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**Examining the Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, and
Ethnic Identity of Venezuelan Immigrants**

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SPAN 4399: Honors Thesis

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April 13, 2023

Abstract

The number of Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S. reached 545,000 in 2021, with Venezuelans becoming one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S. Many Venezuelan immigrants have been driven to leave their country due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, economic collapse, and political instability. This study explores the experiences of Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S. Data from an online survey and semi-structured interviews was collected from 113 Venezuelan immigrants. The quantitative data was analyzed using systematic methods while the qualitative data was analyzed by identifying key themes and providing sample quotes. Participants were recruited through various methods: university organizations, social media, WhatsApp groups, flyers in local business, and word of mouth. Participants were categorized into four main groups based on their age of arrival and time in the U.S. Acculturation was highest among immigrants who arrived as children and had spent more than seven years in the U.S. Overall, acculturation was described as a necessary but difficult task. However, acculturative stress was relatively low for this population compared to other Latino immigrants. The type and level of acculturative stress differed depending on the age of arrival and time in the U.S. Meanwhile, all participants reported a strong sense of pride and commitment to their ethnic identity with younger immigrants spending more time actively exploring their identity. Findings from the present study highlight the importance of strong social networks and cultural values for Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S.

Introduction

According to the 2021 American Community Survey, there are 545,000 Venezuelan immigrants living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The population of Venezuelan immigrants in the U.S. has grown dramatically in the last ten years given that in 2010 there were only 115,000 Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Venezuelan immigrants have become one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the U.S. (Batalova & Hoffman, 2023). Venezuelans have been immigrating to the U.S. since the 1990s at the start of the Bolivarian Revolution led by President Hugo Chávez (Paéz, 2017). During the early 2000s, migration was driven by family members living in the U.S. and employment sponsorship in the U.S. (Cadenas, 2018). However, the reasons for migration changed between 2012 and 2015 as Venezuela faced a growing economic crisis brought on by the falling price of oil worldwide and a decrease in agricultural, commercial, and service enterprises (Paéz, 2017). Shortages of food, medicine, and goods became the norm for Venezuelans with many facing hunger and malnutrition (Paéz, 2017, Cadenas; 2018). In 2016, the inflation rate reached 600% and 70% of Venezuelans were unemployed or working in the informal sector (Paéz, 2017).

Since 2016, the economy has collapsed with inflation reaching a peak of 130,000% in 2018 (Davis, 2023). Due to the ongoing severe humanitarian crisis and political instability, Venezuelans faced widespread poverty, food insecurity, deterioration of education, public services, and housing (ACAPS, 2021). In fact, the 2021 Living Conditions National Assessment estimated that 94.5% of Venezuelans live in poverty and 76.6% are experiencing extreme poverty (*América/Venezuela*, 2021). Poverty has increased over the years with the level of extreme poverty having increased 8% since the year prior (*América/Venezuela*, 2021). Moreover,

according to a report by the non-profit *Cáritas* in Venezuela (2020), 14% of children under the age of 5 face acute malnutrition. Furthermore, a third of the population faces acute food insecurity (World Food Program, 2020). Most Venezuelans struggle to access food due to food shortages and the unaffordable high cost. In October 2021, the monthly cost of food was \$348 while the average monthly salary was \$23, as of July 2022 (CENDA, 2022).

Given the catastrophic situation, seven million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have fled to various countries with the third largest population of Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S. (ACAPS, 2023). The Organization for American States notes that the five main reasons for fleeing are the humanitarian crisis, violence, human rights violations, lack of public services, and the economic collapse (OAS, 2021). Recently, Venezuelan immigrants have started traveling by land to reach the U.S. southern border (UNHCR, 2022). This treacherous journey requires traveling through the Darien Gap on the border of Colombia and Panama which is one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world (UNHCR, 2022). Migrants face dense forest, steep mountains, and natural hazards as well as violence from criminal groups. Those who are able to cross arrive in remote communities, feeling exhausted and often in need of medical attention (UNHCR, 2022). They must continue the journey through Central America and Mexico to reach the U.S. where the immigration policies are ever changing. Between January and August 2022, 68,000 Venezuelans crossed the Darien Gap which is a 2,600% increase from 2021 (R4V, 2022). According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the 2022 average monthly unique encounters with Venezuelans at the southern border was 15,495 (USDHS, 2022). Considering the growing number of Venezuelan immigrants, the current study seeks to explore the experiences of Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S.

Acculturation

As immigrants arrive in the U.S., they face the challenges of adapting to a new culture and new surroundings. Acculturation involves the acquisition of new cultural values (Berry, 2003). Berry's bidimensional acculturation model suggests that there are four strategies for acculturation that incorporate varying degrees of participating in the culture of the host country and maintaining the cultural values of their home country, also known as their heritage culture (Berry, 1997). The four strategies are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Individuals who practice integration tend to participate in the new culture while simultaneously maintaining their previous cultural values. Meanwhile, the assimilation strategy involves participating in the new culture but choosing not to maintain aspects of their heritage culture. Segregation is the opposing strategy as individuals avoid participating in the new culture and hold onto their heritage culture. Finally, marginalization involves having little interest in the new culture or their heritage culture (Berry, 1997). Although it may be assumed that individuals have some control over which strategy they chose to implement, societal factors can play a role in how an individual can acculturate (Marín, 1992). For example, prejudice or racism can lead to implementation of the segregation strategy (Marín, 1997). Acculturation is also influenced by time in the U.S. and age of arrival (Cheung et al., 2011). Those who immigrated at a relatively young age and are exposed to the host culture for more time will report greater identification with the host culture (Cheung et al., 2011). Overall, acculturation is considered a complex concept with varying models, ways of measuring, and methods of assessment (Lara et al., 2005).

Acculturation can have varying effects on a person's mental and physical health (Torres, 2010; Lara et al., 2005). In fact, it has been shown to influence the health of immigrants, but this effect is complicated and not fully understood (Lara et al., 2005). In a literature review of the effect of acculturation on health among Latino immigrants, Lara et al. (2005) highlights how

higher levels of acculturation can have both positive and negative effects on the health.

Acculturation has been linked to higher levels of alcohol use, drug use, smoking, and less nutritious diet (Black et al., 1993; Amaro et al., 1990; Coonrod et al., 1999; Neuhouser et al., 2004). On the other hand, some studies have found that higher levels of acculturation are linked to greater healthcare and preventative care use, but this relationship is confounded by the fact that those who are more acculturated face fewer barriers to care (Chesney et al., 1982; Borrayo & Guarnaccia, 2000; Wells et al., 1989). Lara et al. (2005) highlights that most of the research up to that point had mostly focused on Mexican-Americans. As such, it is imperative to consider the acculturation experiences of Latino immigrants from different countries of origin.

