

NATIONAL  
LATINO  
ALLIANCE  
FOR THE ELIMINATION  
OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



ALIANZA  
LATINA  
NACIONAL  
PARA ERRADICAR LA  
VIOLENCIA DOMESTICA

**POSITION PAPER**  
**WORKING WITH MEN & BOYS**  
**TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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**Author**

Julia Perilla, Ph.D.



## ALIANZA MISSION

The National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza) is part of a national effort to address the domestic violence needs and concerns of under-served populations. It represents a growing network of Latina and Latino advocates, practitioners, researchers, community activists, and survivors of domestic violence. Alianza's mission is to: ***promote understanding, initiate and sustain dialogue, and generate solutions that move toward the elimination of domestic violence affecting Latino communities, with an understanding of the sacredness of all relations and communities.***

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# POSITION PAPER ON WORKING WITH MEN & BOYS

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Since 1997, Alianza has been actively involved in addressing domestic violence at the national level in the areas of training, research, policy, and community education. Our collaboration with federal agencies and organizations has provided visibility and credibility to our work to prevent and end domestic violence in our communities. In that process we have taken approaches and developed strategies that often differ from conventional ways of addressing this issue, for example the inclusion of both women and men at all levels, our work with entire families, and our focus on youth.

This position paper on working with men and boys delineates the principles with which we approach this task. Because Alianza believes that the elimination of domestic violence is an evolving issue that requires a great deal of thought and an inclusive process, we see this position paper as a work in progress and a vehicle to engage people in conversation. We expect to offer updates on our positions on this issue as it becomes indicated. At the same time, we strongly encourage your comments.

We want to know how the content of this paper matches your experiences and principles. Part of Alianza's mission is to promote dialogue. We invite you, then, to think aloud with us.

## SUMMARY

Alianza firmly believes that the eradication of domestic violence from Latino communities requires the ongoing and committed participation of both Latinas and Latinos – women and men. Furthermore, the following are essential elements of Alianza's philosophy and strategies regarding our work with men.

- Men and women must work together to create models of egalitarian and respectful collaborations and working relationships that can serve as a blueprint for our current work to address domestic abuse and for the next generations of Latinos and Latinas.
- Given the fact that most of the victims and survivors of domestic violence are women and children and most perpetrators are men, we believe that it is important to dedicate this entire document to exploring and discussing male to female violence in the home. At the same time, Alianza is well aware that the majority of men do not use violence against their families, that there is battering in same-sex relationships, and that some men are abused by the female partners as well. These issues will continue to be addressed by Alianza in other publications and venues.

- In order to understand the root causes of domestic violence and to enhance and maximize the potential collaborations between men and women in the movement, it is essential to analyze and address the power differential between genders and the need to re-educate and dispel the misconceptions and false teachings behind these gender imbalances. Violence and abuse are never justified. Men must engage in ongoing self-reflection regarding attitudes of superiority based on gender and the devaluing of women.
- The safety and well being of women and children is paramount to our joint work. Whereas we recognize that Latinos who batter are internal oppressors and victimizers who need to be held accountable (sometimes through the criminal justice system), it is important to develop and promote services and programs that help them to stabilize their lives and enhance their chances for remaining non-violent. We have to go beyond viewing them only as “perpetrators”...they are part of our families and communities, men who need help being with women, elders, and children. Healing from oppression and recovering positive aspects of our cultural traditions, men can find real balance in their lives, recapture a sense of belonging, and become productive members of their communities – nurturing fathers, good husbands/partners, role models for other men and boys, and advocates for non-violence.
- To this end, the eradication of violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular requires that we move beyond criminalization and punitive measures against men who batter as the only strategy to address this social problem. It is important to understand how abuse took root in our families and how this has happened in the context of multiple oppressions in order to move toward the right steps to heal and change.
- Latino cultures, as do other cultures, contain values, beliefs, and expectations that can be used to justify, excuse, and even encourage domestic violence. At the same time, there are a number of Latino cultural traditions and values that support and celebrate respectful and healthy relationships that need to be emphasized and encouraged and that can be employed to help eliminate domestic violence using an assets-based approach.
- Domestic violence is a learned behavior, not a genetic characteristic (except in rare cases), nor a mental health problem, although mental conditions and substance abuse can co-exist with domestic violence. As a learned pattern, it can be unlearned and replaced by non-violent beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and behaviors. Men need to

be involved in helping to create safe and healthy families.

