

Effects of Acculturation and Gender on Mexican American Teens' Perceptions of
Dating Violence Prevention Programs

by

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ABSTRACT

Dating violence in ethnic minority populations is an understudied phenomenon and little attention has been paid to the experiences of Mexican American youth; less research has been done on how those experiences alter perceptions and acceptance of participation in prevention programs. This study advances knowledge on how Mexican American adolescents view dating violence prevention programs and how cultural beliefs and values may hinder or encourage effective participation. Focus groups (N = 9) were formed with Mexican American youth aged 15-17 years separated by gender and acculturation status (Mexican-Oriented/Bicultural/Anglo-Oriented), as determined previously by acculturation scores measured by the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARMSA; 0 or below = Mexican Oriented, 0-1 = Bicultural, 1 or above = Anglo-Oriented). Several themes emerged throughout the focus group discussions that were derived from culturally-based needs. Mexican American adolescents made recommendations for program development (e.g., a broad curriculum beyond the topic of dating violence) and delivery (e.g., barriers to participation, the implications of peer involvement) within the context of their cultural values and needs. Low acculturated and bicultural teens identified specific cultural needs and their relevance within a dating violence prevention program. However, across all groups, adolescents felt that the needs of Mexican American youth were similar to other youth in regards to dating violence prevention programs. Implications for how social work can best design and implement prevention programs for Mexican American adolescents are discussed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| LIST OF TABLES | v |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 2 |
| Ecological Systems | 2 |
| Mexican American Culture | 3 |
| Acculturation..... | 4 |
| Prevention Programs..... | 6 |
| Gender | 9 |
| IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK..... | 11 |
| Present Study..... | 13 |
| METHOD..... | 14 |
| Participants..... | 14 |
| Procedures | 15 |
| Measures..... | 16 |
| Analysis | 19 |
| RESULTS..... | 19 |
| Sample Description | 19 |
| Focus Groups..... | 20 |
| Cultural Diversity | 21 |
| Acculturation Differences..... | 23 |
| Program Development | 24 |
| Broad Curriculum..... | 25 |
| Program Delivery..... | 27 |

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Participation | 27 |
| Peer Involvement..... | 29 |
| DISCUSSION | 30 |
| IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH..... | 36 |
| LIMITATIONS..... | 37 |
| CONCLUSION | 38 |
| REFERENCES | 40 |
| APPENDIX | |
| A FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS ANALYZED IN THE STUDY | 45 |
| B OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ASSURANCE..... | 47 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 1. | SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS | 49 |
| 2. | MACHISMO AND FAMILISMO GROUP MEANS | 50 |

Effects of Acculturation and Gender on Mexican American Teens' Perceptions of Dating Violence Prevention Programs

Teen dating violence can have lasting negative effects across social, physical, and psychological contexts (e.g., school difficulty, unhealthy coping skills, substance use problems, eating disorders; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Additionally, victims of dating violence are three times more likely to continue patterns of victimization in subsequent romantic relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Particularly troubling is that Latino males and females are at greater risk for exposure to male-female spousal violence than either White or African American youth (Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997), placing them at increased risk for perpetration or victimization of dating violence (Quigley, Jaycox, McCaffrey, & Marshall, 2006). Unfortunately, the majority of research has been conducted on White samples and little attention has been paid to Latino, particularly Mexican American, youth. Though there has been separate research done on acculturation and dating violence (Garcia, Hurwitz, Kraus, 2004; Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, & Reininger, 2004; Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, & Collins, 2004; Ulloa, Jaycox, Skinner, & Orsburn, 2008), and prevention programs within the Latino population (Acevedo, 2008), few studies have thoroughly examined how prevention programs are perceived, taking into account cultural values and levels of acculturation. Mexican American culture includes unique concepts such as *familismo* and *machismo* that are not held across all cultures and have relevance for dating violence (Brabeck & Guzman, 2009). In order to effectively work with the Latino community, cultural values cannot be ignored as culture influences perceptions of and interactions with practitioners (Acevedo, 2008). For

example, culture and acculturation can affect provider preferences when Latino individuals enter into services (Gamst et al., 2002), which need to be taken into consideration when implementing prevention programs designed to work with this population.

The purpose of this study is to understand Mexican American adolescents' perceptions of dating violence prevention programs and identify possible barriers to participation. Participants were recruited from schools and community events near an urban area in the Southwest, and selected into focus groups based on their gender and level of acculturation. In addition to focus group discussions, this study examined the cultural values of machismo and familismo. As suggested in the literature, these two cultural elements can act as protective factors against violent behavior and other negative outcomes. Machismo and familismo are utilized in order to understand the role of these protective factors in adolescents understanding of dating violence and perceptions of dating violence prevention programs.

Literature Review

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory teaches us that a person's environment may affect their subsequent actions, behaviors, and perceptions. The interaction of individuals with their environment can greatly influence lifelong outcomes. In the case of racial/ethnic minorities and acculturation, the influence of environment can affect teens' ability to navigate their way through the dominant culture. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) outlines how the individual moves through various settings (school, home, etc.) and through various systems—microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems. Each of the

aforementioned systems has an effect on the development of any person, regardless of racial or ethnic identity. However, this study will explore how the broader dominant culture and the Mexican American culture together influence Mexican American teens' perceptions of dating violence prevention programs by different levels of acculturation.

Mexican American Culture

Some studies have indicated that adherence to one's culture of origin can be a protective factor and may even minimize the consequences and effects of acculturation (Brabeck & Guzman, 2009; Marsiglia, Kulis, Wagstaff, Elek, & Dran, 2005). Several aspects of Latino culture are relevant to Mexican Americans, such as familismo, which is a value associated with family cohesion (Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzalez, 1995) and machismo, the belief in patriarchal relationships and traditional sex roles (Brabeck & Guzman, 2009). Familismo, a concept especially relevant in Mexican American culture, provides effective protection against negative externalizing behaviors (Marsiglia, Parsai, & Kulis, 2009). The idea of family cohesion as a protective factor in the Latino culture has also been noted by Sanderson et al (2004), in her study on the effects of acculturation on behaviors relating to dating violence in a sample of ninth-grade Latino students. Familismo may be a protective factor against dating violence because more traditional parents may be more involved in their children's lives and require that adolescents introduce their potential dating partner to the family prior to allowing involvement in the relationship (Sanderson et al., 2004). Additionally, familismo has been associated with greater help-seeking behaviors among victims of partner violence (Acevedo, 2000; Brabeck & Guzman, 2009), particularly among women with children. Help-seeking behaviors are invaluable to our

understanding of dating violence prevention. They may be an indicator of the level of knowledge or awareness of dating violence and the availability or accessibility of resources.

