theory, this suggests that ethnic minority group members may be more likely to internalize religious social identities if they have a greater sense of ownership in the congregations they attend.

In the process of creating a more well-developed theoretical rationale for the differential effects that are reported here, researchers should pay attention to the limitations in the current study. One shortcoming merits a brief comment here. The data for the current study were gathered at a single point in time and as a result, it is not possible to determine whether factors like spiritual support “cause” more frequent volunteering or whether people who are engaged in volunteer work at church have a greater opportunity to exchange spiritual support with their fellow church members. Clearly, troubling issues involving the direction of causality cannot be conclusively resolved with data that are gathered in non-experimental settings.

Even though there are limitations in the work that has been presented in the current study, we hope the findings that were observed and the statistical procedures that were utilized open up a more refined and focused dialog on the factors that influence the decisions that older minority group members make about becoming involved in volunteer activities. Getting a firmer grasp on the issues surrounding volunteering holds out the promise of providing greater self-sufficiency among those who may benefit from it the most.

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Table 1**Core Study Measures**

1	Volunteering^a
	Some churches have programs to help people in need, such as food banks or programs that provide shelter to the homeless. Other than giving donations of money, food, or clothing, how often do you spend time working in this type of program in your church?
2	Church Attendance^b
	How often do you attend religious services?
3	Spiritual Support^c
	A. Not counting Bible study groups, prayer groups, or church services, how often does someone in your congregation share their own religious experiences with you? B. How often does someone in your congregation help you find solutions to your problems in the Bible? C. How often do the examples set by others in your congregation help you lead a better religious life? D. How often does someone in your congregation help you to know God better?
4	Religious Commitment^d
	A. My faith shapes how I act each and every day. B. I try hard to carry my religious beliefs over into all my other dealings in life. C. My religious beliefs are what lie behind my whole approach to life.

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^aThis variable is scored in the following manner (coding in parenthesis): never (1), less than once month (2), once a month (3), a few times a month (4), once a week (5), several times a week (6).

^bThis variable is scored in the following manner: never (1), less than once a year (2), about once or twice a year (3), several times a year (4), about once a month (5), 2 to 3 times a month (6), nearly every week (7), every week (8), several times a week (9).

^cThese variables are scored in the following manner: never (1), once in a while (2), fairly often (3), very often (4).

^dThese variables are scored in the following manner: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), strongly agree (4).

Table 2

Means of Study Measures

Study Measures ^a	Evangelicals (N = 143)	Others (N = 520)
Age	73.497	73.386
Sex	.392	.388
Education	6.353	6.896
Church Attendance	7.692	6.821 ***
Spiritual Support	10.284	7.612 ***
Religious Commitment	10.764	9.724 ***
Volunteering	1.587	1.172 ***

^a A high score on the variables in this table have the following meanings: age = older; sex = men; education = more highly educated; church attendance = more frequent attendance; spiritual support = more support; religious commitment= more commitment; volunteering = volunteers more often

*** difference between the means is significant at the .001 level

Table 3 Involvement in the Church and Volunteer Work^a

Independent Variables	Evangelicals (N = 143)	Others (N = 520)
Age	-.037 ^{*b}	-.004
Sex	.446 [*]	-.103
Education	.023	.016 [*]
Church attendance	.087	.030
Spiritual Support	.063 [*]	.011
Religious Commitment	.163 [*]	.041 [*]
Intercept	.954	.695
Multiple R ²	.173	.049

^a A high score on the variables in this table have the following meanings: age = older; sex = men; education = more highly educated; church attendance = more frequent attendance; spiritual support = more support; religious commitment= more commitment; volunteering = volunteers more often

^b Metric (unstandardized) regression coefficient

^{*} = $p < .05$

Table 4 Decomposition of Mean Differences in Volunteering^a

Independent Variables	Differential Impact	Differential Exposure	Interaction	Total
Church Attendance	.389	.026	.050	.465
Spiritual Support	.396	.029	.139	.564
Religious Commitment	1.186	.043	.127	1.356
Age				-2.426
Sex				.215
Education				.035
Constant				.259
Observed Mean Difference				.415

^a A high score on the variables in this table have the following meanings: age = older; sex = men; education = more highly educated; church attendance = more frequent attendance; spiritual support = more support; religious commitment= more commitment; volunteering = volunteers more often