- Domestic violence is a social justice and human rights issue and its interventions (for men who batter, survivors, and their children) are best approached in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner from within the communities in which they occur. Professionals (i.e. psychologists, attorneys, social workers, physicians, etc.) have important assets to offer in the joint effort to eradicate violence in Latino homes and in intimate relationships. However, professionals are most effective when they serve as adjuncts to the work that is carried out in communities, where front-line workers can provide credibility, accessibility, and ultimately, sustainability for our work with families. At the same time, collaboration between professionals and front line workers strengthens community capacity and thus enhances the social change component of our work.
- Men who work with Latino men who batter must establish strong relationships with women advocates based on a respectful, egalitarian and just approach, so that the safety and well-being of survivors and their children is always at the center of the work with men.
- Latino communities within the U.S. are highly diverse. Outreach efforts and prevention campaigns targeting Latinos must reflect this diversity within diversity so that individuals can identify with messages that promote a focus on cultural values, attitudes and beliefs and responsible models of non-violent manhood based on respect and equality.
- Our work with Latino boys and adolescents is a central building block in the eradication of domestic violence in our communities. Alianza is thus committed to encouraging adults to listen to the voices of our youth and supporting their efforts in prevention initiatives that respond to the specific needs of Latino youth in all its rich diversity.
- Our work with men must be carried out at both the intervention and prevention levels. Thus, at the same time that we work with men who have used violence against their partners and children, we must also engage men who have stopped their violence and want to continue their journey towards non-violence, and with men who have never used violence and want to join the work of eradicating domestic violence from our communities.

## **DISCUSSION**

*Domestic violence is a serious and damaging problem for Latino communities throughout the United States, one that requires an honest look at a range of factors that perpetuate this violence within our communities, as well as outside our communities... Latino men who batter are influenced by oppressive patriarchal traditions and models of masculinity and manhood that are widespread in our cultures and in society. In addition, the multiple oppressions that many men in our communities experience intensify oppressive conduct in intimate relationships and complicate the change process...*

*Because of the magnitude of the problem and its far-reaching effects on our families and communities, we need the involvement of multiple sectors of our population. Families and members of our communities have crucial roles to play in preventing and ending domestic violence...*

(from Alianza's Analytical Framework)

Alianza believes that our work with men is about social change. The approach of Latinas and Latinos working together not only reflects the reality of the lives of our people, but it is also the culturally appropriate way to eradicate domestic violence in our communities. Cultural values and traditions that may support and condone domestic abuse must be identified and questioned. At the same time, those traditions and values that enhance life-giving and respectful relationships must be emphasized and used extensively in programs, interventions, campaigns and trainings in our communities. With the well being of women, men and children at the center, these initiatives should always be based on a careful gender analysis that also includes histories of oppression and current life challenges such as poverty and immigration issues, among many others. Finally, our work with men and boys is essential in order to stop the intergenerational cycle of violence and help build safe, healthy, and thriving families for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

### **How serious is the problem?**

Domestic violence is a serious problem throughout the world. In the United States, studies indicate that one in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Prevalence studies of domestic violence in Latino communities within the United States have obtained contradictory results. Some research suggests that Latinas may experience domestic violence at rates higher than Anglo women and other studies have found no significant differences between women from these two groups. Of special interest to our discussion of our work with men are the results of a study that found significant differences among Latino subgroups, based on the country of origin of the participants.<sup>2</sup> These initial findings call attention to the tremendous diversity within Latino communities and the need to

design services and interventions that are specific to individual Latino communities and subgroups.