Another important aspect of Latino culture that has relevance to our understanding of dating violence is machismo. Acceptance of machismo among women has been found to decrease the likelihood of help-seeking efforts (Acevedo, 2008), and is often linked to women of lower acculturation status. Cultural expectations of men include the idea of machismo, as men are often expected to exercise control over the family, leaving men to be the more dominating partner (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006). Machismo, however, has also been determined to be a protective factor inherent to the Mexican culture, particularly for females in association with substance abuse (Unger, Ritt-Olson, Lorena Terna, Terry Huang, Hoffman, & Palmer, 2002). Miranda et al (2006) argue that, in marriages, acculturation of the female partner may lead to increased conflict as she attempts to define her independence from the family or male partner, suggesting that differing levels of acculturation and adjustment to acculturation in Latino romantic relationships may lead to increased conflict. Prevention programs addressing sex roles in the Latino culture may assist in avoiding situations that lead to perpetration or victimization of dating violence behaviors.

Acculturation

Acculturation is when one group or culture takes on the attributes or characteristics of another group or culture. Essentially, acculturation is one group or individual acclimating to and adopting the social values and patterns exhibited by another group. Acculturation has been associated with several

areas detrimental to long-term health such as alcoholism and drug abuse, fatalism, suicidal ideation, and mental health (DeHoyos & Ramirez, 2007; Cuellar et al., 1995). Acculturation is quite significant in perceptions of what constitutes dating violence, reports of victimization or perpetration of dating violence, and knowledge about dating violence (Sanderson et al., 2004).

The level of acculturation may affect knowledge of dating violence and enforcement of gender stereotypes particularly for boys (Ulloa et al., 2004). For example, Ulloa et al (2004) found that Latino boys, but not girls, who were more proficient with the English language held more knowledge about dating violence and supported nonviolent conflict solutions. Latino youth with a stronger belief in egalitarian romantic relationships were more likely to disapprove of violent retaliation and were more aware of the negative consequences related to perpetration of violent acts (Ulloa et al., 2004). Sanderson et al.'s (2004) study of 4,525 ninth-graders found that Mexican American female adolescents whose primary language was English were 89% more likely to report victimization than were their Spanish speaking counterparts who were 48% less likely to file a report.

Levels of acculturation also affect mental health outcomes and service participation (Gamst, Dana, Der-Karabetian, Aragon, Arellano, & Kramer, 2002). Gamst et al (2002) found that mental health outcomes were compromised for Anglo-oriented Latinos, indicating that Mexican-oriented Latinos may have the advantage of cultural adherence as a protective factor. Mexican-oriented individuals were also more likely to want a Spanish-speaking professional as well as a professional of the same gender (Gamst et al., 2002). Anglo-oriented Latinos were either ambivalent to the language used or preferred English-only.

Mental health outcomes are relevant to acculturation and dating violence because depression and anxiety have been associated with perpetration (Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, & Cothorn, 2000; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). High acculturation levels in Latino adolescents has shown to be a risk factor, whereas cultural adherence has shown to be a protective factor for both boys and girls. These findings are relevant to prevention programming because they inform research and practitioners on recipient preferences in relation to the delivery of services.

Bicultural adolescents, unlike their Mexican-oriented or Anglo-oriented counterparts, have shown to adapt easier in multiple and diverse settings. Biculturalism is when individuals maintain identity with their culture of origin while simultaneously maintaining a positive interaction or relationship to another—more dominant—culture. Existing research has indicated that bicultural teens have higher levels of self-esteem (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007) and have lower high school dropout rates (Feliciano, 2001) than their English-language dominant and Spanish-language dominant counterparts. Biculturalism is often viewed as a protective factor, and is less associated with acculturative stress (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994) which is seen as a risk factor for dating violence perpetration and other risk-taking behaviors.

Prevention Programs

Prevention program design is generally met with several challenges. One challenge that is essential to overcome when working with racial/ethnic minorities is that of culture. Although there are varying concepts of what constitutes culture, it is generally agreed that culture is the set of values, behaviors, and norms that are present within a group defined by similar characteristics (Hughes

& Seidman, 2002). Unfortunately, the majority of prevention programs do not take culture or acculturation into consideration (Gosin, Marsiglia, & Hecht, 2003). In creating programs, culturally sensitive approaches must be utilized to genuinely reach the target population.

Dating violence prevention programs aimed at teens are typically offered in a school setting, and often strive to increase awareness of dating violence and unhealthy relationship behaviors (Wolfe & Jaffe, 1999). Wolfe and Jaffe note that common activities in adolescent programs may include video presentations, theatrical vignettes, or speeches delivered to the teens from survivors of abuse. Adolescents are often more receptive to messages of boundaries and independent responsibility than warnings and lectures on consequences of negative behaviors. However, as of yet, there have not been any dating violence programs that have included working with families of adolescents (Whitaker, Morrison, Lindquist, Hawkins, O'Neil, Nesius, Mathew, & Reese, 2006), which may be a barrier for Latino youth who uphold values of familismo.

As an example of an effective culturally grounded program, the *keepin' it REAL* program integrates culturally sensitive curricula into classroom settings in order to decrease substance abuse and increase anti-drug attitudes. This program measures Latino acculturation by language proficiency and preference. They found that less linguistically acculturated boys were less likely to report drug use than more acculturated boys but were more likely to report drug use and pro-drug attitudes than less acculturated girls (Kulis, Yabiku, Marsiglia, Nieri, & Crossman, 2007)—less linguistically acculturated girls reported less substance use and pro-drug attitudes due to protective factors associated with the Latino culture. Despite the differences in efficacy of the *keepin' it REAL* program within

the subgroups of gender and acculturation, it has shown to be effective with the more acculturated Latino population (Marsiglia et al., 2005). This program may serve as some evidence that acculturation and gender need to be explored further to understand the effect these two factors have on minimization of risk behaviors.

An example of a well-established dating violence prevention program is *Safe Dates*. The *Safe Dates* project was a school-based intervention implemented to teach dating violence prevention in rural North Carolina (Foshee, Bauman, Ennett, Linder, Benefield, & Suchindran, 2004). The program was delivered to mostly White students (72.8%; 51.2% female) and consisted of ten 45-minute information sessions instructed by health educators, a poster competition, and a theatrical production (Foshee et al., 2004). It has been reported as effectively decreasing behaviors and attitudes associated with dating violence. Foshee et al (2004) determined that their booster program that was delivered three years later was ineffective in decreasing violent behaviors, and in fact increased rates of perpetration and victimization across all forms of dating violence (e.g., psychological abuse, physical, sexual). It is believed the booster may have inadvertently led to conflict in the adolescent's romantic relationships due to partners asking for a separation or attempting to seek help. Although *Safe Dates* has primarily been used with White adolescents from rural areas, Foshee et al (2004) indicates that it has been successfully implemented with various populations, including those located in urban areas and outside of the U.S. The *Safe Dates* project, though successful, may lack in generalizability with other populations (Whitaker et al., 2006).

Without taking culture and acculturation into consideration, prevention programs designed for Latinos may risk utilizing stereotypes. The use of the Spanish language has been utilized as a means of cultural competence in both group facilitation and survey delivery (Acevedo, 2008; Marsiglia et al., 2005) in various programs. Acevedo (2008), as an example, implemented a program to work specifically with Latino individuals newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. The requirement for the group was that all participants be fluent in Spanish in order to attend (Acevedo, 2008). Though the idea of Spanish fluency is important to the culture, such an approach may have alienated Latinos of higher acculturation.

