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Hautala, Dane; Dombrowski, Kirk; and Marcus, Anthony, "Predictors of Police Reporting Among Hispanic Immigrant Victims of Violence" (2015). *Sociology Department, Faculty Publications*. 260.

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Published in *Race and Justice* 5:3 (2015), pp. 235-258

doi: 10.1177/2153368714554717

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# Predictors of Police Reporting Among Hispanic Immigrant Victims of Violence

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine predictors of police reporting among Hispanic immigrant victims of violence. A sample of 127 Hispanic immigrants was generated through a chain-referral procedure in the city of Hempstead, New York. Participants were asked about their most recent victimization experiences, and detailed information was collected on up to three incidents. The analyses were based on a total of 214 separate victimization incidents, one third of which were reported to the police. Logistic regression analyses indicated that serious injury, multiple-victim incidents, and perceptions of discrimination increase the odds of a police report. Moreover, incidents involving a Black primary assailant were less likely to be reported to the police than incidents involving an assailant perceived to be of Hispanic origin. Supplementary analyses suggested that this latter relationship may be contingent upon the type of crime and the victim's relationship with the assailant. At the policy level, these findings call into question assumptions about very recent immigrants being too socially isolated and distrustful of law enforcement to sustain robust reporting levels, as well as pointing to encouraging possibilities for productive engagement between police and Hispanic immigrant populations.

**Keywords:** Hispanic, immigrant, victimization, police, reporting, respondent-driven sampling

Over the past three decades, a large body of literature has been amassed on predictors of police reporting. Few studies, however, have examined police reporting trends among Hispanic victims generally (see Rennison, 2007, 2010) and Hispanic immigrant victims specifically. Hispanics comprise the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the United States, and the population is expected to double by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Moreover, approximately half of the current immigrant population in the United States is of Hispanic origin, and trends show steady growth (Passel, 2006). Despite this population increase, crime statistics and police reporting data currently do not exist for the distinct category of Hispanic immigrants, possibly reflecting the difficulty in obtaining data from this hard-to-sample population (McDonald & Erez, 2007) and the comparatively high percentage who are without a visa or other legal documentation (Passel, 2006). Despite higher rates of trust and satisfaction with police than their native-born counterparts (Davis & Hendricks, 2007), it is widely believed that underreporting of crime and victimization is endemic among Hispanic immigrants (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). Lurking behind this issue is whether citizenship status and legal immigration standing affect police reporting (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). At present, too little data have been collected on the latter for broad generalization, though many police suspect significant underreporting of crime by Hispanic immigrants (Chapin, 2011; Skogan, 2009).

The nonreporting of crime to the police has several general social implications (Skogan, 1984). First, by not reporting to the police, victims may be denied access to important ameliorative services. Second, nonreporting may reduce the possible deterrent effect of the criminal justice system. Third, if a large percentage of crime goes unreported, the police mandate to protect and serve may be undermined. These effects may be general to the society as a whole, but they may also be specific to particular communities or segments of communities. For Hispanic immigrant victims of violence, nonreporting of crime may have several additional consequences. First, systematic nonreporting among Hispanic immigrants limits our understanding of the extent of violent victimization among this population and the social context in which it occurs, hampering the design and implementation of effective public policy. Second, nonreporting of crime, where it reflects a culture of fear, may encourage a sense of impunity among victimizers, potentially creating a vicious cycle of victimization and increasing criminal behavior. Third, nonreporting limits the engagement between vulnerable populations and the authorities, potentially impeding the community relationships that have been demonstrated to be crucial to reducing the risk of victimization and promoting positive interactions with criminal justice officials (Davis & Erez, 1998). With these possible implications in mind, it is apparent that anything that would hamper integration among Hispanic immigrants may have a broader impact on the communities in which they live and work.

Indicative of such outcomes was the murder of Ecuadorean immigrant Marcelo Lucero in 2009, in the town of Patchogue, New York, one county east of where the current study took place. This internationally reported incident highlighted the danger of having significant sections of the population outside the ambit of public institutions of law, order, and social integration and helped spark a national de-

bate about the causes and consequences of successful or failed social integration of immigrants (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). In this case, and we suspect in others, issues of victimization and immigrant/police relationships act as touchstones for broader social concerns. Under these conditions, accurate data and systematic analysis of levels of police reporting/nonreporting would seem essential.

The purpose of this study is to examine the predictors of police reporting among a sample of Hispanic immigrant victims of violence residing in Long Island, New York, using data collected several months before the Lucero murder. The legal standing of our research subjects was not a part of this investigation. Therefore, throughout the article, we address the broader issues of reporting by Hispanic immigrants. However, as discussed in the conclusions to the article, we estimate that a very high proportion of our subjects were in fact undocumented at the time of our interviews. The following analysis addresses several gaps in the police reporting literature. First, the study adds to the limited body of knowledge on Hispanic immigrant victims of violence. Second, we describe a novel sampling approach that can be used to reach this otherwise hidden population. Third, we present results that confirm expected patterns of reporting with regard to crime severity, but demonstrate unique variations by the race/ethnicity of the assailant. These results point to issues of interracial/ethnic dynamics that have received little discussion in relation to immigrant interactions with the criminal justice system.

## Literature Review

### *Conceptual Frameworks*

The extant literature on police reporting has focused on situational factors of the victimization incident, including offender and incident characteristics, along with sociodemographic characteristics of the victim, as possible predictors of a crime being reported to the police. In this article, two competing, yet overlapping, theoretical approaches were used to integrate these various predictors previously found to be important for reporting into a single coherent framework and to derive a set of hypotheses for this study: Gottfredson and Gottfredson's (1988) decision making in criminal justice, and Black's (1976) behavior of law. Both approaches provide generalized explanations for why a victim's relationship with the assailant and multiple-victim incidents may influence police reporting, which in turn may be used to look for similarities and differences in the reporting patterns of Hispanic immigrant victims specifically. The two theories, however, diverge with regard to how "seriousness" is conceptualized, allowing us to treat them as competing explanations. For example, Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1988) conceptualize seriousness as the self-evident individual consequences of a crime (e.g., bodily and financial harm), whereas Black's (1976) theory conceptualizes seriousness as the extent to which an abstract quantity of law is mobilized.

