Title

The Sexually Active Mexican Adolescent: A Preliminary Report

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Publication Date

1985-06-01

THE SEXUALLY ACTIVE MEXICAN ADOLESCENT:

A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

  Adolescent fertility has become identified as a major social problem
in the United States; however, little empirical data are available
regarding the critical social variables which influence adolescent
sexual behavior. While adolescents learn about sexuality from many
sources, two major sources that influence adolescent attitudes toward
sexual behavior are from persons who form their internal support
network--family and peers. The adolescent's family and peers are
instrumental in forming the adolescent's knowledge base about reproduc-
tion, contraceptive use, and other sexual behavioral variables. The
importance and role of these influences can differ when viewed in
another cultural context. To date, little is known about differences in
sexual behavior among culturally diverse adolescent groups nor what
impact acculturation to American values may have in influencing the
development of attitudes toward sexual behavior.
  A community based comparative survey of about 1,000   adolescent
females from Los Angeles County was undertaken to examine the similari-
ties and differences of sexual behavior and its consequences.
  The following brief discussion outlines preliminary descriptive find-
ings on differences between these sexually active and nonsexually active
Mexican-American and Anglo-American adolescents, ages 13 to 19.

The Adolescent's Background and Environment

  Table I shows the distribution of the sample by age and sexual behav-
ior. As noted, there is a generally even distribution across age groups
with Mexican-American adolescents being somewhat more skewed to the

Table I. The Sample

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                        Mexican          Anglo
                        (N=700)          (N=321)

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    Ages

    13                  133 (19)         39 (12)

    14                  126 (18)         74 (23)

    15                  112 (16)         51 (16)

    16                   77 (11)         48 (15)

    17                   91 (13)         32 (10)

    18                   91 (13)         58 (18)
    19                   70 (10)         15  (6)

    X                   15.6            15.7

Sexually Active

    Yes                 127 (18.5)      102 (34.1)

    No                  560 (81.5)      197 (65.9)
Refused                  13              22

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younger years; however, the mean ages of both ethnic samples are simi-
lar.   With regard to sexual activity, Anglos are almost twice as likely
to be sexually active than the Mexican females.

The Family

  Sociodemographically, the families of the Mexican and the Anglo ado-
lescents were distinctly different. With respect to parental education,
Anglo parents had many more years of schooling than the Mexican parents.
Mexican mothers average 8.1 years of schooling compared to the 12.8
years of schooling of the Anglo mothers. Almost 45 percent of the Mexi-
can mothers were employed full or part time compared to 63 percent of
the Anglo mothers. The average age of all mothers was in the range of 38
to 41 years.
    With respect to fathers, Anglo fathers had many more years of school-
ing than Mexican fathers. Mexican fathers averaged 8.3 years of school-
ing compared to 13.1 years of schooling for the Anglo fathers. The
majority of all fathers were employed full time and their average age
ranged between 40 and 43, similar to the mothers.
    Table II shows the family incomes of both Mexican and Anglo families.
Because many adolescents did not know the family's income, there is a
large amount of missing data. Nonetheless, for the data that were col-
lected, they reflect the populations fram which these samples were

drawn. For the Mexican sample, median income is about $17,000, while for the Anglos it is about $32,000. Additionally, the $17,000 is further diminished since Mexican households compared to Anglo households tend to have larger families dependent on that income.

With respect to source of income, most families are dependent on salary and wages; however, a few families ware dependent on public assistance. Mexican families were more likely to be dependent on public assistance. Mexican sexually active adolescents were more likely to be from families who were dependent on public assistance (20.8%) than the Mexican families with nonsexually active daughters (11.7%). Among the Anglo families none of the families of the nonsexually active women were dependent on public assistance, while 4.9 percent of the Anglo families with sexually active daughters were dependent on public assistance.

Sexually active teens were more likely to come from divorced families (38%) than the nonsexually active teens (26%). The divorce rate for both ethnic groups was similar, with Mexican families having only a slightly lower rate.

With respect to general geographical stability, sexually active teens were more likely to have moved frequently and attended several schools. When the adolescents were asked if they had lived in the same house since the age of six, 20.5 percent of the sexually active Mexican adolescents compared to 34.6 percent of the nonsexually active Mexican adolescents responded "yes." In contrast, the same data for the Anglo adolescents resulted in 32.4 percent versus 53.3 percent respectively.

Thus, the data suggest that sexually active teens tend to come from less stable homes characterized by more divorce, and are less likely to have lived their whole life with both their parents. They also experience more geographical mobility in both residences and schools attended.

