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The Effects of Problem Drinking and Sexual Risk Among Mexican Migrant Workers on Their Community of Origin

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Abstract

Although the financial remittances sent by male Mexican migrant workers residing in the United States can result in higher standards of living for their families and home communities, out-migration may lead to increased migrant problem drinking and sexual risk behaviors, which may in turn impact these same communities of origin. Based on semi-structured interviewing ($n=60$) and participant observation in a migrant sending community in central Mexico and a receiving community in the Northeastern United States, this paper explores the effects of out-migration on HIV risk and problem drinking among United States-based migrants from a small agricultural community in the Mexican state of Puebla. We argue that problem drinking and risky sexual behaviors among these migrant workers have had significant consequences for their home community in terms of diminished remittances, the introduction of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and loss of husbands or kinsmen to automobile accidents. Moreover, although rumor and gossip between the two communities serve as a form of social control, they may also contribute to increased problem drinking and sexual risk.

Keywords

migration; problem drinking; HIV risk; farm workers; community consequences; Mexico

Introduction

Mexican-origin migrant populations face considerable hardship in the United States: discrimination, fear of deportation, substandard housing, and highly exploitative working conditions. Men who journey to the United States without their families additionally struggle with loneliness, depression, and a deep nostalgia for the life they left behind, emotional states which may result in problem drinking behaviors and unsafe sexual activity (Bletzer 2004; Duke et al. 2003, 2004; García 2004). These behaviors, in turn, can have profound effects on their families, and on their home communities more generally. For example, the monetary costs of engaging in hazardous drinking and sexual risk behaviors may reduce the amount of remittances that workers are able to send to their families. Likewise, alcohol-related accidents may result in lost wages, which may in turn negatively impact the household economy. Spouses in the home community may be at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections from their returning partners, or abandoned should that partner become romantically involved while in the United States (Hirsch et al. 2002, 2007). Lastly, behaviors learned in the receiving

community, which may have weaker mechanisms of social control than in the community of origin, may result in a variety of social problems once those migrants return to their home communities.

This paper explores the contexts and consequences of problem drinking by migrant agricultural workers who reside in the northeastern United States, with a particular focus on the effects of these behaviors on their community of origin. As part of a larger study on drinking and sexual risk among farmworkers in Connecticut, this article examines the effects of out-migration on problem drinking and sexual risk among United States-based migrants and their families from San Felipe Teotlaltcingo (population 8,632), an agricultural community in the central Mexican state of Puebla. We examine the various structural, emotional, and contextual factors that facilitate heavy drinking and sexual risk among this population, and the effects of these behaviors on workers' well-being. In addition, we explore the consequences of migrants' heavy drinking on their home community, particularly in terms of workers' capacity to provide financial and emotional support to their families, and their risk of spreading sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—including HIV—which may result from alcohol-related encounters with sex workers.

Effects of Migration on Sending Communities

Although there is a growing history of research on alcohol use (Alaniz 1994; Bletzer 2004; Chi, White-Means, and McClain 1992; García 2004; McDermott and Lee 1990; Watson 1997; Watson et al. 1985) and sexual risk (Castro et al. 1988; Ford et al. 2001; Goicoechea-Balbona and Grief 1992; Inciardi 1999; Magaña 1991; Weatherby et al. 1997) among farmworkers in the United States, only recently has consideration been paid to the effects of these behaviors on workers' home communities (Fagetti 2000; Hirsch et al. 2002, 2007; Lurie 2003). A focus on both sending and receiving communities is critical for understanding problem drinking and sexual risk among migrant populations, since it allows us to consider cultural—often highly gendered and context-specific—norms that influence drinking and sexual comportment in both locales, as well as the structural conditions that influence these behaviors. More broadly, this dual-community orientation provides a lens through which to conceptualize the ways in which these behaviors and their consequences, played out within the dialogic relationship between sending and receiving communities, are embedded in social, economic, and globalizing processes.

The effects of out-migration on sending communities—particularly in terms of familial and community well-being—are complicated, and in some sense contradictory (Binford 2002). In the economic sphere, remittances can result in higher standards of living for residents, as well as greater access to capital for establishing businesses, paying for children's education, carrying out religious-ritual activities, and initiating community improvement projects (Cohen 2001, 2004; Durand 1998; Moran-Taylor 2008). However, as families become accustomed to higher standards of living, it is more difficult for them to return to their previous level of subsistence once the migrant re-settles in the community. Migration can also create economic dependence in the sending community, since remittances are more commonly used to pay for general household expenses than for investment in business ventures or community development (Grey and Woodrick 2002; Griffith 1985, 2006). Remittances may also increase social stratification and exacerbate economic disparities. Furthermore, communities receiving high levels of remittances typically suffer from inflation, as local prices increase in order to match local purchasing power (Arroyo Alejandre and Sandoval 2000; Conway and Cohen 1998). In addition, out-migration has become a rite of passage for young men in many sending communities (Binford 2002; Conway and Cohen 1998). Migration also puts a high level of stress on female heads of household, who typically become responsible for both childrearing and economic subsistence (Marroni 2000). Familial well-being is particularly challenged in

the case of women who are abandoned by their expatriated spouses (Fagetti 2000). Lastly, many migrants who re-settle in the community suffer from depression, at least in part because they are no longer able to provide for their families as they had before (Binford 2002; Borges et al. 2007; Espinosa 1998).