Acculturative Stress

As a part of the acculturation process, many immigrants face conflicts when adapting to a new culture known as acculturative stress (Berry, 2003). Acculturative stressors may include discrimination, undocumented immigration status, language barriers, or economic uncertainty (Dillon et al., 2012; Caplan, 2007; Salas-Wright et al., 2015). Acculturative stress has been found to be higher among Latino immigrants who were forced to immigrate, those who are not U.S. citizens, and those with higher Spanish proficiency (Lueck & Wilson, 2011). Higher levels of acculturative stress have been linked to greater psychological distress, mental health issues, and negative physical health outcomes among Latino immigrants (Silva et al., 2017; Driscoll & Torres, 2013; Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2021). In fact, chronic exposure to stress has been documented as a social determinant of health; as such acculturative stress is an important social factor in the negative health outcomes of Latino individuals living in the U.S. (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2021). In a systematic review of the physical health outcomes associated with acculturative stress, Gonzalez-Guarda and colleagues (2021) noted that acculturative stress can influence

asthma in children, disability in older adults, poorer sleep outcomes, and more negative self-perceived health.

However, many factors can help individuals cope with acculturative stress and reduce the negative health effects (Finch & Vega, 2003). Strong social support and seeking religious support can reduce the effects of acculturative stress and especially discrimination (Finch & Vega, 2003). Furthermore, Berry et al. (1987) noted that the level of acculturative stress varies depending on age, education, and acculturation strategy. For example, individuals with higher levels of education may have access to resources that reduce certain stressors (Berry et al., 1987). For many immigrants, acculturative stress may decrease as they acculturate to the host country and their English proficiency improves (Caplan, 2007; Lueck & Wilson, 2011). In spite of the negative health effects of acculturative stress, immigrants tend to have better health than U.S. born Latinos, a phenomenon known as the immigrant paradox (Teruya & Bazargan-Hejazi, 2013). One explanation for the immigrant paradox is that heritage culture's characteristics and values can serve as protective factors against negative mental and physical health outcomes (Horevitz & Organista, 2013). Calzada and Sales (2019) conducted an analysis of the cultural stressors and assets that influence the relationship between acculturation and depression. They noted that more acculturated mothers of Mexican origin who reported less *familismo* and lower levels of ethnic identity reported depressive symptoms (Calzada & Sales, 2019). Ethnic identity was found to weaken the link between acculturation and depression (Calzada & Sales, 2019). These results support the hypothesis of Berry (1997) that the strategy of integration, adapting to the new culture and maintaining cultural values of the country of origin, is the most adaptive method.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity can serve as a protective factor for the negative effects of acculturative stress (Smith & Silva, 2017). Higher levels of ethnic identity indicate greater commitment and a sense of belonging to the culture of origin (Phinney, 1992). Ethnic identity is a predictor for well-being and has been found to moderate the relationship between ethnicity-related stressors and well-being (French & Chavez, 2010). However, ethnic identity can differ based on an individual's age, time in the U.S., and socialization (Ontai-Grzebik & Raffaelli, 2004). In a study of the influences on ethnic identity among Latino young adults, younger participants reported higher levels of ethnic identity, but there were no age differences on commitment to ethnic identity (Ontai-Grzebik & Raffaelli, 2004). Furthermore, participants who reported greater orientation to Latino culture and had spent more time in the U.S., had higher levels of ethnic identity (Ontai-Grzebik & Raffaelli, 2004). These findings support the notion that in order for an individual to develop their ethnic identity, they need to have a contrast group, which for immigrants involves their time spent in the U.S. (Phinney, 1990). Overall, strong ethnic identity and social support can help build resilience to cope with stressors and has been reported among Venezuelan immigrants (Abrams et al., 2022). Narratives from focus groups of Venezuelan immigrants highlighted the importance of social support to build networks, but the immigrants also noted a need for programs to understand how Venezuelans differ from other Latinx immigrants (Abrams et al., 2022).

Present Study

The present study seeks to examine the experiences of Venezuelan immigrants living in the U.S. I explore the acculturation, acculturative stress, and ethnic identity of Venezuelans immigrants. Although there are a few studies that focus on Venezuelan immigrants, none of them focus on these three concepts in the context of individuals living in the U.S. Based on the

existing literature, I hypothesize that acculturation will differ depending on age at immigration and length in the U.S., in such a manner that Venezuelans who immigrated at a younger age or who have lived in the U.S. for a greater length of time will report greater acculturation. My second hypothesis is that Venezuelans who have lived in the U.S. for a longer period of time and who report greater acculturation will report lower levels of acculturative stress. My final hypothesis is that younger immigrants will report higher levels of ethnic identity given that the literature points to adolescence being a period for developing one's ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). Furthermore, I will highlight the lived experiences of Venezuelan immigrants through interviews as they share their perspectives on immigration, acculturation, discrimination, community, and culture.

Positionality Statement

Before I present my study, I want to establish my connection to this research population as I am a Venezuelan immigrant. I was born in Venezuela and immigrated to the U.S. in 2007. Following various policies by President Hugo Chávez to nationalize the oil industry, my parents were laid off from their jobs. In 2007, my father began working for a U.S. based oil company. When the company chose to reduce their operations in Venezuela, they transferred several of their engineers to work in the U.S. My family was able to move to the U.S. due to my father's employment who sponsored our move and our residency as well as our citizenship. When we immigrated to the U.S., we arrived in Katy, one of the suburbs of Houston, Texas. This area has been home to a growing number of Venezuelan immigrants, and my family has seen our community expand over the years. This study will largely focus on individuals from this community in Katy but will also include other areas in the U.S., such as Florida and San Antonio.

One of the main motivations for this study was a realization that my experiences in Venezuela and immigrating to the U.S. in the early 2000s are drastically different from the experiences of recent Venezuelan immigrants who are being forced to flee the country's dire conditions. In one example, The New York Times published the story of a mother, Dayry Cuauro, and her six year old daughter, Sarah Cuauro, who traveled through the Darien Gap in search for a better life in the U.S. (Turkewitz, 2022). During several days of the arduous trek through the jungle, Dayry and Sarah were separated not knowing if they would be reunited and make it out alive. They were ultimately reunited, but two days after crossing the Darien Gap, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that Venezuelans who arrived at the southern border would not be allowed to enter the U.S. (Turkewitz, 2022). Their story is one example of the sacrifices and risks that Venezuelan immigrants will take, only to be met with the ever-changing immigration policies in the U.S.

I resemble Sarah in a few ways. We were born in the same town in Venezuela, have well-educated parents, and immigrated at the same age, but our situations are completely different. Her migration journey is one that is overwhelmed by trauma and hardship while I only recall arriving in a new house and adjusting to a new school. Therefore, the present study seeks to also compare and contrast the experiences of established immigrants with those who have arrived more recently and often under extremely different circumstances.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 99 adults who completed the online survey and 14 adults who were interviewed. All participants identified as Venezuelan and had immigrated to the U.S. or

had parents who immigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela. Tables 1 and 2 provide the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics for Online Survey

Characteristic	Total sample (n = 99)
Gender, <i>n</i>	
Female	74
Male	25
Age, <i>M (SD) range</i>	35.4 (15.0) 18-66
Education, <i>n</i>	
Did not finish high school	3
Finished high school	10
Some college or currently in college	27
Bachelor's degree	33
Some graduate school	4
Advanced degrees	22
Immigration Status, <i>n</i>	
Citizen	67
Permanent resident	12
Non-immigrant status	14
Undocumented	2
Asylum status	3
Temporary Protected Status	1
Age at Immigration, <i>M (SD) range</i>	24 (16.3) 0-53
Born in the US	10
Arrived as a minor	36
Arrived as an adult	53
Year of Immigration, <i>n</i>	
Before 2000	5
2000 - 2004	19
2005 - 2009	27
2010 - 2014	22
2015 - 2021	25
Reason for Immigrating	
Work	34