Gottfredson and Gottfredson's (1988) decision making in criminal justice framework argues that across the criminal justice process, including victim re-

porting, individuals are strongly influenced by the victim's relationship with the offender, the seriousness of the offense, and the offender's prior criminal conduct. This approach largely conceptualizes police reporting behavior as a rational choice (see also Skogan, 1984) in which victims report to the police when the benefits of reporting outweigh the costs. For this study, we are particularly interested in the victim's relationship with the offender and the seriousness of the offense. Both offer opportunities to assess police reporting among Hispanic immigrant victims of violence and evaluate these in terms of expectations born from prior research results.

In contrast, Black (1976) conceptualizes law as a quantifiable variable that can be measured in myriad ways, and which is unevenly distributed over a population. For example, reporting to the police is an example of mobilizing "more law" than is mobilized by not reporting. To track the extent to which law is mobilized across aspects of social life, Black sees law as varying across five axes: stratification, morphology, culture, organization, and social control. Several of these axes are significant to the current discussion. We draw from all of these dimensions, except for culture, to generate hypotheses about the association between offender, incident, and victim characteristics with police reporting.

### ***Offender Characteristics***

Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1988) argued that victims are reluctant to report crimes to the police if they involve a known assailant. In these cases, criminal incidents may be viewed instead as a private matter that is best dealt with outside the purview of the criminal justice system. Black (1976) argued something similar. He proposed the concept of morphology, or what may be described as the horizontal aspect of social life, which he defined as "the distribution of people in relation to one another" (p. 37). Within this aspect of social life, the amount of law likely to be mobilized by a criminal incident varies with the relational distance between the two parties, which can be described as the extent to which people participate in one another's lives. In Black's theory, the amount of law mobilized is argued to be greater when the level of interaction between two parties decreases. Numerous studies support these theoretical assertions in which crimes committed by stranger assailants are more likely to come to the attention of police officials (Avakame, Fyfe, & McCoy, 1999; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1988; Skogan, 1984). This issue is particularly salient for immigrant populations who may have less interaction with nonimmigrant society for reasons such as language difference or geographical concentration. For Hispanic immigrants, a group that currently contains higher relative proportions of undocumented immigrants, social isolation may be a more general characteristic, at least for some portions of the population. Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) found that Hispanic immigrant perceptions of "who is a criminal" are shaped by their interactions with family and friends, with those falling outside their community more likely to be perceived as criminal. While this study does not focus on documented/undocumented distinctions in our sample, it is likely that a very high portion of our study sample was undocumented (discussed subsequently). For this reason, we might expect

even greater social distance between victims and victimizers when victimizers come from outside the local Hispanic immigrant community where the study took place. This possibility informs our first hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Drawing from the decision making in criminal justice and behavior of law frameworks, incidents involving a known offender are expected to have lower odds of a police report than incidents involving an unknown assailant.

In addition to the victim's relationship with the offender, the perceived race/ethnicity of the offender may be an important predictor of police reporting behavior for many of the same reasons identified previously. In the United States, racial distinctions often mark significant community boundaries across which levels of social interaction are curbed. However, Black also defined stratification (the vertical aspect of social life) as a second axis across which access to law could be predicted: "It is any uneven distribution of the material conditions of existence, such as food and shelter, and the means by which these are produced" (p. 11). Along this axis, those with greater access to material conditions also have greater access to law (and thus would be more likely to report a crime, for example). Hispanic immigrants in the United States, in this sense, would be suspected of having less access to law than their nonimmigrant neighbors, as the bulk of this population remains more economically and socially marginalized than nonimmigrants in their same communities, with high poverty rates relative to the general U.S. population (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). With reference to stratification, Black would view Hispanic immigrants as likely to have less law than those around them. Under these conditions, we might expect them to demonstrate lower levels of police reporting of those perceived to have "more law" than they do (i.e., lower rates of police reporting when the assailant is not also Hispanic).

This argument, however, runs counter to most of the previous literature examining the race/ethnicity of the offender and police reporting. Indeed, an important indicator of police reporting in the United States, more broadly, is whether or not the primary assailant is African American. Victimization incidents involving an African American assailant have a higher likelihood of being reported to police than incidents involving an assailant of another race (Carbone-López, 2005; Xie & Lauritsen, 2012; Yun & Mueller, 2011). As evidence of systemic "profiling" that goes well beyond formal policing, these findings highlight the deeply embedded tendency in the United States to attribute crime to race, and especially to African Americans (Tonry, 2011). Thus, when compared with Menjivar and Bejarano's (2004) findings, such data raise the question of whether the race/ethnicity of the offender may be an important predictor of police reporting because of status differences between assailants and victims (in which case, we might expect lower levels of reporting for non-Hispanic assailants), or conversely, whether social separation along racial lines predominates (where we might expect greater levels of reporting for incidents involving non-Hispanic victimizers). Thus:

**Hypothesis 2:** Based on Black's (1976) notion of stratification, we expect incidents involving a primary assailant of a racial/ethnic group other than Hispanic (in this case, primarily African American) to have lower odds of a police report than incidents involving a Hispanic primary assailant.

### ***Incident-Level Predictors***

In addition to offender characteristics, several incident-level factors have been shown to be strong and consistent predictors of police reporting. Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1988) argued that victims appear to operate on a "serious dimension" and report crimes to the police if they involve great amount of bodily harm and/or property loss (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Furthermore, incidents involving multiple victims can be considered as more serious than single-victim incidents because the harm caused by personal victimization is spread across multiple individuals. Black's (1976) theory makes similar predictions with regard to multiple-victim incidents. For Black, groups with larger memberships and more internal organization (roles, rules, and formal procedures) tend to have "more law" than groups with little formal organization (mobs and cliques; see Hypothesis 5). As such, multiple-victim incidents can be considered "more serious" than single-victim incidents and thus more law mobilized as a result. Such a result would find considerable support in the existing literature. In general, victimization incidents involving a greater level of crime severity are more likely to be reported to the police (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1988; Gottfredson & Hindelang, 1979; Skogan, 1984). This finding has been identified in a diverse range of samples, including data from Taiwan (Kuo, Cuvelier, Sheu, & Chang, 2002), Great Britain (Tarling & Morris, 2010), and international crime surveys (Goudriaan, Lynch, & Nieuwebeerta, 2004). More specifically, axes of crime severity such as assailant weapon use (Felson & Pare, 2005), whether injuries were sustained (Ammar, Orloff, Dutton, Aguilar-Hass, 2005; Orloff, Dutton, Haas, & Ammar, 2003; Rennison, 2007), and whether multiple victims were involved (Lizotte, 1985) have all been found to increase the odds of a police report. Given the consistent association between crime seriousness and police reporting in different geographic contexts, we expect the Hispanic immigrant victims of violence in this study to follow similar patterns.