Table II. Family Income

Annual Income $	Mexican (N=700) N (%)	Anglo (N=321) N (%)
Under 5,000	21 (5.4)	3 (1.6)
5,000 -- 9,999	95 (24.4)	14 (7.3)
10,000 -- 14,999	72 (18.5)	14 (7.3)
15,000 -- 19,999	64 (16.4)	18 (9.4)
20,000 -- 24,999	45 (11.5)	25 (13.1)
25,000 -- 29,999	38 (9.7)	14 (7.3)
30,000 -- 34,999	20 (5.1)	21 (11.0)
35.000 -- 39,999	13 (3.3)	14 (7.3)
40,000 -- 44,999	8 (2.1)	16 (8.4)

45,000 -- 49,999	5 (1.3)	12 (6.3)
50,000+	9 (2.3)	40(20.9)
Missing data	310	130
# Dependent on Income		
1-4	232 (37.2)	226 (77.7)
5-6	198 (31.8)	54 (18.6)
7-8	108 (17.3)	10 (3.4)
9-10	47 (7.5)	1 (0.3)
10+	38 (6.1)	0
Missing Data	77	30

The Adolescent

   Mexican-American adolescents in general were less likely to be
currently attending school than the Anglo adolescents. Moreover, the
sexually active young women were less likely to be attending school than
the nonsexually active women.
   Most of the young women thought they would graduate from high school
or at least complete the high school graduate equivalency diploma (GED).
Overall, the nonsexually active adolescents perceived themselves as
advancing their schooling beyond high school more often than the
sexually active adolescents. Sexually active adolescents are more likely
to plan on attending a trade school; however, Mexican adolescents seem
to plan on attending a trade scbool more often than Anglo adolescents.
As is true in the general population, Mexican youth are less likely than
their Anglo counterparts to perceive themselves as college bound.
   With respect to religion, Mexican youth primarily designated Catholi-
cism as their religious preference while Anglos tended to be affiliated
with one of the Protestant denominations. Mexican youth in general
attended church more frequently than the Anglo youth. In part the dif-
ference can be explained by the more traditional church attendance among
Mexican-Americans than in the broader society; however, even among this
ethnic group there was a significant difference in church attendance
between the sexually active and the nonsexually active.
   Nonsexually active youth and Mexican adolescents in general were more
likely to perceive their religion as very important to them. What seems
the most dramatic is the proportion of both ethnic groups of the
sexually active who indicated that their religion was "not at all
important."
   There are some differences between the sexually and nonsexually
active adolescents with respect to school attendance, future plans, and
religiosity. Sexually active adolescents seem to be less likely to form
strong school or church bonds and have less high educational aspirations
(Table III).

Table III. Adolescent Backgrounds

| | Mexican | | Anglo | |
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA

School Attendance

| Currently in school | 70 (55.1) | 497 (88.8)| 66 (64.7) | 194 (98.5)|

Future Schooling Plans

(Multiple Responses)

Graduate high school	95 (74.8)	514 (92.3)	80 (79.2)	195 (99.0)
GED	13 (10.4)	33 (6.0)	18 (17.8)	4 (2.0)
A.A.	37 (30.3)	277 (51.2)	59 (59.0)	96 (49.2)
Trade school	56 (42.3)	200 (37.2)	35 (35.0)	21 (11.1)
B.A./B.S.	36 (30.0)	276 (51.1)	48 (47.1)	145 (76.0)
B.A./B.S.+	25 (21.1)	226 (42.4)	37 (37.4)	119 (64.5)
No plans	20 (15.7)	10 (3.4)	15 (4.9)	4 (2.0)

Religion

Attendance

At least once a week	37 (31.9)	293 (53.3)	15 (16.9)	66 (35.9)
2-3 times a month	19 (16.4)	94 (17.1)	7 (7.9)	25 (13.6)
Once a month	15 (12.9)	49 (8.9)	5 (5.6)	14 (7.6)
Less than once a month	49 (44.1)	113 (20.7)	62 (69.6)	79 (42.9)

How important is
your religion?

Very important	49 (38.6	295 (52.7)	23 (22.5)	77 (39.1)
Somewhat important	39 (30.7)	206 (36.8)	32 (31.4)	77 (39.1)
Not very important	14 (11.0)	37 (6.6)	16 (15.7)	22 (11.2)
Not at all important	25 (19.7)	22 (3.9)	31 (30.4)	18 (9.1)

Sexual Behavior

Sexual Development

   Virtually all of the   young women had begun to menstruate with the
exception of 17 Mexican-Americans and 10 Anglo-Americans; thus only 2.6

percent of the sample had not begun mensus. All of the sexually active teenagers had begun their menstrual cycles. The average age of onset of menarche for all the subsamples as 12.3 years. The only group that differed slightly were the sexually active Anglo females at 12.5 years.

Virtually all of the adolescents reported having developed breasts. The majority reported breast development as having started between the ages of 11 and 13.

The average age of first sexual intercourse was 15.4 for the Mexican adolescents and 15.2 for the Anglo adolescents. Sixty-five percent (65%) of both sexually active ethnic groups reported that their parents knew they were sexually active.

Table IV shows that when the young women were asked their reason for engaging in sexual intercourse for the first time it was "because I really liked the guy." The second most cited reason for both ethnic groups was "It just happened." The groups differed on the third reason. Mexican young women said, "We planned to get married," while the Anglo women said, "We just wanted to." Interestingly, few said it was because most of their girlfriends had; however, that may have been part of the reason for "just wanted to."