Political, Social, Economic Situation of Venezuela	25
Political and Economic Prosecution	8
Opportunities in the U.S.	8
Education	7
Visa Lottery	5
Family	4
Not Applicable	3
No Response	5
Years in the U.S., <i>M (SD)</i>	12.6 (6.5) 1-30
U.S. State of Residence, <i>n</i>	
Texas	67
Florida	18
California	2
Wisconsin	2
Ohio	1
No Response	9
Venezuelan State of Residence, <i>n</i>	
Zulia	40
Capital District	18
Falcon	5
Carabobo	4
Lara	3
Other States	15
Not Applicable	3
No Response	11

Table 2

Participant Characteristics for Interviews

Characteristic	Total sample (n = 14)
Age, <i>M (SD) range</i>	44.1 (19.6) 21-69
Gender	
Female	10
Male	4
Age at Immigration, <i>M (SD) range</i>	32.8 (18.2) 6-62
Arrived as a minor	2
Arrived as an adult	12

Year of Immigration, <i>n</i>	
Before 2000	2
2000 - 2014	5
2015 - 2021	7
Reason for Immigrating	
Work	4
Economic Situation of Venezuela/Opportunities in U.S.	4
Political Prosecution	2
Family in the US	2
Insecurity in Venezuela	1
Visa Lottery	1

Procedure

Online Survey

After receiving approval from the Trinity University Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited for the online survey through various methods. Flyers promoting the study were posted in Venezuelan restaurants and food trucks. The online survey was shared through WhatsApp group chats that were composed on predominantly Venezuelan members and through Instagram. Additionally, the principal investigator reached out to Venezuelan organizations at eight public universities in Texas and Florida (e.g., Venezuelan Student Association at Texas A&M University) to see if they could share the flyer and link for the online survey with their members. To be eligible for the online survey, the participants had to be at least 18 years of age and identify themselves as Venezuelan. Participants read and signed a consent form before starting the survey. The survey was administered via Qualtrics and took about 5 minutes to complete.

Interviews

To obtain diverse immigrant experiences, purposeful sampling was used in recruitment for the interviews. Additionally, snowball sampling was implemented as participants were asked

to suggest other individuals to be included in the study. To be interviewed, the participant had to be born in Venezuela and immigrate to the United States. All participants signed consent forms as part of the interview process and gave permission for the interview to be recorded. Three of the interviews were conducted prior to the start of this study for a class project. These participants agreed to have their interview information used in this study and signed consent forms accordingly. The rest of the interviews were transcribed using a transcription tool, Trint.

Measures

Online survey

The survey consisted of 44 questions including demographic information (i.e., age, gender, education, work industry), immigration questions (i.e., immigration status, age at which they immigrated, year that they immigrated, reason for immigrating), and geographic location questions (i.e., state and city where they currently reside in the U.S., state and city where they lived the longest in Venezuela). Ensuring a short survey was important to promote completion of the survey and reduce the response burden on participants. The survey was available in English and Spanish according to the participants' language preference. Eighty-three percent of the participants chose to take the survey in English.

Acculturation. Acculturation was measured using the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (SASH; Marín et al., 1987). This scale has 12 items that factor into three subsections of acculturation. Five items pertain to Language Use, such as "*in general, what language do you read and speak*" or "*what language do you usually speak at home.*" Three items pertain to Media Use, such as "*in what language(s) are the T.V. programs you usually watch,*" and four items pertaining to Ethnic Social Relations, such as "*your close friends are.*" The Language Use and Media Use items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Only Spanish to 5=Only English).

Meanwhile, the Ethnic Social Relations items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=All Latinos/Hispanics to 5=All Americans). A higher score on the SASH represents greater acculturation to American culture. Although it has not been tested on a group of Venezuelans, the SASH has shown to be a valid measure across Hispanic groups (Marín et al., 1987; Ellison et al., 2011). Similar to other studies (Marín et al., 1987), this scale had good internal consistency for this sample ($\alpha = .833$).

Acculturative Stress. Acculturative Stress was measured using the short-form version of the Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory (RASI; Benet-Martinez, 2003). This is a 12-item scale with the items being categorized into four domains: Work and Language, Discrimination, Intercultural Relations, and Cultural Isolation. A sample question is *“it’s hard for me to perform well at work because of my English skills.”* The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This short form and its Spanish translation have been validated for use with Latinx immigrants in the U.S. (Merced et al., 2022). The scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .808$).

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic Identity was measured using the revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The MEIM is the most frequently used measure when measuring ethnic identity and has been used across diverse racial and ethnic groups (Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The revised version (MEIM-R) has shown to have greater internal consistency than the MEIM (Herrington et al., 2016). MEIM-R is a 6-item scale that consists of two subscales: exploration and commitment. Sample questions of each subscale include *“I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group such as its history, traditions, and customs”* and *“I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.”* Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly

agree). The items were modified to be more specific to Venezuelan identity. Higher scores on this scale indicate a greater sense of Venezuelan identity. The scale had good internal consistency for this sample ($\alpha = .885$). Two additional items from the MEIM were included in the survey to be analyzed independently and not as a part of the scale. The items were “*I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly Venezuelan members*” and “*I participate in Venezuelan cultural practices, such as special food, music, or customs.*” This measure was translated by the principal investigator and the translation was verified by a bilingual Venezuelan immigrant.

Interviews

Questions for the interviews were semi-structured and allowed for conversation on a variety of topics. The first questions pertained to the participant’s age at the time of immigration, and their reason for immigrating. They were asked to describe their life in Venezuela prior to immigrating, their experiences during the immigration process, their experiences when they first arrived in the U.S., and challenges that they faced when they first arrived. The next set of questions pertained to the Venezuelan community. They were asked to describe the Venezuelan community in the U.S. and any changes that they have witnessed with regards to this community. They were asked questions regarding both Venezuelan and American culture, such as “*what Venezuelan traditions do you continue to practice and which ones have you stopped practicing*” and “*which American customs have you started to practice.*” The final questions were related to how they identify (i.e., Venezuelan, American or both), the importance of their Venezuelan identity, and how they preserve their culture to pass down to their children or loved ones.

Data Analyses

Quantitative Analyses

The quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS software. Correlation analyses were conducted between the main measures as well as their subscales (SASH, MEIM-R, and RASI) and proxy variables, such as age at immigration, length in the U.S., and language preference. These proxy variables are commonly used to test the external validity of an acculturation scale. An additional correlation analysis was conducted between the three main measures and their subscales. Furthermore, responses were divided into four categories depending on the participant's age at immigration and the year that they immigrated: a) Youth Established Immigrants are those who immigrated before the age of 18 and before 2015 (n = 35); b) Adult Established Immigrants are those who immigrated after the age of 18 and before 2015 (n = 38); c) Youth Recent Immigrants are those who immigrated before the age of 18 and after 2015 (n = 11); d) Adult Recent Immigrants are those who immigrated after the age of 18 and after 2015 (n = 13). Several one-way analyses of variance were conducted to determine any group differences in their responses to the three main measures and their subscales.