**Hypothesis 3:** Drawing from Gottfredson and Gottfredson's (1988) argument of crime seriousness as an important factor for police reporting, we predict that incidents involving a weapon are more likely to be reported to the police than incidents not involving a weapon.

**Hypothesis 4:** Similarly, incidents in which the victim was seriously injured are more likely to be reported to the police than incidents where the victim was not seriously injured.

**Hypothesis 5:** Furthermore, incidents involving more than one victim are considered "more serious" than single-victim crimes, and thus are more likely to be reported to the police.

### ***Victim-Characteristic Predictors***

In addition to offender and incident characteristics, two victim-level characteristics salient to Hispanic immigrant victims may be important predictors of police reporting behavior: perceptions of discrimination and length of time spent in the United States. Black defines social control as the normative feature of social life. This describes features of social life that define what is considered conventional and what is considered deviant. Law varies inversely with social control, such that those occupying more conventional statuses have more law than those who are considered more deviant. Manifestations of societal racism and xenophobia such as perceptions of discrimination based on race/ethnicity and/or immigration status can be conceptualized as a form of social control that defines who and what is socially desirable, and creates and maintains status variations by race, ethnicity, or perceived status of acculturation. Discriminatory rhetoric and experiences may create a climate of fear (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009), which has the potential to promote violence against Hispanic immigrants while simultaneously making victims reluctant to contact police for fear of community retribution (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). In turn, all of these factors would then have the potential to impact reporting rates by Hispanic immigrants.

**Hypothesis 6:** Drawing from Black's (1976) notion of social control, we predict that Hispanic immigrants perceiving discrimination due to their racial/ethnic and/ or immigration status are less likely to report to the police than those who do not perceive discrimination.

The victim's length of stay in the United States may also be an important predictor of police reporting. Black's notion of radial distance posits that people vary in the extent to which they actively participate in social life. Black argued that law directly varies with integration in that individuals who are more integrated into society have more law than those who are in the margins. Prior research suggests that immigrants who have been living in the United States for shorter periods of time may be less familiar with the social and cultural norms of reporting crimes to the police (Davis & Erez, 1998). We examine length of time spent in the United States as a proxy for social integration with the assumption that those living in the country longer are more socially integrated than those living in the United States for less time. Limited research among Hispanic immigrants would appear to support this argument. Two studies of Hispanic immigrant victims of domestic violence found that those living in the United States longer were more likely to call the police than those living in the United States for less time (Ammar et al., 2005; Orloff et al., 2003).

**Hypothesis 7:** Based on Black's concept of radial distance, we conceptualize time spent in the United States as a proxy for social integration, such that those living in the United States longer are more socially integrated than those living in the country for less time. Thus, following Black, we predict that the amount of time spent living in the United States will be positively associated with the odds of a police report.



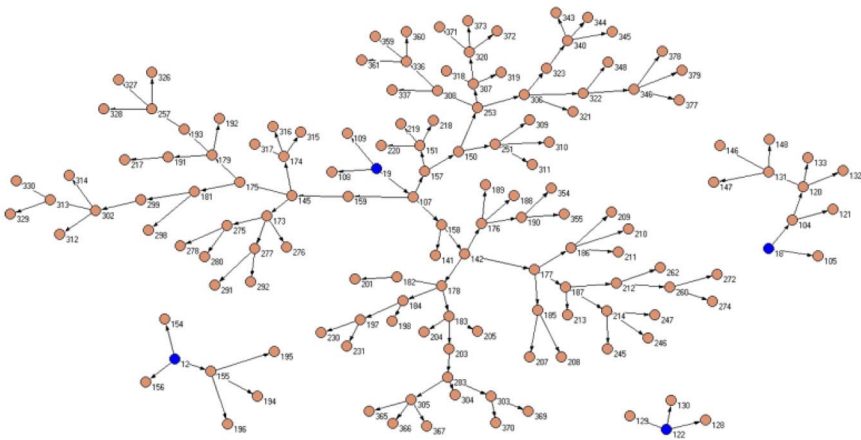
## Method

### Sample

Tests of these hypotheses were made using data collected in the suburban town of Hempstead, New York, in 2008. Formally, Hempstead has a population of approximately 50,000 people, but the town exists in a quasi-urban geography linking several surrounding towns into a larger peri-urban zone at the center of Nassau County, New York's nearly 1.3 million people. In recent years, Hempstead has become a racially mixed city composed of Black and Hispanic majority neighborhoods, reflecting high levels of Hispanic immigration to the area. The data discussed here were collected as part of a larger project funded by the District Attorney's Office of Nassau County New York. The project aimed at understanding levels of victimization and potential problems associated with victim reporting, including immigration status, community reporting norms, prior police interaction, and overall experience with the criminal justice system. Hispanic residents of Hempstead and surrounding areas were considered a "hard-to-sample" population in large part because of the high percentage of noncitizen/ undocumented immigrants.