Out-migration also carries with it a host of psychological, financial, and legal problems for those who leave their communities. United States-based migrant laborers, particularly those who are undocumented, face isolation, economic exploitation, and difficult living and working conditions. For this predominantly male population, who may spend years apart from their families, gendered notions of drinking behavior and sexual comportment, coupled with their overall fear of deportation, can result in hazardous drinking (Duke 2002; Duke et al. 2003, 2004). Likewise, worker stress, diminished social constraints, and perceptions of the United States as a socially liberal society, may lead to problem drinking and other escapist activities (Armeli et al. 2000; Carney et al. 2000; Hovey 2001; Perreira and Sloan 2001). Pre-existing, culturally prescribed drinking patterns (Bennett et al. 1998; Frye 1996; Gutmann 2007; Kearney 1972; Lewis 1959; Mitchell 2004; Taylor 1979) are, of course, also likely to affect migrants' drinking behavior. However, research has shown that newly arrived migrants have lower rates of alcohol dependence and abuse than Mexican Americans (Johnson, VanGeest, and Cho 2002; VanGeest and Johnson 1997) and, possibly, migrants who have been in the United States for longer periods of time (Worby and Organista 2007). Indeed, evidence suggests that male, Mexican-origin farmworkers' odds of alcohol use increase for every year that they reside in the United States (Winkleby et al. 2003). This pattern suggests that migrants' experiences in *el norte* profoundly shape their drinking behaviors. Recent literature also maintains that the psychological well-being of migrants, and by extension their likelihood of engaging in problem drinking and other self-destructive behaviors, also may be based on the circumstances of their departure (Leavey et al. 2007). Joseph Grzywacz et al. (2006), for example, argue that male Mexican-origin farm workers' negative health outcomes are based on incompatible expectations, since providing for their families entails eschewing their roles of engaged parent and spouse.

Regardless of country of origin, migrants face greater risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections than do stable populations. Among mobile populations who are subject to prejudice and exploitation in the receiving country, the risk is magnified (UNAIDS 2001). Consequently, workers who are undocumented and/or suffer from substandard living conditions and an exploitative work environment are at particular risk (Bronfman and Minello 1995; Mangaña, de la Rocha, and Amsel 1996; Organista, Carrillo, and Ayala 2004; Pérez and Fennelly 1996). Moreover, sexual risk often occurs in the context of the diminished inhibitions and impaired judgment caused by drinking. For example, among Latino male migrants, particularly those who are single or who live apart from their spouses for extended periods, soliciting sex workers, eschewing condoms during relations with casual partners, and other risky sexual activity often occur in the context of alcohol use (Ehrlich, Tholandi, and Martinez 2006; Magaña 1991; Organista and Kubo 2005; Rhodes et al. 2006; Shedlin, Decena, and Oliver-Velez 2005). Exposure to HIV and other STIs in the United States can contribute to infections in the Mexican sending community, particularly in terms of women's rates of infection (Salgado de Snyder, de Jesús Pérez, and Maldonado 1996). For example, although one woman is infected with HIV for every six men in Mexico, in rural states with large sending communities—including Puebla—the rate is one in three (Cruz 2000). Among married rural Mexican women whose husbands had resided in the United States, according to Hirsch and her colleagues, recognition of the linkage between migration and HIV risk—and of the role of condoms in preventing HIV and other STIs—is high, particularly among younger women. However, despite their awareness of the prevalence of extra-marital relations by local men living abroad, most women assumed that their husbands had been celibate during their separation. Furthermore, for a returning male to insist on using a condom would indicate

infidelity, while if a woman wished to use a condom it would indicate a lack of trust (Hirsch et al. 2002). Although in certain contexts, women who remain in sending communities may also engage in sexual relations while their spouses are absent (Lurie 2003), a female spouse's comportment tends to be closely monitored by her partner's relatives. An additional consequence of the male partner engaging in sexual relations while abroad is that he may abandon his family, leaving his spouse and children in an economically precarious situation (Hirsch et al. 2007).

Method

In order to explore the effects of problem drinking and HIV risk by migrant workers on their communities of origin, the authors initiated a two-year ethnographic study in San Felipe Teotlaltcingo in the Mexican state of Puebla. Previous mixed method research carried out by the first author and his research team at a fieldsite in Connecticut revealed a tightly-knit population of San Felipe residents living in that community.

