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Friendship and Suicidality among Mexican-American Adolescent Girls and Boys

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Abstract

Friendship factors have been implicated in adolescent suicidality, but this relationship has not been verified across ethnicities. This study examined suicidality and friendship problems (i.e., social isolation, poor friendship quality, friends' school disconnection, and friends' delinquency) among Mexican-American adolescents, an understudied, vulnerable group in terms of suicidality. Three hundred thirty-eight community adolescents, two thirds of whom were educationally-at-risk, participated in the study. Suicidal ideation and behavior rates were high, particularly among girls. Friends' school disconnectedness increased girls' odds for suicidal ideation by 13%. This association was even greater for girls in good academic standing. Friendship problems were not associated with suicidality in boys. Ethnic identity was a minor factor in suicidal ideation, and only for girls. These findings confirm, among Mexican American adolescents, the role of gender in the relationship between friendship and suicidality.

Keywords

Friendship; Suicidal ideation; Suicidal behavior; Gender; Ethnicity

Introduction

The importance of peer relationships increases during adolescence (e.g., DiFilippo & Overholser, 2000; Kidd, Henrich, Brookmeyer, Davidson, King, & Shahar, 2006; Hartup, 1996; Prinstein, Boergers, & Spirito, 2001; Windle, 1994). Peer relationships appear to be particularly influential for girls. Girls place greater importance on peer relationships, report closer peer relationships, and also report more strain from peer relationship problems than boys (e.g., Bradley, Flannagan, & Fuhrman, 2001; Colarossi, 2001; DiFilippo & Overholser, 2000; Kobus & Reyes, 2000; Prinstein, Boergers, Spirito, Little, & Grapentine, 2000; Way, Cowal, Gingold, Pahl, & Bissessar, 2001).

According to theory, relationships are important in suicidality. For example, social integration is typically considered relevant to suicidal behavior, though there is disagreement on whether it is a protective or a risk factor because close relationships can provide support but also stifle individuality and even model self-destructive behavior (King & Merchant, 2008; Kushner & Sterk, 2005). Despite the undisputed significance of relationships in adolescent well-being, relatively few studies have explored the role of peer relationships in adolescent suicidality.

Most studies of adolescent peer relationships and suicidality so far have focused on social isolation, with mixed findings. For example, studies by De Man, Leduc, and Labréche-Gauthier (1992), Prinstein and colleagues (2000), and Hacker, Suglia, Fried, Rappaport, and Cabral (2006) found an association between social isolation and suicidality, whereas studies by Queralto (1993) and Shagle and Barber (1995) did not. According to Prinstein (2003), using social isolation as a measure of peer problems presumes that any friendship is better than none. Having bad friends may however be worse for adolescent well-being than having no friends at all (e.g., Güroğlu, Van Lieshout, Haselager, & Scholte, 2007; Prinstein, Boergers, & Spirito, 2001). Research on the impact of peer relationships on adolescent well-being therefore ought to include measures of the quality of these relationships, not just whether adolescents have peer relationships. Assessing problem behavior (e.g., friends' school connectedness or friends' delinquency) in individuals whom adolescents identify as friends is also important. One of the best predictors of adolescent problem behaviors is peers' engagement in such behaviors (Prinstein, Boergers, & Spirito, 2001). In other words, multiple measures of friendship, including measures of friendship quality as well as measures of friends' engagement with deviant behavior, are essential to evaluate the role of friendship problems in adolescent suicidality.

A few studies have examined the relationship between different kinds of friendship problems and suicidality. One study of predominantly (73%) European-American inpatient adolescents documented a relationship between suicidal ideation and lack of friendship support, low perceived peer acceptance, high perceived peer rejection, and affiliation with deviant peers (Prinstein et al., 2000). Similarly, a study of European-American high school students reported that nonfatal suicidal behavior was associated with insufficient reciprocal support, overt hostility, covert hostility, and inadequate mutual self-disclosure in peer relationships (Windle, 1994). A study of ethnically diverse (37% Latina/o; 35% Black; 22% White) urban, sexual minority youth also found nonfatal suicidal behavior to be related to limited peer support and negative peer relationships (e.g., being treated poorly, being ignored, and being manipulated by others; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2005). Finally, a study of predominantly (83%) European-American inpatient adolescents noted that the relationship between peer support and suicidal ideation was different in girls and boys (Kerr, Preuss, & King, 2006).