With regard to the frequency of intercourse, the most mentioned was two to three times per week; however, responses ranged from one time only to three times a week or more. The Mexican women were most likely to have only one sexual partner, while this was less true of the Anglo women. Additionally, there was a small group of Anglo women who mentioned 40 or more partners.

The age of the first sexual partner was usually between the ages of 16 and 21. However, a small group (7%), mostly Anglo young women, mentioned that their first partners were between 30 and 35 years of age. For those who had more than one partner, the ages of subsequent partners were similar to that of the first partner.

Pregnancy and Contraception

Many of the adolescents came from homes where their sisters had been pregnant adolescents. Moreover, many had mothers who themselves were pregnant during adolescence. The frequency of mother and sister adolescent pregnancy was greatest among the sexually active samples.

Table IV. Sexual Behavior

	Mexican (N=127) N (%)	Anglo (N=102) N (%)
Reason for first time sex		
Liked the guy	37 (29)	34 (33)
Just happened	35 (28)	24 (24)
Planned on marriage	24 (19)	7 (7)

Curious	9 (7)	11 (11)
Just wanted to	5 (4)	15 (15)
Most girlfriends had	3 (2)	
To keep boyfriend	2 (2)	5 (5)
Wanted to get pregnant		----
Other	11 (8)	5 (4)
Number of partners		
Only one	90 (70.9)	42 (41.2)
two	11 (8.7)	9 (8.8)
three	8 (6.3)	17 (16.7)
four	7 (5.5)	11 (10.8)
five	1 (0.1)	8 (7.8)
six or more	10 (7.9)	15 (14.7)

Among Mexican-American sexually active adolescents, 47.2 percent had sisters who were pregnant before the age of 17, compared to 34.3 percent of the nonsexually active Mexican adolescents. Among the Anglos the rate was lower and the difference slight between the sexually active and the nonsexually active (25.9% versus 25%).

With regard to the mothers of these adolescent women, mothers of the Mexican adolescents were more likely to have been teen mothers (child-bearing before the age of 17) than Anglo adolescents' mothers. One out of four Mexican mothers had their first ccild between the ages of 15 and 17, while 13 percent of the mothers of sexually active Anglo women and 5.8 percent of those nonsexually active bore their first child between these ages.

Table V. Pregnancy and Contraception

	Mexican	Anglo
	(N=127)	(N=102)
	N (%)	N (%)

Pregnant		
Ever	57 (45)	23 (23)
Currently	16 (13)	5 (5)
# Times Pregnant		

1	42 (73.7)	15 (65.2)
2	11 (19.3)	6 (26.1)
3	4 (7.0)	2 (8.7)

   Almost half of the sexually active Mexican-American adolescents had
been pregnant at least once. The Anglo adolescents were more likely to
be sexually active but less likely to become pregnant (see Table V).
Anglo adolescents, however, are more likely to become pregnant more than
once.
   With regard to contraception, Anglo adolescents are twice as likely
to contracept as Mexican-American adolescents (36% versus 16% respec-
tively). Contraception does appear to decrease the pregnancy rate among
the sexually active Anglo adolescents.

Knowledge

   Table 6 shows that most of the adolescents have had a course in sex
education. The nonsexually active were less likely to have had a sex
education course but in part this may be explained by the fact that more
of the younger girls are represented in this category and may not have
had the course yet.
   While about one-third of the adolescents indicated that their major
source of knowledge about birth control was their sex education class,
it is notable that other major sources of information are friends and
peers. The sexually active young women were more likely to cite their
friends as a major source while the nonsexually active were more likely
to indicate their mother was their second major source of information
about birth control.
   With respect to the time of the month that one was most likely to
become pregnant, more of the Anglo adolescents were knowledgeable in
this area than were the Mexican-American adolescents. Sexually active
women were also more often correct than were nonsexually active women.
   Sexually active young women were very knowledgeable about   the
location of a clinic or health center that provided birth control infor-
mation. In fact they were almost three times as knowledgeable about
these facilities as nonsexually active adolescents. Additionally, 61
percent of sexually active Anglo youth and 43 percent of Mexican youth
indicated that they had gone to one of these health facilities for birth
control.

Social Networks

Family Networks

   Nonsexually active adolescents had a generally better relationship
with their parents. As shown in Table VII, nonsexually active adoles-
cents spent more time talking to and participating in activities with

Table VI. Knowledge

| | Mexican | | Anglo | |
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA
Course in sex education	100 (78.7)	402 (71.8)	91 (89.2)	157 (79.7)
Source of birth control				
Sex education class	31 (24.4)	191 (34.1)	29 (28.4)	71 (36.0)
Friends/peers	24 (18.7)	79 (14.1)	23 (22.5)	32 (16.2)
Clinic	20 (15.7)	-----	17 (16.7)	2 (1.0)
Mother	19 (15.0)	96 (17.1)	18 (17.6)	46 (23.3)
School teacher	11 (8.7)	68 (12.1)	3 (2.9)	11 (5.6)
Sister/brother	10 (7.8)	23 (4.1)	3 (2.9)	4 (2.0)
Other	12 (9.4)	93 (16.6)	9 (8.8)	31 (15.7)
When in menstrual cycle most likely to get pregnant?				
Before period begins	21 (18.9)	67 (16.8)	21 (22.1)	41 (27.5)
During period	5 (4.5)	33 (8.3)	1 (1.1)	6 (4.0)
Right after period	24 (21.6)	59 (14.8)	7 (7.4)	9 (6.0)
Second week after period	37 (33.3)	112 (28.0)	47 (49.5)	55 (36.0)
Any time during month	24 (21.6)	127 (31.8)	19 (20.0)	37 (24.8)

