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15

Mexican-American Experience with Alcohol South Texas Examples

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The Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas provides a fascinatingly complex research site for the anthropological investigation of alcohol-related behavior. The area is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multilingual. It supports a complex mixture of urban and rural life-styles.

Three major cultural systems predominate in the Valley. These include the Mexican National cultural system, which is the dominant cultural system on the Mexico side of the border, south of the Rio Grande River. More precisely, it is the border expression of Mexican National culture and differs in some ways from the expression of that culture in the interior. The other two cultural systems, the Mexican-American and Anglo-American cultures, are on the United States side of the border. They too are influenced by the border dynamics of the region and differ from the non-border expressions of each system.

Each major cultural system has multiple divisions, which separate the ethnic and cultural groupings into more homogeneous belief and behavioral patterns. I call these groupings life-style subdivisions. These divisions are created by economic, occupational, linguistic, and educa-

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*Ex: The American Experience
w/ Alcohol Ed. by Linda Bennett
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tional patternings. They combine class with cultural ecological and linguistic variables to create a series of divisions that reflect more accurately the cultural reality than more commonly used social science divisions of class, caste, and socioeconomic status.

The existence of these divisions has both practical and theoretical implications for the alcohol field. Cultural differences are directly related to differences in the accepted levels of consumption of alcohol, type of behavior associated with drinking, differences in drunken comportment, and the whole area of alcohol consumption. Since all successful models of alcoholism treatment depend on communication and on the values and attitudes toward alcohol that are built into cultural and subcultural systems, these divisions are also important in setting up appropriate therapeutic systems for the individuals who follow these life-styles.

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REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The research for this chapter focused on the Mexican-American cultural system. Mexican-Americans make up approximately 80% of the more than one-half million people living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The remaining 20% are predominantly Anglo-American, with less than 0.5% of the population black, Native American, or Asian. The area contains the two poorest standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) in the United States, based on *per capita* income. Over 50% of the resident households fall below the federal poverty level. The area is the home base for an estimated 180,000 Mexican-American migrant and seasonal farm workers. It is also a seasonal in-migration area for approximately 100,000 winter residents, most of whom are elderly Anglo-Americans from the midwestern United States, and Canada.

Mexican-Americans in the Valley can be heuristically divided into six life-style groups, based on a combination of income, cultural-ecological, and linguistic variables. Two groups—the migrants and the non-migrant poor—make up the poorest elements of the Valley life-style subdivisions. Both groups engage in seasonal and periodic employment, primarily in agriculturally related occupations, or as unskilled labor. Linguistically both groups tend to be Spanish dominant and often have very limited or no English proficiency.

Nearly all the most recent Mexican National immigrants fall within these groups, especially among the non-migrant poor. The bulk of both groups are second-, third-, fourth-generation or more native U. S. citizens. Educational levels tend to be below fifth grade for older persons and below eighth grade for younger persons.

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201
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People and household units move back and forth between migrant and non-migrant groups on either a permanent or temporary basis. Both groups tend to live in *colonias* or in *barrios*. Colonias are small rural communities that are unincorporated, lack most utilities (e.g., potable water, drainage, trash disposal), but the land there is cheap enough so that a resident can own his own lot and build a house on it. The houses are often built in stages that reflect the economic success of the owner. Barrios are neighborhoods within the incorporated urban centers in the Valley, which are predominantly low-income areas, although some have achieved middle-class status due to the widespread success of barrio residents. In both one often sees homes that differ significantly from others in size and in quality of construction. This reflects a greater level of success for the household, compared with the others. It also reflects a cultural value of remaining in the colonia or barrio, rather than following the middle-class pattern of suburban flight for the upwardly mobile. Adherence to this value has important implications for the development of leadership and influence networks in the region.

The major differences between the two groups are due to cultural-ecological factors. The migrants engage in an annual migratory cycle that takes them away from the Valley for 3- to 9-month periods, whereas the non-migrants remain in the Valley doing seasonal labor. The agricultural specialization and the location of work tend to determine the length of time spent outside the Valley. However, after a short (1- to 3-year) adjustment period, most migrants follow a firmly established migratory cycle. They develop personal relationships with growers and return year after year to the same crops, farms, or areas. This establishes a life-style that is analogous to the migratory cycles of nomadic groups in other areas of the world. Included in this life-style is the clear belief that the lower Rio Grande Valley is home, a permanent residence from which they temporarily move periodically. In addition, groups working in specific "upstream" locations tend to be members of the same extended family and/or residence networks. Thus many of the social patterns and networks that bind the migrants together when they are at home remain in force when they are upstream. These consistencies in life-style, networks, and life experiences create an identifiable social group. The non-migrant poor overlap somewhat in networks with the migrant, but not in out-of-Valley work experience or life-style.

