



WORKING WITH LATINA WOMEN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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HISTORY OF ENCUENTRO LATINO

Encuentro Latino was founded in 2008 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Encuentro Latino was initially a collaborative project of New Mexico State University's Family Violence Project and La Casa, Inc. (a domestic violence services provider located in Las Cruces, NM).

From 2008 to 2011, the goal of Encuentro Latino was to build the capacity of domestic violence providers to serve Latino families experiencing domestic violence. At the beginning of 2012, Encuentro Latino transitioned to serving as an online clearinghouse for information on domestic violence and Latinos. In 2014, Encuentro Latino was adopted as a project of the International Safe Shelter Foundation.

Originally located in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Encuentro Latino now exists virtually. Encuentro Latino is maintained by a group of volunteers.



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OVERVIEW

Domestic violence reaches every corner of our society; it does not discriminate based on a woman's age, background, or ethnicity¹. Due to the indiscriminate nature of domestic violence, domestic violence workers such as case managers, social workers, counselors, and residential advisors are faced with additional challenges in finding ways to meet the needs of women from diverse cultural backgrounds². Domestic violence workers must be prepared to assist women with different values, lifestyles, and cultures, without imposing their own beliefs or desires on the woman.

Latina women who experience domestic violence have unique experiences and needs.

Research that has been conducted with Latinas shows that they experience domestic violence differently than European-American women^{3,4}. This study focuses on the unique experiences of Latinas

¹ Goodman, L. A., Koss, M. P., Fitzgerald, L. F., Russo, N. F., & Keita, G. P. (1993). Male violence against women: Current research and future directions. *American Psychologist, 48*, 1054-1058.

² Kasturirangan, A., & Williams, E. N. (2003). Counseling Latina battered women: A qualitative study of the Latina perspective. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 31*, 162-178.

³ Edelson, M. G., Hokoda, A., & Ramos-Lira, L. (2007). Differences in effects of domestic violence between Latina and Non-Latina women. *Journal of Family Violence, 22*(1), 1-10.

exposed to domestic violence and how these experiences can inform how domestic violence services can be culturally sensitive in order to negotiate/work with these experiences. It explores if and how cultural identity, gender roles, and community affect the way Latina women experience services in a domestic violence shelter.

The Latino population is now the fastest growing ethnic group in the country. Latinos make up 17.4% of the United States population in 2014 with predictions to grow to 28.6% by 2060⁵. There

Latinos constitute a diverse population with many different values, beliefs, and traditions, but often facing similar barriers.

is a great variation within the Latino population and the ethnonym Latino describes a wide-range of different groups including Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and South and Central American. The different groups share some commonalities such as language, family importance, and acculturation issues. The Mexican-American population makes up 66% of the Latino population in the United States and will be the focus of this research project with an emphasis on the commonalities shared with the Latino culture as a whole⁶.

Latina women face unique challenges in coping with domestic violence and patterns of help-seeking behavior. Several social, cultural,

⁴ Kasturirangan, A., & Williams, E. N. (2003). Counseling Latina battered women: A qualitative study of the Latina perspective. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 31*, 162-178.

⁵ Colby, S. L. & Ortman, J. L. (2015). Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060. *Population Estimates and Projections*. U.S. Census Bureau.

⁶ Edelson, M. G., Hokoda, A., & Ramos-Lira, L. (2007). Differences in effects of domestic violence between Latina and Non-Latina women. *Journal of Family Violence, 22*(1), 1-10.

and political barriers exist for abused Latina women, including social isolation, language barriers, discrimination, fear of deportation, dedication to family, shame, and cultural stigma of divorce⁷. Further, research has shown that Latina women underutilize social services when compared to African-American and European-American women⁸, and have been shown to be less likely than non-Latina woman to report domestic violence to the police and seek restraining orders⁹. These findings may result from cultural variables such as family values, gender roles, spirituality and language barriers, immigration status, process of acculturation, and their experience with racism that has been shown to hinder Latina women from trusting institutions including law enforcement and the courts¹⁰. These women face not only danger in their homes, but also struggle with discrimination based on their gender, race, and immigration status¹¹.



