

The Arizona Report

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Mental Health and Mexican American Adolescents

by Andrea J. Romero

There is a critical need to address the mental health issues of adolescents in the Mexican American community. Recent national health surveys indicate that Latino adolescents have the highest rates of depressive symptoms and suicide attempts.* In fact, Latina teens have the highest rates of depressive symptoms compared to other ethnic and gender groups.* These high rates are reflective of the Mexican American adolescent community, since Mexican Americans comprise more than 60 percent of the pan-ethnic Latino group in the United States. Depression in teenagers is particularly important to understand because it is associated with many risky health behaviors, such as smoking, drug use, and alcohol use. The first questions I asked when I saw these statistics were

“Why are the rates so high, and what can we do about it?”

There is very little research that has explored the cultural context of stress, depression, and self-esteem for Mexican American teens. In order to fill this gap in the research, I have conducted several studies, and I am preparing a series of publications that further investigate the relation between culture and mental health in Mexican-descent adolescents. Two recent articles from these studies are based on questionnaires completed by 881 rural middle school Mexican-descent adolescents. The questionnaire was provided in English and Spanish and included measures of demographics, economic status, self-esteem, coping, loneliness, and depression. Several cultural measures also were included such as perception of discrimination,

language preference, ethnic identity, and sociocultural stress.

My first question about mental health and culture was “Are there any unique stressors that Mexican American adolescents experience that may be contributing to the higher depressive rates?” Understanding the stressors unique to Mexican American adolescents is the first step to providing better mental health services. In order to respond to this question, my article, entitled “Sociocultural Stress and Depression in Adolescents of Mexican Descent,” investigates the relation between stress and depressive symptoms. Previous studies have not addressed the bilingual and bicultural experience of Latino adolescents as this new sociocultural stress measure does. For example, it includes questions concerning discrimination by teachers and

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Tucson Is Site of 2001 NACCS Conference

MASRC will host 28th annual gathering in April

The Mexican American Studies & Research Center is hosting the 28th annual National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference that will take place in Tucson in April 2001.

The conference title is:

I-uan g ceksan, Tuchá Aria Wa Frontierapo,
Borrando Fronteras, Erasing Borders:
La Educación, Salud, Inmigración, e Historia del Pueblo

As noted by the 2001 NACCS Conference Site Committee:

The title reflects the continuing presence of the Tohono O’odham, Yoemi (Yaqui), and Mexicanas/os on the Arizona-Mexico border. It is the very strength of these communities that opens the door to a discussion of borders as real, as metaphors, as imagined, as imposed, as delineations of choice or coerced divisions.

As we prepare for the upcoming conference, we are reminded of the issues affecting our diverse communities, particularly those along the U.S.-Mexican

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Andrea Romero is newest member of MASRC faculty

Andrea J. Romero joined the MASRC in the fall as an assistant professor. She completed her doctorate in Social Psychology at the University of Houston in 1997, where she also received an M.A. in Psychology in 1995.

From 1998 until joining the UA faculty, Romero was the project director of a large school-based cancer prevention program at the Center for Research in Disease Prevention at the Stanford University School of Medicine. Her research interests include Latino adoles-



Andrea J. Romero



cent health, and health promotion programs for under-served communities. Her research has focused on social, psychological, and cultural factors influencing the mental and physical health of adolescents.

She is currently working on developing culturally based health promotion programs for Mexican American youth and their families. This research will focus on developing innovative strategies for recruitment and creating positive health behavior change.

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peers, cultural differences within families, and monolingual stress — both for those who speak only English, and for those who speak only Spanish. Teens reported that family obligations and derogatory ethnic jokes from friends were the most stressful. Additionally, youth with more sociocultural stress reported more depressive symptoms.