The third group of Mexican-Americans in the Valley can be labeled the working class or the stable poor.¹ These are individuals whose earn-

¹ I am indebted to Dr. David Alvarez, Professor of Sociology, Pan American University, for pointing out the separate life-style subdivisions of this group in the Valley when I

ings fall within or just above poverty level incomes, but who have stable, permanent, year-round jobs. Their occupations include such semi-skilled jobs as janitors, hospital aids, and orderlies, some agricultural jobs (such as grove care personnel), and some jobs in the light manufacturing industries that have recently moved into the Valley. Linguistically this group, like the former two, tends to be Spanish dominant, but generally has a somewhat greater proficiency in English. Educational levels are higher, with most having between an eighth grade and a high school graduate level of attainment. The key to these individuals' improved social and economic position within their communities is the steady nature of their employment, rather than their higher income levels. Many migrant families earn more during the season than do working-class families. The stable poor, however, have incomes that are relatively immune to seasonal fluctuation or weather conditions that can cause a disastrous year for both the migrant and non-migrant groups. This stability of income allows for better planning, establishment of credit (however minimal), and a permanent residence. Thus their children can complete their schooling uninterrupted. This has implications for upward mobility. A Chicano scholar pointed out that of the three groups this is the only one in which individuals have realistic aspirations for upward social mobility in succeeding generations.² The Garcia family is one such family. The father works in a local *bodega*, or packing shed. All eleven of his children are completing or have completed high school; two are registered nurses, one is a licensed vocational nurse working on her R. N. degree, another is a dental assistant, and two are housewives; one child is still in high school, another in college, and so on. All are achieving, or have achieved, a middle-class life-style. This is primarily due to the stable employment of the father. As can be seen this group maintains a strong positive orientation to education and generally has more prestige, as a family unit, within the local social system than the other two groups, even though many of the households are found within the urban barrios. Few reside in the colonias.

The next subdivision is the middle class. This is perhaps the most heterogeneous of all the subdivisions within the community. Unlike other areas in the United States, the middle class in the Valley is difficult to designate upper or lower middle class because of an overall compression of the upper income groups, due to its recent, rapid growth. The recent genesis of this middle class does not permit subtle distinctions based on occupation, education, or residence. This group is linguistically

asked him to review this particular typology of Mexican American subgroupings.

² Dr. David Alvarez, personal communication, November 26, 1982.

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heterogeneous, including households and individuals who are Spanish dominant, others who are completely bilingual, and still others who are English dominant, with extremely limited proficiency in Spanish. Education levels are generally at the high school graduate level and above, including a significantly growing number of individuals with advanced and professional degrees. Although Valley towns were segregated during the pre- and the immediately post-World War II era, there are virtually no census tracts that are not at least 50% Mexican-American. This holds from the poorest to the wealthiest. The middle class does not live in the barrios, but instead resides in more loosely organized neighborhoods, or housing tracts, which are virtually indistinguishable from suburban neighborhoods elsewhere in the United States. Many Valley communities are becoming increasingly suburban, without even having been distinctly urban.

Like the first two groups, the middle class can be viewed as consisting of two life-styles, one urban, the other "kickers" or *los rancheros*. Kickers are individuals who are involved in the South Texas ranching complex. The word, derived from the pejorative label *shit kickers*, are easily visible due to their Western style dress, pickup trucks, Country Western and Tex-Mex music, and involvement with ranching. This particular group is especially interesting in respect to alcohol, since it is strongly oriented to and, at times, organized around alcohol consumption, especially beer.