Qualitative Analyses

The qualitative analysis was conducted using NVIVO software and following the methods outlined by Miles et al. (2018). The interview data was categorized according to the method of provisional coding, meaning that the primary codes were developed based on what data was expected considering the interview questions. The primary codes were Changes in the Venezuelan Community, Decision Making, Immigration Process, Life in the U.S., Life in Venezuela, Reason for Immigration, Venezuelan Culture, and Venezuelan Identity. Subcodes were developed within these primary codes during the coding process. The subcodes within each primary code were developed as common themes arose throughout the interviews. An example of this coding structure is the primary code of Reason for Immigration has four subcodes of

insecurity, lack of resources in Venezuela, opportunities in the U.S., and loved ones in the U.S.

The coding was used to categorize similar data from different participants and create clusters of related information.

Results

Quantitative Results

Correlations

Overall there were no significant correlations between the three main measures of acculturation, ethnic identity, and acculturative stress. To examine the relationship of time residing in the U.S. and age at immigration with acculturation, ethnic identity, and acculturative stress, I assessed the correlations between the scales/subscales and these two variables. As shown in Table 3, the composite score of SASH had a moderate negative correlation with age at immigration indicating that those who immigrated at a younger age have higher rates of acculturation. When analyzing the subscales of the SASH, Language Use was more strongly correlated with age at immigration ($r = -.744, p < .001$) than the Media Use ($r = -.212, p < .05$) and Ethnic Social Relations subscales ($r = -.260, p < .05$). The correlations between age at immigration and the SASH composite score as well as Language Use score were significant even when controlling for current age. The composite score of SASH was positively correlated with time in the U.S. further supporting the fact that those who have spent more years in the U.S. have higher rates of acculturation. Time in the U.S. was positively correlated with the Language Use subscale ($r = .415, p < .001$). However, there was no significant correlation between time in the U.S. and the subscales of Media Use and Ethnic Social Relations.

Table 3

Correlations between study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age at Immigration	24	16.3	—				
2. Length in US	12.6	6.5	-.287**	—			
3. SASH	33.2	.67	-.606**	.407**	—		
4. MEIM-R	3.8	.99	-.230*	-.093	-.087	—	
5. RASI	29.3	8.91	-.162	-.152	-.077	.183	—

**p < .01, *p < .05

On the other hand, there was no significant correlation between age at immigration or time in the U.S. and the RASI score. However, more nuanced relationships were revealed when analyzing the RASI subscales of the measures, shown in Table 4. Age of immigration was negatively correlated with the scores on Discrimination, Intercultural Relations, and Social Isolation. However, the correlations were not significant when controlling for current age. These correlations suggest that those who immigrated at a younger age report more experiences with discrimination, conflicts from cultural differences, and feeling isolated. Current age largely influences the relationship between age at immigration and Discrimination, Intercultural Relations, and Social Isolation. Meanwhile, there was a positive correlation between age at immigration and scores on the Work and Language subscale, and a negative correlation between time in the U.S. and Work and Language scores. Both of these correlations are significant even when controlling for current age. These associations indicate that participants who immigrated at an older age and participants who have spent less time in the U.S. experience the most stress from difficulty finding jobs and communicating in English. It should be noted that the mean RASI score for this sample ($M = 29.3, SD = 8.91$) is somewhat lower than the mean score ($M = 40.0, SD = 13.74$) for a heterogeneous sample of Latinx immigrants (Cariello et al., 2020).

However, it is difficult to make a direct comparison as Cariello et al. (2020) used the full length RASI scale (15 items) and the current study used the short form (12 items).

Table 4

Correlations between Age at Immigration, length in the U.S., and RASI subscales

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age at Immigration	—					
2. Length in US	-.287**	—				
3. Work and Language	.446**	-.336**	—			
4. Discrimination	-.253*	-.048	.229*	—		
5. Intercultural Relations	-.281**	-.130	.149	.322*	—	
6. Cultural Isolation	-.381**	.141	.034	.519**	.302**	—

**p < .01, *p < .05

Meanwhile, the composite score of MEIM-R was negatively correlated with age at immigration but not significantly correlated with time in the U.S. This relationship was driven by the subscale of Exploration, which was significantly correlated with age at immigration ($r = -.287, p < .01$) while the Commitment subscale was not significantly correlated. However, these correlations are largely influenced by current age. When controlling for current age, the correlations between age at immigration and MEIM-R as well as the Exploration subscale are no longer significant. This finding suggests that those who immigrated at a younger age may have a greater sense of Venezuelan identity, but this finding is influenced by the current age of the participants.

Analyses of Variance

As previously mentioned, the sample was categorized into four groups based on their age at immigration and the year that they immigrated. Participants who immigrated before the age of 18 are categorized as "Youth" and those who immigrated at 18 years old or after are "Adult". "Recent Immigrants" are participants who immigrated in 2015 or after, and "Established Immigrants" are those who immigrated before 2015. This categorization resulted in four groups: Youth Established Immigrants, Adult Established Immigrants, Youth Recent Immigrants, and Adult Recent Immigrants. In an analysis of group differences on SASH scores, the Youth Established Immigrants significantly differed from the other immigrant groups, $F(3, 91) = 15.92$, $p = .001$, $n^2 = .335$. Bonferroni post hoc analysis showed that the Youth Established Immigrants reported significantly higher scores on acculturation than all other immigrant groups. Although insignificant, the difference between acculturation scores of the Youth Established Immigrants and the Youth Recent Immigrants is small, thus demonstrating a trend of Youth Recent Immigrants starting to acculturate more. The difference between groups is larger in the Language Use subscale than the other SASH subscales. Table 5 shows the mean scores of the main measures and their subscales separated by immigrant groups.

On the RASI, there was a significant difference between immigrant groups on their level of acculturative stress, $F(3, 85) = 2.79$, $p < .05$, $n^2 = .090$. Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference test indicated that the Youth Established Immigrants reported significantly higher scores on acculturative stress than the Adult Established Immigrants. When considering the RASI subscales, the Adult Recent Immigrants had significantly higher scores than all other immigrant groups on Work and Language. The Youth Established Immigrants reported significantly higher scores on Discrimination and Intercultural Relations than the Adult Established Immigrants. With regards to Cultural Isolation, there was no significant difference

between Youth Established and Youth Recent, but both groups reported significantly higher scores than Adult Established Immigrants. As expected, participants who immigrated recently as adults have the most difficulty with work and speaking English. However, participants who immigrated as children and have spent more time in the U.S. report greater experiences of discrimination, intercultural conflicts and cultural isolation as was revealed in the correlation analyses.

On the MEIM-R, there was a significant difference between immigrant groups, $F(3, 90) = 3.76, p < .05, n^2 = .111$. Bonferroni post hoc analysis showed that the Youth Established Immigrants reported significantly higher scores on ethnic identity than the Adult Established Immigrants. However, when analyzing the subscales, there is no significant group difference in the Commitment subscale scores. This result indicates that all participants report similar levels of commitment to their Venezuelan ethnic identity regardless of the age they immigrated or years in the U.S. On the Exploration subscale, Youth Established Immigrants reported significantly higher scores than the Adult Established Immigrants, and the Youth Recent Immigrants also reported significantly higher scores than the Adult Established Immigrants. In this case, participants who immigrated as children are more likely to report exploring their Venezuelan ethnic identity than those who immigrated as adults. Two additional questions from the MEIM were analyzed. There were no significant group differences in their responses to being active in social groups with mostly Venezuelan members. However, when asked if they participate in Venezuelan cultural traditions, the Youth Established Immigrants had significantly higher scores than the Adult Established ($p < .01$) or Adult Recent Immigrants ($p < .05$). While it would be expected for the Youth Established Immigrants to be more strongly acculturated to American culture, they report greater participation in Venezuelan traditions than their fellow immigrants.