The most extensive study of friendships and adolescent suicidality used a nationally representative sample of 13,465 adolescents in grades 7 through 12, and a longitudinal design. It explored the relationship between adolescent suicidality and several friendship problems, including social isolation and intransitivity of friendships (that is, when an individual's friends are not friends with each other), with patterns of risk being examined separately for girls and boys. Social isolation and intransitive friendships were both associated with suicidal ideation in girls but not in boys. Also, in girls, the relationship between social isolation, intransitive friendships, and suicidality was stronger than other known correlates of suicidality (e.g., depression), suggesting that friendship problems may be particularly influential in girls' suicidality (Bearman & Moody, 2004).

Research on adolescent friendship and suicidality has registered significant methodological development, including attention to multiple friendship domains and separate examination of female and male patterns. A major limitation of past research however is its focus on European-American samples. Furthermore, studies that included ethnic minorities (e.g., Bearman & Moody, 2004; Rosario et al., 2005) did not examine trends by ethnicity. Rates of youth suicidality, however, vary by ethnicity with potentially different suicidality pathways for different ethnic groups.

Latina/o youth are an ethnic minority group of particular interest with regard to suicidality and friendships. They have higher rates of suicidal ideation and nonfatal suicidal behavior than non-Latina/o youth (Eaton, Kann, Kinchen, Ross, Hawkins, Harris, et al., 2006; Locke & Newcomb, 2005; Tortolero & Roberts, 2001; but see Roberts, Roberts, & Xing, 2007, for an exception). Latina adolescents are at particularly high suicidality risk. They report more suicidal ideation and nonfatal behavior (24% and 15%, respectively) than White, non-Latina girls (21.5% and 9%, respectively), Latino boys (12% and 8%, respectively) and White, non-Latino boys (12% and 5%, respectively) (Eaton et al., 2006). With regard to friendships, Latina/o adolescents report stronger friendship bonds, especially among girls and those who are less acculturated. For example, in two recent studies, urban Latina/o youth (age 15 on average) from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds rated their friendships as more affectionate, reliable, and intimate, and their friendship quality higher than similar-background African-American and Asian-American adolescents (Way et al., 2001; Way & Greene, 2006). However, in another study, acculturated working and middle class Mexican-American pre-teens (age 10 on average) did not differ from European-American peers with regard to various friendship characteristics (perceived friendship support, common activities, emotional attachment, and conflict) (Bradley et al., 2001). At the same time, the latter study noted greater gender difference between girls' and boys' emotional attachment among Mexican-American adolescents, compared to European-American youth (girls in both groups reporting more emotional attachment).

An additional limitation of past studies of adolescence and friendship problems (e.g., Bearman & Moody, 2004; Prinstein et al., 2000) is their reliance on school or clinical samples, limiting the generalizability of findings, particularly to Latina/o adolescents. For example, school samples exclude dropouts, the adolescents who are most at risk for a variety of dysfunctional behaviors, including suicidality (Canino & Roberts, 2001). Compared to youth who do not drop out of school, dropouts report lower motivation, association with deviant peers, and feelings of alienation from school (Worrell & Hale, 2001). Additionally, limited educational achievement is a risk factor for adolescent suicidality, whereas positive school experiences are a protective factor (Beautrais, 2003; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 1994; Borowsky et al., 2001; Shagle & Barber, 1995; Thompson, Mazza, Herting, Randell, & Eggert, 2005). Only 53% of Latina/o youth graduate from high school compared to 75% of non-Latina/o White students (Swanson, 2001). Mexican-American youth have the highest dropout rate of any major ethnic group, including other Latina/o youth (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Inspired by the questions raised by past studies, this study examined friendships and suicidality among female and male Mexican-American adolescents, a group with higher rates of suicidality than non-Latina/o youth (Canino & Roberts, 2001). To avoid the limitation of school samples, this study focused on the most at risk students, with one third of its sample being youth who had dropped out of school, and a second third being students at risk for drop out. Based on the findings of previous studies (e.g., Beautrais, 2003; Borowsky et al., 2001; Eaton et al., 2006; Worrell & Hale, 2001), we expected Mexican-American adolescents to report high rates of suicidal ideation and behavior, especially girls and those with school problems. In this study we also included a measure of ethnic identity, for exploratory purposes, because of previous mixed findings on its role in dysfunctional behavior. In some studies a strong ethnic identity protected against the psychosocial precursors of suicidality (e.g., Oetting & Beauvais, 1990; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). By contrast, in a study of predominantly Mexican-American and mixed ancestry adolescents, lower levels of acculturation (as measured by Spanish language preference and having a foreign-born mother) were associated with higher levels of suicidal ideation (Olvera, 2001). Furthermore, a recent study found ethnic identity to be unrelated to suicidality in a sample of economically disadvantaged Latina/o youth residing in an almost