Although it is difficult to obtain comparable statistics for different countries, there is a wide disparity in the prevalence rates of domestic violence depending on the country being studied. Studies conducted in Latin America suggest that in some countries 10% of the women experience domestic violence, whereas studies in other countries reveal that 60% of women experience violence from their partners during the course of their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have enacted laws against domestic violence or have characterized the violence as a crime.<sup>4</sup>

### Why work with men?

This is a question that the original Alianza steering committee members asked themselves in the mid-1990s. Having worked for many years in the violence against women movement, the Latina women and Latino men who came together to begin the work of the organization had to struggle individually and collectively to create a structure that was respectful, egalitarian, fair, and effective. It was not an easy task. We had been used to the then existing model in which women worked with women and men worked with men with little, if any, communication or contact. There was mistrust and a tendency to retreat to our learned roles. When the men's voices began to predominate in our discussion, some women were reluctant to challenge our brothers. Even though the men who were with us had taken strong stands against male violence, the pervasive legacy of male dominance and women's subordination followed us. Little by little we got to know one another and were able to listen to each other in different ways, to challenge each other respectfully, and to create structures that reflected our philosophy (i.e. we opted for a joint leadership model and elected two co-Chairs, a woman and a man). We also decided to maintain a 70% to 30% female to male ratio in our Board.

Our first national symposium in 1997 generated a productive discussion about men and women working together that was both skeptical and self-reflective. It led to an unshakable commitment to create approaches that were appropriate for our communities. Because we live in the world and our society is not yet gender-neutral, we find ourselves at times reverting to the old ways and need to remind one another that what we are about is not only advocacy and policy, but social change. This means that we continue to work together – women and men – to model healthy ways of collaboration in our common goal of eradicating domestic violence in Latino communities.

In deciding to work together, we were beginning to affirm a Latino/a vision. It was important to include men because we are rooted in a culture where families are central. Men are an integral part of our lives as brothers, fathers, husbands, uncles, sons, etc. Patriarchy exists within our culture and sets the stage for many forms of violence against women, but it does not mean that it is impossible to learn to work together. In reality, working together has enriched and deepened our vision.

The responses to violence against women in the United States have attempted to protect battered women and their children by creating community responses that rely heavily on shelters for battered women and on criminal justice system approaches to hold men accountable for their violence. While we value the life-saving aspect of these responses, we feel that more comprehensive strategies are needed to address the realities of the women, men and children who were affected by the abuse as survivors, witnesses, or perpetrators of violence in their homes.

In taking this position, we are mindful of the voices of many Latina women who have been abused. Participants in focus groups conducted by Alianza in sites throughout the United States as well as many Latina survivors who are members of community-based programs have indicated that they want the violence in their home to stop without having to necessarily leave their partners or involve the criminal justice system. Therefore, they often ask for services for their partners and children, in addition to those available for themselves. They have a sense of kinship with the men who have abused them and their children, even as they acknowledge the harm and hurt that the men have inflicted. A key issue is that they can acknowledge their partners both as oppressors and as victims of oppression who, like themselves, face multiple challenges. Alianza acknowledges and respects these voices even as we want to hold men responsible and help them to change.

Dr. Etiony Aldarondo, a well-known domestic violence activist, researcher and writer who has been active with Alianza from its beginnings, states: "It is essential to include men in the domestic violence movement. In fact, it would be a mistake to exclude them. We bring a different dimension to the dialogue about what Latino men should be doing to end domestic violence. We have a stake in helping to define what it is to be a good man, a good husband, and a good father; and beyond that what we can do to promote the well-being of our children, our families, and our communities. As Latinos we cannot be silent and expect others to tell us the kind of individuals we should be or how we should be perceived." Dr. Aldarondo is one of many male voices from our community that we acknowledge and accept as part of the vision of women and men working together. In Alianza's vision, "we" means the joint voices

of women and men, Latinas and Latinos, who have joined together to advocate for a comprehensive approach to creating safer and more peaceful families and supporting our communities.

Working with men not only means that men are part of Alianza and that we continue to explore and model ways for Latinas and Latinos to work together. Alianza continues to develop opportunities for men and women to collaborate at the national and local levels to create effective strategies to address the issue of domestic violence from within a Latino cultural perspective. In our communities, women parent sons and have fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, and other male relatives. At the same time, men parent daughters and have mothers, sisters, nieces, etc. and do not want to see these women's lives affected by violence. Our efforts must go beyond expecting Latino men to treat their partners and children in non-violent ways; we must also strive to create healthy relationships, in which our Latino brothers are responsible, respectful, and loving partners and fathers, and models for children of what an honorable Latino man can and should be.