The final group is variously described as "the old families" or "the rich." The Valley was first settled by the Escandon expedition of 1750, and some families in the area have maintained their land and/or their wealth for many generations. These families are active in local and regional politics and form a small but significant elite of ranchers and owners of citrus and commercial farms. Their children are frequently lawyers or physicians, or enter similar professions. They are bilingual, and a significant number of the families have retained ties, including land holdings, in Mexico. Some also include extended family networks whose members are prominent in regional politics in Mexico. As with many elite groups, the families are relatively inconspicuous in the community, except within their own social network. They influence all the life-style groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluations presented in this chapter result from data collected during longitudinal research contact in the field. I have been living,

ROBERT T. TROTTER II

working, and doing research at the same field site continuously for the past 10 years. This allows for the development of a much more complex methodological structure than short-term research.

My approach, called "spiral methodology," begins with extensive ethnography that provides the descriptive base for a valid research spiral. This stage is followed by "focused ethnographies." These are studies of specific problem or content areas within the overall cultural system. Focused ethnographies are intensive investigations of narrow subject areas that allow a part of the total system to be described and analyzed, but always within the context of the overall frame created by earlier research. They provide the structure and the variables for the next stage, which is generally some form of survey. Surveys test validity, reliability, and distribution of variables across the broader cultural groups being studied. This is particularly important in the complex societies being investigated here. The survey results can then be taken back to the community for commentary, discussion, and even debate or rejection. The community reaction to the survey focuses on further ethnographic exploration, and further refines typologies and concepts. This initiates a second loop of the spiral—toward more specific, yet broader coverage.

The outcome of this process is an accurate, detailed ethnography coupled with methodologically sound generalizations across a complex, heterogeneous, social system. This approach is being followed with the research on alcohol use in the lower Rio Grande Valley, although because of the nature of the approach, it is by no means complete.

To date the general ethnography of the region has been pursued for over 10 years. One ethnography has focused on alcohol-related behaviors in the conventional health care system, on the folk medical system (and on the *curandero's* treatment of alcohol-related problems in particular), and on bar behavior, primarily in predominant "kicker bars." Surveys of alcohol use and abuse have been conducted on the college population (Trotter, 1982) and on a general population in one city (Maril & Zavelta, 1979). An ethnography of migrant drug, just completed, is complemented by a survey of migrant college students.

Material has been drawn from all such sources and summarized as trends and tendencies within or across the life-style groups presented above for this chapter. This summary should be taken as a broad-brush approach, presenting normative patterns while omitting some important elements of variation within and between some of the subgroups. The spiral methodology is excellent for balancing normative and variational data, but only when it has been carried out to a degree that does not yet exist for the Valley for alcohol-related data.

see 14
page 14



OVERVIEW OF DRINKING PATTERNS

The general thrust of the research completed thus far has been to determine culturally normative drinking patterns, to discover emic views of and values toward alcohol use and abuse, and to make recommendations about the development of culturally appropriate treatment of alcohol-related problems. However before those subjects can be covered, one of the persistent Anglo myths about Mexican-American drinking needs to be reevaluated. This is the myth of the poor Mexican male who instead of buying food and clothing for his children goes out, and because of uncontrolled machismo, buys drinks for his equally profligate friends. Some of the roots of this stereotype can be seen in the ethical perspective of the temperance movement described in an earlier chapter by Genevieve Ames. This is compounded by the fact that many of the Mexican-American males' preferred drinking locations in the Valley are publicly visible, as opposed to the more culturally "hidden" drinking of Anglos, which takes place within the home. The resulting stereotype of Mexican-Americans is that they are frequent, heavy, often boisterous and abusive drinkers. Included in the stereotype is an assumption that alcohol abuse and alcoholism must be rampant, especially among the poor. The stereotype is not supported by the data collected in the Valley. In fact, as will be shown below, Mexican-Americans as a group tend to be more conservative in their drinking patterns than are Anglos in the same environment.

← add to males

The most significant finding about Mexican-American drinking patterns is the persistent differences in sex roles relative to alcohol consumption. Two surveys (Maril & Zavaleta, 1979; Trotter, 1982), as well as the ethnographic data, confirm that there are significant differences in the amount and type of alcoholic beverages consumed by Mexican-American males and females, as well as differences in preferred drinking locations, the social context of drinking, drinking patterns, and attitudes toward drunkenness.

The data point to a general conservatism among Mexican-Americans, *vis-à-vis* drinking. The percentage of the male population of drinkers is the same, or slightly lower than males in the United States as a whole. One study (Trotter, 1982) indicated a tendency for Mexican-American males and females both to have their first drink, and to begin drinking on a regular basis, approximately a year or more later than their Anglo-American counterparts.