To compensate for the difficulty in researching "invisible" populations, a peer referral approach was utilized to recruit victims of violence whose victimization was known to one another. Peer referral was intended to allay fears about participating in the project and to provide greater transparency to potential participants in the research process itself. Coupon-based link tracking was used to monitor the recruitment process, resulting in the recruitment of 148 Latino immigrants, all of whom reported being victimized in the past 12 months. This method followed closely the protocols described by Heckathorn (1997, 2002) as respondent-driven sampling (RDS; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). RDS is a methodology that is used to recruit equilibrium samples (with corresponding error estimation and population weighting) of hard-to-reach groups by taking advantage of intragroup social connections to build a sample pool. RDS is much like the well-known and often-used recruitment strategies of "snowball sampling" and "chain-referral sampling," but unlike these methods, whose primary utility is generating a large number of research subjects, RDS also provides a powerful set of analytic/statistical tools for creating weighted population estimates that are almost as powerful and robust as those generated through more common probabilistic statistics for randomly sampled data (Heckathorn, 2002; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). Additionally, by using RDS, researchers are always introduced to each new unnamed research subject by a friend or associate who can describe the nonthreatening nature of participation in the study beforehand, and vouch for the researchers' good faith, thereby facilitating subject recruitment and increasing the likelihood of respondents answering questions honestly.

A small number of initial research subjects called "seeds" are recruited, interviewed by the researchers, and paid for their time and effort. Following their interviews, the seeds are given three sequentially numbered coupons and instructed to pass them along to friends or associates who meet the project recruiting criteria. The numbers on the coupons allow the researchers to identify each research sub-



**Figure 1.** Referral chains showing subject-to-subject recruitment by respondent ID number, with seeds indicated by color.

ject (names are not used), prevent duplication, identify who recruited each participant, and keep track of subsequent recruitment patterns. These patterns are then used in the estimation and weighting process. When coupons are redeemed by eligible research subjects, their recruiter is compensated. The eligible subjects referred by the seeds comprise the first wave of the sample and they are each given three coupons to recruit the next wave of study participants. Study participants are recruited in this fashion until the desired sample size is reached. Our goal in this study was to recruit 150 recently victimized immigrants of Hispanic background. Figure 1 shows the referral chains for participants in the study, identified by respondent identification numbers. Participants 12, 18, 19, and 122 were seeds, while the remaining individuals presented for the interview with a referral coupon from a prior participant. As one can see there, the bulk of participants came from Seed 19, with referral chains of length 8 or 9 across three branches.

Research subjects were interviewed in Spanish by native speakers at a local nonprofit social service agency with considerable service experience in the Latino community in Hempstead, which is located a few blocks away from the Hempstead Police Department. Initial seeds were referred to the research team by the agency and were recruited from a local home improvement store parking lot located several blocks away where undocumented immigrants congregate to seek day labor opportunities. Research subjects were offered US\$20 for the initial interview, and they could earn up to US\$30 more by recruiting three additional eligible research subjects at US\$10 per referral. The research team was composed of two university staff who supervised the work and coordinated the schedules, and six trained graduate students who managed participant intake and conducted interviews. In the spring of 2008, interviews were conducted twice a week during the daytime for a 6-week period.

As part of the interview, respondents were asked to report how many times they have been victimized since moving to the United States. Detailed information was collected for up to three most recent victimization incidents. All of the analyses presented subsequently are based on the victimization incidents ( $n = 229$ ) rather than individuals making the reports ( $n = 148$ ). Because of missing data on variables of interest, the final analytic sample comprised 127 individuals who accounted for 214 separate victimization incidents (89.5% of the total victimization incidents). Ten respondents were missing data on all the victimization variables and only had valid data for the demographic characteristics, and were thus deleted from the sample (6.8% of the sample; 4.2% of the victimization incidents). Eleven respondents were missing on specific items included in the analyses and were listwise deleted (7.4% of the sample; 4.6% of victimization incidents). We compared those who had complete data on the items included in the analyses with a large number of demographic and victimization incident characteristics. Compared to those with complete data, incidents with missing data were less likely to involve a weapon or a respondent who is married. In addition, those with missing data tended to be older than those with complete data.

The sample data were also analyzed for both degree-based and homophily-based recruitment bias across a range of respondent characteristics using the Respondent-Driven Sampling Analysis Tool (RDSAT) platform developed by Heckathorn and colleagues (Spiller, Cameron, & Heckathorn, 2012). In all cases, the analyses were done using the Dual Component average network size estimation and 20,000 bootstrap resamplings. The confidence level was set at 2.5% (for a 0.95 confidence interval) for all estimates. Network size estimates in the top (and bottom) 5% were “pulled in,” and seeds were excluded from the estimate. The “Enhanced Data Smoothing” algorithm was employed, as described by Spiller, Cameron, and Heckathorn (2012) and Wejnert (2009). The sampling analysis (see Table 1) indicated low levels of homophily for all variables, indicating that seed characteristics had little influence on subsequent referrals for the following variables: age, country of origin, length of current stay, marital status, self-reported income (weekly, monthly, and yearly), and times victimized in the last 12 months. Homophily in RDS sampling is measured on a scale from  $-1$  to  $1$ , with  $0$  indicating neutral recruiting (i.e., the variable exerted no influence on the recruiting pattern when compared with what we would expect from a random matching of respondents). A negative score indicates heterophily, the tendency to recruit outside one’s own group at a rate greater than that expected by random mixing; a positive score indicates the presence of homophily, or the tendency to recruit within one’s own group. In general, homophily rates below  $.3$  (or heterophily rates above  $-.3$ ) indicate a low level of clustering on the respective variable within the sampled population (Heckathorn, 2002). The only borderline variable was *length of stay*, with immigrants having lived in the United States less than 3 years on their most recent trip demonstrating moderate levels of heterophily, meaning that those who had spent less time in the United States tended to associate with those who had spent more than 3 years there, rather than with other newer arrivals. Here the recommended population weighting fell just outside a 5% range (indicating an under-recruitment of 8% and an over-recruitment of persons in the United States

**Table 1.** Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) Analysis.

	Homophily	Error
Times victimized		
One time	-0.038	0.046
Two or more times	-0.156	0.046
Weekly income		
Under US\$4,000	0.042	0.098
Over US\$4,000	0.042	0.098
Marital status		
Unmarried	0.199	0.055
Married	0.063	0.055
Length of current stay		
Under 3 years	-0.298	0.046
Over 3 years	0.016	0.046
Age		
Under 35 years	-0.112	0.050
Over 35 years	0.097	0.050
Country of origin		
Honduras	0.132	0.058
El Salvador	0.065	0.052
All other	0.064	0.027

**Note.** All analyses were completed via RDSAT 7.1.38.

for more than 3 years by 5.9%). All other population weights for the sample were less than 5%. Similarly, bootstrap standard error scores for all variables were below .05 for the 20,000 bootstrap resamplings for all variables except marital status and weekly income (the latter reflecting the fact that there were considerable missing data for this variable). Together, these figures indicate a reliable sample that appears to have reached equilibrium for the variables described previously.