The data collected in San Felipe consist of 50 semi-structured interviews with community members, recruited through a stratified sampling protocol consisting of return migrants ($n=20$), female heads of household whose spouses¹ were currently residing in Spoolton (a pseudonym), Connecticut ($n=20$), and key informants ($n=10$). The latter included civil and religious leaders, health workers, and others who could help shed light on the key variables, as well as provide general information on the history, economy, and cultural life of San Felipe. Respondents within each of the three strata were recruited via snowball sampling procedures. In addition, our analysis included observational and interview data from our earlier research on migrant and stationary farmworkers in Connecticut. As that study did not focus specifically on San Felipe-origin farmworkers, only five Spoolton-based community members were interviewed. However, these interviews provide important, sometimes, contrasting insights regarding the issues of concern.

The analysis also includes interview data from Connecticut-based key informants, including sex workers who provided services to Spoolton's migrant laborer population. United States-based San Felipe migrants were recruited via snowball sampling procedures, while the sex workers and other key informants were selected through opportunity sampling. In keeping with the overall recruitment protocol of the Connecticut-based research, Spoolton-based workers had to have reported consuming seven or more alcoholic drinks in the past seven days (in order to exclude abstainers and very moderate drinkers). The stratified sampling protocol and major interview themes elicited from the San Felipe and Spoolton groups can be found in Table 1.

Informants gave written consent using standard consenting procedures approved by two institutional review boards: Hispanic Health Council (HHC) in Hartford, Connecticut, the home institution for the United States-based research; and *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (BUAP), where the San Felipe research team was based. Participants at each site received a small financial remuneration for participating in the interviews. Interviews were carried out by the authors and by trained qualitative researchers at BUAP and HHC in Puebla and Connecticut, respectively. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim in the original language by trained staff members. In addition to interviews, researchers observed numerous drinking occasions in both communities, in workers' apartments, within cantinas and other drinking locales, as well as during feast days and other celebrations, which they documented in fieldnotes.

¹In this paper, we use the terms "spouse," "wife," and "husband" to refer to cohabiting romantic couples, regardless of whether they are legally married.

The authors developed the interview guides and initial coding manual. The first author coded all of the transcribed interviews, archival document materials, and observational fieldnotes using a thematic analysis approach (Miles and Huberman 1994) via the ATLAS.ti software package, Version 5.0 (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development 2006). Boolean and semantic searches of the coded transcripts allowed us to retrieve pertinent interview segments and notes regarding the major themes of the study. Tentative findings were discussed by the authors throughout the coding process, and these results subsequently were cross-validated to ensure credibility.

The Fieldsites: San Felipe Teotlalcingo, Puebla, and Spoolton, Connecticut

San Felipe Teotlalcingo (population 8,632) is a highland community located in the shadow of the Iztaccíhuatl Volcano in the Mexican state of Puebla. Its economy is largely based on fruit cultivation, particularly plums, apples, pears, peaches, and *tejocote* (Mexican hawthorn), as well as small-scale flower production. Town residents also engage in subsistence agriculture, particularly corn.

Given its relative isolation and limited economic opportunities, migration has long been a critical economic strategy for San Felipe families. Prior to the mid-20th century, residents migrated to urban centers throughout Mexico, principally Mexico City. Since the 1950s, migration has shifted to the United States, initially under the auspices of the Bracero Program. By the mid-1980s, the first San Felipe residents began settling in Spoolton, primarily to work on area farms. As in much of Mexico, the dismantling of agricultural trade protections and subsidies, reduced access to credit for small farmers, constitutional changes that severely weakened the *ejido* (communal land tenure) and, most notably, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, had a devastating effect on San Felipe's agrarian-based economy. This chain of events accelerated the flow of San Felipe's able-bodied residents to the United States, and drastically increased the region's dependence on remittances (Gómez Carpineiro 2003; Gómez Carpineiro and Duke 2008). Although funds sent to families in San Felipe may have a beneficial economic impact in the long term, migrants and their families are responsible for paying back the sometimes prohibitive fees charged by *coyotes* (smugglers) to deliver them to the United States, and must struggle to make ends meet between the period when the migrant leaves the community and when (s)he receives his or her initial paycheck.

For much of its history, Spoolton was a mill town located in a primarily rural region of Connecticut. At its economic peak, the town housed five large cotton mills, and served as a principal supplier of silk and cotton thread for the United States. The growing popularity of synthetic fibers, coupled with increased international competition from manufacturers with lower labor costs, led to the gradual decline of the region's textile industry. In 1985, the last of these mills closed its doors. With a population of 15,823, Spoolton serves as a commercial center for the region. Although the town is still predominantly white (61%) the total Latino population more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, from 16 to 30 percent. Conversely, the white population dropped by nearly 19 percent during that same period. Spoolton remains highly segregated, with Latinos tending to occupy a few densely populated neighborhoods of apartments and multi-family dwellings near the town center. While Puerto Ricans represent the principal Latino ethnic group, Hispanic population growth is also fueled by an influx of Mexicans and Central Americans, many of whom work in one of the three large farms located within a 10-mile radius of the town. These farms produce Christmas trees, eggs, and mushrooms, respectively. Other migrants work at the town's large paper recycling plant, as kitchen workers in restaurants, or as day laborers.