This attempt has resulted in both controversy and hope. The new paradigm of working across genders and emphasizing profound change for men has not always been understood or accepted by mainstream domestic violence institutions or even by some Latina-led agencies, who have expressed concerns about the potential danger of losing the focus on the plight of battered women or diminishing the emphasis on accountability for the batterer. However, Alianza is convinced that this approach, rather than shifting focus or minimizing the importance of batterers taking responsibility for their violence, actually enhances the safety of Latina survivors and their children in culturally appropriate ways. To understand our approach, we would like to briefly consider our history and culture and how this impacts perspectives for working with men.

### **What is the role of History and Culture?**

Whether immigrant or U.S.-born, Latino people have endured multiple oppressions. Latin America has a long history of social oppression based on class, ethnicity, and economic resources that has deep and significant connections with gender relations. Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean endured a cruel colonization process at the hands of the Spanish and the Portuguese, among others. Native populations were forcibly converted to Christianity, enslaved and subjected to a sustained colonizing campaign. In this process, native women were violated and forced to marry and/or bear children for the colonizers among many other abuses. This, along with the patriarchal traditions of the colonizers, contributed to the devaluation of women. In addition, colonization was characterized by large

scale economic oppression of native and newly arriving colonial populations. A very few families achieved highly concentrated control of wealth, natural resources and land. In most instances, the result was a tyrannical and hierarchical social structure with rigid class differences that lasted well beyond the colonial period.

This hierarchical social structure was mirrored in the rigid gender-based power hierarchies within many Latino families. In a sense, no matter how oppressed, humiliated and deprived of opportunity a man was in the public arena, in private life he could count on being the boss – the person in control. Within this rigid tradition, men had the right of command within their families, including control of property and economic resources. Men could also have illicit sexual relationships or maintain other households outside of wedlock with little consequence. Sadly, the injustices and oppressions experienced in daily life could fuel or serve to justify some Latinos' violence and oppressiveness towards their partners. We are still struggling with this tragic connection between public humiliation and victimization and private oppression and abuse. We think of this as internalized oppression.

This aspect of traditional Latino masculinity is the source of many stereotypes about Latinos. There is a prevailing perception in American society that Latino men are more sexist and more violent than men from other cultures, a stereotype that is not supported by research studies. Machismo is often understood as a particularly virulent and one-sided form of male supremacy. Unfortunately, the idea that violence is a norm for men – especially for Latino men – is believed not only by people in general, but also by some Latino males about themselves. This perception is internalized and used by some Latino men as an excuse or justification to commit acts of violence against their partners and children. At the same time, we all live in a general society in which violence is often condoned and accepted as a way to relate to one another.

However, the mainstream American stereotypes about machismo and Latino men tell only a part of the story. Within Latino communities there were many sources of opposition against oppressive and hierarchical social structures and the equally rigid gender-based family structures. It is important to recognize that our historical roots also include a number of indigenous communities that maintained a more respectful and egalitarian process. Additionally, one of the major sources of opposition was the enduring emphasis on and belief in the importance of family and family ties. This probably has roots in the Spanish/Portuguese and in the Native American societies of the Americas. To meet family obligations and to fulfill one's role within the family are core ideals for many Latino societies.

For men, this has offered a counterweight to the one-dimensional emphasis on male supremacy. While many men expect respect and obedience within their families simply because they are men, others believe they must earn respect, by being good providers, giving others respect, providing a good example for children, and by meeting obligations as fathers, husbands, sons and providers. Again, it is important to recognize that there are conflicting models of manhood for most Latino men, that this is a normal state of affairs in our societies and in our culture, and that we want to adopt approaches to working with Latinos that recognize and build upon our strengths.