### **Measures**

The focal dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of police reporting. For each incident, respondents were asked whether or not it was reported to the police. Those who answered with a yes were coded as 1, and those who answered no were coded as 0.

**Offender characteristics.** Two assailant characteristics were examined. First, for each victimization incident, respondents were asked what they perceived the race/ethnicity of the primary assailant to be. Response options included Black/African American, Hispanic, White, Asian or Middle-Eastern, or mixed. Because most of the identified assailants were Black or Hispanic, we combined the White, Asian, Middle-Eastern, and mixed groups. For the regression analyses, we created three dummy variables for primary assailant race. Because our hypotheses make explicit comparisons between Hispanics and the other racial groups, the Hispanic

dummy variable was excluded in regression analyses and served as the reference category. A second assailant characteristic identified for analysis was the extent to which the victim knew the assailant. In the interview, respondents were asked whether or not the primary assailant was somebody they knew. Those who answered yes were coded as 1.

**Incident characteristics.** Three incident characteristics were examined. First, respondents were asked whether or not a weapon was involved. Those who answered yes were coded as 1. Second, respondents were asked whether or not they were seriously injured. The yes responses were coded as 1. Third, respondents were asked how many others were victimized during the incident. Because of extreme positive skewness, the variable was dichotomized such that incidents involving one or more additional victims were coded as 1.

**Victim characteristics.** Two victim characteristics were assessed. First, two measures capturing respondent perceptions of discrimination were created through interviewer-coded questions. If at any time during the interview, a respondent reported feeling discriminated against because of their Hispanic ethnicity or their status as an immigrant, interviewers reported so in the survey. A direct question was never asked to the respondent regarding perceptions of discrimination. All possible wordings were thought to prejudice responses. Instead, open-ended conversations about interactions with police and community were assessed by the interviewer. Discrimination was examined on two axes: racial/ethnic status and immigration status. These 2 items were combined to create a dichotomous variable with those reporting any discrimination along either axis coded as 1. Second, each respondent was asked how many months he or she had been in the United States on their current trip. The ordinal response options range from 0 (1–11 months) to 13 (more than 20 years). Each category was recoded to the midpoints in year intervals (e.g., 1–11 months recoded to 0.5 years, 13–23 months recoded to 1.5 years, etc.) to create a continuous measure.

### **Analytic Strategy**

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, binary logistic regression was used to examine the relationship between police reporting and predictors of interest. Variables were analyzed in two stages: (1) an unadjusted, bivariate model and (2) a multivariate model with all variables included. We ran the models with controls for age, gender, country of origin, and type of crime (robbery/assault), and found that these variables were not significant in bivariate or multivariate analyses. Furthermore, the inclusion of these variables in the model did not change the size or significance of the parameter estimates of the variables of interest (results available upon request). Given this, we decided to retain the more parsimonious model without these extensive controls. Because incident-level data were used, observations were not necessarily independent by respondent, which may result in inefficient estimators (e.g., standard errors). To relax this assumption, the cluster option was used in Stata Version 13 (StataCorp, 2013) to estimate ro-

**Table 2.** Incident-Level Characteristics Included in the Analyses.

	%
Demographic characteristics ( <i>N</i> = 127)	
Age (Median)	38.0
Male	96.9
Married	21.3
Spouse living in the United States	7.1
Country of origin	
Honduras	38.6
El Salvador	39.4
Guatemala	13.4
Other Central American Country	8.7
Occupation	
Construction	42.5
Day laborer	22.8
Landscaping	10.2
Other	24.5
Yearly income <sup>a</sup> (Median)	US\$ 6,250.00
Variables included in analyses ( <i>N</i> = 214)	
Percentage of incidents reported to the police	31.8
Known assailant	11.7
Primary assailant race	
Black	74.3
Hispanic	19.2
Other	6.5
Weapon involved	61.2
Seriously injured	37.9
Others victimized	6.1
Reported any discrimination	22.4
Length of current stay in the United States (mean years)	6.3

*N* = 214. All incident variables are dichotomous unless otherwise stated.

a. *n* = 75.

bust Huber–White sandwich errors (Huber, 1967; White, 1982), which were clustered by respondent identification number (see Rogers, 1993).

## Results

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Demographic characteristics are reported in Table 2 to give a better sense of the sample composition. A majority of the respondents originated from El Salvador (39.4%), Honduras (38.6%), or Guatemala (13.4%). Less than 1 in 10 participants (8.6%) originated from other Central American countries. Most respondents (78.7%) were between 21 and 45 years old (*Mdn* = 36–40 years), and almost all were male (96.9%). On average, the participants of this sample reported living in the United States for 6.42 years (*SD* = 5.40). Slightly over one fifth (21.3%) re-

**Table 3.** Logistic Regression Models Predicting Police Reporting.

	Bivariate Model			Multivariate Model		
	<i>b</i>	(SE)	OR	<i>b</i>	(SE)	OR
Assailant characteristics						
Known assailant	0.41	(0.41)	1.51	-0.32	(0.55)	0.72
Black primary assailant <sup>a</sup>	-0.92**	(0.33)	0.40	-1.35**	(0.48)	0.26
Other primary assailant race <sup>a</sup>	0.51	(0.52)	1.67	-0.65	(0.61)	0.52
Incident characteristics						
Weapon involved	0.60 <sup>y</sup>	(0.33)	1.82	0.27	(0.35)	1.30
Seriously injured	1.30***	(0.32)	3.66	1.24**	(0.38)	3.45
Others victimized	1.32*	(0.60)	3.76	1.38*	(0.63)	3.99
Victim characteristics						
Reported any discrimination	0.68 <sup>†</sup>	(0.36)	1.97	0.77*	(0.37)	2.15
Length of stay in the U.S.	0.03	(0.03)	1.03	0.02	(0.03)	1.02
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			.14			
Model $\chi^2$	37.60***					
<i>df</i>	8					

*N* = 214. Robust standard errors estimated. **OR** = odds ratio; **SE** = standard error.

a. Hispanic primary assailant is the reference category.