Most San Felipe migrants are employed in the agricultural sector, but will work in other local industries if farmwork becomes scarce, or should better opportunities arise. It is also worth noting that employment at the mushroom and egg farms is more akin to factory labor than farmwork, in that production takes place indoors, is highly mechanized, and workers' time is precisely regulated. San Felipe respondents estimate that between 1,000 and 2,000 of their compatriots currently work in Connecticut, nearly all of them male and undocumented. Indeed, local migrants in Spoolton sometimes refer to their neighborhood as *San Felipe Chico* (Little San Felipe). Thus, San Felipe and Spoolton are not merely communities isolated from each other in space, despite the vast distances that separate these towns. Rather, they are each embedded in a global ethnoscape (Appadurai 1990) produced through migration, transnational communication, and the global circulation of capital.

Communication between Spoolton-based migrants and their families in San Felipe primarily occurs via telephone. Through this medium, migrants are able to maintain relationships with their spouses, children, and kinsmen in San Felipe. For those remaining in San Felipe, it also provides a window into life in Spoolton, and it is at least in part through these conversations that *felipenses* develop their views on migration, on United States cultural norms, and on the opportunities and perils of working in the United States. Telephone communication is also the principal vehicle for the constant circulation of rumors between the two towns, much of which concern the alleged sexual intrigues of both migrants and their spouses in San Felipe. As we discuss below, rumor may provide a measure of social control regarding sexual risk, but is also the principal vehicle for the circulation of anxiety which, in turn, leads to greater risk.

In the following sections, we first briefly address San Felipe residents' overall assessment of the effects of migration on the community, particularly in terms of its economic and social impact. In order to gain an understanding of the drinking norms that migrants brought with them to the United States, coupled with perceived changes in those norms by return migrants, we next include a discussion of drinking behaviors in San Felipe. Drawing on data from San Felipe residents, as well as with both return migrants and those still residing in Connecticut, we then discuss the characteristics and circumstances of problem drinking and sexual risk in Spoolton. In the final two sections, we discuss San Felipe residents' perceptions of the effects of problem drinking and sexual risk carried out by their counterparts in Connecticut on their community, being attentive to the role of rumor as both a risk factor and a form of social control.

Local Perceptions of Migration

San Felipe residents hold generally positive views regarding out-migration to the United States. In particular, there was wide agreement that the remittances that migrants send home significantly benefit the household economy and, by extension, the community economy as a whole. These funds are used for general household maintenance (e.g., food, clothing), the education of minor children, and repairs and additions to household dwellings. It is not uncommon, for example, to see houses with second storey additions in various stages of construction or new pickup trucks parked along the street, the direct result of remittances from spouses or kinsmen. In some instances, particularly among unmarried migrants, remittances are sent to parents, and are used to purchase land for cultivation, or to subsidize family-based agricultural activities. Although remittances are not typically used for civic improvements, migrants have provided funds to construct an auditorium for San Felipe's Catholic church, and to subsidize the costs of the community's annual cycle of traditional festivals. In a few instances, remittances have also facilitated the opening of a few small business ventures, including the construction of a greenhouse for flower cultivation. As a local official noted:

I feel that San Felipe's economic base is sustained by the remittances that come from the United States. Ultimately, we've seen how the town has developed, the

physiognomy of San Felipe has changed a lot from being a rural town, and now we see it becoming semi-urbanized, little by little.

However, residents also identified several negative facets of migration, particularly in terms of the town's young people. Few local boys are interested in attending school or seeking work in the area, instead biding their time until they can migrate to the United States. Young people who return to San Felipe, furthermore, feel constricted by the slow pace of small-town life. This same official remarked that:

Here in the community, we all know each other, but [young people] who worked over there [in the United States] bring other ideas. What's bad is that they bring another way living, and I've seen a good deal of rebellion against authority.... They bring another culture. We see that over there is *la cultura de cholos* (the culture of gangsters), so they come back here with that idea, with that culture.

This participant shared with many of those who had not traveled to *el otro lado* (the other side) the perception of the United States as not only a site of physical danger (the often hazardous journey across the border, harassment by immigration authorities, and violence committed by thieves who prey on undocumented workers) but of physical and moral contagion: of disease, vice, and a culture of promiscuity that has infected traditional modes of comportment. There can be little wonder, then, that spouses, parents, and other felipenses could view migration approvingly from an economic standpoint, but with a sense of concern bordering on panic regarding the dangers that their countrymen face so far from home, and the consequences of that separation on the community itself.