Table VII. Parental Relationships

| | Mexican | | Anglo | |
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA
Hours spent with mother per week				
None	8 (6.3)	24 (4.3)	7 (6.9)	4 (2.0)
1-7	56 (44.1)	193 (34.5)	40 (39.2)	40 (25.4)
8-14	23 (18.1)	108 (19.3)	24 (23.5)	45 (22.8)
15-21	12 (9.4)	67 (12.0)	14 (13.7)	39 (19.8)
22-28	10 (7.9)	53 (9.5)	8 (7.8)	27 (13.7)

29+	18 (14.2)	115 (20.5)	9 (8.8)	32 (16.2)

Hours spent with father par week

None	39 (30.7)	150 (26.8)	23 (22.5)	20 (10.2)
1-7	65 (51.2)	232 (41.4)	57 (55.9)	72 (36.5)
8-14	14 (11.0)	72 (12.9)	14 (13.7)	57 (28.9)
15-21	4 (3.1)	52 (9.3)	3 (2.9)	27 (13.7)
22-28	3 (2.4)	22 (3.9)	2 (2.0)	11 (5.6)
29+	2 (1.6)	32 (5.7)	3 (2.9)	10 (5.1)

Closenees to mother

Very close	70 (55.1)	380 (67.9)	55 (53.9)	127 (64.5)
Somewhat close	37 (29.1)	107 (19.1)	31 (30.4)	55 (27.9)
Not very close	10 (7.9)	44 (7.9)	10 (9.8)	7 (3.6)
Not at all close	10 (7.9)	29 (5.2)	6 (5.9)	8 (4.1)

Closeness to father

Very close	31 (29.5)	82 (38.5)	17 (18.1)	73 (39.0)
Somewhat close	37 (35.2)	155 (32.8)	44 (46.8)	78 (41.7)
Not very close	19 (18.1)	80 (16.9)	16 (17.0)	25 (13.4)
Not close at all	18 (17.1)	56 (11.8)	17 (18.1)	11 (5.9)
No father figure	22	87	8 --	10

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their mothers; however, Mexican adolescents were more likely to spend
time with their mothers than Anglo adolescents. In general the adoles-
cents felt a closeness to their mother and few indicated that they did
not feel close to her. With respect to fathers,Anglo nonsexually active
young women were more likely to spend time with their fathers and to
feel close to them.While Mexican adolescents spent less time with their
fathers than did the Anglos, they too felt a closeness to them. When
queried as to whom they felt closer, about 42 percent of all the young
women indicated that their relationship with their mother was closer
than their relationship with their father.There were slight differences
across ethnic groups and between the sexually active and nonsexually
active with respect to feeling equally close to both parents (Mexicans:
SA=20%. NSA=32%; Anglos: SA=17%, NSA=26%).
   When the young women were asked to whom they would go to talk about
problems, about one-half of the sexually active adolescents mentioned
their boyfriends and one-half of the nonsexually active mentioned their
mothers. While all the adolescents indicated their girlfriends as their
first or second choices for someone to talk to, sexually active women
were still more likely to mention their boyfriends before their mothers.
The only group that indicated an individual other than a girlfriend,

boyfriend, or mother was the nonsexually active Mexican adolescent who also indicated a sibling.

These data suggest that while mothers are important in the adolescent's life as a support system, these adolescents are still heavily reliant on their peers as their major resource for conversation and problem-solving.

Peers

The peer network of Anglos was larger than that of the Mexican adolescents. Mexican adolescents tended to indicate a network of less than 10 friends while Anglos indicated a network of over 10 friends. Ninety percent (90%) of the Anglos also stated that they saw their friends every day or at least several times a week, while only 75 percent of the Mexican adolescents stated that they saw their friends this often.