<sup>†</sup> *p* < .10 ; \* *p* < .05 ; \*\* *p* < .01 ; \*\*\* *p* < .001

ported that they were currently married, and even fewer reported having a spouse currently living in the United States (7.1%). Almost three quarters (74.6%) of the sample reported that they made between US\$2,500 and US\$15,000 in the past year (*Mdn* = US\$6,250). Only about two third of the respondents answered questions about their income, though. Three quarters of the respondents reported their occupation as day laborer (22.8%), construction (42.5%), or landscaping (10.2%).

Table 2 also presents descriptive statistics for the incident characteristics. Approximately one third (31.8%) of the incidents were reported to the police. Most of the incidents involved a Black primary assailant (74.3%) and a weapon (61.2%). Fewer incidents involved serious injury (37.9%), a known assailant (11.7%), or multiple victims (6.1%). The major crime types comprised robberies (68.9%) and assaults (31.1%).

### Bivariate Statistics

Table 3 presents the unadjusted logistic regression odds ratios for each of the hypothesized predictors. Three of the seven variables significantly predicted police reporting. First, incidents involving a Black primary assailant had lower odds of resulting in a police report than those involving a Hispanic assailant. Incidents in which the primary assailant's race was perceived as "other" were not significantly different from incidents involving a Hispanic primary assailant. Second, the odds of a police report were significantly higher for incidents resulting in serious injury

to the victim than incidents not involving serious injury. Third, the odds of a police report were higher for incidents involving more than one victim. The victim–assailant relationship, weapon use ( $p = .07$ ), discrimination ( $p = .06$ ), and length of stay in the United States were either marginally significant or nonsignificant.

### **Multivariate Models**

Table 3 also presents the multivariate model predicting police reporting. The only significant assailant characteristic was for the race/ethnicity of the primary assailant. As hypothesized, the odds of a police report were 74% lower for incidents involving a Black primary assailant compared to Hispanic primary assailants. Incidents involving an assailant categorized as “other” were not significantly different from incidents involving a Hispanic primary assailant. Two of the incident-level characteristics were significant. As hypothesized, the odds of a police report for incidents resulting in serious injury were 245% higher than incidents not resulting in injury. Likewise, the odds a police report were 299% higher for incidents involving multiple victims than incidents involving a single victim. Contrary to expectations, incidents involving a weapon did not predict police reporting. Only one of the victim characteristics was significant. Controlling for all assailant, incident, and victim characteristics, the coefficient for perceived discrimination increased slightly and became statistically significant, indicating a possible suppression effect. Contrary to expectations, incidents for which the reporting respondent had separately identified experiencing discrimination had double the odds of being reported to the police than incidents in which the victim had not separately identified experiencing discrimination. Length of time spent in the United States was not a significant predictor of police reporting.

### **Supplementary Analyses**

The race/ethnicity of the primary assailant was a consistent predictor of police reporting in every model. More specifically, incidents involving a Black primary assailant had lower odds of resulting in a police report than those involving a Hispanic primary assailant. To further examine this relationship, two ancillary analyses were performed. First, we examined possible two-way interaction effects to assess whether certain incident and victim characteristics moderate the association between the primary assailant’s race/ethnicity and police reporting. We found no evidence of moderating effects for any of the other study variables by race (results not tabled). Second, we examined the bivariate correlates of incidents involving a Black primary assailant and incidents involving a primary assailant of another racial/ethnic group. In these analyses, we decided to collapse the Hispanic and other race/ethnicity category for two reasons. First, the previous analyses showed no differences between Hispanic and “other” primary assailants. Second, the following analyses produce substantively similar results based on whether we assess Black versus Hispanic or Black versus all other race/ethnicity comparisons. The only two factors significantly associated with the primary assailant’s race were the victim–assailant relationship and the type of victimiza-



tion (results not tabled). Incidents involving a Black primary assailant were less likely to involve a known assailant, compared to incidents involving another racial/ethnic group (4.3% and 32.1%, respectively;  $\chi^2 = 32.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, incidents involving a Black primary assailant were more likely to be a robbery than an assault (82.2% and 56.1%, respectively), while the opposite was true for the other racial/ethnic groups (17.8% robbery and 43.9% assault;  $\chi^2 = 16.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Given these findings, we stratified the results by crime type and victim–assailant relationship (e.g., robbery/known assailant, robbery/unknown assailant, assault/known assailant, and assault/unknown assailant) and ran a series of bivariate analyses for assailant race and police reporting. Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used to determine statistical significance. The only significant crosstab showed that, among incidents involving a robbery and an unknown assailant, police reporting was lower for incidents involving a Black primary assailant compared to other racial/ethnic groups (24.6% and 52.6%, respectively;  $\chi^2 = 6.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine predictors of police reporting among a sample of Hispanic immigrant victims of violence. The findings help remedy the paucity of empirical research on Hispanic victims of violence in general and Hispanic immigrants in particular. More specifically, the study advances our understanding of predictors of police reporting among Hispanic immigrants and the context in which it occurs. Furthermore, we highlight a novel sampling approach that we believe is most appropriate for gaining access to this otherwise hard-to-reach population. Of the two assailant characteristics examined (Hypotheses 1 and 2), only the primary assailant's race was significantly related to police reporting. The victim's relationship with the assailant was not a significant predictor (Hypothesis 1 not supported). This finding contradicts the decision making in criminal justice (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1988) and behavior of law (Black, 1976) frameworks discussed previously. There may be several explanations for this finding. First, relatively few incidents involved a known assailant; as such, there may not be enough variation to capture statistically significant differences. Second, it is possible that the stranger/known-assailant dichotomy does not adequately capture Black's concept of relational distance. More victim–assailant relationship categories (e.g., spouse, close friend, casual acquaintance, etc.) would give more information on the variation in police reporting among known assailants (e.g., Avakame et al., 1999; Gartner & Macmillan, 1995). Despite these caveats, Rennison (2007) found that Hispanic victims were less likely to report to the police when the assailant was a stranger compared to an intimate partner, indicating that the effect hypothesized by Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1988) and Black (1976) may vary by race/ethnic group. Our results would seem to provide some measure of support for her conclusions. Likewise, the relationship between victim–assailant relationship and police reporting may be contingent upon crime type and the race/ethnicity of the offender.