Cultural sensitivity is scarce in programs designed to prevent teen dating violence, and few have been designed to address specific racial/ethnic populations (Foshee & Reyes, 2009). In a critical review of current dating violence prevention programs, Whitaker et al (2006) found only one intervention designed to specifically address a minority population (African American youth) in a comparison of 11 widely used programs. Whitaker recommended that future dating violence prevention programs focus on cultural contexts and implement culturally relevant strategies. Cultural sensitivity and awareness with the Latino population would require language considerations as well as cultural (e.g., familismo, machismo) and acculturation considerations.

Gender

Rates of teen dating violence are likely underestimated (Centers for Disease Control, 2009), especially among minority youth, as victims and perpetrators of dating violence typically do not report violence or use professional services for assistance (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). For Latino youth, the decision to report is partly dependent on the gender of the perpetrator and whether the

perpetrator was somebody familiar to them (Rayburn, Jaycox, McCaffrey, Ulloa, Zander-Cotugno, Marshall, & Shelley, 2007). In Ashley and Foshee's (2005) study of 365 perpetrators and victims of dating violence adolescents typically did not seek help, and when they did, they chose to utilize informal sources such as friends and selected family members. Interestingly, male perpetrators and victims were more likely than female perpetrators and victims to seek professional assistance (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). Hispanic women are less likely than their White counterparts to report victimization and to later seek professional counseling after victimization (Sorenson & Siegel, 1992), though they are more likely than males across racial/ethnic groups to experience victimization. Little is known about Mexican American youth and what factors may change reporting and help-seeking habits. Understanding the reasons behind a lack of reporting and help-seeking behaviors for Mexican American adolescents may help us to develop more effective programs and increase our ability to reach the adolescents who most need it. Taking cultural factors and resources into consideration (e.g., community, family, religious affiliation) is essential to program success when working with ethnic minority populations (Barbarin, McCandies, Coleman, & Atkinson, 2004). While the problem of adolescent dating violence has been most identified with adolescent boys, adolescent girls have been identified as perpetrators as well (Miller & White, 2003; Foshee, 1996). In a 2007 study where 41 Latino ninth-graders were sampled (Rayburn et al., 2007) from the Los Angeles public high school system, Latino boys and girls were more likely to perceive dating violence as more severe when perpetrated by a male, and less severe when those same acts were committed by a female (Rayburn et al., 2007). Interestingly, female perpetration

of violence was perceived as justifiable (e.g., there may have been a reason such as the male victim acting in a negative way that would warrant violent retaliation), and both boys and girls felt “sympathy” for female perpetrators of violence, ridiculing male victims. Boys and girls with more traditional attitudes toward gender relationships were more likely to accept mutually violent romantic relationships (Rayburn et al., 2007). Although acculturation was not specifically measured, the results suggest that future prevention programs need to address gender stereotypes that occur in the Latino population and how this interacts with acculturation. The present study will address this gap by assessing differences in perceptions of violence prevention programs across gender and levels of acculturation.

Implications for Social Work

Social workers are involved with relationship violence in many arenas, including child welfare, mental health, healthcare, schools, and rehabilitation. In order to be more effective within these settings, social workers must take into account the influence of culture starting at the intake and continuing throughout the client/worker relationship (Bent-Goodley, 2005). Unfortunately, many schools of social work do not effectively deliver a comprehensive education on partner violence specifically (Black, Weisz, & Bennett, 2010), and even less offer education on culturally sensitive approaches to partner violence and intervention. If culture is not effectively implemented into a program, it may only deter participants and hinder successful completion and participation. However, Asbury (1999) warns that generalizing cultural prevention programs against domestic violence may only alienate people of color from services. The Latino culture is complex, and the issues of family, gender roles, and tradition need to

be considered (Ulloa, Jaycox, Skinner, & Orsburn, 2008). Cultural awareness in the design of prevention programs aimed at the Latino adolescent population is essential, as is sensitivity to the effects of acculturation (Ulloa et al., 2008).

Understanding the relevance of cultural adherence in the design of prevention programs has serious implications for social work professionals. The effects of acculturation on Latino perceptions of dating violence prevention may fuel future prevention program design, thus creating more effective implementation. Effective implementation may promote increased reporting and help-seeking behaviors, and diminish acts of perpetration, victimization, and long-term negative consequences. Latino male perpetration of partner violence, for example, has been associated with gender role perceptions, acculturation stress, and anger (Saez-Betancourt, Lam, & Nguyen, 2008). Though there are laws in practice meant to protect victims of partner violence, they do not address specific barriers facing Latina women (DeCasas, 2003) such as language and cultural differences. Social workers implementing prevention programs need to utilize scholarly research on culture and acculturation in order to understand how those factors may influence attitudes, knowledge, and risk behaviors related to dating violence. By doing so, they will be more effective in implementing prevention programs which may help to avoid future complications for Latino families, such as incarceration.

Understanding the experiences Mexican American adolescents have with dating violence is crucial to social work practice for several reasons. Social workers are found in various arenas, particularly in schools, case management, and professional mental health settings. Currently, there is a lack of research within social work that expressly concentrates on prevention programs specific to

the Mexican American culture. Recognizing the differences in acculturation for Mexican American adolescents may help social workers to implement and facilitate prevention programs more effectively

Present Study

It is critical to understand experiences of dating violence among Mexican American youth in order to have culturally informed prevention programming. First, the Hispanic population in the United States is 16.3% and is the fastest growing minority population (U.S. Census Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Hispanics account for 30.8% of Arizona's total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In Arizona's Maricopa County, Mexican Americans accounted for 20.3% of the population in 2004, and are currently the largest group of racial/ethnic minorities.

Secondly, there has been an identified need in the literature for culturally relevant programs on teen dating violence for Mexican American youth (Black & Weisz, 2004). Mexican American culture includes themes of family cohesion, views on gender roles, and language of preference that may not be relevant factors to consider within the dominant White culture. Preferred language is an important aspect to consider when working with this population, as many studies use it as a proxy for acculturation. Spanish language preference is related to acceptance of traditional gender roles by Latino adolescents (Ulloa et al., 2008). Cultural adhesion may be a protective factor (Brabeck & Guzman, 2009; Marsiglia et al., 2005) and deviation from culture may increase the likelihood of partner violence victimization (Garcia, Hurwitz, & Kraus, 2004). Lastly, adolescents in the Latino population differ in their reports of victimization or perpetration of dating violence, based on their level of acculturation and gender

(Sanderson et al., 2004), and on their perceptions of the negative consequences associated with dating violence (Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, & Collins, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to: 1) examine the different perceptions of dating violence prevention programs by gender and levels of acculturation: Mexican-oriented, bicultural, and Anglo-oriented; 2) identify factors that would promote or prevent participation in prevention programs; 3) develop an understanding of cultural components needed to be integrated into prevention programs when working with this population.