There was also a real difference between the ethnic groups sexually active or not, on whether they ever discussed sex with their friends. In general Mexican adolescents (60%) did not discuss sex with their friends, while the same held true for only 35 percent of the Anglo youth. In part this discrepancy is culturally based. Sex is a sensitive topic that is less likely to be openly discussed in the Hispanic

Table VIII. Peer Network

	Mexican		Anglo	
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA

Age of friends

Older	38 (31.4)	95 (17.2)	51 (50.0)	21 (10.8)
Same age	80 (66.1)	424 (76.7)	49 (48.0)	170 (87.2)
Younger	3 (2.5)	33 (6.0)	2 (2.0)	4 (2.1)
No friends	6	8	---	2

Friends in school

All	45 (35.4)	398 (71.1)	43 (43.0)	155 (78.7)
Most	25 (19.7)	64 (11.4)	25 (25.0)	31 (15.7)
1/2	10 (7.9)	34 (6.1)	10 (10.0)	7 (3.6)
A few	14 (11.0)	38 (6.8)	13 (13.0)	3 (1.5)
None	24 (18.9)	19 (3.4)	8 (8.0)	1 (0.5)
Don't know	9 (7.1)	7 (1.3)	3 (3.0)	-- ---

Girlfriends had sex

All	27 (24.1)	7 (1.4)	37 (36.3)	5 (2.7)
Moat	21 (18.8)	22 (4.5)	33 (32.4)	5 (2.7)
1/2	20 (17.9)	41 (8.3)	14 (13.7)	14 (7.5)
A few	37 (33.0)	122 (24.7)	15 (14.7)	94 (50.5)

	Mexican SA	NSA	Anglo SA	NSA
None	7 (6.3)	301 (61.1)	3 (2.9)	68 (36.6)
DK/no girlfriends	15	67	-- ---	11

Girlfriends pregnant

	Mexican SA	NSA	Anglo SA	NSA
All	12 (11.0)	3 (0.6)	3 (3.0)	-- ---
Most	8 (7.3)	12 (2.2)	6 (6.0)	-- ---
1/2	10 (9.2)	17 (3.2)	8 (8.0)	2 (1.0)
A few	50 (45.9)	138 (25.6)	51 (50.5)	48 (24.9)
None	29 (26.6)	369 (68.5)	33 (32.7)	143 (74.1)
DK/no girlfriends	18	21	1	4

Table VIII. Peer Network (continued)

	Mexican		Anglo	
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA

What girlfriends think
about premarital sex

	Mexican SA	NSA	Anglo SA	NSA
Never okay	23 (18.1)	247 (44.1)	3 (3.0)	61 (31.0)
Okay if plan to marry	29 (22.8)	115 (20.5)	7 (6.9)	35 (17.8)
Okay if like guy, no plans	22 (17.3)	66 (11.8)	9 (8.8)	23 (11.7)
Okay if going steady	6 (4.7)	21 (3.8)	20 (19.6)	14 (7.1)
Okay if both want to	40 (31.5)	82 (14.6)	62 (60.8)	64 (32.5)
Don't know		7 (5.5)	29 (5.2)	1 (1.0)

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culture. In this case, because of the cultural taboo the Mexican women
may be less likely to admit to a discussion with others about the topic.
In fact, when the adolescents were asked what they do talk about with
their friends, the most frequent answer among the   Mexican sample was
"school," while the most frequent answer among the Anglo sample   was
"boys in general," not necessarily sexual topics. Problems related to
school was the third most frequent answer provided by the Anglo women.
   The sexually active adolescents were most likely to associate with
girlfriends who dated, while the nonsexually active were more likely to
associated with girlfriends who did not date at all or dated
infrequently. This may be because, as noted in Table VIII, sexually
active adolescents were more likely to associate with   older friends.
This seemed to be slightly more true of the   sexually   active Anglo

adolescents.

Sexually active adolescents also tended to associate with friends who were not in school. This may be because their friends tended to be older, as well as less school oriented.

With respect to the sexual behavior of their friends,sexually active adolescents were more likely to associate with other sexually active adolescents. Thus, the peer network of the adolescents were reflections of themselves. The sexually active adolescents were also more likely to indicate that at least a few of their friends had been pregnant. The attitudes of the friendship network toward premarital sex also were more liberal. The girlfriends of the sexually active women were more likely to feel that personal choice was important in the decision to be sexually active; that is, if both the girl and her partner wanted to then it was okay. The nonsexually active adolescents were much more likely to feel that their girlfriends thought it was "never okay." Thus peer networks seem to hold views similar to the adolescents themselves. Sexually active adolescents are more likely to associate with others who are sexually active, have been pregnant, are older, are not in school, and feel that premarital sex is okay if the partners mutually want it.

Attitudes

Adolescents

About 50 percent of the nonsexually active Mexican adolescents and 25 percent of the Anglo nonsexually active adolescents do not date or go out with boys except in a group activity. Some of the sexually active adolescents do not date on a regular basis (MA=40%; AA=10%).

Among those who do date, the average age to begin dating was 14 and among the Mexican nonsexually active,age 15. Interestingly,the average age to become sexually active was 15. When the young women who dated were asked if they ever allowed the boy to "go further than kissing,but without sex" (i.e., heavy petting),the sexually active were more likely to say "yes" (Mexicans: SA=56%,NSA=18%; Anglos: SA=92%. NSA=40%). There are some clear ethnic differences even among the sexually active. This may be due to the issue of "respeto," or respect, which is a strongly held value in the Hispanic culture, and these findings are not inconsistent with those values.