Table 5

Means by Immigrant Groups

Measure	Youth Established Immigrants	Adult Established Immigrants	Youth Recent Immigrants	Adult Recent Immigrants
SASH	37.89 _a	30.47 _b	32.73 _b	28.31 _b
Language Use	15.46 _a	9.50 _b	11.36 _b	8.62 _b
Media Use	11.86	11.78	12.09	10.08
Ethnic Social Relations	10.57 _a	9.19 _b	9.27 _{ab}	9.61 _{ab}
MEIM-R	4.13 _a	3.45 _b	4.23 _{ab}	3.76 _{ab}
Exploration	4.05 _a	3.09 _b	4.17 _a	3.69 _{ab}
Commitment	4.21	3.81	4.30	3.82
RASI	31.90 _a	26.22 _b	30.56 _b	31.38 _b
Work and Language	5.32 _a	7.46 _b	5.89 _{ab}	10.08 _c
Discrimination	10.23 _a	7.51 _b	8.67 _{ab}	7.85 _{ab}
Intercultural Relations	8.42 _a	5.65 _b	7.33 _{ab}	7.77 _{ab}
Cultural Isolation	8.06 _a	5.59 _b	8.67 _a	5.69 _{ab}

Note. Significance levels by items – SASH: Youth Established Immigrants (YEI) versus Adult Established Immigrants (AEI) and Adult Recent Immigrants (ARI), $p < .001$, YEI versus Youth Recent Immigrants (YRI), $p < .05$; Language Use: YEI group versus all other groups, $p < .001$; Ethnic Social Relations: YEI versus AEI, $p < .05$; MEIM-R: YEI versus AEI, $p < .05$; Exploration: YEI versus AEI, $p < .01$, YRI versus AEI, $p < .05$; Work and Language: YEI versus AEI and ARI, $p < .05$, AEI versus ARI, $p < .05$; Discrimination: YEI versus AEI, $p < .05$; Intercultural Relations: YEI versus AEI, $p < .001$; Cultural Isolation: YEI versus AEI, $p < .05$, AEI versus YRI, $p < .05$

Qualitative Results

Overview

The interview topics largely covered the process of immigration including the specific circumstances and life in Venezuela that led them to immigrate and the challenges they faced in the U.S. with regards to barriers and acculturation. We discussed their connection to Venezuelan culture, identity, and cultural sustainability. In this analysis, I compare and contrast the experiences and perspectives of those immigrated more than a decade ago and those who immigrated more recently. The analyses have been broken down into five sections: reasons for immigrating, acculturation, acculturative stress, Venezuelan community, and Venezuelan identity. In each section, I present an overview of my findings and provide sample quotes that illustrate the similarities and differences between established immigrants and recent immigrants.

Reasons for Immigrating

One of the main reasons for immigrating has been the impact of economic hardship, political turmoil, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela that have been ongoing for many years (ACAPS, 2021). As years have passed and the situation in Venezuela has worsened, the reasons for immigrating in recent years have been somewhat similar to the reasons that drove migration in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, migration has drastically increased in recent years, leading some to describe the current wave of immigration as an exodus (Batalova & Hoffman, 2023; Páez, 2017). The interviews highlighted political prosecution, insecurity, opportunities in the U.S. and lack of opportunities in Venezuela as key reasons for immigration (See Table 6). Table 6 highlights the parallels in the reasons for immigrating between established and recent immigrants. Other reasons (not listed in Table 6) included job opportunities and family in the U.S. When asked why they chose the U.S., and Texas specifically, as their destination, many individuals cited the petroleum industry in the area, the presence of family members, an

established Venezuelan community, or a level of stability in the U.S. that they did not see in nearby Latin American countries. Although individuals left Venezuela for different reasons, they all faced pressure to adapt to American culture when they arrived in the U.S.

Table 6

Reasons for Immigrating and Year of Immigration

Reason for Immigrated	Year of Immigration	Example Quote
Political Prosecution	2004	Yo perdí mi trabajo y ...empecé a trabajar en una organización que estaba en contra del gobierno y bueno, sufrí persecución política. <i>(I lost my job and ...started working for an organization that was against the government and I experienced political prosecution.)</i>
	2017	Yo me fui el 23 de julio del 2017. Cuando tenía una semana en Londres, me llamó la gente de FUNPAZ (una organización para la paz y justicia) y me dicen ... no te regreses porque estás fichada por el CONAS (un componente de la Guardia Nacional). Si te regresas, vas presa. <i>(I left on July 23, 2017. After spending a week in London, the people from FUNPAZ (a peace and justice organization) called me and told me ... do not come back because CONAS (a segment of the National Guard) has you on their record. If you come back, they will arrest you.)</i>
Insecurity	1995	Un impulso aún mayor que fue un crimen muy serio en nuestra familia... Ya no me sentía segura estando donde estaba. <i>(A greater impulse was the occurrence of a serious crime in my family... I no longer felt safe where I was)</i>
	2016	Decidimos venirnos...más que todo por la seguridad. <i>(We decided to come... for the safety more than anything)</i>
Opportunities in the U.S.	2010	El futuro que se le podía ofrecer a mis hijos acá era sumamente superior al que podía ofrecer en Venezuela. <i>(The future that I could offer my children here was far superior to the one I could offer in Venezuela.)</i>
	2019	Me gané la lotería de la visa ... y obtuve mi residencia permanente de los Estados Unidos... [Quería venir a los Estados Unidos] por mejor calidad de vida y porque ya tenía mis hijos y quería ofrecerle una oportunidad mucho mejor de

		estudios, de desarrollo como persona. <i>(I won the visa lottery ...and obtained permanent residence in the U.S... [I wanted to come to the U.S.] for a better quality of life and because I had my kids and I wanted to offer them a better opportunity for their studies, for their development as people.)</i>
Lack of Opportunities in Venezuela	1998	El país presentaba una crisis económica fuerte. Había un control de cambio y estaba siendo difícil conseguir trabajo para nosotros. <i>(The country was facing a difficult economic crisis. There was a change of power and it was difficult for us to find jobs.)</i>
	2021	[Mi vida era] monótona, aburrida, con muy poco progreso personal. Estancada. Ya sólo vivía del día a día... Simplemente me gradué de la universidad y ahí quedé. No tenía ninguna meta por cumplir. <i>([My life was] monotonous, boring, with very little personal progress. Stagnant. I lived day by day... To put it simply, I graduated from university and that was it. I didn't have any goals to accomplish.)</i>

Note. The quotes are presented in the original language to honor the voices of the individuals, but they were translated by the principal investigator to make them accessible to non-Spanish speakers.