The second question I asked about culture and mental health was “What can we do to change these high rates of depression and suicide?” To answer this question, the second article, “Ethnic Identity & Self-Esteem: A Test of the Social Creativity Hypothesis,” explores the positive aspects of culture associated with mental health in Mexican American teens. Teens with high levels of ethnic pride had higher self-esteem, even when they reported intense sociocultural stress. Teens with less ethnic pride were more likely to have lower self-esteem when they experienced sociocultural stress. However, the cause-and-effect relationship between ethnic pride, self-esteem and depression is not clear because the

data was only collected at one time point. A longitudinal study is necessary to understand the cause-and-effect relation between cultural factors and mental health outcomes. My future research plans include a longitudinal study of mental health and culture, with measures taken at multiple time points from the same group of teens.

The findings from these articles suggest that high levels of ethnic pride may prevent low self-esteem and depressive symptoms, even in the face of sociocultural stress. The implications for counseling Mexican American youth are that unique stressors, such as discrimination, should be taken into account. The implications for prevention programs are that elements of ethnic pride should be included in programs for Mexican American youth.

Culturally based prevention programs may not only increase self-esteem, they may also foster positive interactions between ethnic groups. In a previous publication, “Perception of Discrimination and Ethnocultural Variables in a

Diverse Group of Adolescents,” I found that ethnic pride was associated with more positive attitudes towards other ethnic groups. Thus, culturally based prevention programs may have multiple benefits for Mexican American adolescents.

My research program combines elements of unique stress and coping techniques of Mexican American youth to address mental health issues within the community. My research program at the University of Arizona will continue efforts to develop scientifically proven, culturally based prevention programs to address the issue of the high rate of depressive symptoms and suicide among Mexican American youth. AZR

* Centers for Disease Control, 1999.

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Tuberculosis, Cervical Cancer studied at 3rd annual Border Academy

The July 2000 Border Academy focused on public health issues in the U.S.-Mexico border region, and medical doctors from both countries presented case studies on tuberculosis and cervical cancer. The intensive four-day seminar also featured a tour of health care facilities in Tijuana, Mexico, including *Fronteras Unidas Pro Salud*, which provides health care and sexual and reproductive education to families in the impoverished rural and urban areas of Baja California.

The Academy, which was attended by medical students, nurse practitioners, and other health care professionals, took place in historic Old Town San Diego at the Ramada Limited Hotel. Speakers included Dr. James E. Dalen, vice president for Health Sciences at the University of Arizona's Health Sciences Center and dean of the UA College of Medicine; Dr. Francisco García, assistant professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at University Medical Center in Tucson; Dr. Doug Campos-Outcalt, medical



director of Preventive Services at the Maricopa County (Arizona) Department of Public Health; Dr. Ciro Sumaya, dean of the School of Rural Public Health at Texas A & M University; Dr. Marion Moses, president of the Pesticide Education Center in San Francisco; Dr. Eduardo Pérez-Cruz, head of Programa de Solidaridad for the

Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS) in Mexico City; and Dr. Manuel Cano Rangel, head of the Infectious Disease section at the Hospital Infantil del Estado de Sonora in Hermosillo, Mexico.

The Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego, provided assistance in setting up the conference. The tour was conducted by Lori Senini of the San Diego County Department of Health Services Office of Border Health.

AZR

Photographs on this page are from a children's clinic in Tijuana, Mexico, one of several facilities visited on the tour.

Photos by Juanita Francis



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border, such as education, health, and immigration. Thus, the above title reflects our community's commitment to improving both Mexican American and Native American communities by integrating Chicano Studies programs into the elementary and high school grades as a bridge to higher education, improving the overall health status of Mexican American and Native American communities, and preserving our public history, which cannot be accomplished without challenging, crossing, and erasing existing borders.

The Marriott University Park Hotel, one block west of the UA campus, is the conference site. NACCS 2001 will begin on Wednesday, April 4, and continue through Sunday, April 8, 2001. For hotel reservations, and to receive

the hotel's conference discount, contact the Marriott University Park Hotel **directly** by March 2.