The percentage of drinkers among the female population is considerably less than among women in the United States as a whole. Not

surprisingly, there are stronger sanctions against women drinking than there are against males. The data also indicate that although Mexican-American males, as a group, engage in more drinking episodes per unit of time than do their Anglo contemporaries, they drink less per occasion, so the total amount of alcohol consumed by both groups is about the same. Mexican-American females however participate in significantly fewer drinking occasions than do Anglo females. They also consume fewer drinks on those occasions. In the Valley, both Mexican-American and Anglo females drink less often and consume less alcohol per occasion than do their male counterparts. In fact, in terms of individuals who drink, more than one-third of the Mexican-American females questioned did not drink at all (Trotter, 1982).

The ethnographic research indicates that the use of alcohol by women is constrained by group pressures revolving around the twin concepts of virtue and respect. An individual, particularly a female, can "demonstrate" a lack of virtue through the inappropriate use of alcohol in the community. Inappropriate use of alcohol by either sex also demonstrates a lack of respect for family and family members, and especially for parents. Both of these conditions act to impose social controls on drinking in the small, tightly knit communities and in the extended family systems that predominate in the Valley.

The situation of women, relative to drinking behavior, is especially crucial to the use of culturally shaped social roles as an explanation of behavior. A significant number of Mexican-American women in the Valley are part of a "protective environment." The "protection," in this case, refers not only to strong negative sanctions against drinking, but also to restrictions on other behavior that would facilitate the individual's access to places where drinking might occur. Thus, it is not surprising that Mexican-American females tend to be the most conservative group in the Valley in drinking behavior.

In addition to lower levels of alcohol consumption, the role differentiation between males and females in the Valley also leads to different preferences in drinking settings and the choice of drinking companions. Both males and females tend to drink more frequently outside the home than in it, and this is especially true for young people. Unmarried children who smoke or drink in front of parents are often thought to be extremely disrespectful, and to shame their family. There are few social pressures on drinking at friends' houses or in public drinking establishments. For males, there is a strong positive sanction for drinking with members of the same sex, which may act as a "pull" factor for drinking outside the home, complementing the "push" factor of disrespect. For

females, the choice of drinking scene is more limited. Both can drink at friends' homes or in public establishments, but for females there is a restriction in terms of which public establishments are acceptable and which are not. Generally, as one informant put it, it is acceptable for a female to drink in a public establishment as long as the major reason for people being there is to dance. But a girl can easily "lose her reputation" by being seen drinking in a bar. A bar is any establishment where the primary purpose is drinking, even if it has a dance floor. Male and female role differences not only influence drinking, but also the choice of drinking companions. There is a strong tendency for Mexican-American males to drink most frequently with other males, unless they are engaged in courtship or family celebrations. For example, in one survey (Trotter, 1982, p. 319), nearly two-thirds of the Mexican-American males stated that they most frequently drank with small or large groups of the same sex. This compares to less than one-fourth of the Mexican-American females stating that they most frequently drank with individuals or groups of the same sex. These data suggest that female drinking patterns are primarily associated with or even partially depend upon relationships with the opposite sex, whereas those of males more closely depend upon relationships with friends of the same sex.

Overwhelmingly, Mexican-American males tend to drink beer, with hard liquor second, and wine a distant third. Women, on the other hand, strongly prefer mixed drinks or wine rather than beer. Beer is considered a non-feminine drink, as well as a less reputable drink (one informant said only bar women should drink beer). Males tend to drink in social settings (bars, friends' homes) and with individuals (male friends) that would encourage the consumption of beer because of its lower cost and its association with masculine images. Televised sport events, regular bar associations, along with a special social occasion called the *pachanga*, provide important male focal points for drinking in the Valley.