exclusively Latina/o and African-American urban community (O'Donnell, O'Donnell, Wardlaw, & Stueve, 2004). Finally, in this study, patterns of covariates were modeled separately by sex, given past findings that friendship and suicidal behavior patterns differ for girls and boys (Bearman & Moody, 2004). Based on previous studies of friendships and suicidality as well as the literature on the importance of friendships for Mexican-American adolescents, particularly Mexican-American girls, we hypothesized that girls' friendship problems would be associated with suicidal ideation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 338 (55% girls) Mexican-American adolescents from two communities in the Southwest U.S. (populations 90,000 and 350,000). Ethnicity-experts recommend that researchers identify Latino subgroups whenever possible rather than treating Latino participants as if they were all the same (Duarte-Velez & Bernal, 2007). The vast majority of Latino adolescents living in the Southwestern U. S. communities we sampled were Mexican-American (Gibson & Jung, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Therefore we refer to participants in this study as Mexican-American rather than Hispanic or Latina/o. This study's participants ranged in age from 14 to 19 years ($M = 16.51$, $SD = 1.15$). The majority of these adolescents (90%) were born in the United States (U.S.). About two thirds (69%) were educationally-at-risk, either at risk of dropping out (31.4%) or school dropouts (37.2%); the rest (31.4%) were in good academic standing. Most (66%) described their parents' income as "average," with an equal split between participants describing their parents' income as above average (19%) and below average (15%). A majority (76%) of adolescents reported their mother's education as either less than 12 years (36%) or high-school level (40%), with only 24% describing their mother's education as more than 12 years

Measures

Friendship Problems—Were assessed using questions developed by Oetting and Beauvais (1986) based on their adolescent peer relationship theory. To assess social isolation, the question "I do not have a group of friends that I spend time with" was used. Adolescents who endorsed the above statement did not complete the remaining friendship questions.

The remaining friendship questions assessed poor friendship quality (six items), friends' school disconnection (seven items), and friends' delinquency (nine items) (see Table 1). Total Poor Friendship Quality, Friends' School Disconnectedness, and Friends' Delinquency scores were calculated by summing the 4-point Likert responses. Higher scores indicate more friendship problems. In this sample, reliability of the Poor Friendship Quality, Friends' School Disconnectedness, and Friends' Delinquency scales were high ($\alpha = .89, .83$, and $.87$, respectively).

A principle components analysis was conducted on questions assessing poor quality of friendship and friends' school disconnection. Items assessing friends' delinquency were not included because of the dichotomous nature of the questions. A promax rotation was selected and all factors with an Eigenvalue greater than one were retained. Based on this criterion, two factors were extracted. These two factors accounted for 60.05% of the variation among the items. Factor one (Poor Friendship Quality) accounted for 43.49% of variance (Eigenvalue = 5.65) and factor two (Friends' School Disconnectedness) accounted for 16.56% of variance (Eigenvalue = 2.15). The correlation between the two factors was .44. The pattern matrix with scale items and associated factor loadings is presented in Table

1. Correlations between the three friendship subscales ranged from .04 to .47, suggesting that each of the subscales measured distinct, but related, friendship dimensions.