Please do not make your hotel reservations on the Internet or at an 800 Marriott number! If you register via those methods, NACCS will not be credited with your stay, and you will not receive the discounted NACCS room rate. The registration form is currently available on the conference web site, (www.naccs.org), and interested individuals are encouraged to register as soon as possible. AZR

**Marriott University Park Hotel
(520) 792-4100**

For more information contact the NACCS 2001 Committee at lotero@u.arizona.edu or visit the NACCS web site: www.naccs.org



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Psychosocial factors and Latino adolescent behavior

Two recent studies by Scott Carvajal examined, respectively, acculturation and drug use in Latino adolescents, and psychosocial factors related to the delay of sexual intercourse.

In the first study, titled "Relating a Social Influence Model to the Role of Acculturation in Substance Use Among Latino Adolescents," Carvajal and colleagues at the University of Houston examined the way acculturation affected substance use in Latino (predominantly Mexican American) middle school students.¹ Acculturation was measured in two ways: language use (frequency of using Spanish and English), and interactions with peers (Latinos and non-Latinos).

Though acculturation was not found to be directly related to use of alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana among these adolescents, the researchers did find that for more acculturated youth peer pressure appeared to be an important factor in decisions whether or not to use drugs. For less acculturated youth, what their peers wanted them to do wasn't particularly important, but their own attitudes about using drugs were.

These results have implications for the development of future drug prevention programs. For programs with more acculturated Latino youth (e.g., those who use more English), a focus on activities helping to boost peer pressure resistance would be an effective strategy for preventing drug use. For programs with less acculturated Latino youth, creating educational materials in Spanish that address the consequences of drug use would be an effective strategy.

In the second study, "Psychosocial Predictors of Delay of First

Sexual Intercourse by Adolescents," Carvajal and colleagues at the University of Texas School of Public Health examined factors related to sexual activity in a diverse sample of high-school students.² The predictors examined included demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, and gender, in addition to factors consistent with a psychological theory called the Theory of Planned Behavior.

The factors included the youths' and their peers' attitudes about sex, and refusal self-efficacy—or the degree to which these adolescents were confident they could refrain from having sex in a pressured situation. The results showed that psychological factors were better predictors of delay of intercourse than demographic variables, and in fact were rather consistent predictors for all groups of adolescents regardless of gender or race. These findings are significant in that youth programs that include a goal of delaying sexual intercourse should foster positive attitudes toward abstinence, address peer views about sexual activity, and engage youth in practice scenarios where they learn to resist pressures to have sex before they are ready. *AZR*

¹ Published in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* (Carvajal, Photiades, Evans & Nash, 1997).

² Published in *Health Psychology* (Carvajal, Parcel, Basen-Engquist, Banspach, Coyle, Kirby & Chan, 1999).

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MASRC Associate Research Professor Scott Carvajal

Scott C. Carvajal, who joined the Center as an associate research professor in August, received his doctorate in Social Psychology from the University of Houston in 1996. While he was involved in post-doctoral study in Health Education and Statistical Methods at the University of Texas School of Public Health, he also received an MPH degree from that institution. For the last three years he has been a senior research associate and senior analyst at ETR Associates, a leading health education research and publishing firm in Santa Cruz, California.

He has led or collaborated on numerous projects that foster health behaviors in diverse youth populations. Much of this work has been published in applied psychology and public health journals. Carvajal's research at the MASRC includes developing new Latino-focused health education studies in adolescent substance use prevention and juvenile justice, as well as conducting analyses of ongoing projects. He has recently taught Research Methods in the UA Dept. of Psychology.



Scott C. Carvajal

Perspectives in Mexican American Studies

“The newest volume of *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* features articles by several new voices, and by others who have a long list of published works to their credit. They provide us with information of interest, and offer fresh observations of the Mexican American experience. The authors include veterans of *el movimiento*, experienced scholars, and some who are newer on the scene . . .

“The topics covered in this volume, from sports in the Midwest to small town life in Central Mexico, seem to have little in common except for their focus on Mexican-descent people, but on closer inspection, one can see that the idea of labor runs like an arroyo through this book. Sometimes it is on the surface. At other times it is a subterranean channel, unseen, but still the reason for the shape and placement of the dry wash above. . . .”

from the Introduction

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From “Mexican Baseball Teams in the Midwest, 1916-1965”

by Richard Santillán

published in volume 7 of

Perspectives in Mexican American Studies

Sports have been a major presence in the lives of Mexican Americans since the early 20th century. This has been particularly true of Mexican Americans in the Midwest, where sports such as baseball took on a special significance. More than merely games for boys and girls, the teams and contests involved nearly the entire community, and often had political and cultural objectives . . .