Pachangas are a special drinking scene in the Valley. They are generally all male secular rituals that occur periodically within Mexican-American male networks in the Valley. When asked to define a *pachanga*, one informant said "That's easy. The definition is meat, beer, and politics." *Pachangas* are drinking scenes in which a group of males with close familial, friendship, and political ties get together for a barbecue, generally with quantities of meat and beer. The men stand or sit outside around the grill, occasionally grabbing bits of meat with the tortillas provided for that purpose, and drink beer. Most *pachangas* function to reinforce existing social ties and simultaneously serve as a focal point for political, business, or social strategy sessions, depending on the

composition of the group. Among middle-class people, there has been some effort to include females in the *pachangas*, but most attempts have failed. The existing social setting in which barbecue and beer coexist with women's participation are familial parties or celebrations; the function of the gathering is different, and in many cases, there is a mild to strong sanction against women drinking. Therefore, the conflicting role models for *pachangas* (unlimited male beer drinking) and familial parties (limited female drinking) have not made mixed-sex *pachangas* comfortable.

Females, however, tend to drink in settings and with drinking companions that favor the consumption of mixed drinks and include the presence of male companions, either family members or dates. This helps maintain sanctions for low levels of consumption. It creates the interesting condition within the broad cultural system of making female drinking and the control of drunken comportment dependent upon cross-sexual role patterns, while making male drinking and drunken comportment dependent upon same-sex models.

In the Valley, males are generally given significantly more license in drunken comportment than are females. There are strong sanctions against female drunkenness; drunk females tend to attempt to mimic sobriety in their drunken comportment. The exceptions to this are females who have accepted a deviant role, occasional all-female situations where the absence of males allows a different, frequently humorous expression of drunkenness, and occasional family parties where stressful situations (accident, death, etc.) are used to excuse a rare bout of inebriation for an adult female.

Male drunken comportment, on the other hand, does not change according to the sex of the participants in the drinking scene and is used in some situations to express aggression (mostly verbal, but occasionally physical) that could not otherwise be expressed in a social context. Males can normally be confident that behavior that would be socially unacceptable when they are sober will be excused when they are drunk. Many times you hear someone describing the socially negative things a male said or did, excusing and absolving the person by saying "but, *pobrecito*, he was drunk and didn't know what he was doing." A woman's behavior in a similar circumstances is much more likely to be castigated than absolved.

This overview of drinking behavior and drunken comportment indicates that significant differences exist between the sexes. These can be viewed as role responses to the values of respect and modesty within the culture. Another convention should be added to the above. Very

few young Mexican-Americans drink in public in front of their parents. To do so is to show extreme disrespect for both parents and family; it constitutes a public flouting of parental authority. To be drunk in front of them would be improper in the extreme.

Females virtually never drink in front of their parents, regardless of marital status, having children of their own, or any other indicator of adult status. Males, if invited to do so by their fathers, are sometimes given freedom to drink with parents after they are married and have children of their own. However individuals of both sexes refrain from drinking in front of their parents, at least in mixed-sex groups, all their lives.

MIGRANT AND NON-MIGRANT POOR

As summarized earlier, the migrant or non-migrant poor person is normally only minimally bilingual/bicultural. Hispanic values for drinking predominate. Several authors have pointed out that this group has the most sexually dimorphic drinking patterns within the cultural system (Meril & Zavaleta, 1979; Paine, 1977). Both men and women view male drinking as an expression of manliness and maintain strong negative sanctions toward female drinking. However, contrary to some Mexican-American stereotypes, there is little association in this group between deviant behavior and heavy drinking (Johnson & Matre, 1978). This group has the highest level of abstinent females: up to more than 85% not having consumed any alcohol for the past 12 months (Meril & Zavaleta, 1979). Most males drink (over 90%).

Drinking scenes for this group are *cantinas* (inexpensive bars located close to the barrios and virtually exclusively male), *pachangas*, and dances. Drinking also occurs at family gatherings, although the primary focus of these parties is the social celebration, not the drinking. This contrasts sharply with the middle-class "cocktail party." Celebrations in the barrios are primarily family and fictive kin gatherings having the purpose of social reinforcement of kinship ties. Cocktail parties are more "alcohol focused" and serve primarily a non-kin social function, especially to aid the social advancement of the participants.

The primary alcoholic beverage consumed at all migrant and non-migrant poor functions is beer. The only exception is dances. Drinking is less negatively sanctioned for females at dances. The normal dance is one in which the participants bring their own bottles and buy setups (cups, ices, mixer) from the proprietors of the dance hall. Clear-cut distinctions are made between dance halls and bars. The dance hall

personnel sell beer, wine, and setups, but no hard liquor. Since everyone brings a bottle, it is considered a modified family gathering. The socially relaxed atmosphere gives married women greater license to drink than in their own homes or in their parents' home. This type of setting is also observable at some Christmas parties given by some companies for their employees, as well as at major celebrations (e.g., weddings and *quincianeras*, fifteenth birthday, coming-of-age celebrations).