Drinking Behaviors in San Felipe Teotlalcingo

San Felipe residents did not consider alcohol use to be a significant problem in the community until recently, noting that public displays of drunkenness were rare outside of temporally bounded fiestas. Alcohol has long served as an important component of baptisms, first communion celebrations, weddings, or saints' days, as well as community-wide celebrations like Cinco de Mayo and the annual fiesta cycles sponsored by the town's religious organizations or *mayordomías*. Boys typically have their first experience with alcohol within these celebratory contexts, sometimes with parental consent, other times in secret. The average age of drinking initiation for boys was 15 years old. There remain negative cultural sanctions against women drinking alcohol and, to the degree that such behavior occurs, is carried out in secret. We have no accurate data on girls' age of initiation, but for those who have tried alcohol, initiation typically begins in adulthood.

Apart from drinking occasions accompanying celebrations, we observed groups of men drinking alcohol on the street and inside general stores. These drinking occasions were more likely to occur during weekends, although residents noted that alcohol consumption increased during the fruit harvest (May-December), when men have more disposable income. Although less common, respondents reported occasions when they drank alcohol to excess in order to stave off sadness or depression. In most cases, this despondence was triggered by concern for the well-being of loved ones in the United States, given the loneliness, discrimination, and work-related challenges that the latter face. Respondents were quick to point out, however, that these periods of self-medication were temporary. Among men, and return migrants in particular, drinking was not seen as a vice, but as a vehicle for facilitating relaxation at the end of the work day.

As mentioned above, the behavior of return migrants, particularly young people, was a concern among town residents, especially as it pertains to changing norms around public drinking. Many attribute the more liberal attitudes of return migrants to behaviors that they developed

while in Connecticut. Interestingly, the local health minister attributed these behaviors to the fact that migrants' lives were actually more restrictive in the United States:

What we have noticed is that the young people from here who leave and come back have more freedom [now]. But over there, they are more limited because there are laws, and here we don't have many police. So they come back and *hacer cosa y media* (cause all kinds of trouble). They go around drunk, they get into fights, there's a lot more public disorder here because they are freer here...and because they have been to the United States, they feel superior to the people from here.

Problem Drinking Behaviors and Sexual Risk in Spoolton

San Felipe residents, including return migrants, widely held the view that problematic drinking among their acquaintances and kinsmen in Spoolton was a significant concern. A few attributed these to behavioral characteristics that migrants brought with them to the United States, as in this exchange with a 44-year-old return migrant, who was asked whether it was common for felipenses to drink to excess while living in Spoolton:

Well, yes, and it's not good because it creates a bad image. But *el clásico mexicano* (the typical Mexican) will never stop doing those things. He's always being macho, drinking, smoking. You're in another country, and although we try to call attention to it, we don't understand, the Mexican doesn't understand. Like, sometimes the police will give us a warning, but as soon as they leave, as soon as they turn the corner, the party starts up again.

More common, however, are sentiments that equate problem drinking in Spoolton with the hardships that felipenses face there.

Another important factor contributing to problematic drinking, witnessed on numerous occasions by our research team in Spoolton, involved peer pressure. In Spoolton, several apartment buildings consisted solely of people from particular Mexican states. Thus, one building housed workers from Guanajuato, another from Hidalgo, a third from Puebla. Many of the *poblanos* (persons from Puebla) were from San Felipe or neighboring communities. As many as seven lived in these small apartments, sleeping on mattresses that covered the floor. Peer pressure to drink among roommates was intense, particularly in light of established reciprocal patterns in which housemates took turns purchasing cases of beer. One San Felipe resident living in Spoolton reported:

All my roommates know that I am a heavy drinker. If they invite me to drink a beer and I say no, they get upset. They say, "You are not our friend anymore, we saw you drinking with another guy, why don't you drink with us?" Sometimes in order not to listen to them anymore, you just end up drinking with them. And the problem is that you don't only drink one beer, but you keep on and on. Then somebody else invites you, and complains if you don't accept because, "Why did you drink with him and not with me. Why did you accept his beer and not mine?"

The peer pressure to pay for sex is similar to the pressure to drink. Sex workers were numerous in Spoolton, and regularly walked the streets of the neighborhoods where the workers lived. As a return migrant noted, "[In Spoolton] one is more prone to getting what's called the illness, AIDS, because many women dedicate themselves to working the streets... the bars, also." Sometimes, on the workers' payday, the sex workers would go door to door in the apartment buildings, soliciting their services. Other groups of workers would make occasional road trips to visit brothels in New York City or Providence, Rhode Island. The same respondent who had reported on drinking pressure added that:

Many times we experience pressure to have sex in the same way as for drinking. They say, “In that house there are three or four women, let's go over there.” If I don't want to go they ask me, “What's wrong with you? Is it that you don't know what sex is, what love is, or is that you are not a real man?” They insult you, because if you don't want to do what they do, you are homosexual. The pressure is high. We all live with many people, we are rarely on our own, so it's not just that one person attacks you, but three, four, or five, and the one who is clean (i.e., remains celibate) is isolated by the group.