Sometimes, a thousand people, representing dozens of small Mexican communities, would gather to watch baseball games in the years prior to World War II. People socialized and discussed community issues at the games, and strengthened their sense of racial and ethnic solidarity. In the post-war period sports continued to play a major part in the overall cultural and political agenda of the Mexican American population.

In addition to community unity, two other key benefits of athletics have been the leadership skills and survival tactics that young people developed by participating in team sports—skills that have been useful in the political arena and in the fight for social justice. Many parents, in fact, encouraged their children to join teams to develop such skills. Thus, besides the sheer fun of playing and competing, sports served as a means of establishing community solidarity, developing leaders, and imparting a sense of fair play . . .

In the early part of the 20th century, a handful of Midwestern Anglo charitable organizations and churches offered recreational activities for Mexican youth. In addition, a few of the YMCA clubs

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permitted Mexicans to join and use their facilities as members. Nevertheless, Mexican American communities chose to build their own sports networks according to several individuals who came of age in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. They noted that the Mexican community established an elaborate web of athletic associations during the 1920s and 1930s. These included the Aztec Social Club, Los Gallos Athletic Association, *El Club Azteca*, and *El Club Deportivo Internacional*. The sports clubs of East Chicago and Gary, Indiana, *El Club Deportivo Internacional* and the Gary Athletic Club, sponsored a host of sporting events including tournaments in soccer, basketball, and baseball.

In Kansas City, the Mexican Athletic Club was established in 1922 and organized numerous boxing events, bowling tournaments, and track-and-field competitions. In the larger urban Mexican communities, parents pooled their meager finances and purchased buildings and converted the structures into recreational centers. The smaller Mexican communities generally rented buildings for sports activities. These centers and the land around them were the locations of weight rooms, boxing rings, basketball courts, and baseball diamonds.

A handful of Mexican athletic clubs even had swimming pools according to Lando Velandez of Des Moines, Iowa. Lando's father was active with sports activities and tried unsuccessfully to build a gym for the Mexican community in Des Moines. The Anglo power structure prevented the Mexican community from developing a sports center in the early 1920s. His father, nevertheless, did establish the Mexican Athletic Club in Des Moines in 1925. Lando continued his father's

work, and in 1962, almost 40 years after his father's efforts, spear-headed the creation of the Mexican American Recreation Club.

World War II disrupted the sports movement in the Midwest as young men and women defended the nation both on the battlefield and in defense plants. Nevertheless, the post-war period witnessed a movement to recapture the athletic spirit and superb talent of the community. Both the second generation of Mexican Americans and recent arrivals from Texas and Mexico enjoyed sports immensely in the Midwest. In retrospect, the pre-war sports activities among Mexicans was only a prelude to far more significant sports participation between 1945 and 1965.

There was an incredible growth in organized sports in the Midwest Mexican community after 1945. Before the war, major sports were limited primarily to baseball, boxing, and basketball. Afterwards, however, more Mexican Americans began taking part in bowling, tennis, golf, soccer, football, and wrestling. Women's sports came of age during this period as well. Whereas women were mainly involved with softball prior to the war, they later became active in baseball and basketball leagues, and bowling tournaments. Women's teams in all sports sprung up all over the Midwest.