A consistent predictor in each model suggested that incidents involving a Black primary assailant were less likely to be reported to the police than incidents involving a primary assailant identified as Hispanic (Hypothesis 2 supported). This finding contradicts several police reporting studies in which victimization incidents involving a Black offender were more likely to be reported to the police (Carbone-López, 2005; Xie & Lauritsen, 2012; Yun & Mueller, 2011). Drawing from Black's (1976) stratification concept, those in higher socioeconomic positions have more law than those occupying lower socioeconomic groups. In this case, the Hispanic immigrants in the sample occupy a marginalized social status, and thus, can be conceptualized to have less law (e.g., police reporting power) than African Americans. Unfortunately, we lacked other assailant demographic data to make firm conclusions regarding offender social status and police reporting.

Two supplementary analyses were conducted to better understand the influence of differences in race/ethnicity on the police reporting patterns of Hispanic immigrants. First, we found no evidence of two-way interaction effects by race, which indicates that the other predictors included in this study do not vary as a function of the primary assailant's race. Second, we examined the correlates of primary assailant race and found two significant relationships. Incidents involving a Black primary assailant were less likely to involve a known offender. In addition, incidents involving a Black primary assailant were more likely to be economically motivated (i.e., involving robbery). Given this, we found that incidents involving a robbery and an unknown assailant had lower odds of a police report if the primary assailant was Black, compared to the other racial/ethnic groups. Prior research among Hispanic victims of violence shows that robberies have low police reporting rates among this population (Hart & Rennison, 2003; Rennison, 2007), which may partially explain the lower police reporting trends for race in Hempstead. As noted by Rennison (2010), the relationship between police reporting and various predictors among Hispanics may be contingent upon other situational contexts (e.g., crime type, weapon use, injury to the victim, etc.). More research is clearly needed to understand the interactions between race/ethnicity and social context in reporting crime to the police.

The two most robust predictors of police reporting were whether serious injuries were sustained and whether there were multiple victims (Hypotheses 4 and 5 supported). Both of these factors indicate a greater level of seriousness, which supports Gottfredson and Hindelang's (1979) critique of the behavior of law theory. It appears that the Hispanic victims in this study operate on a seriousness dimension and report crime when a certain level of harm or perceived harm is inflicted. One of the most important reasons victims give for not reporting crime to the police is that "it was not serious enough" (Hart & Rennison, 2003; Skogan, 1984). Furthermore, Rennison (2010) found that among Hispanic victims of violence, the least likely scenario to be reported to the police was a single male who sustained no injuries. The results indirectly support these contentions, and prior research that shows injury (Ammar et al., 2005; Orloff et al., 2003; Rennison, 2007) and multiple victims (Lizotte, 1985) as significant predictors of police reporting. The only incident characteristic that did not achieve significance was whether or not a weapon was involved (Hypothesis 3 not supported). This mixed finding has been found elsewhere (e.g., Bachman, 1998).

Of the two victim characteristics examined, only perceived discrimination significantly predicted police reporting. Participants who reported experiencing discrimination due to their ethnicity and/or immigration status had higher odds of police reporting (Hypothesis 6 not supported), which contradicts Black's (1976) concept of social control. One plausible explanation for this finding is that those who explicitly state that they have perceived discrimination are more cognizant of it and deal with it in a more proactive manner. In this view, victims who perceive their victimization as part of a process of broader social discrimination are more likely to also recognize discrimination as a social wrong. Those who are less aware or open about their experiences may internalize these thoughts and beliefs that may create apprehension about criminal justice agents. In this case, higher levels of reporting by Hispanic victims of violence who see their victimization as part of a process of discrimination may find support in Gottfredson and Gottfredson's (1988) hypothesis about the seriousness of an offense—provided we understand that from the victim's point of view, crimes of discrimination are more serious than economic crimes.

In addition to perceived discrimination, the victim's length of stay in the United States did not predict police reporting patterns (Hypothesis 7 not supported). This finding contradicts prior research showing a positive relationship between time in the United States and the odds of a police report (Ammar et al., 2005; Orloff et al., 2003). This measure was used as a proxy for integration and acculturation with the assumption that the longer the stay in the United States, the more integrated the participants were in the society (as suggested by Black's notion of radial distance). Some explanation of this may be found in Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) results, which show that the more time Hispanic immigrants spend in the United States, their perceptions of police and criminal justice system become more negative, rather than positive.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Given the exploratory nature of the study, which was designed as much to determine the possibility of surveying a sample of immigrants outside the framework of institutional recruitment as it was to study violent victimization, it is unsurprising that we are left with more questions than answers. Crucially, nearly all these questions demand expanded research that better captures the relationship between immigrant integration and police reporting. In particular, comparative and longitudinal data that identify factors influencing reporting behaviors over time would seem important, as would regional variation. Along these lines, three important limitations of this study warrant particular attention.

First, there are several issues pertaining to generalizability. The Hispanic population within the United States is relatively heterogeneous in terms of cultural and social backgrounds. Furthermore, different urban areas in the United States have different concentrations of Hispanic groups (Motel & Patten, 2012). This study was comprised of immigrants primarily from El Salvador and Honduras, which is reflective of the demographic characteristics of Long Island, New York (Mariano, 2008). As such, the result may not be generalizable to all Hispanic im-

migrant victims of violence. Further, we have referred throughout the article to our sample as one composed of Hispanic immigrants. We have made no distinction between those who entered and work in the United States legally, and those who did not. During the data collection phase, we did not ask our subjects about their immigration status (i.e., documented or undocumented). In pilot testing, answers to direct questions of this sort were found to be highly unreliable. Rather, our survey asked respondents whether they had a bank account and separately, whether they had a United States driver's license. Only 6 of the 148 respondents in the total sample reported having either a driver's license or a United States bank account. If we consider either or both of these to be somewhat crude proxies for legal immigration status, then we would estimate that roughly 94% of our sample is undocumented. While such a number is not improbable for Nassau County or Long Island, New York, in general, it is likely atypical of Hispanic populations elsewhere, particularly along the United States—Mexico border where long-term patterns of border crossing are common. As such, our findings may be more generalizable to undocumented immigrants elsewhere than to the general category of Hispanic immigrants. Without a more reliable way to obtain accurate data on the immigration status of our sample, however, we opted for the more general category.