By addressing the above areas for exploration, this research hopes to answer the question: How does acculturation effect perceptions toward dating violence prevention, and how do those perceptions and attitudes effect Mexican American teens; specifically, how do perceptions alter the wants or needs they have in prevention programs and are those wants and needs founded in Mexican culture? Although this study is informed by Ecological Systems Theory, the theory does not very well address the influence of the larger environment on individual perceptions relating to the value in incorporating one's culture-of-origin into education and the learning process, such as through prevention programs designed to teach them positive long-term behaviors.

Method

Participants

Adolescents recruited into the Mexican American Teen Relationships (MATR) study were required to be between the ages of 15-17 and self-identify as Mexican American. Youth were recruited through area high schools and alternative schools, as well as through public events (e.g., First Friday) and word-of-mouth. Follow-up phone calls were made to teens that provided contact

information, and parental consent forms were mailed to their homes along with introduction and information letters. After consent was received from the parent, the teen was then invited to complete the MATR survey online at ASU or at their high school. All adolescents were required to complete an online survey prior to being invited into a focus group. The adolescent survey measures include attitudes toward and experiences with dating violence, acculturation, perceptions of gender stereotypes, and social support systems. Based on their acculturation scores, adolescents were selected into focus groups stratified by gender and acculturation status. All participants submitted signed parental consent and assent forms prior to participation in the MATR study. Participants were compensated for their participation in both the survey (\$15) and focus groups (\$10).

Procedure

Based on their survey responses, participants were divided into low acculturation, bicultural or high acculturation groups (separated by gender). All focus groups were conducted by a moderator (a graduate research assistant) and two assistant moderators—the researcher and a trained undergraduate research assistant. I posed all questions regarding prevention programming, particularly in relation to cultural needs and differences. It was ensured that female moderators were present for all girl groups, however, the same accommodation could not be made for all boy groups; a male was present for all but one of the teen boy focus groups. High acculturation focus groups were exclusively conducted in English, as was the stated preference by group participants, bicultural and low acculturation groups were conducted in both Spanish and English with preference given to the language chosen by the

participants—particularly with the low acculturation groups, Spanish and English were used interchangeably throughout the discussion. Translations and back translations were completed for each of the focus group questions and probes, and all research assistants were bilingual, from varying cultural backgrounds. Focus groups were started with several minutes of natural conversation and introductions, followed by an overview of confidentiality and group rules (e.g., arguing, nothing said leaves the room, respecting differing points of view). Interaction was encouraged to elicit natural conversation and further the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Debriefing forms were given to each participant to take home upon completion of each group, which provides information on relationships and resources for assistance in unhealthy relationships.

Measures

The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA) was the measure used to calculate acculturation. Measuring acculturation is complex, and there has been much debate as to the best method of measurement (Unger, Ritt-Olson, Wagner, Soto, & Baezconde-Garbanati, 2007). Unger et al (2007) argue that measurement of acculturation during adolescence is especially difficult due to the stage of development and resolution of ethnic identity. Language use has often been determined as an adequate measurement of acculturation (Serrano and Anderson, 2003), but other studies have determined it is insufficient to fully capture the complexities associated with acculturation (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). The ARSMA was developed originally by Cuellar, Harris and Jasso (1980) and was later modified into a short form (ARSMA-SF). The ARSMA is intended to measure levels of acculturation based upon questions

regarding language of preference and preferred activities. Respondents are asked to rate their responses on a 5-point scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Very much or almost all the time,” in response to statements such as, “I enjoy speaking Spanish,” and “I enjoy reading books in Spanish.” Scores greater than 0 indicate Anglo-Oriented and scores less than 0 were indicate Mexican-Oriented. The mean score in the present sample was skewed towards Anglo-Oriented at 1. Participants scoring 1 or greater were invited to participate in the Anglo-oriented (or high acculturated) focus groups and participants scoring 0 or less were invited to participate in the Mexican-oriented (or low acculturated) focus groups, all participants in the mid-range (0-1) were recruited to participate in bicultural groups.

The ARSMA-SF was used in this study for several reasons: 1) it is an adaptation of a widely used bidimensional measure; 2) it specifically asks about language and activity preference; and 3) the short-form was a brief measure with good reliability. The original ARSMA developed by Cueller et al (1995) is a 30-item measure that proved too lengthy for the purposes of the MATR study, and has been modified in other research with adolescents due to its length and esoteric language (Unger et al., 2007). In the ARSMA-SF, the word “Anglo” was retained from the original ARSMA, which was changed to “White” in the MATR study due to reported lack of familiarity from participants.

This study utilizes the ARSMA as a means of informing the qualitative focus groups, and will not be used to quantify relationships between individual acculturation status and various components within the Mexican culture (e.g., familismo, machismo). This study is primarily qualitative and draws from a constructivist grounded theory perspective. Throughout the process of data

collection, questions are modified and focus group transcripts are routinely read for emerging themes. After a process of open-coding for major themes, those themes are interpreted to understand how they apply to the research questions and how those interpretations fuel the hypothesis and guiding theory.

Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2005) strives to understand the phenomena that emerge from the data more than placing emphasis on the methodology and theory processes, as with traditional schools of grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory allows for the researcher to become part of the data, as it supports that phenomena are empirically based in reality, but that interpretations of those realities are individually interpreted from both the participant and the researcher analyzing the data into meaningful categories, constructing the data. The constructivist approach to grounded theory, if combined with critical inquiry, can greatly add to knowledge founded in the pursuit of social justice as it helps researchers understand perceptions and person-in-environment realities.

All focus groups included open-ended questions about the adolescents' perceptions of programs designed to prevent dating violence within a larger discussion on attitudes, perceptions, and long-term effects of dating violence. At the end of a thorough discussion about dating violence, the moderator then asked several questions related to prevention programs (see Appendix A) and cultural needs within those programs. All questions and probes were translated into Spanish and verified by two bilingual research assistants for accuracy. Focus groups were transcribed by a bilingual undergraduate research assistant as well as a bilingual graduate assistant, and have been reviewed by a second transcriber for accuracy. Transcripts have been coded for themes using

inductive content analysis by two independent coders with experience in qualitative coding.

Analysis

Survey responses have been analyzed using SPSS Software. The ARSMA-SF was the primary determinant for focus group participation, and youth was divided according to their states as Mexican-oriented, bicultural, or Anglo-orientated. Participants were contacted according to group placement. After the focus groups were transcribed and checked for accuracy, each transcript was entered into the QSR NVivo program software for the purposes of qualitative coding. The primary coder conducted a thorough reading of written transcripts and searched for recurring themes or ideas that were then separated into meaningful categories. This form of inductive analysis allowed for themes to originate from the experiences of the group, rather than from a pre-existing framework. The final coding scheme was developed in conjunction with the principal investigator and was then analyzed by a second coder for reliability. Weight was given to comments on the basis of specificity, extensiveness, emotion, and frequency (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The first coder reviewed the transcripts and developed an open coding scheme, applying content to appropriate categories; the second coder sought to verify those categories by analyzing the content in its entirety ($K=.96$). Categories were determined by the first coder through a process of refinement, integration, and connection of themes.