The Mexican American community followed its rich sports tradition by resurrecting several sports clubs and recreational centers after World War II, including *El Club Deportivo Azteca*, the Mexican American Youth Association, *El Club de Deportivos de Joliet*, the Azteca Club, the Wichita Mexican American Athletic Club, the Pan American Club, the Mexican American Athletic Club of North Platte, the Argentine Center, *El Club Colonia Mexicana*, and *La Sociedad Deportivo*. The Quad-Cities area

of Iowa and Illinois formed several sports clubs, including the Quad-Cities Martial Arts Center, Pena's Boys Club, and the Silvis Youth Organization. In addition to developing their own clubs, Mexican Americans became active in various city sports and leagues, said Elmer Vega of Newton, Kansas:

Prior to the war, the Mexican community established its own sports network of clubs, centers, teams, and tournaments. The second and third generations have continued this rich tradition into the 1980s. There is, however, a significant difference. Unlike before, the second and third generations have become directly involved with Little League, Pop Warner, summer sports programs, high school sports, and other mainstream sports activities. We felt that, as taxpayers and citizens, our community and children were entitled to these recreational benefits.

Thus, intergenerational cooperation was a powerful social adhesive that brought together people of all age groups playing sports. Alex Cruz of Parsons, Kansas, noted that:

I was the manager of the Parsons baseball team from 1952 to 1954. Our team was sponsored by several companies, including "Big Heated Red" and Coca-Cola. We played Chanute, Kansas City, Topeka, Coffeyville, and Fredonia . . . My father played baseball for the MKT railroad company during the 1930s. It was not uncommon to have three generations of ballplayers from the same family in the Midwest.

The most popular sport among Mexicans in the U.S. has been baseball. The rise of baseball as a spectator sport in the Mexican community simply reflected the rise of mass spectator sports in the nation. Nearly every Midwest Mexican community, small or large, had baseball teams to represent it. The sport became

Continued on next page

one of the major forms of recreation, and was played before overflowing crowds. Most of the teams selected names from their rich historical past, such as the *Aztecas*, *Mayans*, *Cuauhtemocs*, and *Aguilas*. The choice of these names was a way of respecting and reaffirming the Mexican culture.

There were Mexican teams in the Topeka area as early as 1916, and by 1919 several Mexican baseball teams in the Kansas City and East Chicago areas were already playing. Additional clubs were organized and various leagues formed during the 1920s. Some of the early Mexican teams included *Los Obreros De San Jose* of East Chicago; the Osage Indians of Kansas City; the Mexican All-Stars of Silvis; the Moline *Estrellas*; *Los Mayans* of Lorain, Ohio; *Las Aguilas Mexicanas* and *Los Cometas* of Topeka; and *Los Nacionales* of Wichita, Kansas.

In fact, there were several popular types of baseball leagues in the Mexican Middle West: industrial, Catholic, community, migrant, and women's leagues. It was not unusual for a remarkable player to participate in two or more of these different leagues. Moreover, being an outstanding player was oftentimes a ticket to employment for Mexicans, because businesses wanted to have winning baseball teams. Companies went out of their way to find outstanding Mexican players. Furthermore, many Catholic schools had baseball teams composed largely of Mexican players and called themselves the *Guadalupanos*. Likewise, most Mexican communities had their own teams that represented them in statewide competitions.

Migrants had their own baseball teams during the summer months. These migrant teams and leagues were found in Western Nebraska, for example, in Scottsbluff, Bayard, Bridgeport, Morrell,

Lyman, and Minatare. Other migrant teams could be found in Kansas, Minnesota, South and North Dakota, and Colorado. There were women's teams that played prior to and after World War II as well. There was also an informal network of Mexicans who played pickup games between regular games and tournaments.

Unfortunately, for those trying to organize baseball games, it was often true that Mexican teams were not allowed to play on city diamonds or in parks owned by local businesses or cities . . .

Because they were barred from some public parks before the war, Mexicans made their own ball fields, frequently in vacant lots or in pastures near the railroad tracks, roundhouses, or steel factories . . .

The Mexican communities constructed baseball fields with colorful names such as *La Yardita*, *El Huache*, and Devil's Field. Another was known as Rabbit Field because players continuously had to chase rabbits off during games. Sometimes, cars were used in the outfield as bleachers, with people sitting on the hoods, trunks, and roofs, said Perfecto Torrez of Topeka. Eva Hernandez of Hutchinson recalled, "Our baseball team . . . played near the National Armory. Both the Morton Salt and the Carey Salt Company had baseball teams with Mexican players. We played in the cow fields, which we affectionately called *Las Vegas*." Hernandez's husband, Matt, was an outstanding baseball player and she often watched him play before and after World War II.