Decisions to pay for sex often take place in the context of drinking occasions, in which peer pressure and alcohol-fueled disinhibition may result in migrants engaging in activities that they would not otherwise consider doing. As one return migrant noted, “[Your friends] pressure you when you are drinking. They say, ‘Let's go there, I know of a place where there are some girls.’ And that is how you start doing this... because I have never been driven to do that when I was sober.”

Many of Spoolton's sex workers were intravenous drug users and were, thus, at significant risk of carrying HIV and Hepatitis B and C, in addition to other sexually transmitted diseases. Many of their Mexican clients would insist on not using a condom, and some sex workers charged extra for this service. As a local sex worker noted, “Some women find themselves in the situation that they need the money, and they would have sex without using a condom. I would have to say that that is pretty common. If you need something badly enough, you do what you can to get it.” When asked whether he thought that San Felipe workers in the United States would use condoms during casual sexual encounters, a 39-year-old return migrant summed up the relationship between problem drinking and unprotected sex in Spoolton this way: “Probably yes, *cuando van en sus cinco sentidos* (when they are sober)...but if they are inebriated, probably not. I know this because when I was there, people would ask me, ‘What's the use of eating candy with the wrapper still on?’” Some San Felipe men would become romantically involved with women in the United States. Sometimes these relationships would be temporary, but for others it would result in these men abandoning their families in San Felipe.

It is important to note that not all San Felipe were engaged in problem drinking behavior. For some, drinking did not result in negative outcomes. Rather, moderate drinking was seen as a way to relax, to quench their thirst on warm days, and as a social lubricant. Likewise, not all felipenses solicited the services of sex workers, nor did all married men engage in romantic relationships while in the United States. However, as the following sections indicate, problem drinking and sexual risk—and their subsequent effects on San Felipe—were significant concerns for those residents left behind in Puebla.

The Impact of United States Problem Drinking on San Felipe

San Felipe residents expressed significant concern regarding the drinking behaviors of their spouses and kinsmen in Connecticut. Local explanations regarding the causes and consequences of problem drinking varied, however. As noted above, a small number felt that migrants' problem drinking was attributable to culture. From this perspective, migrant drinking patterns were not significantly different from those in San Felipe. However, the consequences of excessive drinking are more severe in the United States, given the relative strictness of law enforcement and the general absence of social support. More common were explanations based on the contention that the traditional modifying influences on problem drinking behavior (the presence of parents, community elders, and spouses) were largely absent in Connecticut. A 43-year-old spouse of a migrant, speaking specifically about young felipenses in Spoolton, pointed out that, “It's really easy to become addicted to alcohol because [in the United States], there are no parents, no controls, and it's your money. You earn it and you spend it. If they were here, their parents would say, ‘Respect our home and don't carry on that way.’”

Likewise, a 37-year-old return migrant described his frustration in trying to curtail the risky behavior of young felipenses when he was in Spoolton:

The young people from here who are over there, they're the type who drink and feel like Juan Camaney [a popular film character known for his drinking and womanizing]. "That's how I am," and you try to explain it to them, and they're going around drinking like crazy and the truth is, we would tell them, "If you're going to [have sex], then protect yourself." But it would go in one ear and out the other.

Still others believed that migrants were highly susceptible to the despair caused by their difficult working and living conditions and to the loneliness of being away from their families. This may, in turn, encourage problem drinking behaviors and difficult communication with their spouses. As a 34-year-old return migrant noted:

Well, some of (the migrants), maybe out of despair, I don't know, will not call their wives or children if they get laid off, and I have often seen that, "I didn't call my wife because I miss her and my kids too much," and then he would end up going on a bender (*agarran la tomadera*).

For some families, problem drinking by their Spoolton-based spouses and kinsmen may not only have emotional, but material consequences. A number of migrants reduced the remittances they sent home over time, in part because they spent their surplus income on alcohol. One return migrant witnessed the effects of heavy drinking on finances: "Some [migrants] get drawn into vice, every week. [On pay day], they'll spend half of their salary on alcohol."

San Felipe residents were particularly concerned about the possibility of migrants being arrested for public intoxication or suffering from accidents related to excessive drinking. Run-ins with the police in Connecticut were relatively common, given that so few migrants were able to obtain valid drivers licenses or auto insurance, and that driving behaviors tend to be more cautious in the United States than in Mexico. When San Felipenses are pulled over while under the influence of alcohol, the outcome can be difficult, as a 34-year-old spouse reported: "Well, [my husband] drank over there, he gave himself over to drinking, and the police grabbed him for drinking and driving a pick-up truck that wasn't his and they locked him up." Although migrants arrested by the police were not typically deported during the period in which we carried out this research, the length of time that the worker sits in jail can cause hardship to their families in the form of lost wages, and the fines they are expected to pay can be prohibitive.