Results

Sample Description

The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. Within the 9 focus groups there were 29 adolescents: 11 boys (37.93%) and 18 girls (62.07%). All adolescents identified as Mexican American as that was a requirement for recruitment and participation. The mean age of the respondents was 16.21 years ($SD=.73$). Survey responses indicated that 19 (65.52%) of the teens in this sample were born in the US, 9 (31.03%) of mothers were born in the US and 6 (20.69%) of fathers were born in the US, the remaining parents of the sample were born in Mexico.

Teens were asked to complete a section of the survey in which they responded to questions regarding the values of familismo (e.g., “Relatives are more important than friends”) and machismo (e.g., “A wife should never contradict her husband in public,” “The father always knows what is best for the family”). The mean score for familismo was 3.27 ($SD=.70$). Due to the small sample size, we were unable to test for significant differences across the groups therefore mean results across the focus groups are presented for descriptive purposes only (see Table 2). Low acculturated and bicultural girls scored similarly in familismo. Qualitatively, high acculturated females appeared to have the lowest scores in the cultural value of familismo and bicultural teens had the highest scores. The group mean for machismo was 2.41 ($SD=.62$). High acculturated girls scored similarly to low acculturated boys, whereas high acculturated boys appeared to have a higher mean than any of the other acculturation groups. Machismo appeared to be lowest in the bicultural group. Low acculturated girls appeared to have the highest mean for girls across all three groups.

Focus Groups

Focus group results are discussed in terms of program development and program delivery within the context of adolescent perceptions of their culture and the relevance of dating violence prevention programs. Names of the participating adolescents were not used in the transcription and participants were asked to avoid using names throughout the session. Direct quotes taken from the focus group transcripts will be used throughout each of the following sections to highlight the themes.

Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity was a theme that was heavily present throughout the discussion of dating violence prevention program development and delivery. As understanding the perceptions of culture and its value in prevention programming was the purpose of this study, we explored the meaning of culture with the teens. In some groups, teens desired cultural equity (e.g., “I don’t think race matters” High acculturated girl, FG5), and teens indicated that their culture had little influence on their individual decision-making. This theme was characterized by the sentiment that all races and ethnicities should be treated equally, without targeting specific cultural needs for any racial/ethnic group. Groups shared the theme of cultural equity, but at the same time, teens also indicated that there is variability within Mexican culture, just as there is variability across cultures. The idea that youth can learn from one another through cultural diversity and that cultural variation can lead to increased learning was explored with several of the groups.

Although teens talked about cultural equity and cultural variability, teens also discussed the cultural variations that occur within Mexican American culture that cannot be broadly applied to all Mexican Americans. The sentiment

expressed is that programs designed to prevent dating violence cannot accurately generalize curricula on the basis of a broad understanding of Mexican American culture. Instead, prevention workers need to understand that variances occur within culture, so cultural experiences are not the same for all persons identifying as being part of that culture:

“Like in every culture or race, and you’re specifying just Mexicans, there’s all types, too. They’re not like the same ones, stereotypical, so they’re all different” (Bicultural boy, FG 9)

With this statement, the emphasis was on the individual experiences of Mexican American youth within their own culture, stressing the importance of individual behaviors, beliefs, and values. Although it was acknowledged that variation in beliefs, behaviors, and values may differ within the Mexican American culture, teens generally felt that differences should not be a cause for culturally specific curriculum, but instead should be a cause for the implementation of a more generalized curriculum that can be applied across cultures.

In several of the focus groups, cultural diversity was discussed almost as a need to understand other cultures in addition to understanding one’s culture-of-origin, and teens would explain the benefits of culture within the context of prevention program design:

“Then if you are doing like this education thing, if you put more people together from different types of races or just to have different views of everything so you won’t just have like, okay, so Mexican people think this. White people think that. You know? It’d be really cool to like have different types of people and have different types of perspectives.”
(Bicultural boy, FG 9)

There was an omnipresent theme that culture is personal and greatly varies between individuals—even between individuals that may identify as being from the same culture. In all focus groups, the attitude toward culture was that it is personal and varies from individual to individual, depending on their upbringing and unique perspectives. Although racial/ethnic differences were discussed and acknowledged, teens did not specify a need to take such differences into account when working with youth and educating them on dating violence prevention, as dating violence was viewed as an experience that occurs across all cultures. In prevention programs, culture was discussed as being significant only as a unifier across all cultural groups as opposed to being a necessary component for participation or efficacy to any specific racial/ethnic group.

Acculturation differences. High acculturated teens generally gave less specific recommendations around their cultural needs and for a culturally sensitive program design but were similar to other low and bicultural acculturation groups within the theme of cultural equity. However, high acculturated teens noted that there are cultural differences across all cultures relating to family involvement and gender roles:

“...Mexican husbands expect the like, wife, to have like food ready for them when they’re home and get the house clean...I think like Caucasian families are more about working together. Like, the guy isn’t so like, ‘No, you have to do that and I’m not supposed to help because I’m a guy.’”

(High Acculturated girl, FG 6)

Bicultural teens, like highly acculturated teens, generally noted that there are differences both between cultures and within the Mexican culture, but no special considerations were suggested for teens identifying as Mexican American

in regards to prevention programming. In one segment, however, bicultural girls did discuss the idea of traditional gender roles as a phenomenon unique to past generations, indicating they believe that traditional values and norms no longer pertain to the Mexican American population or to girls. Specifically—they discussed the idea of independence for women, and attributed typically traditional women’s roles (e.g., marriage, homemaking) not to cultural values but instead to upbringing and privilege:

“I think it depends on how you were raised...some girls’ parents give them everything they want, that’s why they want everything easy. And there are some other girls who are probably going to school and working hard for their stuff...and that’s what makes them want to be independent” (FG 7).

Bicultural boys were the only group to talk specifically about bringing together different cultures, identifying the positive aspects of diversity and the learning that can come from combining different racial/ethnic groups together in one program.

Program Development

Teens were asked what they would like to see in prevention programming that is relevant to their culture, values, and beliefs (i.e., “Would Mexican American teens need dating violence prevention education different from teens of other races/ethnicities?”). As many programs that are designed to prevent dating or intimate partner violence do not specifically target Mexican American teens, the goal throughout the discussion on prevention programs was to understand their cultural needs, if any, and to explore how those needs would need to be implemented into a prevention program. Also of interest was how to effectively design a program that would promote participation, and help us to understand

the barriers to participation. Several considerations for program curriculum and participation were discussed, but explicit cultural needs were rarely mentioned. Teens were generally eager to share their opinions, and informed moderators as to the many considerations they felt must be taken into account (e.g., theater, age limitations, gender) in order for such a program to be effective.

Broad curriculum. Statements that expressed a need for generalized education that did not specifically target the isolated issue of dating violence were coded into the theme of broader curriculum. In focus groups, teens noted a disinterest in prevention programs that specifically targeted dating violence. It was noted that teens would be reluctant to participate in a dating violence prevention program due to the stigma and fear related to participation. The need for such a program was seen more as an intervention/treatment program rather than as a prevention program to assist youth trapped in abusive relationships.