It is important to note that though family is a central value of Latino cultures and essential to our understanding of domestic violence, there can be a tendency to romanticize the family to such an extent that we overlook the tremendous contradictions that are present in its midst. To stop violence against Latina women it is necessary to remember that our families are influenced by values and practices that encourage both male oppressiveness and women's acceptance of subordination, as well as by values and practices that are protective against violence and abuse and that encourage nurturing, responsible and egalitarian relationships by men.

The valuing of the masculine over the feminine, rigid gender roles and expectations, and the misuse of male power within relationships, for example, are often present in Latino families. At the same time, cultural values such as giving and earning respect, giving a good example to children, honor, a strong work ethic, and traditional ways of relating that are more respectful and life-giving are also found among Latino men. The point is that we can examine all the subtle and complex aspects of our cultures to identify those that open the door to oppression and violence and those that can be used to promote healthy and egalitarian relationships without either romanticizing or pathologizing Latino families.

We can use the positive values, practices and traditions to promote personal, internal change for men. This is best achieved in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner by working from within our culture, since those who are most familiar with the culture possess the tools necessary to analyze and change oppressive dynamics. Latino communities may feel more comfortable with - and thus more willing to participate in - interventions and approaches in which men and women work together for the good of the family.

Embedded in Alianza's advocacy on behalf of culturally affirmative responses to domestic violence is our recognition that culture is complex and contradictory. We recognize culture as an important element in the life of individual human beings. It is a way of maintaining and disseminating the values, beliefs, and structures of a group. It is critical to

recognize culture as a historic and dynamic process that is ever-evolving. Viewing culture as a static and rigid structure is problematic, because this implies that it is impossible to change. By contrast, recognition of the active, ever-changing nature of culture creates awareness that each individual, through active participation, is helping to create her or his own history<sup>5</sup> as well as a more just society.

In reality, Latinos have choices regarding the pathways they will follow as men, husbands, and fathers through life. Many people consider machismo and its rigid adherence to male supremacy the only Latino model and overlook the other (contradictory) dimensions of manhood in Latino culture. Rather than acknowledging and using these well-accepted and positive features of Latino manhood that are present among many men and can serve to stabilize our families and communities, we are offered models and approaches to eradicate domestic violence in which Latino strengths, values, histories, and traditions are totally absent.

Latino cultures have elements that can provide strong foundations for creating effective social change strategies. For that however, we must carefully engage both men and women in honest and respectful dialogue about issues that are central to our work. When exploring the role of culture in our work with Latino men, it is necessary to be aware not only of gender issues, but also of language, poverty, sexuality, class structures, race, ethnicity, religion, diversity within the community, and immigration issues, among other factors.<sup>6</sup> Census figures indicate that approximately 40% of Latinos living in the United States are foreign born and of these, 43% entered the U.S. in the 1990's.<sup>7</sup> As a result, immigrant Latinos are a substantial and rapidly increasing presence in our communities and information about and recognition of their unique realities must be integrated into both our understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence and our approaches to interventions and services.

Language can be a key issue in our ability to work with Latino men. We must engage in advocacy about the rights of all Latinos/as who are non-English speakers to have materials available in Spanish, as well as access to an interpreter, so that they can understand the systems and agencies with whom they are interacting. At the same time, the increasing diversity within Latino populations requires that we also become competent to work with Latino men who may speak Portuguese, dozens of indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America, or who possess varying degrees of English fluency. Failure to take into consideration this element in the lives of a growing segment of our communities may decrease the efficacy of our interventions and may increase the danger to Latina survivors and their children.

Acculturation issues are also important in our work with men. As people who have left family, community and country to “come north,” immigrant Latinos become individuals who must contend with dual worldviews on a daily basis. Although the experience may be different for people who settle in well-established Latino communities (i.e. Los Angeles, Miami, San Antonio, Chicago, New York, etc.) and those who begin new lives in towns and cities in which they become the first wave of Latinos coming into the area (i.e. parts of the Southeast and Midwest, etc.), the process of acculturation requires time and an ability to adjust to new surroundings, customs, values, laws, etc., while maintaining the ties with the original culture that provides a solid sense of identity and well being. Alianza is committed to helping systems and providers of domestic violence services to understand that a dual worldview brings with it assets that can be effectively harnessed in interventions and outreach efforts with new immigrants. For example, for many Mexicans and Central Americans newly arrived in the United States, there is a strong connection with the church as a means of maintaining a cultural identity. Catholic and other faith communities serving these recent immigrants thus have a unique potential role as allies in creating culturally competent responses to address domestic violence among these populations through the establishment of clearly delineated and informed collaborations with them.