According to Hernandez-Truyol, “Latinas are in a constant state of translations, existing in the interstices of language, gender, races, cultures

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- ⁷ Lipsky, S., Caetano, R., Field, C. A., & Larkin, G. L. (2006). The role of intimate partner violence, race, and ethnicity in help-seeking behaviors. *Ethnicity and Health, 11*(1), 81-100.
- ⁸ Belknap, R. A., & Sayeed, P. (2003). Te contaria mi vida: I would tell you my life, if only you would ask. *Health Care for Women International, 24*, 723-737.
- ⁹ Krishnan, S. P., Hilbert, J. C., & VanLeeuwen, D. (2001). Domestic violence and help-seeking behaviors among rural women: Results from a shelter-based study. *Family Community Health, 24*(1), 28-38.
- ¹⁰ Hernandez-Truyol, B. E. (2001). Multidimensionality and LatCrit possibilities: Culture, Gender, and Sex. *LatCrit Primer, 2*, 120-136.
- ¹¹ Belknap, R. A., & Sayeed, P. (2003). Te contaria mi vida: I would tell you my life, if only you would ask. *Health Care for Women International, 24*, 723-737.

and ethnicities”¹². Previous research has revealed that there are similar rates of domestic violence between Latina and non-Latina women (although there are many conflicting results), however Latinas appear to be less likely to utilize domestic violence shelters. Additionally, cultural beliefs may exacerbate the effects of domestic violence on Latina women by causing them to remain in an abusive relationship longer¹³. Understanding how domestic violence impacts the Latino culture is essential for workers in helping fields in order to be able to provide culturally sensitive treatment based in understanding a Latina woman through her multidimensional identities.

LatCrit theory began as a legal pursuit but now encompasses many different areas of study for analyzing the social conditions of Latinos.

LATINO CRITICAL THEORY

The worldviews of Latina women often encompass multidimensional and complex experiences and therefore must be explored by looking through lenses of their cultural identity, gender roles, and multicultural roots. From its inception, the Latino Critical theory, or LatCrit theory, embraces a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism impact the Latino population

¹² Hernandez-Truyol, B. E. (2001). Multidimensionality and LatCrit possibilities: Culture, Gender, and Sex. *LatCrit Primer*, 2, 120-136.

¹³ Edelson, M. G., Hokoda, A., & Ramos-Lira, L. (2007). Differences in effects of domestic violence between Latina and Non-Latina women. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(1), 1-10.

and how racism intersects with other forms of oppression such as sexism, classism, nativism, monolingualism, and heterosexism¹⁴. Emerging from Critical Race theory, LatCrit theory enhanced and reconstructed the race discourse beyond the normalized binary black/white paradigm to explore

While having much in common, Latino values and family structures vary widely. We should avoid making assumptions based on ethnicity about a person's values or customs.

the realities of other ethnic groups including Latino, Native, and Asian experiences¹⁵.

This theoretical foundation provides a framework to enhance the complexities of the Latino culture and will reveal the essential multiplicities and interconnectivities of the experiences of Latina women who have been exposed to domestic violence.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

FAMILISMO

Family is a core component of the Latino culture and Latina woman tend to have a strong identification in connection with their family and a family orientation that pervades all aspects of their life¹⁶. There are several key dimensions of familismo, including family obligations and

¹⁴ Iglesias, E. M. (2000). Identity democracy, communicative power, inter/national labor rights and the evolution of LatCrit theory and community. *LatCrit Primer*, 2, 9-98.

¹⁵ Hernandez-Truyol, B. E. (2001). Multidimensionality and LatCrit possibilities: Culture, Gender, and Sex. *LatCrit Primer*, 2, 120-136.

¹⁶ Harris, R. J., Fireston, J. M., & Vega, W. A. (2005). The interaction of country of origin, acculturation, and gender role ideology on wife abuse. *Social Science Quarterly*, 86(2), 463-483.

perceived family support¹⁷. Traditional Latin American society tends to prefer a higher intensity of face-to-face family contact and they are more likely to view the extended family as a source of emotional and instrumental support¹⁸. Family upbringing is where one learns about appropriate and proper conduct, including gender roles, cultural values, and family expectations. Latino families tend to operate on the extended family model where *abuelas y abuelos* (grandmothers and grandfathers) are respected and revered, *tias y tios* (aunts and uncles) are like a second set of parents, and *primos* (cousins) are like *hermanas/os* (sisters and brothers)¹⁹. Attitudes and norms about family privacy and family loyalties often prevent woman from disclosing the abuse and speaking against their intimate partners to friends, courts, and counselors²⁰.