Acculturation

When discussing the challenges that they faced upon arriving in the U.S., all the interviewees mentioned a need to adapt to American culture (See Table 7). More established immigrants, those who immigrated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, emphasized how when they immigrated there were few Venezuelans living in the area, which they say forced them to learn the language and culture very quickly. These established immigrants often discussed how more recent immigrants may not face those same challenges and are slow to acculturate due to the ease of meeting other Spanish speaking immigrants in the area. Yet, when speaking to recent immigrants, they shared the same sentiment of feeling a need to change and adapt to American culture. The recent immigrants often shared how they have struggled to adapt while

acknowledging that they are trying. Recent immigrants were more likely to describe the hardship of acculturation as they have more recent experience with it than the established immigrants who for the most part have become accustomed to American culture.

In two interviews, recent immigrants discussed how it is difficult to adapt to capitalism. They both described how living in Venezuela they had more free time to spend with family and friends. In the U.S., they find themselves constantly working. One of them said “aquí no vives tanto, aquí trabajas y trabajas y trabajas” (*Here you don't live much, here you work and work and work*). They both have family and friends nearby that they rarely see due to their work schedules. It is clear that their work has been a barrier to accessing the social support that is available to them, thus making the transition more difficult. As individuals try to adapt to this new culture and environment, they often face many stressors that make acculturation more difficult.

Table 7.

Perspectives on Acculturation and Year of Immigration

Views on Acculturation	Year of Immigration	Example Quotate
It is Necessary	1995	Vinimos a trabajar y adaptar...Yo creo que este es el país al que vinimos, nosotros tenemos que entender que aquí la lengua es el inglés. (<i>We came to work and to adapt...I think that this is the country where we came, we need to understand that the language here is English.</i>)
	2010	Yo creo que el venezolano se adapta forzosamente. (<i>I think that Venezuelans adapt forcefully.</i>)
	2016	Si tú te vas [a otro país] es porque te vas a adaptar. Yo sé de venezolanos que se han venido y se han regresado, pero es porque no sueltan [la cultura Venezolana]. (<i>If you go [to another country], it is because you are going to adapt. I know of Venezuelans who have come and who have returned [to Venezuela], but it's because they don't let go [of the Venezuelan culture].</i>)

	2019	Uno cuando hace una inmigración uno tiene que adaptarse a la cultura. (<i>When one migrates, one needs to adapt to the culture</i>).
It is Difficult	2016	Poco a poco me sigo adaptando, no es fácil. (<i>Little by little I keep adapting, it's not easy.</i>)
	2021	Mira, si te soy sincera, todavía no me he adaptado a Estados Unidos, porque evidentemente la vida es muy diferente a la que tenemos en Venezuela. (<i>Look, if I am being honest, I still haven't adapted to the U.S. because obviously the lifestyle is very different from the one we have in Venezuela.</i>)

Acculturative Stress

As immigrants arrive in the U.S., they often face countless challenges which may include but are not limited to difficulty finding employment, learning the language, discrimination, feeling culturally isolated from their community, and conflicts regarding cultural differences (See Table 8). In the various interviews, the challenge that was discussed most frequently was learning English. Nine of the fourteen interviewees described learning English as the most difficult aspect of adapting to living in the US. The difficulty of learning English was compounded by the difficulty of working full-time. A few of the immigrants faced issues in finding employment while other immigrants had easier access to employment. Two of the interviewees were able to continue working for their employer in Venezuela; two had job opportunities that brought them to the US; three were able to stay home and care for their children/grandchildren; two arrived as children; one did not describe her employment status at arrival. However, four of the interviewees described having to work various jobs that they described as degrading but necessary. They reported cleaning houses, working in construction, and at several fast food restaurants. All of them, except for the most recent immigrant who arrived in 2021, have found success in their preferred area of work, usually the type of work they

had in Venezuela. They work in the oil industry, entertainment, and interior design. With regards to the other aspects of acculturative stress, none of the interviewees described feeling isolated from their culture; instead, they emphasized the importance of having Latino friends who help them feel at home. It appears that work and language challenges are the most prevalent among the interviewees, but they rarely reported any of the other aspects of acculturative stress. This finding seems to parallel the results from the quantitative analysis that demonstrated low levels of acculturative stress among Venezuelan immigrants.

Discrimination. When asked if they had experienced any discrimination while in the U.S., only one interviewee was able to describe specific racist incidents (i.e., being told to speak English after speaking Spanish with her mom and her son experiencing discrimination by a school coach). She described them as isolated incidents that occurred many years ago. All the other interviewees, regardless of when they arrived in the U.S., said that they hadn't experienced any discrimination due to their ethnic identity. Many of them went on to discuss how if they did experience any discrimination, it did not affect them. One of the interviewees described it as “si tú me quieres discriminar a mí, no vas a encontrar aquí un blanco fácil. Yo no me voy a sentir menos” (*If you want to discriminate against me, you won't find an easy target. I will not feel inferior*). This attitude may be indicative of an internal locus of control or a cultural trait that may protect them from the negative effect of discrimination. Perhaps they view discrimination as a specific incident that can be ignored rather than a systemic barrier. One interviewee did mention that she began to notice discrimination as she learned more and spent more time in the U.S., but other interviewees who have spent more than a decade in the U.S. did not report stress from discrimination.

Sadness Upon Arrival. Although not considered to be a part of acculturative stress, it can be very difficult to cope with the loss of one’s home, family, and friends. Three of the interviewees described feeling a deep sadness or depression during their first few months living in the U.S. One of the interviewees described not wanting to immigrate but being forced to, due to political prosecution. She described crying everyday for the first eight months having left behind her house and belongings to arrive in the U.S. and live in her friend’s spare bedroom. Another interviewee immigrated to be with her husband who she met in the U.S., but she longed for her family and her country. She said “no dejé de llorar por varios días. Recuerdo que por más que yo quería venir, por más que quería estar con mi esposo, con mi hermano...lloraba. Me hacía falta mi familia, ... mi mamá, mi hijo o mi papá, mi tierra, mi comida.” *(I didn’t stop crying for several days. I remember that despite wanting to come, despite wanting to be with my husband, with my brother ... I cried. I missed my family, my mom, my son or my dad, my country, my food).* In both these cases, there was a grieving process for their previous life as they grew accustomed to the U.S. In some ways, this sadness can be attenuated by the presence of a growing Venezuelan community. The fact that these individuals have access to support through friends, family, or community organizations may play a role in their low levels of acculturative stress.