Suicidality—Was assessed using a 4-point rating scale (*1 = a lot, 2 = some, 3 = not much, 4 = not at all*) and the following questions: “In the last 12 months, have you thought about suicide?” and “In the last 12 months, have you attempted suicide?” (Oetting & Beauvais, 1984). These questions are similar to suicidality items in the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) (Eaton et al., 2006). Responses to questions about suicidal ideation and nonfatal suicidal behavior were dichotomized, with participants who endorsed any suicidal ideation or nonfatal suicidal behavior being classified as suicidal.

Ethnic Identity—Was assessed using the Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990-1991). Items assessing Mexican-American ethnic identity measured participation in cultural activities and rituals (e.g., “Does your family live by or follow the Mexican-American or Spanish way of life,” “In the future, with your own family, will you do special things together or have special traditions that are based on Mexican-American or Spanish culture”). Participants responded to the six items using a 4-point rating scale (*1 = a lot, 2 = some, 3 = not much, 4 = not at all*) with higher scores reflecting weaker Mexican-American ethnic identity. Reliability of the scale in this sample of Mexican-American youth was high ($\alpha = .91$). Higher levels of cultural identification using this scale have been positively correlated with self esteem, family support, and school adjustment (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990).

Procedure

Bilingual interviewers contacted adolescents and/or their parents about the study. Participants who were 18 years old signed consent forms themselves; parents of adolescents under 18 were contacted by phone. Consent forms were sent home with students whose parents agreed to their participation. Participation was voluntary and confidential. Participation refusal rates were less than 10%. Adolescents in school were paid \$10 for their participation; adolescents out of school were paid \$20 because of their greater difficulty in participating (e.g., travel costs). Youth in school completed the questionnaires in a private room on campus; youth not in school completed the questionnaires in a quiet public location (e.g., public library).

Questionnaires were available in English and Spanish and bilingual interviewers were present to answer questions. However, none of the participants chose to complete the Spanish version of the questionnaire. Information about participants' sex, age, parents' income, and mother's education was obtained from the participants themselves; information about participants' ethnicity, grade point average, and academic status was gathered from school records. About three percent of the surveys were excluded from analysis because they were incomplete, randomly marked, or considered unreliable due to endorsement of a fake item.

Participants were drawn from two groups: students who were educationally-at-risk (a group that included dropouts and at-risk-of-dropping-out students) and students in good academic standing. Dropouts were youth who had been absent from school for over 30 days and had not enrolled or contacted a school elsewhere. Students at-risk of dropping out were those the school defined as in poor academic standing based on grade point average (GPA). Students in good academic standing were those defined as such by the school based on GPA. Consistent with a yoked control design, the study initially recruited youth who had dropped out of school. Students at-risk of dropping out were selected based on match with the dropouts in terms of high school GPA during the dropouts' last full semester of school, for

the purpose of creating a single “educationally-at-risk” group (Tani, Chavez, & Deffenbacher, 2001). Students at-risk of dropping out and students in good academic standing were also matched with dropouts in terms of ethnicity, grade in school, and sex. This study did not use stratified random sampling over a wide geographic area so findings are potentially confounded by the cultural, educational, and socioeconomic characteristics of this population. Comparisons between groups are relatively unconfounded, however, because matched participants were drawn from the same schools. Cases with missing values on continuous predictors were imputed using the expectation maximization algorithm.

Results

Of the 338 participants, 112 (33%) reported having thought about suicide in the past year, and 51 (15%) reported that they engaged in suicidal behavior in the past year. Girls were more likely to report both suicidal ideation, $\chi^2(1, n = 338) = 6.58, p < .05$, and behavior, $\chi^2(1, n = 336) = 4.48, p < .05$, than boys, though effect sizes were small ($\Phi = .14$ and $.12$, respectively). In all, 39% of girls and 19% of boys reported suicidal ideation; 26% of girls and 11% of boys reported suicidal behavior. For both girls and boys, suicidal ideation was significantly positively associated with nonfatal suicidal behavior, $\chi^2(1, n = 185) = 67.75, p < .01$ for girls and $\chi^2(1, n = 151) = 51.39, p < .01$ for boys. Both effect sizes were large ($\Phi = .61$ for girls and $.58$ for boys). Descriptive information on girls' and boys' suicidal ideation and nonfatal suicidal behavior and friendship problems is in Table 2.