GENDER ROLES

According to feminist theory, issues of power and gender are the ultimate origins of domestic violence. Violence is a part of a system of coercive controls that serve to create and maintain male dominance and an imbalance of power between husband and wife²¹. The Latino family

¹⁷ Sabogal, F., Marin, G., Otero-Sabogal, R., Marin, B., & Perez-Stable, E. J. (1987). Hispanic families and acculturation: What changes and what doesn't. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 9, 397-412.

¹⁸ Harris, R. J., Fireston, J. M., & Vega, W. A. (2005). The interaction of country of origin, acculturation, and gender role ideology on wife abuse. *Social Science Quarterly*, 86(2), 463-483.

¹⁹ Hernandez-Truyol, B. E. (2001). Multidimensionality and LatCrit possibilities: Culture, Gender, and Sex. *LatCrit Primer*, 2, 120-136.

²⁰ Krishnan, S. P., Hilbert, J. C., & VanLeeuwen, D. (2001). Domestic violence and help-seeking behaviors among rural women: Results from a shelter-based study. *Family Community Health*, 24(1), 28-38.

²¹ Harris, R. J., Fireston, J. M., & Vega, W. A. (2005). The interaction of country of origin, acculturation, and gender role ideology on wife abuse. *Social Science Quarterly*, 86(2), 463-483.



structure tends to have a patriarchal hierarchy and to be socialized to follow a model dictating that men have power over women. The social construct of gender favors males and confers more entitlement-based privileges to them²². A common gender dynamic is the *machismo* male and the *marianismo* female, which dictates gender roles in terms of what it means to be male or female in Latino culture²³. The term *machismo* refers to a set of beliefs about how Latino men should act and encompasses both positive and negative qualities. The positive qualities consist of honor, pride, courage, responsibility, and obligation to the family. Some of the more negative traits which could contribute to domestic violence are sexual prowess, high alcohol consumption, and aggressiveness. On the other side, *marianismo* refers to the set of beliefs about how a Latina

Machismo and marianismo have negative as well as positive dimensions

woman should act and includes traits such as submissiveness, deference to others, and self-sacrificing behaviors. Women who have traits of a *marianismo* are thought to follow the Virgin Mary as a behavioral model²⁴.

This ideology socializes women to stop listening to their own needs, thoughts, and desires and to nurture and care for others, especially men, often at their own expense. Latina women tend to fixate on the idea of womanhood as the image of the Virgin Mary. Latinas are glorified by the *marianista* paradigm as strong, long-suffering

²² Hernandez-Truyol, B. E. (2001). Multidimensionality and LatCrit possibilities: Culture, Gender, and Sex. *LatCrit Primer*, 2, 120-136.

²³ Edelson, M. G., Hokoda, A., & Ramos-Lira, L. (2007). Differences in effects of domestic violence between Latina and Non-Latina women. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(1), 1-10.

²⁴ Edelson, M. G., Hokoda, A., & Ramos-Lira, L. (2007). Differences in effects of domestic violence between Latina and Non-Latina women. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(1), 1-10.

women who have endured and kept *la cultura latina* and the family intact. This model requires that women dispense care and pleasure, but not receive the same, that they live in the shadows of and be deferential to the men in their lives: father, brother, son, husband, and boyfriend. Perfection for a Latina is therefore seen as submission²⁵.

CULTURAL VALUES

Important cultural values that play a significant role in Latina women's identity are *personalismo* (personableness), *respeto* (respect), and *simpatía* (kindness). *Personalismo* encourages the valuing and building of warm and friendly interpersonal relationships, as opposed to impersonal or overly formal relationships. *Respeto* implies deference to authority or a hierarchical relationship orientation. It emphasizes the importance of setting clear boundaries and knowing one's place of respect in hierarchical relationships²⁶. *Simpatía* is inducing pleasure in others by actions, kindness, and grace in personal treatment, regardless of the person's status²⁷. The Latina woman may not feel comfortable expressing disagreement to the professional or domestic

The emphasis on simpatía means that a Latina may not feel comfortable expressing disagreement with a domestic violence worker.

²⁵ Vasquez, M. J. (1998). Latinos and violence: Mental health implications and strategies for clinicians. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4(4), 319-334.

