

Trayectos: Social Context and HIV Risk among Mexican Gay Immigrants

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Project Description: *Trayectos* is an ethnographic, four-year study in San Diego, CA, that focuses on the lived experiences of self-identified gay and bisexual Mexican immigrants and their sexual HIV risk. *Trayectos* is based on participant observation in settings where immigrants participate, as well as individual interviews with men who are: Mexican gay or bisexual immigrants; US-born Latino gay or bisexual; and US-born gay or bisexual, of any ethnic background, who have been sexually or romantically involved with a Mexican immigrant in the previous twelve months.

The purpose of the research program is to describe how Mexican gay and bisexual male immigrants are incorporated into US gay life and how their participation in social and sexual contexts in the US affects their sexual health and HIV risk. As part of this goal, we will compare Mexican gay and bisexual immigrants' lived experiences regarding sexuality and HIV risk with those of their US-born Latino counterparts. In practical terms, we aim at generating and disseminating data that HIV educators can use to design and improve HIV prevention programs for gay and bisexual Latino immigrants. In more theoretical terms, we seek to advance our understanding of the emergence of health risks out of the intersection of migration, sexual orientation, participation in US social settings, and social inequality.

Significance: In contrast to white, non-Hispanic MSM, among whom there has been a modest decline in incidence of AIDS cases beginning in 1996, Hispanic MSM "accounted for an increasing proportion of AIDS cases and had smaller proportionate declines in AIDS incidence and deaths" (MMWR, 2000). The epidemiological data available in California suggests that a considerable proportion of Latino MSM with AIDS in California were born in Mexico.

To date, however, little is known about differences in HIV risk, sexual practices and behaviors, and sexual identities between US-born Latino gay men and immigrants. Analysis of data collected by Drs. Rafael Díaz and George Ayala in N.Y., Miami, and L.A. showed that, contrary to what might be expected, recent Latin American gay immigrants have lower levels of sexual HIV risk than US-born Latino gay men. For longer-term immigrants, however, the levels of HIV risk increase, suggesting that the immigrants' length of residence in the US is somehow related to changes in lifestyles experienced by the immigrants as they become incorporated into US society and into gay culture. Explaining how these changes happen is a major goal of the present study.

Project Web Site: www.sdtrayectos.org