Table 8

Experiences of Acculturative Stress and Year of Immigration

Aspect of Acculturative Stress (RASI) Scale	Specific Hardship or Strength	Year of Immigration	Example Quote
Work and Language	Difficulty in finding a job	2004 Arrived as an adult	Yo pienso que lo más complicado fue eso [el idioma]. Y lo otro es la documentación...Sin documentos, pues tú tienes que trabajar en lo que sea que consigas. Pero la barrera del idioma es bastante grande porque sin papeles y sin

			<p>idioma no era nada fácil conseguir un buen trabajo. <i>(I think that the most complicated part was the language. And the other part was the documentation. Without documents, you have to work any job that you can find. But the language barrier is very big because without papers and without the language, it was not easy to find a good job.)</i></p>
		<p>2021 Arrived as an adult</p>	<p>Quiero entrar a un trabajo decente y que no sea denigrante, que no sea en un restaurante, que no sea en la construcción... Es muy difícil conseguir un trabajo sin la experiencia laboral que aquí se requiere. <i>(I want to enter a job that is decent and that is not degrading, that isn't in a restaurant or construction... It is very difficult to find a job without the experience that is required here.)</i></p>
	Limited English skills	<p>1995 Arrived as an adult</p>	<p>Pero él no hablar el idioma para mí fue sumamente difícil... Siempre voy a tener [la barrera], pero yo ya lo entiendo y ya hablo sin problema. <i>(Not being able to speak the language was extremely difficult for me... I will always face a language barrier, but I now understand and I speak without any problems.)</i></p>
Discrimination	Few/no incidents of discrimination	<p>1995 Arrived as an adult</p>	<p>Es probable que sí haya habido alguien con intención de cometer un acto racista conmigo. Pero yo no le he dado cabida. La verdad eso nunca ha sido algo que haya podido pensar en que me haya limitado. Yo le he dado para delante. <i>(It is likely that there was someone with intentions to commit a racist act towards me, but I didn't let them. The truth is that [discrimination] has never been something that in my opinion has limited me. I have continued forward)</i></p>
		<p>2007 Arrived as a child</p>	<p>I have, but I don't know how much of it is the fact that I am Venezuelan and how much of it is other aspects of myself. Because as a person you are not just one thing. I think a lot of it is more than discrimination. I would say ignorance.</p>
		<p>2016</p>	<p>No me afectaba realmente para nada. A mí me</p>

		Arrived as an adult	daba igual si me decían que me fuera a mi casa, que hablara español, que hablara inglés, no me importaba... Hoy en día es diferente porque uno aprende. <i>(It didn't affect me at all. I didn't care if they told me to go home, to speak Spanish, or to speak English. It didn't matter to me... Today, it's different because one learns.)</i>
Cultural Isolation	Friendships with Latinos	1998 Arrived as an adult	A mí me encanta hablar español. Sí, muchísimo más que el inglés, Siento que tengo un broken english, pero nada, me gusta hablar y compartir con la comunidad latina. Es como que nos entendemos mejor. <i>(I love speaking Spanish. Yes, much more than English; I feel like I have broken English... I like talking and sharing with the Latino community. It's like we understand each other better.)</i>
		2016 Arrived as a child	Yo en mi día a día la verdad que estoy con puros latinos, pero mis amigos del trabajo son más que todo americanos. <i>(In my day to day, truthfully, I am only with Latinos, but my work friends are mostly American.)</i>
		2016 Arrived as an adult	En ciertas manera te hace sentir como que estás en casa cuando estás dentro del medio de la sociedad latina. <i>(In certain ways, it makes you feel like you are at home when you are inside of the Latino society.)</i>

Venezuelan Community

The Venezuelan community has grown tremendously in the last few years, which has been especially evident in Katy, Texas where most of my interviewees live. Many of the interviewees discussed this rapid growth along with the growth of Venezuelan businesses, such as restaurants, salons, and bars. When asked to describe the Venezuelan community in the U.S., most of the interviewees made a strong distinction between the immigrants who arrived before 2015 and those who arrived more recently. They often described established immigrants as professionals who arrived through employment opportunities and had a tight knit community.

One interviewee described it as a potential brain drain for Venezuela. However, one of the interviewees made a distinction between Venezuelan immigrants in Florida and Texas in the early 2000s. Having lived in both states, she said that immigrants in Florida often lacked documents, had faced political persecution, and were seeking asylum while immigrants in Texas often worked in the oil industry and had access to resources. She says that the immigrants who have arrived more recently have some of the same characteristics as the immigrants who arrived in Florida in the early 2000s.

Many of the interviewees discussed how recent immigrants are fleeing the economic, social, and political situation in Venezuela, leading to a rise in illegal immigration that they had not witnessed before. In an interview with an English-as-a-second language teacher, she describes how the students who arrived recently lack basic math skills (i.e., addition) that are expected for a child in middle school. She sees this as a reflection of the deterioration of the Venezuelan education system and many students not having access to education in Venezuela. She emphasized how Venezuelan students are facing additional hardships in school due to the combined effect of a language barrier and lacking basic academic skills.

In four of the interviews, respondents indicated that they were worried about how the actions of recent immigrants may result in a negative reputation for Venezuelans. Two individuals cited recent crimes that they believe were committed by recent immigrants, such as “una banda que está robando los catalizadores y los llevan para Venezuela” (*a gang that is stealing catalytic converters and taking them to Venezuela*). Both established and recent immigrants alike discussed how some immigrants arriving in recent months may not have the right intentions or may not follow the laws as they are expected. One of the recent immigrants who arrived in 2021 described how a coworker offered her a fraudulent DoorDash account. The

frequency of this type of behavior is uncommon, but several of the interviewees worried about the reputation of Venezuelans. One interviewee described how “a veces prefiero mantenerme alejada [de la comunidad venezolana] como para no confundirme, porque no me gusta esa viveza criolla, el no respetar las leyes, el hacer lo que me dé la gana” (*sometimes I prefer to stay away [from the Venezuelan community] to not be confused with them, because I don't like that native cunningness, not respecting the laws, doing whatever they want*).

Viveza Criolla. Four of the interviewees attributed wrongful actions to the *viveza criolla*. A recent immigrant described it as “muchas de las personas que están llegando aquí o que llegamos aquí, me incluyo..., tenemos esa habilidad mental de cómo hacerlo por la forma fácil y no la forma correcta” (*a lot of the people who have arrived here... including myself... we have a mental ability to do things the easy way and not the correct way*). *Viveza criolla* directly translates to creole liveliness, but a more adequate translation is “native cunningness.” *Viveza criolla* is an attitude of challenging authority and avoiding the law that is found in Latin America (Estrázulas, 2021). One recent immigrant characterized *viveza criolla* as a result of the corruption in the Venezuelan government that has led individuals to find new ways to survive. Many immigrants living in the U.S. worry that new Venezuelan immigrants will maintain this attitude while in the U.S. However, one interviewee says “si se propone hacer las cosas bien se destaca porque el venezolano es muy recursivo y siempre busca la forma de resolver el problema. No se queda en el problema, sino que va más allá y lo resuelve” (*if they set out to do things the right way, they will stand out because a Venezuelan person is very resourceful and always looks for a way to solve the problem. They don't succumb to the problem, instead they go above and beyond to solve it*). However, the concern over the actions of recent immigrants did not seem to impact their sense of identity.

Venezuelan Identity

All the interviewees, regardless of what year or age they immigrated, expressed strong pride in their Venezuelan identity. Only two of them felt that they identified equally as American and Venezuelan. One of them described it as “Yo soy venezolano por nacimiento y de corazón... pero tengo orgullo de ser americano y soy americano de pensamiento, de decisión, de deseo y obra” (*I am Venezuelan by birth and by heart... but I am proud to be American and I am American in thought, in decision, through desire and work*). At the same time, he goes on to say “mi identidad venezolana es mía y siempre será mía. No va a dejar nunca de ser” (*my Venezuelan identity is mine and will always be mine. It will never stop being [mine]*). On the other hand, one of the interviewees says “Yo no me siento americana para nada y creo que nunca lo sentiré” (*I don't feel American at all and I think that I never will*). Another interviewee says “para mí ser venezolana es como un orgullo, pues vengo de un país que era muy bello” (*For me, being Venezuelan is a source of pride since I come from a country that was beautiful*). She made a point to emphasize that she was using past tense and indicated that the country is no longer prosperous and beautiful.

