

## Sexual Culture and HIV Risk in Populations of Mexican Origin

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**Project Staff:** Héctor Carrillo, Principal Investigator (CAPS-UCSF); Barbara VanOss Marin (Consultant); Melbourne Hovell (Consultant); Stephen Scott, Project Director; Victoria González-Rivera; Ethnographer; Jorge Fontdevila, Ethnographer.

**Project Description:** This research program is funded by the Universitywide AIDS Research Program (UARP) of the University of California. The study consists of forty semi-structured interviews with heterosexual Mexican American and recent Mexican immigrants living in San Diego. Based on those interviews, we are comparing the sexual cultures and ideologies of U.S.-born and immigrant men and women, and link their norms and ideas about sexuality with their sexual decision making, sexual practices, and HIV risk. Our analysis will yield initial data on sexual cultural and ideological differences between the two groups, as well as on differences in sexual socialization and lived experiences. The study will provide the empirical foundation for a larger study on the effects of acculturation on the sexual health of Latinos/as.

**Significance:** In California, Latino populations have been found to be disproportionately affected by HIV. However, not all Latinos/as in the state have the same levels of HIV risk. Differences in HIV risk and sexual behavior can be found among subgroups of Latinos defined by their degree of acculturation and U.S.-born vs. immigrant status. The literature suggests that such differences may be related to the subgroups' sexual norms and values (or, more broadly, to the sexual cultures and ideologies prevalent in each subgroup). Paradoxically, several studies have reported lower levels of HIV risk among less acculturated Latinos/as and recent immigrants when compared with U.S. born and highly acculturated Latinos/as.

Currently, we do not understand fully the cultural patterns and social mechanisms that explain this health paradox. No study to date has thoroughly investigated sexual cultural differences between U.S-born and immigrant Latinos/as in California, or fully explored how Latino/a sexual norms and values are associated with HIV risk. Conducting such research is of crucial importance to increase the cultural adequacy and specificity of HIV prevention programs targeting Latinos/as in the state. This research program will begin to fill this gap.