### **How do we work with Latino men who batter?**

Given the intricate intersections between domestic violence, culture, and other individual and collective elements of their realities, how can Latinas and Latinos work together towards the eradication of violence against women and children? Alianza believes that our work with men must be carried out at both the intervention and prevention levels. As a result, we must work concurrently with men who have used violence against their partners and children, with men who have stopped their violence and want to continue their journey towards non-violence, and with men who have never used violence and want to join the work of eradicating domestic violence from our communities. In addition, Alianza sees a major role for men who remain outside the movement, but are able to talk with other men about domestic violence. Finally – but perhaps most importantly – Alianza believes that our work must include concerted and committed strategies for working with our Latino boys and adolescents.

*Current approaches to intervention.* Alianza strongly believes that the safety of women and children must be central to our work with Latino men who batter and that this is best accomplished through interventions that use culture as its organizing framework. Interventions to address domestic violence have overwhelmingly followed approaches that

maintain strict gender segregation among providers. There has been little communication and/or collaboration between female advocates and male service providers and there is often a great deal of mistrust and unwillingness to cross gender lines in service provision. This model of service to address the issue of violence has worked fairly well in communities and organizations in which the main stated goal of services to battered women is separation from the violent partner and an immediate quest on the part of the woman for independence and autonomy. For many Latina survivors who want to remain in their relationship, however, this model does not work because of its lack of cultural relevance.

At the same time, most interventions for men who batter were created from the perspective of middle-class men of European descent and relied almost exclusively on judicial enforcement. These programs focused almost entirely on reducing levels of domestic violence, without establishing the connections between such violence and other forms of oppression. Little attention was paid to other risk factors (i.e. level of literacy, mental health issues, etc.) that could limit the effectiveness of interventions to help violent men change their attitudes, expectations and behaviors. Additionally, the healing aspects of the process and the culturally relevant redefinition of manhood were often missing from these interventions

During the 1990s, several programs emerged that attempted to bring the values, experiences and attitudes of Latino cultures into their philosophical framework. Some of these programs consisted of translations of existing English-language programs, with some cultural adaptations. A few programs were created totally within a Latino cultural framework and were easily recognizable by participants as tools to effect personal and collective change. Caminar Latino in Atlanta, for example, works with entire Latino immigrant families affected by domestic violence, providing separate, concurrent groups for Latina survivors, Latinos who have battered, and for their children from within a human rights perspective. The men's program began at the request of the Latina survivors. Over the years, new elements have been added to the program at the request of participants, including a substance abuse component and a parenting workshop.

**The National Compadres Network** which started in Los Angeles, California and has extended to other cities, encourages and challenges Latino men by establishing and supporting *Círculos de Hombres* (men's circles) in which Latinos can learn to appropriately manage their destructive emotions and learn how to maintain trusting relationships.

**POCOVI (Programa de Hombres Contra la Violencia Intrafamiliar [Program of Men Against Intrafamily Violence])** in San Francisco was the first program to use the model developed by CECEVIM (Centro de Capacitación para Erradicar la Violencia Intrafamiliar

Masculina [Training Center to Eradicate Masculine Family Violence]) specifically created for working with Latino men who batter. In addition to groups for court-referred men, POCovi engages participants in community outreach strategies to challenge violence against women in the community.

In Chicago, a program was created under the Hispanic Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Chicago called **Alfa y Omega** (el principio y el fin). It was created in order to provide a prevention/intervention response to domestic violence in Latino communities. The program is for Latino couples (with no children) or Latino families that have not reached the criminal justice system yet. It is an attempt to hold men accountable for their abuse towards women and children by addressing issues of partner abuse, child abuse, substance abuse and sexual abuse, along with issues of faith.