Educational status was not associated with suicidal ideation for girls or boys, nor with suicidal behavior for girls or boys. Mexican-American ethnic identity was associated with girls' suicidal ideation, $\chi^2(1, n = 187) = 6.42, p < .05$, and accounted for 4.6% of the variance. Mexican-American ethnic identity however was not associated with girls' suicidal behavior, boys' suicidal ideation, or boys' suicidal behavior.

The association of poor friendship quality, friends' school disconnectedness, and friends' delinquency was examined using logistic regression. All variables were included in the model. The friendship model was significant for girls' suicidal ideation, $\chi^2(3, n = 169) = 17.46, p < .01$, and accounted for 13.3% of the variance. Friends' school disconnectedness was the only significant predictor within the model (OR, 1.14; 95% C.I. [1.00 – 1.30], $p < .05$). A one-unit increase in friends' school disconnectedness increased the odds of girls' suicidal ideation by 13.4%, or by a factor of 1.14. The friendship model was not significantly associated with boys' suicidal ideation, nonfatal suicidal behavior in girls, or nonfatal suicidal behavior in boys.

In order to better understand these results, girls' suicidal ideation was regressed onto friendship factors by educational status. The friendship model was only associated with suicidal ideation for girls in good academic standing ($\chi^2(3, n = 57) = 13.34, p < .01$) and accounted for 29.3% of the variance. The friendship model was not significantly associated with suicidal ideation for educationally-at-risk girls. Additionally, the friendship model did not predict girls' suicidal behavior or boys' ideation and behavior when analyzed by educational status.

Discussion

Rates of suicidal ideation and nonfatal suicidal behavior (33% and 15%, respectively) in this sample of Mexican-American adolescents were similar to those reported for Latina/o adolescents in the national YRBS study (25% and 13%, respectively; Kann, Warren, Harris, Collins, Williams, Ross, et al., 1996), even though this study recorded a broader range of suicidality (4-point continuum) than the YRBS' study yes/no answers.

Consistent with past studies (e.g., Eaton et al., 2006), Mexican-American girls reported significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation and behavior than Mexican-American boys. Gender socialization factors may play a role. In the U.S., nonfatal suicidal behavior is seen as feminine, weak behavior whereas fatal suicidal behavior is perceived as masculine, strong behavior (see Canetto, 1997, for a review). Gender socialization among Mexican-Americans (e.g., Fortuna, Perez, Canino, Sribney, & Alegria, 2007; Queral, 1993; Zayas & Pilat, 2008) may support the same norms of gender and suicidal behavior, with girls finding it more acceptable than boys to engage in what the dominant culture perceives as feminine coping behavior, such as nonfatal suicidality. It may also be that, due to dominant gender norms, girls are more willing to report suicidal ideation and behavior than boys (Canetto, 1997). Research suggests that among adolescents, boys are more concerned than girls about social disapproval over reporting suicidal thoughts and behavior (Rich, Kirkpatrick-Smith, Bonner, & Jans, 1992). This concern is not surprising considering findings that suicidal persons tend to be viewed negatively, with boys being most unsympathetic toward suicidal boys (Canetto, 1997).