²⁶ Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Arredondo, P., & Gallard-Cooper, M. (2002). *Counseling Latinos and la familia: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

²⁷ Fong, R. (2004). *Culturally competent practice with immigrant and refugee children and families*. New York: The Guilford Press.

violence worker, instead they may withdraw from services or not seek assistance at all²⁸.

SPIRITUALITY

For many individuals, spiritual/religious beliefs are a source of strength and it is advisable to explore the extent of a client's religious involvement historically as well as in the present. Spiritual beliefs may serve as a source of resilience and aid coping in Latina survivors²⁹, however, at times certain spiritual beliefs can also create vulnerabilities.

Indigenous spiritual orientations and the tenets of Catholicism have shaped beliefs and practices among Latinos. The term *espiritualismo* (spirituality) is the belief in the existence of and reliance on other forces beyond the human experience. It is usually expressed through organized religion or most commonly through domestic rituals and practices such as *altares* (altars) and *curanderismo* (traditional healing practices)³⁰.

The majority of Latina women belong to the Christian faith, however there are many faith affiliations among Latinos. Faith plays a

Assessing religious adherence is as important as remembering that Latinos can have any religious background and set of spiritual beliefs.

²⁸ Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Arredondo, P., & Gallard-Cooper, M. (2002). *Counseling Latinos and la familia: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

²⁹ de la Rosa, I., Barnett-Queen, T., Messick, M. & Gurrola, M. (2015). Spirituality and Resilience Among Mexican American IPV Survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, forthcoming.

³⁰ Fong, R. (2004). *Culturally competent practice with immigrant and refugee children and families*. New York: The Guilford Press.

critical role for many Latina women and provides a sense of identity and direction in their lives as well as guidance in education and childrearing. Many women of Latino background seek medical and mental healthcare from alternative healthcare providers³¹, as well as obtaining guidance from their religion on what it means to be a good woman, wife, mother, and daughter.

The term *fatalismo* (fatalism) relates to *espiritualismo* by providing a sense that one is not in complete control of one's own destiny, or of surrendering to fate. Thus the response in adverse situations is not to attempt to gain control, but to submit to external forces such as God or destiny³².

LANGUAGE

Language is an important vehicle by which knowledge, beliefs, and traditions are revealed and it is closely related to an individual's history and culture³³. There are many misconceptions about why a Latino speaks only Spanish or only English. Language use can be associated with generation in the United States³⁴. A wide range of variability in the use of English

Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the United States

- ³¹ The Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services. (2008). *Adaptation guidelines for serving Latino children and families affected by trauma* (1st ed.). San Diego, CA: Chadwick Center for Children and Families.
- ³² Fong, R. (2004). *Culturally competent practice with immigrant and refugee children and families*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- ³³ Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Arredondo, P., & Gallard-Cooper, M. (2002). *Counseling Latinos and la familia: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- ³⁴ Arredondo, P., & Perez, P. (2002). Counseling paradigms and Latina/o Americans: Contemporary considerations. In Harper, F. D., McFadden, J., & Friend, M. P. (Eds.), *Culture and Counseling: New Approaches* (pp. 115-131). Portland, OR: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

and Spanish with a Latino client and considerations such as generation in the United States or acculturation should be explored with the client.

Many Latinos do not speak Spanish at all. For some, their parents were punished at school for speaking Spanish, so they discouraged it in their children. Other share that being bilingual or speaking Spanish whenever possible can be viewed as an indication of comfort. It is important to explore and gain an awareness of where speaking Spanish may be uncomfortable to the person, such as in the workplace or around monolingual English speakers.

Bilingualism should be seen as an academic, psychological, social, and economic asset, and not a deficient. Language is a tool of expression of culture and identity, therefore it should be fostered.

However, Latinos are often faced with language discrimination in education, employment, and when they are seeking help from agencies³⁵. As practitioners and service providers move closer to developing culturally sensitive treatment they must consider an individual's values, beliefs, and customs and understand the role of language in the expression of these factors³⁶.

A domestic violence worker needs to explore the level of acculturation with the Latina woman to help support and provide effective treatment congruent with her cultural identity and values.