A major variation in drinking between migrants and the non-migrant poor is seen during the migrant season. Most of the migrants from the Lower Rio Grande Valley participate in the midwestern migrant stream. Some participate in a western migrant stream, and a few in an eastern stream. The nature of the migration patterns causes differences in the migrants' drinking patterns while they are "upstream."

Migrant camps on much of the Eastern Seaboard have historically been singles camps. These camps have barracks-type housing for single males who have been recruited and transported to the harvest site by a crew chief. The crew chief contracts directly with the grower and has considerable authority and control over the laborers. The crew chief often provides all meals for the workers, as well as all beverages. The cost of these essentials are deducted from the migrants' wages and constitute an additional source of income for the crew chief. Since the crew is normally transported in a bus owned by the crew chief, the workers have limited mobility and limited knowledge of the area in which they are working. This factor, combined with the recruitment of single males, the isolation of the camps (local townspeople seldom welcome the migrants), and the control of the crew chiefs, leads to high levels of drinking as recreation.

Migrants in the western stream tend to be the most mobile of the three streams and many travel in family groups. Nearly every family owns a car. The abuses common in the eastern stream are limited by this mobility. The camps tend to be mixed family and singles. Drinking is certainly one recreational activity, but with mobility, other activities are available. The amount of recreational drinking appears to be less than in the eastern stream, but greater than in the midwestern stream.

The midwestern stream is the most conservative, in terms of the levels of drinking as a recreation. Until recent years, the camps have been predominantly family camps. They also tend to be somewhat smaller than either the eastern or the western stream camps. The leaders in the midwestern camps are called *troqueros* (truckers). They own a produce truck, and like the crew chiefs, they develop long-term relationships with one or more growers and contract to bring workers to the fields. Unlike the crew chiefs, the majority of the workers they bring are mem-

bers of their own family, their extended family, or neighbors from their home base. Exploitation of these individuals would be inappropriate and would make life difficult for them when they returned each year to the Valley. It would also make it difficult for them to recruit workers for the next season.

Drinking as recreation in the midwestern stream is also mitigated by the attitudes of the midwestern growers. Many, but not all prohibit drinking in their camps and reinforce this prohibition by expelling individuals who break the rule. Some drinking in the camps is ignored, but there are also instances when the rules are enforced.

In talking with a grower and *troquero* in Michigan, it became obvious that the two of them had cooperated in making their camp a settled, stable environment. The *troquero* had brought along his extended family, plus the unmarried brother of his son's wife. This was the first time the brother had been away from his family. He celebrated his freedom by drinking excessively and becoming increasingly belligerent. On occasion, he refused to work, which increased the workload of the other members of the family. He was joined in his rebellion by one of the nephews of the *troquero*, and the two became a focal point for dissension in the camp. The grower ignored the increasingly visible misbehavior on the grounds that it was the *troquero's* privilege to maintain order in the camp, especially since productivity had not declined. However, the *troquero* was in a situation in which his position was being undermined, and the work was being threatened by dissension. He was exhorted by members of the family to both punish and to ignore and forgive the young men's behavior. His solution was to quietly let the grower know that he would appreciate the enforcement of the no drinking rule. The two young men were sent home at the request of the grower. The *troquero* saved face, since he did not have to throw his nephew and daughter-in-law's brother out of the camp. The grower accepted the role of "heavy," and at the same time allowed the *troquero* to reinforce his position by "saving the whole family from being dismissed." Since the relationship between the grower and the *troquero* had existed for more than 10 years, there was never any intention on either side of letting things get so out of hand that it would be severely damaged.

Ironically, the existence of these family camps and their conservative drinking environment is being threatened by recent legislation designed to improve living conditions for migrants. The laws address much needed improvements in the construction and sanitary facilities available in some migrant camps (not all have poor living conditions). The laws generally have different standards for family camps as opposed to barrack-style, single-sex camps. Each family dwelling must have separate toilet facil-

ities, whereas the barracks can have a single facility if it is adequate for the number of persons in the barracks. The difference in expense has caused a number of growers to switch over to barracks and single-sex camps. This, in turn, has increased the prevalence of drinking as recreation, and its associated problems. For many Mexican-Americans, restrictions against bringing their families along has been a severe dislocation, causing many to shift to new migrant sites. Some have made the change over to all-male camps. However when they return to the Valley, their drinking patterns appear to revert to those of the non-migrant residents of the area.