Amongst low-acculturated girls the benefits of a more generalized curriculum offering were given ample time and consideration. Throughout the discussion the emphasis was on the need for empowering young women to be independent and to establish long-term career goals in lieu of educating young women on healthy relationships and dating violence prevention:

Moderator: “So, for people your age, you say life skills are more important than dating advice?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah. ‘Cause dating, dating, because like...”

“... ya estamos olvidando. Like, we’re like more... we’re not that like...”

“We’re not that into it anymore.”

“We’re not into it ‘cause, ya estamos más... cuando ya estas creciendo ya vas aprendiendo. So once you’re like learning more you go and you’re learning more and more you’re thinking about something else already. You’re thinking about—like sometimes we don’t think about relationships. I don’t want a relationship right now. I just wanna find a job and do something...Not just thinking about boys all the time. We wanna, like, do something in our lives. Not be just that girl that gets married and that’s it.”
(Low Acculturated girl, FG 3)

Teen girls in this group commented throughout the focus group that they would be reluctant to seek outside assistance if they or a friend was experiencing dating violence or abuse. It was felt that if they or others would try to intervene, that the victim of the violent encounter, “don’t listen,” (Low acculturated girl, FG 3, gender) and that parents would blame them (e.g., “...my mom or whoever I talked to would be like, ‘Oh, it’s probably you or your probably going through the same thing’” Low Acculturated girl, FG 3). In addition to difficulty with reporting and seeking assistance, it was believed that dating violence and abuse could be adequately handled by the individual (e.g., “[I can] handle it on my own” Low Acculturated girl, FG 5). Although not explicitly stated, it appeared that the teens in this sample felt that they had no support for reporting perpetration or victimization of dating violence—an area which could possibly be addressed through a prevention program that exposed youth to resources and support.

In summary, the Mexican American teens in this sample felt there was a need for dating violence prevention programs, but that culturally specific curriculum was not required for efficacy. Teens felt that helping youth understand that dating violence is a negative experience that occurs across all

cultures would be more beneficial than implementing a program that targeted Mexican Americans specifically. The idea was expressed that although dating violence prevention is important, a broader curriculum that could help teens improve their long-term quality of life (e.g., healthy relationships, job opportunities) would be better suited for teens than a program that focused solely on dating violence. Although teens made significant and specific suggestions on program content, it was stated that such a program may not attract the attention of youth to voluntarily attend, due to the fear and stigma associated with attendance. It would be beneficial for social workers to understand the barriers to participation (e.g., fear, stigma, narrow curriculum) and minimize them in order to work with the Mexican American teen population.

Program Delivery

In addition to the development of a culturally-based prevention program, the teens discussed factors that would result in a successful program delivery. These factors revolved around program participation and peer involvement.

Participation. The idea that teens would only participate if they were in need of assistance or receiving an incentive was discussed. Although it was generally recognized across all groups that such a program is useful, teens felt it would be largely unattended if there were no incentive attached to participation such as payment or class credit. Among recommendations made by the teens, few were discussed at length and across groups. Program incentives for participation were addressed as it was viewed that participation would be relatively low due to the stigma associated with program participation. Teens suggested money as a worthwhile incentive:

“Do we get paid?” (Low Acculturated girl, FG 3)

“...if you were told you would get \$5 for attending, I’m pretty sure you’d probably get like most of the school.” (Bicultural boy, FG 9)

Lack of incentive such as payment or class credit was largely identified as a potential barrier to participation. Appropriateness of the program curriculum was also seen as a factor in deciding whether or not to participate (e.g., “What would you do there?” High Acculturated girl, FG 6).

Age was a consideration that surfaced in two focus groups, and was discussed extensively. Groups felt that middle school was the most appropriate timing for such a program. Low acculturated girls, in particular, suggested that a program designed to instruct youth on healthy relationships should be done at a younger age since many youth tend to date older teens:

“Yeah, like probably like, maybe if they start at like 7th grade... ‘cause 8th grade they’re already dating, they’re going out. Like, as an 8th grader they’re probably dating like a 19-year-old, an 18-year-old.” (Low Acculturated girl, FG 3)

Introducing teens to dating violence prevention at a younger age was seen as a preparatory precaution to avoid later perpetration and victimization. Although not always discussed in relation to age, dating violence prevention was seen as important to helping teens understand the consequences of dating violence and carrying that message throughout the lifespan.

The need to visualize scenes of dating violence and characteristics of unhealthy relationships was expressed through the suggestion of theater as a tool in prevention program design. Teens suggested roleplaying as a vital tool in both helping youth recognize what constitutes acts of violence (e.g. pushing) and helping youth understand the contexts of violence across cultures:

“Yeah. ‘Cause like—if—if—not to be racist or nothing but like, if they see like an African American person they’re gonna judge, ‘Oh, that’s just between African Americans. That’s not gonna happen to me.’ And if it’s like a Caucasian person then they’re gonna be like, ‘Oh no, they’re perfect.’ That’s stereotyping.” (Low Acculturated girl, FG 3)

Roleplaying was discussed by boys in context of various situations such as jealousy or cheating, posing the question to the audience, “How would you handle this situation (Bicultural boy, FG 8)?” It was suggested that teens be encouraged to participate in the various roleplays—at no time was it mentioned in the groups that adults be involved as actors in the roleplay scenarios.

Peer involvement. The involvement of peers was discussed as both a barrier and a support to program participation. Peers were identified in this study as teens of the same age range, of either gender, that participants associated with in any setting. Many teens suggested that a future prevention program should take place in a school setting, such as in a health class or after school on campus. Teens also suggested that boys and girls should be encouraged to participate, courses should not be separated by gender, and that much more could be learned by combining boys and girls into the same classroom setting:

“...they can debate on certain things, and then like, their points can be proven, and like, so they know how girls think and girls know how the guys think. I think it would be better if it was like combined.” (High Acculturated girl, FG 6)

Whereas some teens felt combining boys and girls into the same prevention course could create an opportunity for learning, others felt it could cause conflict between couples that chose to participate. Having both partners in

the same course could trigger negative issues within the relationship or it could even lead to rumors of abuse from the couples' peer group. However, a method of limiting negative rumors was to control group size: "...you know who's at the table then you can have more responsibility...more things to own up to (Bicultural boy, FG 9)." Peer involvement was generally viewed as a means of support, but some teens saw it as a potential barrier to participation: "I'd actually feel more comfortable with unknown people because they don't know—they don't know anything about you (Bicultural boy, FG 9)."

Group size was mentioned as a factor of consideration regarding peer involvement, but group size was also discussed as an important aspect as to whether or not boys and girls should be in the same program. Both boy and girl focus groups suggested that program classes should combine boys and girls into the same class when offering general education (e.g., healthy relationship behavior), but that boys and girls should be separated when discussing topics that may elicit sharing of personal experiences.