These promising programs recognize the need for the existence of a criminal justice response that protects and increases the safety of battered women and their children. At the same time, there is a clear recognition of the need to use community strengths and resources to go beyond the criminalization of men who batter toward a clearer *concientización* of both their responsibility for the violence they have committed and its intersection with personal and collective histories of oppression, war, violence, racism, homophobia, immigration, and discrimination.

These and other promising culture-specific interventions with Latino men who have used violence in their home are deeply imbedded in the community and are able to track the progress of participants, often obtaining feedback from family members. Although not effective with 100% of the men, the families of many participants who complete the interventions very often report increased feelings of safety and well being, even months and years beyond the end of the program. The men also demonstrate a more profound understanding of the dynamics and effects of their violence and of strategies to maintain their non-violent beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. It appears that the cultural framework from which these programs work creates an atmosphere that is conducive to changes that go far beyond the commonly used criminal justice remedies.

Alianza's philosophy of men and women working together to enhance the safety of women and children and our hope that men will heal, change their lives, and become good husbands/partner, fathers and members of their communities require that communication among service providers be an ongoing goal. Given the significant numbers of Latina survivors who opt to continue living with their partners, this appears to be a critical element in our joint response.

*Background and process.* Our work with Latino men requires that we contextualize their experience from within a historical and social framework that includes our common and unique histories and worldviews. As stated before, the hierarchical and tyrannical, class- and economic-based social structures are mirrored in the gender-based power hierarchy within many Latino families. The injustices and oppressions experienced in society may serve to justify Latinos' violence towards their partners and to make it a natural part of their internal family structure. Given this, it is crucial to design programs that have as their central tenet a clear and fundamental message that violence and abusive behaviors and attitudes are never justified. An exploration of the injustices and oppressions that many men who use violence against their partner have experienced must be used in interventions not to condone the violence they have committed, but rather as a way to help them understand how the victim of historical and/or systemic oppression can become an oppressor of his own family.

In many instances, Latino men who batter have themselves been childhood victims of physical and sexual abuse. The trauma they have suffered has left marks that are still vivid and painful for many of them and that are at the root of the tremendous disconnection, anger, rage, and serious substance abuse that is often present in this population. In the past and to an extent still today, mainstream programs have argued that if men who batter are allowed to talk about their prior traumatic experiences they will use this as an excuse for the violence they have perpetrated against their partner and their children. Alianza does not believe that this has to be the necessary outcome. Well trained facilitators are able to help the participants identify, recognize, and name their traumatic experiences and the ways in which these are affecting the man's life and his ability to live in non-violent ways, while helping the man to explore, understand, and empathize with the experience of the person he battered.

Indeed, the combined experience of the programs mentioned above that spans decades of work with Latino men who batter indicates that it is precisely in these instances, in which men who have used violence begin to understand the tremendous effect of their violence on their family, that they then take the first steps towards non-violence. Because of the importance of children in Latino cultures, becoming aware of the effect of domestic violence on the youth is one of the most profound and effective mechanisms through which Latino men begin their process of change.

There are other ways in which the experience of oppression is especially relevant to work with Latino men. Group facilitators in programs for men who have battered often differ from the men who are mandated to these programs along the very lines that were sources of oppression in their countries of origin (economic class, race, education, etc.). These facilitators

risk using the same hierarchical mechanisms to force Latino men into submission in the attempt to stop their violence. To avoid this problem, group facilitators need to do constant personal work and to recognize that their class, race, education, age, language fluency, etc. can be used as ways to re-oppress Latino men.

The social change that Alianza is trying to effect around the issue of domestic violence requires not only a change of behavior on the part of the violent man, but also a change of heart. To avoid reinforcing patterns of oppression in working with Latino men it is necessary that each man is helped to understand the reason why violence is not a viable option for himself as a human being and is provided with tools and skills to use in his journey towards non-violence, rather than for the facilitators to demand their need for change. The latter approach will invariably be met with resistance and disinterest in personal transformation. Additionally, culture-specific programs allow participants to explore and challenge their own culture without fear of being ridiculed and misunderstood by non-Latinos.