Memory. Many of the interviewees shared a similar sense of longing for what Venezuela used to be. One of them says “recuerdo ese mundo bonito. Sí señor, yo lo recuerdo” (*I remember that beautiful world. Yes sir, I remember it*). There is a sense of loss because the beautiful Venezuela from their childhood and young adulthood is gone. One interviewee says “pero bueno, de ahí vengo de un país que ya posiblemente no esté. Pero allí crecí y me formé. Entonces por eso mantengo mi tradición” (*But hey, that's where I come from, a country that may no longer exist, but that's where I grew up and where I became who I am and that's why I maintain my tradition*). For many Venezuelan immigrants, it is extremely important to maintain their customs,

their culture, and their traditions. Very few of them have the ability to return to their home country and if they did return, it would not look like the country they left many years ago. In some ways, the Venezuelan culture that is seen in the U.S. is a result of Venezuelan immigrants who maintain the cultural customs of the past. One of them describes it as “tratamos de arraigarlos al pasado y traernoslo acá” (*We try to plant ourselves to the past and bring it here*). Perhaps this can help explain why they fear the *viveza criolla* of new immigrants. In the U.S., they practice a Venezuelan culture that stems from their memory of what Venezuela used to be, but recent immigrants are bringing with them their culture of Venezuela as it currently is: a state of corruption, shortage, and crisis. One of the interviewees says “no regresaría a Venezuela porque sólo tengo recuerdos. Tengo recuerdos bellos, pero tengo recuerdos de dolor... no tengo nada que me ate para regresar a mi país” (*I would not return to Venezuela because I only have memories. I have beautiful memories, but I also have painful memories... I don't have any reason to return to my country.*) For some immigrants, all they have left is the memories of Venezuela.

Discussion

The present study demonstrates the lived experiences of Venezuelan immigrants and considers the acculturation, acculturative stress, and ethnic identity of this community. For many Venezuelan immigrants, the main reasons for immigrating centered on the economic crisis, insecurity and lack of opportunities in Venezuela with the hope of accessing greater opportunities in the U.S. This study suggests that Venezuelan immigrants are actively trying to acculturate to American culture. For the most part, they are implementing the integration strategy as they maintain a strong sense of their own identity and traditions while incorporating aspects of American culture. The interviewees highlighted a strong desire to adapt and an understanding that this is a necessary process meanwhile the quantitative results emphasized the age of arrival

as a key predictor of acculturation. My first hypothesis was supported as individuals who immigrated at a younger age and who have spent more time in the U.S. report higher levels of acculturation. My findings support the notion put forth by Cheung et al. (2011) that there is a sensitive period for acculturation. Similar to Cheung et al. (2011), time spent in the U.S. predicted high levels of acculturation only for individuals who arrived as children. Moreover, it appears that age at immigration and length in the U.S. are more strongly associated with a participant's English language use than the other aspects of acculturation, such as their preference for English media use or American friends/social gatherings.

As the literature regarding acculturative stress is complicated, this study presents findings that both support and go against the current literature. Overall, this sample reported lower levels of acculturative stress compared to other Latino immigrants (Cariello et al., 2020). This finding may be due to the high level of education in this sample with most individuals having acquired a college degree or are currently in college. Another explanation is the recruitment of participants was based on organizations and Venezuelan groups, thus implying that the participants most likely have social support and are part of a Venezuelan community. Both education and social support have been found to reduce the stress of acculturation (Berry et al., 1987; Finch & Vega, 2003). In fact, stress from acculturation was not a significant theme during the interviews; instead, individuals discussed their strong friendships and a lack of discrimination. The interviews shed light on the resiliency of Venezuelan immigrants as they have faced adversity but persevered to adapt in a positive way (Luther & Cicchetti, 2000). Cultural values and the internal locus of control that was seen in the discussion of discrimination may act as protective factors that can reduce the effect of acculturative stress among Venezuelan immigrants (Luther & Cicchetti, 2000).

Yet as expected, Adult Recent Immigrants face the greatest stress due to the pressure of finding employment and the difficulty of learning the language. Meanwhile, Youth Established Immigrants are the ones who are reporting the highest levels of discrimination, cultural isolation, and intercultural conflicts. This may be due to the fact that as individuals acculturate more to the U.S. they become more aware of discrimination and are interacting more frequently with individuals of other cultures, thus increasing potential exposure to conflicts (Bauer et al., 2012). Contrary to the existing literature, there was no significant relationship between acculturation and acculturative stress or between ethnic identity and acculturative stress. Overall, my second hypothesis was not supported by the findings given that acculturative stress was not associated with age of arrival or time in the U.S. However, age of arrival and time in the U.S. were key predictors when considering specific aspects of acculturative stress.

Finally, my third hypothesis was supported as individuals who immigrated at a younger age reported higher levels of ethnic identity. This finding was true for both individuals who immigrated several years ago and those who immigrated recently. As Phinney (1990) describes, adolescence is a key period for exploration of identity. Although all the participants are above the age of 18, the immigrants who arrived as children are closer in age to adolescence than individuals who arrived as adults, and therefore, they are more actively exploring their identity. Furthermore, Phinney (1990) notes that a contrast group is necessary to begin exploration of one's own identity. As such, the Youth Recent Immigrants report the highest level of exploration given that they have recently come in contact with a different culture and are near adolescence. Similar to Ontai-Grzebik and Raffaelli (2004), age did not play a role in one's commitment to their ethnic identity. Across all individuals, there was a strong sense of Venezuelan identity that was specially emphasized in the interviews. The strong ethnic identity and community

connections in Venezuelan immigrants can potentially serve as protective factors against mental health issues or physical health problems.

Limitations and Future Research

This study contains several limitations. First, the small sample size limits the generalizations that can be made about Venezuelan immigrant populations. This sample was largely made up of individuals who arrived before 2015 and may not reflect the experiences of immigrants who have arrived in the time since this data was collected. Additionally, there were unequal sample sizes between the four groups which decreased the possibility of detecting any group differences. As a result, most of the analyses of variance focused on the difference between Youth Established Immigrants and the Adult Established Immigrants. Furthermore, most of the recruitment was done via convenience sampling and focused largely on the area of Katy, Texas, which further limits the generalizability of the results.

Future research should explore the impacts that the acculturation, acculturative stress, and ethnic identity can have on health outcomes and mental health. Given that much of the acculturation and health research has been done on Mexican-Americans, it would be useful to explore the health outcomes of Latino immigrants from other countries of origin. Additionally, the phenomenon of acculturative stress continues to be complex even within Latinos of a specific country of origin. It is clear that stressors differ between immigrants depending on various characteristics, such as time in the U.S., age of arrival, education, and employment. Therefore, resources for immigrants should be tailored to the various stressors that immigrants face and acknowledging that the needs of more acculturated immigrants differ from those of less acculturated immigrants. Overall, the ability to build social support networks in a new country while maintaining their own cultural values can be beneficial for the well-being of immigrants.

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