In this study, ethnic identity was not strongly related to suicidality. It was associated only with girls' suicidal ideation (with less suicidal ideation in more Mexican-American identified girls) and accounted for less than 5% of the variance. The weak association of ethnic identity and suicidality is consistent with findings from a study of urban Latina/o and African-American youth residing in an almost exclusively Latina/o and African-American urban community (O'Donnell et al., 2004). A reason for these findings may be that our sample, like O'Donnell and colleagues, was drawn from a primarily ethnic-minority community, where ethnic identity was perhaps not as salient as it might be in other areas. Also, a positive ethnic identity may not be sufficient to protect against suicidality. Past studies found that having a positive ethnic-minority identity did not predict good performance in school; engagement in, or feeling connected with the dominant culture however did (e.g., Oyserman, Kimmelman, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003). A recent study of mostly first-generation, high school Latinas/os in Los Angeles found that acculturation (orientation toward "Anglo" or "Latina/o" culture) was generally unrelated to family conflict and depression (Céspedes & Huey, 2008). Other evidence also indicates that among ethnic minority adolescents, conflict with parents over cultural values, particularly over gender norms, may be a more relevant measure of ethnic orientation, and a more important predictor of distressed behavior than a negative ethnic minority identity, especially for girls (e.g., Céspedes & Huey, 2008; Fortuna et al., 2007; Queral, 1993; Zayas & Pilat, 2008).

Friendship problems, specifically friends' school disconnection, were associated with suicidal ideation in Mexican-American girls, but not in Mexican-American boys, though boys reported more friendship problems. This result is consistent with findings on the greater importance of friendship to adolescent girls, compared to adolescent boys (e.g., Bradley, Flannagan, & Fuhrman, 2001; Colarossi, 2001; DiFilippo & Overholser, 2000; Kobus & Reyes, 2000; Prinstein et al., 2000; Way et al., 2001). Additionally, the impact of friendship problems on suicidality has been found to be greater in girls than in boys (Bearman & Moody, 2004; Watt & Sharp, 2002). When the association between friendship and girls' suicidal ideation was analyzed by academic status, the relationship disappeared for educationally-at-risk girls. Given that most adolescent friendships are school-based (e.g., Way & Greene, 2006), this finding is not surprising. Educationally-at-risk girls likely had fewer friends than girls in good academic standing. Friendship problems might therefore have less impact on educationally-at-risk girls than girls in good academic standing. It may be normative for educationally-at-risk girls to have friends who are disconnected from school.

Surprisingly, friends' school disconnection was the only individual predictor of Mexican-American girls' suicidal ideation. We speculate that having friends who are disconnected from school may be more upsetting for girls perhaps because girls, including Latina girls, feel more engaged with school (e.g., Lupart, Cannon, & Telfer, 2004; Supple, Ghazarian, Frabutt, Plunkett, & Sands, 2006; but see Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005 for an exception). Having friends in poor academic standing may be especially upsetting for girls in good academic standing. The resulting stress could be expressed as suicidality.

In this study, friendship problems (i.e., social isolation, poor friendship quality, having friends who are disconnected from school, and association with deviant peers) were not associated with suicidal behavior for either girls or boys. These findings are similar to those by Bearman and Moody (2004) who noted that their study's friendship problems (social isolation and intransitive friendships) predicted suicidal ideation, but not suicidal behavior, and only in girls. Our findings are also consistent with observations by Kidd and colleagues (2006) who observed that school-connectedness and peer support were not significant predictors of nonfatal suicidal behavior in their national sample of mostly European-American (70%) youth. Taken together, these findings suggest that the path to suicidal ideation may differ from the path to nonfatal suicidal behavior. Some friendship factors, including friends' school connectedness, may play a role in girls thinking about suicide but not in their transition from suicidal thoughts to behavior.

This study has a number of limitations. First, only one question each was used to assess suicidal ideation and nonfatal suicidal behavior. There were no questions about frequency, duration, or severity of the suicidal thoughts or behaviors. Second, this study used written self-report measures. A structured, written-format may be inadequate to evaluate a complex affective domain such as friendship, particularly among Latinas/os, given the strong meanings of friendship for this group (Way et al., 2001; Way & Greene, 2006). At the same time, it is possible that the anonymous, written format of our study facilitated openness. Studies indicate that, at least among adolescents of European-American descent, suicidality reports are highest when obtained via anonymous approaches (Evans, Hawton, Rodham, & Deeks, 2005). To evaluate these questions with Mexican-Americans, future studies might supplement anonymous, structured, written measures with semi-structured interview questions. Third, this study is cross-sectional, so it is unknown whether suicidality came before or after friendship problems. Future studies should use longitudinal data to explore the directionality of the associations and analyze possible interactions between variables, such as ethnic identity and friendship.