³⁵ Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Arredondo, P., & Gallard-Cooper, M. (2002). *Counseling Latinos and la familia: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

³⁶ Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Arredondo, P., & Gallard-Cooper, M. (2002). *Counseling Latinos and la familia: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is the exchange of cultural attitudes and behaviors that occur when people from differing cultural backgrounds come into contact with one another, mainly referring to the adaptation of the minority to the majority culture³⁷. Acculturation is viewed as a potentially stressful experience because of the culture conflict, isolation from social networks, discrimination, and possibly a decline of self-concept³⁸. Levels of acculturation vary on a continuum and may serve as guidance for a worker to explore the Latina's worldview. Acculturation also varies within families and at times may cause family conflict due to intergenerational variations in acculturation³⁹. Traditional expectations of cultural values, gender roles, and language may vary according to a person's adaptive level to the mainstream culture.

Providing culturally competent services to Latinos begins with a self-assessment.

CULTURE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

Understanding the diversities that exist between and among Latinas, a domestic violence worker needs to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding to provide adequate services for Latina women in crisis. Workers must be able to empower the woman, while

³⁷ Unger, J. B., Ritt-Olson, A., Wagner, K., Soto, D. Baezconde-Garbanati, L. (2007). A comparison of acculturation measures among Hispanic/Latino Adolescents. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 36, 555-565.

³⁸ Flaskerud, J., & Uman, G. (1996). Acculturation and its effect on self-esteem among immigrant Latina women. *Journal of Human Stress*, 22(3), 123-133.

³⁹ Thomson, M.D. & Hoffman-Goetz, L. (2009). Defining and measuring acculturation: A systematic review of public health studies with Hispanic populations in the United States. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69, 983-991.

using her strengths and cultural framework to make educated decision about what is the best for the Latina woman. Failure to understand the Latina woman's multidimensionality and multicultural roots could be perceived as oppressing and marginalizing. Workers must be diligent to encourage cultural values and view them as strengths, instead of using their own worldview as an indicator of how the woman should live. There is still little empirical research to guide the process of training shelters on cultural sensitivity in domestic violence services. This study aims to further the understanding of this diverse population to consequently benefit domestic violence service providers on how to adequately and sensitively work with Latinos.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative study consists of semi-focused interviews with two Latina women residing in a domestic violence shelter. The methodology of semi-focused interviews was chosen so as to be able to form an atmosphere of safety for the woman to provide an honest testimony that allows the individual to speak, focus on their own thought process, have individual attention, and foster self-disclosure⁴⁰. Semi-focused interviews provide the researchers with direct access to the language and concepts that the participants use to structure their responses⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Madriz, E. I. (1998). Using focus groups with lower socioeconomic status Latina women. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 114(15), 1-15.

⁴¹ Huges, D., & DuMont, K. (1993). Using focus groups to facilitate culturally anchored research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21(6), 775-806.

FINDINGS

Eight themes were identified on the basis of the interview transcriptions, the process notes, and follow up reflections. The themes are (a) cultural identity, (b) gender roles, (c) perceptions of family support, (d) cultural values, (e) leaving the relationship, (f) community, (g) shelter services, and (h) shelter staff. The term typical is used when both women answered in the same way or in a similar manner and the term variant is used when the women responded differently.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

The two women identified themselves differently, however their perceptions of the typical Latina were similar. One woman “Bella” self-identified as being Mexican-American; while the other woman “Josie” preferred to self-identify as Hispanic⁴². The two women disclosed that

There is wide variation in how a Latino/a may wish to refer to themselves

they see themselves fortunate for being born in the United States and being able to speak English. They both gave examples of the discrimination against Latina women who are not native to the United States or who do not know how to speak English.

One woman stated “I see myself as being Mexican-American. I see myself as, you know, being Mexican, but being blessed to not have been born in Juarez. A lady from Juarez has a full taste of, you know, discrimination and being just rejected basically, by anyone and everyone.”

⁴² Names have been changed to protect the privacy of our participants.

Both of the women felt that when a person appears to be from Mexico, the more discrimination they experience. The women appear to sort the different types of Latina women by their immigration status and language usage. Describing their cultural identity, both women stated that they are proud of their Latin American descent; however, they rejected certain aspects of what they feel associated them with immigrant woman; i.e. language usage (specifically being able to speak English).