El Parque Anahuac, for example, had a seating capacity for 500 people. It was not unusual for large crowds to show up to see the better Mexican teams. When *Los Aztecas de Chicago* came to play against the East Chicago team during the first week of June of 1927, the game drew a standing

room only crowd of over 3,000 spectators. Large crowds were common in the Great Lakes area. This beautiful baseball diamond in East Chicago was eventually destroyed during the Depression because the wooden seats were used as firewood during the cold winter months. Also, someone discovered that beneath the surface of the field were deposits of coal. Apparently a coal or railroad company had left it there. The news spread quickly, and soon the leveled, desolate field became a center of activity with men, women, and children digging for the precious fuel with shovels and sticks . . .

Sunday was baseball day in Mexican communities across the Middle West. Residents first went to church and then breakfast before heading to the game. The players, on the other hand, ran home after church changing quickly into their uniforms and hurried to warm-up before the fans arrived, said Phillip Martinez of Dodge City, Kansas. The baseball games started around one in the afternoon. The people wore their Sunday best to the games.

Some of the games in Hutchinson drew better than a thousand people from in town and the surrounding communities said Bacho Rodriguez. Rodriguez was an outstanding pitcher for the Hutchinson team during the 1930s. He remembers games that usually drew 1000 to 1500 spectators. He noted that he and a few other players were scouted by the New York Yankees . . .

AZR

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BORDER ACADEMY 2001 WILL CONVENE IN McALLEN, TEXAS

The 2001 Border Academy, a collaborative effort involving the UA College of Medicine, the MASRC, and the Texas A & M School of Rural Public Health, will take place next July in McAllen, Texas, and is titled, "Clinical Issues in Diabetes Affecting Diagnosis and Treatment of the Mexican-Origin Patient."

The intensive three-day seminar will explore health and health-related policy issues affecting individuals and communities in the U.S.-Mexico border region. Its international faculty is made up of scholars, clinicians, and professionals from both Mexico and the United States. Attendees will include medical students, nurses, public health professionals, medical doctors, and others interested in working with Hispanic and border populations.

One day of the seminar will be devoted to clinical case study presentations on various topics related to the treatment and prevention of diabetes in the border region. The Academy also includes a one-day tour — participants will visit the immigrant *colonias* on the U.S. side of the border, as well as Mexican and

U.S. health care facilities in the McAllen-Reynosa area.

Most of the speakers at the 2001 Academy will be practicing clinicians with regional and national reputations in the field. The Border Academy features a highly interactive style of instruction with extensive dialogue between speakers and workshop participants.

By the close of the Academy, it is expected that attendees will be able to:

- ❖ Identify and diagnose at least two major clinical issues in the management of diabetes within the U.S.-Mexico border region
- ❖ Recognize the limitations of treatment modalities given resource constraints on the border
- ❖ Understand the impact of the Mexican and American health-care delivery systems on the health of border residents, and how this may impact the quality of care for diabetes patients



The Border Academy offers 23 Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits for this program, and attracts a broad range of participants from the U.S. and Mexico. **It will begin on July 19 and end on July 21, 2001.**

The Border Academy seeks to promote an understanding of health care issues on the Mexican and U.S. sides of the border. It offers a dynamic curriculum, and brings together medical professionals who share the border as a common subject and focus. It also seeks to create a network of Academy alumni and faculty who will continue to share insights and resources, thus fostering a greater sense of community on the border.

The 2001 seminar will be the fourth annual Border Academy. Previously, it has taken place at the Biosphere II Center in Oracle, Arizona; in Rio Rico, Arizona; and San Diego, California.

Those interested in attending the Border Academy or learning more about the Arizona Hispanic Center of Excellence (AHCOE) should contact: Jannine Valcour at (520) 626-2160. *AZR*

**The AHCOE web site is:
www.hispanichealth.arizona.edu**

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