Discussion

Although culture was discussed in the context of prevention programs, teens seemed unable to identify specific cultural values associated with their own experiences. Across all groups teens were able to comment on culture, but few teens were able to pinpoint specific needs other than language. Research indicates that language is largely viewed as a proxy for acculturation (Serrano and Anderson, 2003). However, it has also been identified that many other factors must be taken into consideration in order to fully understand the level of acculturation and how that person interacts within their culture, particularly Mexican Americans (Cuellar et al., 1995). Although there is research literature

that notes the importance of incorporating the values of machismo and familismo into culturally competent programs, focus groups with this sample did not specifically address those values, nor did they suggest that such values were relevant to participation or program design. However, the values of machismo and familismo were reflected on indirectly through discussion and recommendations for program design.

Though not explicitly stated, low acculturated girls discussed wants and needs which tie directly into the protective aspects of machismo and familismo. While discussing the need for prevention programming, low acculturated girls stated they want to be involved with a partner that is independent and masculine, but that is also willing to support their ambitions and education for the betterment of their family:

“Even though—even though like, you have a kid, you don’t want to not only depend on the person you’re with, ya’ know. It’s your kid, too. You know? You have to have something. You have to have change and motivation to keep going, you know, to have a good job. So you can provide her better...You want everything for your kids.” (Low Acculturated girl, FG 3)

The wants and needs expressed throughout the focus group discussion tie directly to positive aspects of cultural values; in prevention programming, cultural values are relevant to design in light of the fact that teens want small group size and groups separated by gender, as they feel such separation would be more conducive to discussion, learning, and sharing, minimizing barriers related to gossip or negative responses from peers. It could be possible that teens prefer a more intimate setting to garner support from peers that could otherwise be

provided by family thus creating a sense of familismo, however, family was not viewed as a viable source of support. As a result, a recommendation to consider for future program design would be to incorporate positive traits of machismo (e.g., protection, providing, support) into curriculum in order to help teens differentiate negative aspects of machismo that carry relevance for dating violence versus positive aspects that protect against dating violence. Incorporating machismo as a positive paternalistic trait may be received positively across all cultures, and does not have to be isolated to Mexican American teens alone.

Gender was discussed as a consideration for prevention programs only as a means of separating groups for the purposes of in-depth discussion. Both boys and girls indicated that a larger class would be better for broader topics (e.g., healthy relationships) and smaller groups should be separated by gender to allow for the sharing of personal experiences or opinions on dating violence. Teens felt that the separation of gender would be helpful to know what other teens are experiencing for a sense of support, knowing that one is not alone if they are currently experiencing partner violence. Teens expressed that combining boys and girls into a larger classroom setting for exploration of more sensitive topics would not be conducive to active participation and discussion, but would instead allow room for ridicule or negative experiences.

The depth to which culture was discussed with this sample of teens may be affected by several factors. First, the urban southwest area in which this study took place was undergoing strict reform in immigration and what constitutes citizenship during the time of recruitment and conducting of focus groups. For many teens, it could be possible that identifying as Mexican or

Mexican American carried a negative connotation. In focus group discussions, many teens could have attempted to deviate from values associated with their culture-of-origin to blend into the larger societal value of strict immigration reform and law enforcement. Secondly, adolescence is a period in which teens see their peer relationships as the most satisfying in their lives (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987) and thus may attempt to maintain those relationships by sharing a group identity versus a separate identity such as through cultural differences. Lastly, a task of adolescence is to separate from the family and explore peer relationships and individual identity, which could mean that teens may be unable or unwilling to adhere to the values or traits derived from their family and culture-of-origin. This inability of the Mexican American teens in this sample to differentiate one's culture-of-origin from other cultures, suggests that homogeneous communities may have a role in the ability to identify specific cultural needs or influences, perceiving their community as a norm that can apply to all cultural groups. This may be particularly true if teens have not had significant exposure to other cultures.

Regarding program development, teens discussed theater and roleplay as possibilities for the structure of a prevention program. Theater programs presented to youth have been determined to assist youth in managing emotions and life situations (Larson & Brown, 2007), as well as a means of social support. Theater and improvisational theater have been found to work effectively with inner-city youth in relation to violence prevention (Kisiel, Blaustein, Spinazzola, Schmidt, Zucker, & van der Kolk, 2007). Teens in this sample specified that roleplays should be limited to real-life, antagonistic scenarios in which observing teens would be encouraged to formulate their own opinions and possible

reactions, much like the *Safe Dates* program that teaches youth about dating violence through the use of theatrical productions (Foshee et al., 2004). The suggestion of an interactive program with roleplay scenarios may have been particularly relevant to this sample as several groups were recruited from an area high school that incorporates the Teen Interactive Theater Education (TITE) program into elective course curriculum. The TITE program is a theater-based program designed to decrease negative and delinquent behaviors, and has been delivered to over 200 youth, 63% of which self-identify as Hispanic (McDonald, Williams, & Carter, 2011). TITE is a program grounded in experiential learning, allowing teens to create scenarios that teach each other how to avoid risky behaviors and encourages them to select topics relevant to their community. As noted by Wolfe and Jaffe (1999), dating violence prevention programs often incorporate theater and are generally viewed positively by youth.

Teens indicated that having an incentive would increase their desire to participate in a dating violence prevention program. Incentive may have been suggested by teens as minority teens do not typically participate in help-seeking behaviors (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). Teens in this sample indicated that help-seeking is difficult. One reason they were reluctant to view their parents as a source of support is because they felt parents would see them as culpable rather than as a victim or assisting a friend. A reason for not seeking outside help for a friend was due to fear that the friend would not be receptive to assistance and feel betrayed. There did not appear to be a gender difference in this study around help seeking as has been found in previous research (Ashley & Foshee, 2005) but the teens' reluctance to seek services after victimization is consistent with other studies on Hispanic samples (Sorenson & Siegel, 1992). Another possible

reason for desiring an incentive for participation is the stigma associated with a dating violence prevention program. Focus group participants indicated that fear and stigma are barriers to participation; fear of creating possible conflict with a current or potential dating partner and stigma from peers knowing you are seeking assistance.

Having peer involvement was mixed. It was generally viewed as positive, for the social support it offered, but it was also viewed as potentially detrimental. Teens discussed that knowing the attendees to a program or class was beneficial in that it would allow them the comfort to speak freely, without fear of judgment. However, in this study, teens also said peer presence may hinder discussion—particularly when couples are involved—and cause problems for youth outside of the program setting. The lack of anonymity was seen as a potential barrier to participation, leading to problems with friends and romantic partners. Research has indicated that peers may also have a negative influence on the adoption of positive messages delivered through prevention programs as teens participating in negative behaviors such as violence may only promote and normalize such behaviors (Poulin, Dishion, & Burraston, 2001).