CULTURAL VALUES AND TRADITIONS

This domain was created to further understand the multiple values that the participants hold. The women appeared to have difficulties describing their cultural values and traditions. Both women described language, food, family, respect, and spirituality to be the most important cultural values and stated that they would pass these on to their children. The women both discussed the importance of family and family respect; even though neither of their parents supported their decision to leave the abusive relationship and turned them away. Bella stated “we have a lot of respect, respect goes a long way in our family, you know, honor your mother and father regardless of how they treat you, love them, you know, just respect to the utmost. They are your mother and father and same thing for your grandparents, same things for your siblings, aunts and uncles, your give them the utmost respect.” Josie discussed the importance for a family to correct you as a child and felt that she had good “tias” who interacted with her as mothers, “I have a couple of moms that would lecture me, and give me good morals.”

The participants discussed the importance of food in their family and in the shelter. The women discussed that it is important to have Mexican food in the shelter, because it is what their children are used to. The women also discussed the importance of food in their family and traditions with cooking with their family. Josie explained, “food, the way that the food is made and the talk during the cooking, like *chismes* (gossip), that is a good cultural thing to have, it keeps the other ones that are being talked about straight.”

Language was also a value that both women believed was important to their culture. Both of them described that previously they really did not see the importance of learning Spanish or teaching Spanish to their children, but now see it as an advantage. Bella feels that Spanish “can take me as far as I want it to take me, because it is amazing how not too many people know it and I can translate for someone in Wal-Mart or in the bank. It’s gotten me through so many things, it’s gotten me through jobs; you can even get paid more for being bilingual. At first I did not think it was important to teach my children any kind of Spanish, but I do now. My oldest now wants to know Spanish; he says he wants to know what I am saying.”

Both women also emphasized the importance of knowing English as well as Spanish. Bella stated, “it’s very important as well as anyone who knows Spanish, they need to learn English. You know especially if you

It is difficult for an individual from any culture to see their culture objectively and be able to describe it. It is best to ask specific questions.

live here in the United States, you need to learn it and it is difficult, but you need to learn it, it is vital.”

Spirituality was discussed with both women and both women described themselves as Catholic. When talking about culture, both women discussed Christianity and Catholicism as a part of their identity. Josie described the importance of the sign of the cross, praying, and the sacraments to her and her family. Bella stated “I believe that I have installed in my children that Jesus is the only way, you know, Jesus is the only way. The world will say many things, but Jesus is the only way to salvation.”

One variant response was Josie’s discussion of how a Hispanic will give a sign to move on in the conversation. She discussed that there is a throat clearing process where a person “clears their throat, straightens their neck, and straightens their back. You straighten up and kind of regroup in a second, but it pretty much means let’s go forward.” She explained that she and her family would do that if they are offended rather than confront the person.

Finally, the women discussed how they felt their culture was changing. Josie discussed how she felt that social workers were a big part of her culture changing and she felt that her culture was changing for the better. Josie explained that she feels that the children are taken better care of, her culture is moving away from poverty, and women are able to speak up more. Whereas Bella only described how she has broken her family traditions by leaving and not staying connected to the family. Bella

describes the value of staying connected with the family as almost “mafia” like.

GENDER ROLES

The participants described traditional gender roles in the Latino culture where the woman is viewed as submissive and the male is dominant. This domain was broken down into two categories, female gender role expectations and male gender role expectations, to examine how women and men are brought up in the Latino culture.

The women both discussed how they did not feel that they were equals to men. The participants describe the role of a woman through the identities of being a wife, a mother, and a daughter. They each stated specific expectations and obligations to their family. Josie expressed that the role of a good wife is to stay in the kitchen, take care of her man, and be loving to her children. Bella stated that “I forget what I am allowed to do, what I am allowed to say,” but discussed that “a woman was not meant to carry this whole load and a man is not meant to carry the whole load, you have to work together in being united, otherwise a marriage cannot work.” The women discussed how they are encouraged to be submissive to their fathers and their husbands.

Gender roles vary quite a bit in the Latino culture.

The participants also felt that the role of a man was traditional and described the role as being a protector, dominant, and a father. They described traditional gender specific expectations and chores where the men’s duties are outside the home and at work. Bella believes that “a

male role would be to, he would be the protector, he would be the provider, he would be someone to lean on, because a woman is not always, a woman was not made like a man was. A man's role would also be a father and successful." Josie explained her view as "he should lift all of the heavy stuff, he should work hard, and then be able to come home and do whatever he wants to." Josie stated that she is raising her son to be "the dominant one" and explains that this will make him "a good husband, but a difficult son."

PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

This domain explored the participants' perceptions of their families during and after the abusive relationship. The participants typically believed that their family was supportive of them, except when it came to leaving the abusive relationship. Both women went to their families first when they left the relationship, however, they were encouraged to return to the relationship and not break up their family. Bella disclosed that her family took his side and still has a relationship with her abusive partner. "Bella" feels that she can still call on her family for support, but feels she cannot go to them for this, because "they feel that the abuse is ok and that the family unit is more important." Bella stated that they do not know that she is in shelter and they would not approve of it, if they knew.

Josie's responses were similar to Bella's. She explained that the only way her family will accept her leaving is if it all works out, but if she fails they will not accept her leaving. Both women explained that they have great respect for their parents and will always love them.

LEAVING THE RELATIONSHIP

Participants described their decisions to leave their abusive partners as an act of learning what other women have done and their thoughts about staying in an abusive relationship helped them to realize the need to leave. Both women discussed specific incidents that caused them fear and propelled them toward leaving. Bella discussed that she talked to a woman who had gone through a similar experience but had decided to stay for the children. She told Bella that it was not worth it and that she regretted it. Josie stated that she started to learn about domestic violence in a class she was taking and started to think about how she had no more control left in her life.

Lack of family support for leaving an abusive relationship is a tremendous hurdle to a woman seeking help.

Upon deciding to leave their partners, both women went to their families and then decided to go into a shelter. Both of the participants had previously heard about the shelter, but pictured it like a gym room with cots in it, therefore neither of them wanted to go and felt like bad mothers for taking their children into the shelter. The participants discussed their delight in the shelter atmosphere and felt safe and welcomed by the staff.

Josie explained her experience as, “I called the police and the police told me to come into shelter. They took me in and they fed me really good food, and it was warm and home cooked, so I felt at home. They showed me the room and I knew my children would feel safe. They could sit up in bed and see me because our beds were so close and it was clean.” Bella

stated that she first had to turn to herself for help, because her family would not help her and then when she came into the shelter she was able to receive counseling. Only one participant sought medical treatment, which was for a panic attack.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

This category was designed to examine what the participants felt about the support of their community. The domain was broken down into three categories: views of domestic violence, safety concerns, and community resources available. Josie describes the community she is currently residing in as old-fashioned and “stuck in the 1980’s with drive-by shootings and cocaine.” She stated that the community believes that domestic violence is normal and that the community members do not recognize domestic violence. Bella feels that she is safe in her community, but also agrees that the community does not see that domestic violence is wrong.

Community outreach is an excellent tool to help change community perceptions on domestic violence.

Both women discussed the community resources that they were aware of in the community and feel that there are not enough community resources for everyone and that not everyone knows where to go for the resources. Bella discussed the challenges that many Latina women have who only speak Spanish, because they have fewer resources available to them. Josie feels that she is just now starting to learn but feels “it is a lot of pressure, because I am in this new place and I still don’t know the name

of the electric company. There are not enough housing resources and I feel that there needs to be more dental.” Josie explained the challenges that she in receiving Medicaid.

SHELTER SERVICES

This category was created to explore what the participants felt about the domestic violence shelter and to describe what they felt works and does not work. The women both described feeling welcomed when they first entered the shelter and mentioned how impressed they were with the facility.

The women were asked if they had a magic wand how they would change the shelter. Bella felt that she liked the counseling, being around others that are in the same situation as her, and having friends. She disliked the conflicts between the women, unsupervised children, and mean and unmotivated caseworkers and RA’s (Residential Assistants). Bella felt the needs of the shelter are: more community resources, childcare, new beds, new carpets, mandatory groups, parenting groups, and loving workers.

Josie liked that she felt welcomed and loved, that everyone followed the rules, and that people listened to her. Josie explained that she did like not being told what to do when she was in a hurry. Josie feels that the needs of the shelter are: more realistic transitional plans, having access to

Consider using a tool to assess clients’ perceptions of the shelter and suggested areas of improvement.

their own food, community resources, mandatory groups, transportation, and caseworkers with more time.