The adolescents were asked about their views on the best age for a woman to begin having sex, to marry, and to have children. The adolescents most frequently felt that the age of 18 was the average age for a woman to begin having sex. The Anglo sexually active women were the only group that felt the best age was 16. The subsamples gave the same ages as the best age for males to also begin having sex. Interestingly, with respect to marriage, the sexually active Anglo women felt that between the ages of 23 and 25 was the best time for a woman to marry,while all of the Mexican adolescents felt that 20 was the best age to marry. Similarly the Mexican women felt that the ideal age to bear the first baby was 20, while among the Anglo women the ideal age was 25. Again, the strong cultural value placed on children and the role of women as nurturers in Hispanic culture may influence the tendency to the younger age,while in the Anglo culture, career and advancing one's schooling is also a strong value, suggesting a later childbearing age.

The adolescents were asked to indicate how many children they would like to have, and then how many children they believe that most Anglo and Mexican women would like to have. Virtually the whole sample indicated that they would like to have two or three children. Thus, on the

basis of how many children they would ideally like to have, there were
no ethnic differences. They were also in agreement in how they perceived
their own and the other ethnic group's ideal number of children. All the
adolescents perceived Anglos as wanting two or three children, while
they all also perceived Mexicans as wanting four or five children. It is
interesting that while Mexican adolescents indicate that they only want
two or three children they believe that other Mexican women want more.

The adolescents were asked why teens have premarital sex (Table IX).
The three main reasons given were because "they liked the guy," "to keep
their boyfriend," and "because they are curious." While there were
slight differences in the ordering of these three reasons among the
sexually active and nonsexually active and between the ethnic groups,
they were still the reasons most frequently cited.

With respect to their own attitudes toward premarital sex, their
views were similar to their peers of the same subsample. The nonsexually
active were significantly more likely to indicate that it was "never
okay," while the sexually active were more likely to feel it was okay to
have sex if both partners mutually wanted to. Among the Mexican-American
adolescents, plans for marriage was an important factor in their
decision.

All of the women felt that if an adolescent became pregnant she
should have the baby and keep it. Termination of the pregnancy or
placing the child up for adoption after birth received few positive
responses. They also said that in addition to keeping the baby, the
teenage mother should try to get the father to marry her.

The feelings toward abortion were very negative. The entire sample
felt that abortion was permissible only if the mother's health was
endangered or the pregnancy was a result of rape.

Parental Control and Attitudes

Table X shows some areas of control parents exercise over their
children. It does appear that most parents try to set an expectation as
to when the adolescent should be home. Curfews seemed to be slightly
more enforced among nonsexually active adolescents, and one out of five

Table IX. Adolscent Attitudes

| | Mexican | | Anglo | |
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA

Why do teens have sex?

	SA	NSA	SA	NSA
Most of girlfriends do	8 (6.3)	43 (7.7)	7 (6.9)	15 (7.6)
Like the guy	40 (31.5)	159 (28.4)	25 (24.5)	34 (17.3)
To keep boyfriend	30 (23.6)	138 (24.6)	25 (24.5)	72 (36.5)
Want baby	-- ---	7 (1.3)	-----	-- ---
Just want to	15 (11.8)	74 (13.2)	14 (13.7)	24 (12.2)
Curious	27 (21.3)	108 (19.3)	25 (24.5)	41 (20.8)

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    Don't know                 7 (5.5)     31 (5.5)     6 (5.9)    11 (5.6)

How do you feel about

   premarital sex?

  Never okay               21 (16.5)   342 (61.0)    7 (6.9)    83 (42.1)

  Okay if plan to marry    49 (38.6)   140 (25.0)   13 (12.7)   38 (19.3)

  Okay if like guy,
  no plans                 20 (15.7)    22 (4.0)    11 (10.8)   22 (11.2)

  Okay if going steady,

  no plans                  2 (1.6)     11 (2.0)    13 (12.7)   10 (5.1)

  Okay if both want to     35 (27.6)    44 (7.9)    58 (56.9)   44 (22.3)

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Table X. Parental Control

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                    Mexican                    Anglo

          SA            NSA            SA           NSA

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Sets curfew

   Very much       75 (59.1)   374 (66.8)    49 (48.0)   120 (60.9)

   Somewhat        28 (22.0)   115 (20.5)    34 (33.3)    58 (29.4)

   Very little     24 (18.9)    71 (12.7)    19 (18.6)    19 (9.6)

Controls where
teen goes

   Very much       58 (45.7)   336 (60.0)    35 (34.3)    76 (38.6)
   Somewhat        26 (20.5)   125 (22.3)    36 (35.3)    73 (37.1)
   Very little     43 (33.9)    99 (17.7)    31 (30.4)    48 (24.4)

Controls who teen
    goes out with

   Very much       54 (42.5)   294 (52.5)    52 (31.4)    77 (39.1)
   Somewhat        24 (18.9)   117 (20.9)    39 (38.2)    63 (32.0)
   Very little     49 (38.6)   149 (26.6)    31 (30.4)    57 (28.9)

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sexually active adolescents perceive their parents as not being very strict about a curfew. Control over where the adolescent goes is more strongly developed in the Mexican-American adolescent's home, while in Anglo homes, this type of control is felt much less. This difference is to some degree culturally based. The tradition of supervising where a young woman goes is rooted in the tradition of chaperones or duennas, and still is seen as an appropriate role played by parents, if not accompanying the young woman, at least to act as a guide about where she may go.