In addition to possible ethnic heterogeneity, the urban context may shape the results in important ways (e.g., access to resources, larger social networks, etc.) that may not be generalizable to rural areas. Finally, the sample was almost exclusively male, and thus, the results may only apply for Hispanic male immigrants. More research is clearly needed to better understand the experiences of female Hispanic immigrant victims and factors that influence police reporting behavior among this group.

Second, the sample size for the study was relatively small by RDS standards. We achieved the “rule of thumb” five waves after seeds in some recruitment trees, but this measure of success has been questioned recently (Gile & Handcock, 2010; Gile, Johnston, & Salganik, 2012; Goel & Salganik, 2009). As a result, it is likely that the sample was biased by local factors such as location bias and clustering within networks that was not revealed by the RDSAT analysis. Mitigating the latter was the fact that the recruitment criteria, having been a victim of violence in the last 12 months, likely forced coupon referrals out of specific local bottlenecks.

Third, we lacked data on numerous correlates found in the previous literature. For example, prior research shows that neighborhood and other structural factors are important contextual factors that influence police reporting behaviors (Baumer, 2002), especially among immigrant communities (Davis & Henderson, 2003). Similarly, we lacked measures about the respondent's experience with crime and the criminal justice system within their country of origin. Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) noted that Latino immigrant views are shaped through a bifocal lens in which experiences in the country of origin combine with experiences in the United States to influence attitudes and interactions with the police. In addition, we lacked other measures of acculturation such as English fluency and knowledge of the criminal justice system that have been found to be important for other immigrant groups (Yun & Mueller, 2011). The addition of these mea-

tures would allow us to examine how experiences in the country of origin combine with levels of acculturation and crime context to influence police reporting behavior. This may also help elucidate our findings of perceived primary assailant race/ethnicity and police reporting. Given that race is a socially constructed phenomenon, a more in-depth analysis of the past (e.g., country of origin experiences) and present (e.g., community context, interactions with others) contexts would allow us to better examine how meaning becomes attached to racial/ethnic categories and how these socially constructed meanings come to influence police reporting patterns.

## Conclusion

High levels of police reporting among recent Hispanic immigrants that do not directly correlate with length of time spent in the United States, or inversely correlate with perceived ethnic discrimination, together suggest problems with social integration theories (e.g., Black's behavior of law) for predicting victimization reporting behavior. Natural history models of immigrant adaptation that assume a gradual evolutionary path from arrival and initial contact to assimilation and integration do not find support in the results shown here, at least as far as police reporting data reflect on this process.

Such counterintuitive findings surprised the authors of this article and the police agencies that received our report. Significant prior discussion by the research team centered on the suspicion that Hispanic immigrants (particularly where high percentages could be expected to be undocumented) would demonstrate very low levels of police reporting. This turned out not to be the case, suggesting how little is really known about the process of immigrant adoption of and integration into the sociolegal norms of citizenship. It also calls into question common assumptions about the sociocultural differences brought by immigrants, the process of overcoming those differences, and our understanding of how a sense of belonging and home develops over time.

In fact, it may be that Latin American immigrants, even those without legal residence, arrive in the United States with a surprisingly robust desire and ability to engage authorities, fulfill the duties of civil society, abide by local laws and norms, and subscribe to "mainstream values." In this view, it is possible that low levels of trust in authority and participation in the rituals and obligations of residence may be the product of their integration and socialization into new roles in the host country economy and social positioning in local communities, rather than preexisting differences of nationality, culture, language, education, and values that need to be bridged by assimilation processes.

At the policy level, these findings call into question contemporary assumptions about policing very recent immigrants that place considerable focus on their assumed cultural and social differences. Under such conditions, distance from the law can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, the practice of never asking victims of (or witnesses to) a crime about their immigration status that has been promoted by immigration rights advocates may be perceived as a form of social avoidance, rather than the respect for privacy that is intended.

Higher than expected levels of crime reporting by Hispanic immigrants should not be taken as evidence that police everywhere are making sufficient efforts to reach victims in immigrant and potentially undocumented communities. Prior research suggests that foreign-born immigrants report greater satisfaction and trust in police than their native-born counterparts (Davis & Hendricks, 2007), but despite these findings, immigrants appear to be less willing to report crime to the police than their native-born counterparts (Davis & Erez, 1998; Davis & Hendricks, 2007). As noted previously, this may stem from their experiences with criminal justice officials in their country of origin (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). If this may indeed be the case, the question becomes how do we transform these positive perceptions of criminal justice officials in the United States into greater willingness to report to the police? We would suggest that police outreach in immigrant communities requires an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the community members.

Prior research among police officials suggests that language barriers and cultural differences are believed to be key determinants of immigrant willingness to voluntarily engage in the criminal justice system (Davis, Erez, & Avitable, 2001). From a purely impressionistic standpoint, we speculate that lack of a common language may be a greater barrier to communication between police and Hispanic immigrant victims of violence than deep-seated suspicion on the part of victims. As such, programs highlighted by criminal justice officials in Davis, Erez, and Avitable's (2001) study (such as cultural sensitivity training, language assistance, and increased outreach) may help promote equal access to justice for Hispanic immigrants.

**Acknowledgments** — The authors wish to thank David Kennedy and Ric Curtis at John Jay, District Attorney Kathleen M. Rice of Nassau County, and Chief Joseph Wing (retired) of the Hempstead Police Department for their direction and assistance with the project. This project was funded by a grant to the Center for Crime Prevention and Control (PI David Kennedy) at John Jay College, CUNY, from the Office of the District Attorney, Nassau County, New York. The authors declare they have no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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