This study also has several strengths. First, the community-based sample is more representative of the adolescent suicidal population than clinical or school-based samples. Clinical samples are unique for many reasons, including respondents' history of mental health treatment. School-based samples are also unrepresentative because they miss a high-risk group, drop-out adolescents. Inclusion of drop-outs is particularly important when investigating Mexican-American adolescents given their high dropout rates. Second, this study's large sample of Mexican-American youth contributes to the literature on under-researched and underserved populations.

In conclusion, this study provides the first general profile of friendship problems and suicidality among community Mexican-American adolescent girls and boys, an understudied, vulnerable group in terms of suicidality. Suicidal ideation and behavior rates were especially high among girls. Friends' school disconnectedness emerged as a factor in girls' suicidal ideation, particularly for girls in good academic standing. Ethnic identity was not a strong factor in these adolescents' suicidality. These findings confirm, among Mexican-American adolescents, the role of gender in suicidality. These findings also suggest

that friendship problems may be less important in Mexican-American adolescent suicidality than in U.S. general-population adolescents' suicidality. This may be particularly true for Mexican-American boys, who reported experiencing more friendship problems but less suicidal ideation and nonfatal suicidal behavior than Mexican-American girls. It is possible that Mexican-American youth are particularly resilient to negative friendship experiences, compared to other Latina/o youth and non-Latina/o youth. Alternatively, the impact of these negative experiences may not manifest itself in suicidality for Mexican-American youth as it may in other groups.

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Table 1
Measures of Social Isolation, Poor Friendship Quality, Friends' School Disconnectedness,
and Friends' Delinquency

Factor	Reliability	Items	Component [*]	
			1	2
Social Isolation ^a	n/a	I do not have a group of friends that I spend time with.	n/a	n/a
Poor Quality Friendship ^b	$\alpha = .892$	Do your friends care about you?	.761	.079
		Do you care about your friends?	.754	.132
		Did your friends really try to help you?	.775	.039
		Can you count on your friends when things go wrong?	.798	-.019
		Do you have friends you can share joys and sorrows with?	.898	-.135
		Do you feel you can talk about problems with your friends?	.847	-.038
Friends' School Disconnectedness	$\alpha = .828$	How many of your friends are attending high school? ^c	-.018	.527
		What kind of students are your friends? ^d	-.015	.766
		What kind of grades do your friends get? ^d	.026	.749
		Did your friends like school? ^b	.021	.814
		Did your friends think school is fun? ^b	.050	.722
		Did your friends like their teachers? ^b	-.119	.869
		Did teachers like your friends? ^b	.093	.658
Friends' Delinquency ^e	$\alpha = .868$	Have any of your close friends ever gotten a traffic ticket?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever had their driver's license taken away?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever stolen a car?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever dropped out of school?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever been kicked out of school?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever stolen anything fairly expensive?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever been arrested?	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever been placed on probation for a crime.	n/a	n/a
		Have any of your close friends ever been sent to jail?	n/a	n/a

* Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis with Promax Rotation

^a Check/No Check

^b Rating Scale: 1 – a lot, 2 – some, 3 – not much, 4 – not at all

^c Rating scale: 1 – all of them, 2 – most of them, 3 – few of them, 4 – none of them

^d Rating scale: 1 – very good, 2 – good, 3 – not too good, 4 – poor

^e Yes/No

Note: All scales are summative except social isolation

Table 2
Suicidality and Friendship Problems in Mexican-American Girls and Boys

Variable	Girls (<i>N</i> = 187)		Boys (<i>N</i> = 151)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Suicidality				
Suicidal Ideation	73	39.0%	39	25.8% *
Suicidal Behavior	35	18.9%	16	10.6% *
Friendship Problems				
Social Isolation	24	12.8%	24	15.9%
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Poor Quality Friendship	9.22	3.29	11.49	3.67 **
Friends' School Disconnectedness	16.77	3.16	17.53	3.67 *
Friends' Delinquency	13.98	2.95	14.09	2.82

*
 $p < .05$,

**
 $p < .01$