Again that same Hispanic tradition is apparent in controlling whom the young women may go out with, although this is less strict, than where she may go. Overall, among the Anglo adolescents, the degree of control exercised by parents is relatively evenly distributed across the three categories with slightly more control being shown among the parents of the nonsexually active women.

Parents felt that the age that was okay for their daughters to begin dating boys was about the age of 16. This is slightly higher than when the girls actually began to date, which was the age of 14. In this respect there was little difference between the parents of the two ethnic groups.

The parental attitudes about the best age to get married and to have the first child were similar to their daughters (Table XI). Most parents thought it was best to marry in the age range 21 to 23, while the best age for the first baby was 23 to 25.

With regard to attitudes toward premarital sex, birth control and pregnancy, the perceived views were more liberal, depending on whether the adolescent was sexually active or nonsexually active. In general, most of the young women perceived their parents as feeling that premarital sex was never okay; however, the sexually active Anglo women perceived their parents as very liberal, with only 42 percent feeling that their parents thought it was never okay, and more apt to feel that premarital sex was okay if both the partners mutually wanted to. Many of the adolescents felt that if there was a marriage commitment their parents would say premarital sex was okay.

About 40 percent of the parents were perceived to feel that birth control was okay only if the individual was married, whereas 78 percent of the parents of the sexually active Anglos were perceived as thinking it was okay if one was having sex. Perhaps this view of parents was held because so many of the parents knew their daughters were sexually active (65%) and possibly condoned birth control rather than risk their daughters to pregnancy. For many Mexican parents birth control was never

Table XI. Parental Attitudes

	Mexican		Anglo	
	SA	NSA	SA	NSA

Premarital sex

| Never okay | 87 (71.0) | 466 (84.0) | 42 (42.0) | 146 (74.0) |
| Okay if plan to marry | 25 (20.0) | 66 (12.0) | 16 (16.0) | 34 (17.0) |

Okay if like guy,

no plans	3 (2.0)	6 (1.0)	9 (9.0)	6 (3.0)
Okay if going steady, no plans	-----	4 (1.0)	13 (13.0)	2 (1.0)
Okay if both want to	7 (6.0)	9 (2.0)	20 (20.0)	9 (5.0)

Attitudes toward
birth control

Okay only if married	52 (41.0)	229 (41.0)	14 (14.0)	81 (41.0)
Okay if having sex	43 (34.0)	65 (12.0)	80 (78.0)	80 (41.0)
Never okay	23 (18.0)	181 (32.0)	4 (4.0)	22 (11.0)
Don't know	8 (6.0)	82 (15.0)	4 (4.0)	14 (7.0)

Pregnancy

Okay only if married	101 (80.0)	513 (92.0)	65 (64.0)	174 (90.0)
Okay, married or not	26 (16.0)	17 (3.0)	32 (32.0)	16 (8.0)
Don't know	5 (4.0)	27 (5.0)	4 (4.0)	3 (2.0)

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okay. Again, the strong Catholic religious influence that has tradition-
ally been part of the Hispanic culture may act as a deterrent to the use
of birth control, which may partially explain the low use of birth con-
trol among the Mexican-American adolescents.
   As expected, parents do not think that out-of-wedlock pregnancy is
acceptable; however, the sexually active Anglo females perceive their
parents as being more liberal than other parents.
Like the adolescents, parents were perceived as feeling that abortion
was only permissible if the woman's health was in danger or if the
pregnancy was the result of rape. Overall the parents data showed them
to be perceived as more liberal about abortion depending on whether they
knew their daughter was sexually active or not. If the daughter was
known to be sexually active, then the more liberal parental views were
perceived to be on abortion.

                        Acculturation

   Table XII shows the acculturation variables with respect to the
mother, father, and adolescent. In general, sexually active daughters
come from more acculturated families. The nonsexually active Mexican
daughters are more likely to come from a home where the primary spoken
language is Spanish, and where two out of three sets of parents do not
speak any English or very little, requiring their daughters to primarily
speak Spanish to their parents. While most of the young women spoke
English, probably because of school attendance, an extremely high
percentage still were bilingual. However, those who only spoke English
were more likely to be sexually active females.
   There seems to be a relationships suggested between level of accultur-
ation and the early onset of sexual activity. In some ways the issues of

culture cut across both the sexually and the nonsexually active. For
example, among the sexually active Mexican-American women, they are more
likely than Anglos to perceive themselves in a committed relationship,
and to be more likely to have had only one sexual partner. For this
reason, many may not feel the necessity to use contraception, both for
religious reasons and because they have plans to marry the young man
anyway, so that pregnancy is not something to necessarily be avoided.
Children are viewed as central to a family commitment and to a
relationship and are a welcomed addition. Thus, for Mexican adolescents
sexual activity may be more than curiosity but part of what is believed
to be a committed relationship. While premarital sex is not condoned,