Alcohol-related accidents are of even greater concern. The principal highway linking Spoolton with neighboring communities, as well as with the local farms where many Felipenses work, is narrow and switch-backed. At night, the road is extremely dark, and in the winter the pavement is subject to icing, conditions that San Felipe drivers rarely experience in Puebla. Four townspeople have been killed in alcohol-related automobile accidents while living in Connecticut. Apart from the grief that such accidents cause in the community, families of victims face considerable hardship in obtaining the necessary funds to return the body to San Felipe.

The Impact of United States Sexual Risk on San Felipe

The infidelity of spouses on both sides of the border was a constant source of anxiety, fueled by rumors circulated through telephone conversations and, among the men in Spoolton and their non-poblano co-workers alike, by the constant teasing about being cuckolded while they were working in the United States. Spouses in San Felipe felt considerable anxiety about their partners' activities due to the combination of gossip, the lack of modifying influences to curtail casual sexual encounters, and the perceived moral laxity of the United States. Likewise, for the male workers in Spoolton, suspicions that their partners were unfaithful sometimes resulted

in their engaging in problem drinking, or in engaging in extramarital encounters out of anger, despair, and jealousy. In contrast to their husbands in the United States, however, it would be extremely difficult for these women to engage in extramarital affairs, since their day-to-day activities are monitored so closely by their husbands' families. Many, in fact, moved in with their in-laws during their husbands' absence. Nonetheless, female spouses must continually remain vigilant to avoid their actions being the subject of gossip, which could get back to their partners in the United States. Here a 35-year-old describes her concern that her husband in Connecticut may hear unfounded rumors about her:

I know this girl whose husband went [to the United States], he's a friend of my husband, and he left her with their daughter, and now people in town talk about how she *anda con uno y con otro* (is going around with other men). So before my husband left, he said, "I don't want to think that one day you might be talked about the same way that she is." And he's still telling me this when he calls, and I'm afraid that someone will gossip about me to my husband.

Female heads of household expressed significant concern about their partners engaging in risky sex while in the United States, particularly given the widely held view of the United States as a place rife with sexual contagion and moral decay. In particular, these spouses worried about the possibility of contracting sexually transmitted infections when their husbands return to San Felipe. Here, an 18-year-old spouse reports confronting her husband via telephone over his extramarital relations, which she had heard about from a relative in Spoolton:

Well, I didn't ask him about it, he confessed. And I told him to be very careful about [STIs] because I've heard that there are a lot of them there. He told me not to worry about that, and said that "my biggest struggle here is with alcohol." And I told him, "One leads to the other...if you go around drinking, it's a risk because then you may have sex with someone who can give you an infection."

As mentioned above, some migrants became involved in romantic relationships in Connecticut that resulted in their no longer providing for their families. While many of these romantic partners were Latinas from Puerto Rico or other parts of Mexico, some were drawn from the relatively small number of female migrants from San Felipe living in Spoolton. A female head of household reported her frustration with male migrants' propensity to get involved in extramarital relationships, even with women who had not previously interested them:

Why is it that [men] don't consider those of us from this town to be pretty, but when [women from here] go over there, they seem much more beautiful? When the men are here, they don't care for those women, but over there, they *ya se juntan* (hook up)? [Q: And what happens to their wives?] Well, they leave them. For example, this woman, her husband came back, but now lives with the other woman. That's the kind of thing that goes on in this town.

As stated previously, migrants' relations with sex workers—many of whom were intravenous drug users—were relatively common in Connecticut. One return migrant reported the extent to which San Felipe migrants had put themselves at risk:

[In Spoolton], I struck up a friendship with a Puerto Rican woman who was a sex worker. Her husband was an addict.... Well, this girl told me that in order to make \$10, she would have sex with three or four guys. And this girl told me that one of her friends had an infection (STI). "And what about contraceptives?" (she asked her). "No, they're not very useful for preventing infections!" And several people from here, from San Felipe, had sex with that woman.

As a result of sexual relations with sex workers and/or unprotected sex with multiple partners, a number of men have returned with sexually transmitted infections, including syphilis and gonorrhea, while others managed to have these infections treated in the United States. More

tragically, despite the stigma against HIV, four HIV positive young men returned to San Felipe from the United States, and subsequently died of AIDS. As a local official reported:

Some of those who got sick came back here to die in their own homes, and you know that sooner or later everybody finds out about it.... You know that in the United States there's also prostitution, you get infected, and so far they haven't found a cure.