Understanding the influence of peers in prevention program design is essential, particularly through adolescence, as delinquent behaviors modeled by the peer group can factor into perpetration of violent behaviors. As suggested by teens in this sample, group size may temper some of those negative effects. Group size is a significant variable that effects participation, interaction, and satisfaction (Thomas & Fink, 1963). Though there may be some consequences of working with adolescents in groups, it can be a valuable tool to helping reduce risk in the lives of teens (Malekoff, 2004). Teens in this sample noted the size of

focus groups (4-6) was conducive to discussion. In the future, social workers designing dating violence prevention programs may want to consider the benefits of small breakaway groups to promote active participation from attendees.

Implications of Research

The teens in this sample discussed culture not as it pertains to their need for cultural competency in prevention program design, but how it can be used to unite different cultural groups; opening a dialog to assist teens in understanding that dating violence is not isolated to a specific gender or culture, but that it is a negative experience that occurs across all groups. Teens expressed a need for a broad curriculum that allows them to learn about what constitutes a healthy relationship and a healthy future (e.g., career options), as well as a need to participate in the process of program delivery, such as through roleplay and open debate. Several logistical considerations were discussed, such as peer involvement, the age of participants, group size, and couples involvement. The age of participants has been considered in prevention research as a useful variable in effective program design. For social workers involved in prevention program design, the ways in which the participant age may factor into participation with Mexican American teens should be explored in order to reach youth most effectively.

Understanding the intimate relationships of Mexican American youth is invaluable to social work practice as it is a rapidly growing population, particularly in the Southwest. It is imperative that social workers understand the effects of acculturation on the attitudes and perceptions of Mexican American teens—not to create a separate and specialized curriculum but to instead offer a broader education that can apply to their individual experiences as teen racial/ethnic

minorities and benefit their quality of life through prevention education. Offering a prevention program founded in Mexican American culture to teens without regard to acculturation status and gender may only alienate youth from participation, as traditional values may not apply to individual experiences and perceptions of culture (Ulloa et al., 2008). Although current research literature on teen dating violence is significant and informative, little is understood as to how Mexican American teens' participation in prevention programs may be influenced by their level of acculturation. This study is relevant to policy as it informs social workers how to work with the Mexican American teen population to minimize long-term risk that may carry societal implications such as incarceration for partner violence. Social workers are also in the position to advocate for the allocation of funds needed to implement social services that assist youth in crisis.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that may need to be addressed in the future. First, the ARSMA had to be modified and adjusted for the teens in this sample due to the skewness in the data that resulted from a more acculturated sample (e.g., mean of 1 rather than 0). This limitation came as a result of the MATR team's inability to actively recruit in high schools that have English as Second Language (ESL) classes due to the vulnerability of the population in the anti-immigration social and political climate at the time of recruitment. Secondly, the teens in this sample were primarily from an urban setting and from public schools which affects the generalizability of the findings. Also affecting generalizability is the small sample size. As discussed, the social and political climate occurring in the larger environment at the time of recruitment carried a heavy anti-immigrant sentiment, which may have affected the teens'

willingness to address and discuss at length any needs specific to Mexican culture in a group setting.

Further limiting this study is the manner in which questions were posed to the teen focus groups. Culture, cultural needs, and cultural differences are not often easily identified by teens, as the primary goal in this stage of development is marked by an exploration and questioning of self-identity. For the purposes of this study, teens were specifically asked to describe their cultural needs, which may have been approached differently had the study concentrated on cultural identity and the adolescents' experiences of culture and acculturation. By asking teens to respond to questions targeting their cultural needs in the context of dating violence, they may have felt the need to target the factor of individual choice as a means of protecting their cultural values and perceptions.

Conclusion

Social workers must take acculturation status and gender into consideration when constructing dating violence prevention programs that work with Mexican American teens. The teens in this sample made significant references to cultural need that may not be factors when implementing a program for adolescents from other cultural backgrounds. Though not explicitly stated, themes touched on cultural values that should be incorporated into prevention curriculum regarding healthy romantic relationship behaviors. Other factors such as participant age, group size, and incentive should also be taken into consideration. Teens suggested that prevention education earlier in adolescence could make for positive long-term outcomes and group size should be minimal when discussing topics that may elicit personal sharing; incentive may not be a significant consideration as much as understanding barriers to

participation such as stigma and fear of judgment from peers. Acculturation and its effects on self-identity for Mexican American teens carries great meaning as it affects perceptions across the lifespan and throughout various systems of interaction.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS ANALYZED IN THE PRESENT STUDY:

- 1.) If it were offered, would you be interested in taking a class or participating in a program about dating violence in relationships?

Probe: What would encourage you to participate?

Probe: What would stop or prevent you from participating?

- 2.) Would Mexican American teens need dating violence prevention education different from teens of other races/ethnicities?

Probe: How would it need to be different for Mexican American teens?

- 3.) As a Mexican American teen, what would be important for us to include in a program?

Probe: Are there any values or beliefs from the culture that are important to you?

APPENDIX B
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ASSURANCE



To: Lela Williams
411 N. Cen

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh Full Board

Date: 09/27/2010

Committee Action: Renewal

IRB Action Date 09/27/2010

Renewal Date 09/27/2010

IRB Protocol # 0910004444

Study Title Mexican American Teen Relationships (MATR) Study

Expiration Date 09/16/2011

The above-referenced protocol was given renewed approval following full board review by the Soc Beh Full Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Committee. Failure to renew your study before the expiration date will result in termination of the study and suspension of related research grants.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh Full Board immediately. If necessary a member of the Committee will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh Full Board. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Table 1

Sample Demographics

| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------------|------------------|----------|-----------|
| Sex | | | |
| Male | 37.93% | | |
| Female | 62.07% | | |
| Age | | 16.21 | (.73) |
| 15 | 17.24% | | |
| 16 | 44.83% | | |
| 17 | 37.93% | | |
| Grade | | 10.69 | (.85) |
| 9 th | 6.90% | | |
| 10 th | 34.50% | | |
| 11 th | 41.38% | | |
| 12 th | 17.24% | | |
| US Born | | | |
| Teen | 65.52% | | |
| Mother | 31.03% | | |
| Father | 20.69% | | |

Table 2

Machismo and Familismo Score Means

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Machismo (total sample) | 2.41 | (.62) |
| Boys | 2.62 | (.64) |
| Girls | 2.28 | (.58) |
| Low Acculturated | 2.50 | (.50) |
| Boys | 2.06 | (1.00) |
| Girls | 2.63 | (.28) |
| Bicultural | 2.12 | (.49) |
| Boys | 2.45 | (.28) |
| Girls | 2.09 | (.13) |
| High Acculturated | 2.38 | (.85) |
| Boys | 3.35 | (.42) |
| Girls | 2.05 | (.69) |
| Familismo (total sample) | 3.27 | (.70) |
| Boys | 3.48 | (.64) |
| Girls | 3.15 | (.70) |
| Low Acculturated | 3.26 | (.79) |
| Boys | 3.08 | (.12) |
| Girls | 3.31 | (.90) |
| Bicultural | 3.56 | (.56) |
| Boys | 3.68 | (.60) |
| Girls | 3.21 | (.18) |
| High Acculturated | 3.10 | (.67) |
| Boys | 3.36 | (.91) |
| Girls | 3.02 | (.62) |