SHELTER STAFF

This category explored the type of support the participants felt they needed from the staff in the domestic violence shelter; however, it appeared that the women did not feel that they were being treated well and described it as abusive. Both Bella and Josie stated that the race or ethnicity of the worker was not important to them, more importantly they wanted a caseworker that has time, patience, understanding, resourcefulness, and is on their side. The participants both disclosed that their workers did not have time for them, were mean to them, and were “almost against them.” Josie stated “some caseworkers are really abusive, I have seen really mad caseworkers and it’s like ok wait a second, now do we have an abuser and an abuser. Like you know, or are you going to teach us how to break the cycle.” Both women disclosed that they only talk to their counselors and not any other workers.

IMPLICATIONS

One of the dangers in talking about a negative problem among minority groups is that it can appear to place blame on the culture, its values, or its practices⁴³, however it is the goal of the researcher to bring about awareness of the specific changes that service providers need to

⁴³ Vasquez, M. J. (1998). Latinos and violence: Mental health implications and strategies for clinicians. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4(4), 319-334.

make to meet the needs of the Latina survivors of domestic violence. The responses from the women explore the marginalization of their experiences as a woman in their community. While the responses provided by the women in this study support much of the research that has already been done in the field of multicultural counseling, the women added many important points about the type of services and service workers that they feel would help them live in a violence-free environment.

Discussing culture and cultural identity is not always easy, especially when discussing a group as diverse as the Latino population. The responses of the participants highlight the importance of family and family values to Latinos. When asked whether battering affects the experience of family disintegration, the responses from the participants reveal that leaving an abusive relationship could result in the family aligning with the batterer instead of the victim.

The responses from the two women do not support the idea of finding solace in extended family members and highlight how the devastation of the abuse could be magnified by the family, as leaving the relationship is perceived as failing to show loyalty to the family. However, the participants continue to feel much respect for the family and share that the family is still a part of their support system, just not around issues involving domestic violence.

With marianismo women are expected to be submissive, tend to the children, and cater to the men.


For the women, their gender roles are aligned with traditional female roles of good housekeeper, mother, and wife. The responses highlight the role of *marianismo*, or the idea that women are submissive, tend to the children, and cater to the men.

The socialization of gender roles in Latina women tends to increase the marginalization, invisibility, and subordination for Latina women inside and outside the Latino community, but also reveals the strength of the women's ability to bear the suffering without protest for the sake of their family⁴⁴. The responses from the women explained how they are proud of the mothers they are and of the wives that they were. The participants appear to be raised with mixed messages of the women they are supposed to be in the Latino culture and how they are supposed to be in the mainstream culture. This identity confusion can cause psychological stress for the women.

Examining the women's responses in regards to the shelter services and the shelter staff reveals that there clearly needs to be an organizational culture that recognizes and embraces the multiplicity of the identities of a Latina woman and rejects any possibility of marginalization or oppression. The participants' concerns show that shelter staff can be viewed as oppressive or even as replicating the behaviors of the abuser. The responses from the women reveal a desire for shelter workers to be understanding, supportive, and knowledgeable about resources.

Furthermore, shelter staff need to help the client create a culturally relevant and individualized transition plan that will fit her needs and the

⁴⁴ Vasquez, M. J. (1998). Latinos and violence: Mental health implications and strategies for clinicians. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4(4), 319-334.



needs of her family. It is essential that shelter staff understand the commonalities that are present when working with Latina woman in abusive relationships. While these commonalities should be used as an initial conceptual framework, understanding that each woman comes with unique experiences that necessitates an individualized treatment plan is also essential. Workers should not assume the relational patterns or attitudes of a Latina woman based on her ethnicity, but rather use cultural knowledge as a flexible framework.

Domestic violence workers can better serve Latina clients through deepening their knowledge and understanding of other ethnicities and cultures to be able to create a transition plan that is culturally specific to the individual. It is useful to explore different identities with the Latina woman, including what it means to be a woman, a wife, a mother, and a spiritual/religious follower, as well as her roles in her family. This will help in the creation of an individualized transition plan which fits her need to be successful at sustaining a violence-free lifestyle.

Possible the most important recommendation from this study, however, is that advocates should work with the Latina population to change the societal norms and conditions that continually marginalize and oppress the Latino population and lead to high levels of risk for Latina victims of domestic violence.