TABLE XII. Acculturation

	Mexican Sexually Active	Mexican Non Sexually Active
Language Spoken (Mother)		
Spanish only	33 (26.0)	228 (41.8)
Mostly Spanish	24 (18.9)	163 (29.9)
Both Equally	38 (29.9)	119 (21.8)
Mostly English	21 (16.5)	23 (4.2)
English only	11 (8.7)	13 (2.4)
No response	---	14
Years in U.S. (Mother)		
-10 years	14 (11.0)	110 (20.0)
Born in U.S.	70 (55.1)	188 (33.6)
Language Spoken (Father)		
Spanish only	22 (17.6)	162 (30.5)
Mostly Spanish	34 (27.2)	159 (29.9)
Both Equally	36 (28.8)	155 (29.1)
Mostly English	23 (18.4)	41 (7.7)
English only	10 (8.0)	14 (2.6)
No response	2	29
Years in U.S. (Father)		
-10 years	13 (10.2)	102 (18.2)

Born in U.S.   71 (55.9)   249 (44.5)

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TABLE XII. Acculturation (continued)

                                       Mexican   Mexican

                                  Sexually Active   Non Sexually Active

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Language of Preference
(Adolescent)

  Spanish only   10 (7.9)   32 (9.7)

  Mostly Spanish   10 (7.9)   26 (4.6)

  Both Equally   34 (26.8)   273 (48.8)

  Mostly English   38 (29.9)   133 (23.8)

  English only   35 (27.6)   96 (17.1)

Language Spoken (Adolescent)

  Spanish only   6 (4.7)   19 (3.4)

  Mostly Spanish   10 (7.9)   85 (15.2)

  Both Equally   41 (32.3)   237 (42.3)

  Mostly English   53 (41.7)   176 (31.4)

  English only   17 (13.4)   43 (7.7)

With whom do you usually

speak Spanish? (Adolescent)

  Parents   62 (48.8)   432 (77.1)

  Other Relatives   19 (15.0)   42 (9.3)
  Friends   7 (5.5)   19 (3.4)

  Boyfriend/Husband   18 (14.2)   1 (0.2)

  Other   21 (16.5)   56 (10.0)

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and there is still   a high   premium placed on virginity in Hispanic

communities, the process of acculturation and a variety of other life circumstances has modified these cultural mores.

SUMMARY

In this study, 1,021 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 were interviewed (700 Mexican, 321 Anglo). These preliminary data show the following major findings:

1. Anglo adolescents were more likely to be sexually active than were Mexican American adolescents (34.1% vs. 18.5% respectively).

2. Mexican American adolescents tended to come from less affluent families than Anglo adolescents (median income ($17,000 vs. $32,000).

3. Sexually active adolescents were more likely to come from less table homes as characterized by higher divorce rates and more geographical mobility.

4. The sexually active adolescent was less likely to be attending school, was less likely to have future schooling plans, and more likely to plan on a trade/vocational education.

5. Mexican adolescents had stronger religious ties and saw their religion as very important to them.

6. The average age of menarche was 12.3 years. The average age for first sexual intercourse was 15.4. Sixty-five percent of sexually active girls reported that their parents were aware they were sexually active.

7. The reasons given for being sexually active were "because I really liked the guy," "it just happened," "we planned to get married," and "we just wanted to."

8. Mexican women were less likely to have had multiple partners. Overall, most sexually active adolescents reported being sexually active 2-3 times a week.

9. Sexually active adolescents were more likely to have come from homes where sisters and mothers had been pregnant as adolescents.

10. Almost half of the sexually active Mexican adolescents had been pregnant at least once (45%), while only 23% of the Anglo adolescents had ever been pregnant; however, Anglo adolescents were slightly more likely to have been pregnant more than once.

11. Mexican American adolescents were less likely to use contraception (16% vs. 36%).

12. Most adolescents have had sex education courses. Besides their sex education class the next major source of knowledge about sexual behavior for many was peers/friends.

13. Nonsexually active adolescents had a generally better relationship with their parents. They spent more time talking and participating

in activities with their mothers; however, Mexican adolescents in general tended to spend more time with their mothers.

14. The peer network of Anglo youth are larger than the Mexican youth. Mexican youth are significantly less likely to talk about sex with their friends than Anglos (60% vs. 35%). Sexually active adolescents associate with older friends, who are not in school, who are sexually active, have been pregnant, and feel that premarital sex is okay if the partners mutually want it.

15. Almost one-half of the nonsexually active adolescents do not date. Average age to begin dating is 14 to 15.

16. Parental control over Mexican adolescents is perceived to be stronger than among Anglos on the issues of curfew, where the adolescent may go, and who she may go out with.

17. Parental attitudes towards premarital sex, birth control, and pregnancy were perceived as more liberal among the sexually active than the nonsexually active.

18. Level of acculturation of parents appears to be an important variable in explaining the early onset of sexual activity. Sexually active Mexican American women are more likely to come from highly acculturated homes. Closeness to the Mexican culture and traditional values may act as a mediator for early sexual activity.