Despite the prevalence of problem drinking and sexual risk among migrants in Connecticut, both return migrants and female heads of household expressed the contention that maintaining fidelity would reduce both of these problems. Many of the return migrants, for example, admitted that they were not faithful to their spouses while they were away, due to what they characterized as loneliness and “immaturity.” Most pointed out, however, that over time they took more responsibility for their actions, reduced their drinking, and avoided contact with other potential sexual partners. On the other hand, these respondents were motivated to return to San Felipe to reunite with their families. For those without concrete plans to return, feelings of loneliness, despair, and structural oppression may continue to result problem drinking and sexual risk behaviors.

Conclusions

San Felipe and Spoolton are embedded within a global ethnoscape formed through the collision between neoliberal policies that impoverish Mexico's family farms and the constant demand in the United States for low cost labor; between perceptions of the United States as a locale of contagion and vice, and xenophobic discourses in the United States concerning the “problem” of Mexican undocumented workers. These communities are enjoined through networks of affect, based on the desire of workers to improve the economic circumstances of their families, and the overall concern for the well-being of spouses and kin on both sides of the border. On the other hand, they are also linked through networks of anxiety, a concern for both the physical and moral dangers that kinsmen face while in the United States, and the rumor-fueled fear of infidelity which weighs so heavily on romantic partners in both towns.

The research presented here contains certain limitations. It focuses on just one sending and one receiving community, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings. Moreover, given the recruitment protocols of the Connecticut-based portion of the study (i.e., male, alcohol-consuming farmworkers residing in various locations in the state), only a small number of Spoolton-based felipenses were interviewed. Lastly, the use of purely qualitative data collection strategies in San Felipe limits our ability to ascertain the overall prevalence of drinking problems by felipenses in either community, the specific effects of drinking in Connecticut on remittances in Puebla, and the prevalence of STIs among return migrants. However, the triangulation of interview and observational data confirmed each of the study's main findings. Moreover, the effects of problem drinking and sexual risk on household economy and community well-being were topics of great concern for all San Felipe residents with whom we spoke.

In this paper, we have attempted to map out the effects of problem drinking and HIV risk among San Felipe's diaspora in Spoolton on their community of origin. We have demonstrated the ways in which long-term separation of these workers from their loved ones, coupled with unhealthy living and working conditions, a precarious legal status, and the relative absence of social controls, have resulted in problem drinking and risky sexual behaviors among some of these migrant workers. These risk behaviors, in turn, have had significant consequences for San Felipe residents in terms of: (1) diminished or curtailed remittances to family members; (2) the introduction of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, which may in turn be transmitted to spouses, and; (3) loss of husbands or kinsmen to automobile accidents or AIDS. This paper also points to the importance of carrying out research in both sending and receiving

communities, in order to illuminate the behavioral and public health concerns of migrant populations and the families they leave behind, as well as the ways in which communication between the two may alternately exacerbate or ameliorate those concerns.

In the current climate of xenophobia and draconian immigration policies in the United States, and the limited economic opportunities for families in rural Mexico, addressing problem drinking and sexual risk in a holistic fashion presents unique challenges. In the receiving community, *juramentos* (formal pledges made to Catholic saints) and other religiously-based initiatives can be effective in curtailing problem drinking and/or extramarital relations. Such endeavors, however, are decidedly piecemeal, and dependent on migrants' overall religiosity. In the sending communities, interventions targeting women whose romantic partners are migrants are critical for reducing their HIV risk. However, an emphasis on condom negotiation per se may be problematic, given the degree to which such self-advocacy is perceived by both men and women as reflecting a lack of trust (Hirsch et al. 2002). However, programs that foster improved communication between spouses before a migrant leaves for the United States would go a long way toward reducing the negative effect of rumor on male problem drinking and sexual activity, and potentially allow for more frank discussions of sexual behavior and the need for self-protection. Although pre-migration relationship counseling would have little effect on the negative structural conditions in which these families are embedded, the promotion of trust and open communication may diminish some of the deleterious effects of long-term separation on the physical and emotional health of these families.

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Table 1
Stratified Sampling Protocol and Major interview Themes

Location	Sample	Gender	N	Major Interview Themes
San Felipe, Pue.	Return migrants	M	20	Perceived differences in drinking behavior and sex risk (United States and Mexico); risk behaviors in the United States; living and working conditions in the United States; migration history; challenges of re-settlement; future plans
	Heads of household whose spouse resides in Spoolton	F	20	Use of remittances; perceptions of partner's risk; overall perceptions of the United States; childrearing issues; household economy
	Key informants	M, F	10	Effects of migration on health, families, and community economy; area history and politics
Spoolton, Conn.	Connecticut-based farmworkers from San Felipe who consumed ≥ 7 drinks in the past 7 days	M	5	Drinking behavior; sex risk; living and working conditions; social support; migration history
	Key informants	M, F	5	Perceptions of migrant drinking and sexual risk behaviors