THE WORKING POOR

The primary condition for membership among the working poor is steady employment. The wages and total income may actually be below that of migrants, or even the non-migrant poor, but the income is predictable. Many of the occupations involve contact with Anglos, hence the group tends to be more bilingual/bicultural than the former two. The steadiness of employment also improves the probability of the children completing their education. Many children of the working poor move into middle-class occupations as a result of their higher educational levels.

The drinking patterns of this group are more age dependent than the former two groups. For individuals who are middle aged, or older, the basic drinking patterns found among the others prevail. For the younger adult and the teenager, drinking patterns have moved toward a more liberal configuration, like that of the middle class described below. More of the young women drink, and they drink in some of the establishments that were proscribed for their mothers. However, the twin values of virtue and respect are still strong and heavily enforced. At least 50 percent of the women in the group are abstinent. The preference for alcoholic beverages is the same as the former two groups.

THE MIDDLE CLASS

The middle class shows the most diverse drinking patterns. The presence of a Mexican-American middle class in the Valley is relatively recent. It began after World War II and has shown explosive growth since the return of the Viet Nam War veterans. Drinking patterns in this group range from the norms described for the groups above to drinking norms that are indistinguishable from national norms.

The least conservative middle-class drinking patterns consist of the

use of alcoholic beverages by both sexes in relatively similar amounts, drinking scenes, and degrees of abstinence or use. As with the working poor, these patterns appear to be linked; the more conservative practices are found in the older age levels of the society. It is not usual to see young females in bars. Although many go in pairs or small groups, with the avowed purpose of dancing, not drinking, their level of alcohol consumption is above that of women at family gatherings or dances. They also participate in some all-female drinking occasions. Some will form all-female groups to go to a bar for a few drinks after work. This latter pattern would be extremely rare or non-existent among all three of the earlier described groups.

There are differences in other parameters of middle-class drinking. Beer is the preferred beverage for males, but liquor, especially some of the prestige liquors (e.g., scotch, bourbon), have greatly increased in popularity. Wine is more frequently consumed than in the groups, especially when people are dining out or having others over for dinner. For women beer does not have the same level of proscription, although it is still considered primarily a male beverage (as in much of the United States). Women tend to drink "light" beers and prestige beers, such as Coors and Michelob.

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In some middle-class homes, unmarried adult children can freely drink with parents without threatening shared values of respect or virtue. However even as the middle class becomes less conservative, the changes are relative. As shown elsewhere (Trotter, 1982), there is still a persistent difference between the sexes in levels of abstinence (about 30% of the females and 10% of the males). These differences also hold for amount of alcohol consumed, settings where drinking is considered proper, and choice of drinking companions. Males still tend to drink with all-male groups more often than with mixed-sex drinking companions. They hold *pachangas* and drink in bars far more often than middle-class women. The women still tend to drink in mixed-sex environments and to be concerned with their reputations, in terms of how much and where they drink. Respect is still a key element in teaching about and controlling drinking and drunkenness in the community.

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THE ELITE

The Valley elite are only now beginning to be studied. From the minimal data available, their drinking patterns appear to be most similar to the more bicultural elements of the middle class. This group belongs to the local Country Clubs, frequents other socially restricted environments, and is rarely visible in the public locations visited by the middle

class. From ethnographic observation, it appears that the preference for type of beverage has significantly shifted from beer, for the males, to liquor and wine for both sexes, at least in publicly visible locations. The *pachanga* is still a key social institution for this group, and there is still a menu of "lots of beer, barbecue, and politics." In fact the *pachanga* appears to be used by this group as a temporary social-leveling mechanism so that politics can be pursued with members of all the other social groups without loss of face or diminution of social status, since everyone at a *pachanga* is "family."

At least in publicly visible environments and at cocktail parties, the elite appear to have virtually no differences in the number of abstainers or the beverages consumed by the two sexes. Women do appear to drink less than their male counterparts. Obviously further research on this group would be useful, since so little has been published.

TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter has presented a general description of some of the normative drinking patterns found in Mexican-American communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The current estimates for the region indicate that the alcoholism rates in the Valley are neither high nor lower than in other areas of the United States. There may be fewer female alcoholics, at least among some of the migrant and non-migrant poor, due to the high levels of abstinence in those groups. Among individuals who drink, alcoholism exists at the same levels as elsewhere.

There is a wealth of anecdotal data on the need for bilingual/bicultural treatment systems for alcoholics. These data are strongly supported by the information collected by the author, as part of an evaluation of a local halfway house program (Trotter, unpublished).

The Midway House program has a success rate of approximately 60%. Success is defined by the staff as permanent abstinence. The program is eclectic, and closer to a truly bilingual/bicultural program than any other the author has seen.

The program is directed at dealing with the realities of language and world view brought into the program by each client. Clients undergo an informal, but rigorous cultural assessment, and their treatment is individually tailored to fit their preferences and orientation. One of the keys to treatment in Midway House is the avoidance of grouping clients. The clients are certainly brought together into functional groups, but the orientation toward individualized treatment keeps these from becoming "groupings." This is a vastly different bicultural approach from

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the ones popular in the late 60s and the 70s, when bicultural counseling was synonymous with cultural sensitivity training and therapy sometimes focused on Aztec art, Chicano poetry, and lectures on the history of discrimination against *Mejicanos* in the United States. In the Midway House model, language, values, and ideals are not something to be taught wholesale, from a single perspective, and then called culturally sensitive therapy. Instead, language, values, and ideals are starting points on a broad cultural spectrum. The world is heterogeneous and knowledge of that spectrum allows the counselor to determine how best to provide an individual client with the unique path for his or her recovery and reentry into society. In the process, a bilingual client may attend both Spanish and English groups, whereas monolingual clients may attend only one. Therapy modalities are mixed, and different options are available, depending on the language abilities and educational backgrounds of clients. Some therapeutic modalities have been created by the staff.

One such modality is the deliberate use of periods of boredom as part of the therapy. The assumption is that life is sometimes boring and that too many programs have people so tightly scheduled that they are on a therapeutic "high" in a program. When these people are occasionally bored in the real world, they cannot cope. The Midway House program deliberately introduces boredom, then teaches mechanisms for coping with it. Midway House also has the only Spanish language Alcoholics Anonymous group that has lasted more than six months. It has been in existence for over six years and is successful because the material has been linguistically modified to match border language and values. The diversity of the program is both a necessary condition and a mirror of the complex cultural environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Its success can be measured by the fact that the rate of success of its clients is identical for both Mexican-Americans and Anglos: The model for cultural intervention in alcoholism is truly bicultural.

The complexity and diversity of norms for drinking that have been presented here should probably be taken as a model for Mexican-Americans and other ethnic groups in the United States. Working with parts of groups may temporarily obscure the heterogeneity, but it quickly resurfaces in most urban environments. The result of this complexity, when alcoholism must be dealt with, leads to the necessity of developing diverse, complex treatment systems. This is counter to the current trend of cost-effective treatment systems that are highly standardized. But as the Midway House example demonstrates, treatment systems must reflect the total cultural complexity of the regions they serve if they are to be successful. And again from the Midway House example, when they

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truly encompass that diversity, they turn out to be more successful than monocultural treatment systems.

SUMMARY

There is a significant heterogeneity within the Mexican-American culture. This diversity is tied to cultural-ecological patterns of subsistence/employment, language orientation, and residence patterns and can be termed life-style subdivisions. This condition is typical of such urban/industrial life-style subdivisions. This condition is typical of such urban/industrial societies as that of the United States; it plays a significant role in our understanding of patterns of alcohol use and abuse. As demonstrated, levels of alcohol use, beverage preference patterns, and drunken comportment are all tied to these life-styles subsets. This diversity makes it necessary to develop complex treatment systems that are reactive to individual cultural patterns and needs of clients, rather than the earlier model of cultural sensitivity training in the guise of alcoholism counseling. As the Midway House model demonstrates, treatment systems must reflect the total cultural complexity of the regions they serve. They must use sensitivity to cultural orientations, but treat alcoholism, not simply promote one vision of cultural awareness. When a treatment system truly encompasses regional cultural diversity, they are apparently more successful than monocultural treatment systems in the same setting.

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