Another critical component of working with Latino men is the use of a feminist gender analysis of violence against women, as Latin American/ U.S. Latina women suggest. Such an analysis provides men the opportunity to understand how their violence hurts not only their partners, but also their children, themselves, and their communities. When facilitators try to analyze Latino people's behaviors without appropriate context they often perceive individual pathology. However, when culture is used to contextualize the behaviors of individual Latinos and Latinas, not only do the broader societal problems or challenges they face emerge, but so too do the strengths and potential of the people.

It is essential that programs include the positive aspects of the values and traditions in our culture that are contained in models of Latino manhood, along with often accepted "versions" of such models that bear careful discussion and analysis. For example, there is emphasis in our culture about the need for a man to be a good provider, respectful of his partner and a positive model for his children. Program facilitators must be aware of the need not just to state these generally accepted cultural values, but also to delve more deeply into their meaning with the participants. As stated previously, this important work of personal and cultural exploration requires that the facilitators themselves be willing to engage in their own ongoing process of self-reflection and personal change.

Another significant element of work with Latino men is training. Speaking Spanish or even being Latino is not sufficient to understand the complexities of Latino people's lives. Many times agencies assume that a worker's identification as Latina or Latino qualifies them to know the different subtleties of Latino people and that having an academic degree will

prepare them to work with perpetrators of violence. This is often inaccurate. As such, training people to work with Latino men who abuse their families must involve consideration of the complexities of every act of violence, of different cultures, of personal and group histories, of personal dynamics, as well as the intricacies of the process of change for individuals and groups. The training of facilitators must emphasize a willingness to be open and to seek feedback from women's advocates, the recognition that work with men has an impact on families as a whole, and the development of flexibility to accept different models of relationships, such as lesbian and gay couples.

### **How do we work with men as allies and agents of social change?**

The eradication of domestic violence in Latino communities is about social change that requires men and women engaging in collaborations that are authentic, respectful, and effective. The work that is done in batterer intervention programs is not sufficient, since participants will need community support to maintain their non-violent attitudes and behaviors obtained during their participation in the program. Thus it is necessary to identify, invite, and train men from the communities to collaborate with women to put a stop to violence in our society.

Men's participation in the eradication of domestic violence is fundamental, but it is necessary for women's voices and presence to be at the center of the work that is conducted on their behalf. Women and men must engage in a self-reflective process from which emerges dialogue that does not recreate authoritarian hierarchies. Rather, the collaboration between Latinas and Latinos must result in approaches that empower all people involved, not giving privilege to one group over another. The perspective used must be gender-based and at the same time inclusive of an analysis of other forms of oppression and other life challenges.

Training men to do the work of changing societal norms is difficult to carry out and maintain, but it is also very valuable because each man who acquires this level of consciousness about domestic violence can become an ally in the work to eliminate domestic violence and end sexism. This anti-sexist work can extend beyond the individual and influence other men to work on their own sexism. Evidence of this has emerged in Alianza's public awareness campaigns. For example, in a series of public awareness events in New York City and New Mexico, entitled "Latino Men Speak Out Against Domestic Violence" Latino community leaders, media personalities, elected officials and other Latino men have taken a public stance against domestic violence. Many of them have expressed gratitude for being invited and given the opportunity to join with women to speak out against domestic violence.

Alianza's strategies to involve men from all walks of life in this endeavor has also brought up a key question that we are still in the process of answering: How do we support men when they want to speak out about domestic violence and its effects on our people? Alianza believes that the joint work of Latinos and Latinas will ultimately result in eliminating domestic violence from our communities and creating a non-violent future for our children and grandchildren.

### **How do we work with Latino youth?**

Although the work with men who have used violence is an essential part of our effort, prevention initiatives with our youth should be a major priority in the eradication of domestic violence from our communities. Many young Latinos grow up amid a society and culture that promotes false notions of what it is to be a man. Some have come to believe that violence is part of their families' or people's core identity.

Current literature indicates that witnessing or experiencing domestic violence has a tremendous effect on children. Some children may become aggressive, while others become passive and suffer from physical and emotional problems. In addition, children may learn that violence is a normal way of solving conflict and that violent family interactions are normal. Alianza board member Jerry Tello, who works with Latino men and youth, says that it's critical to work on healing the men, so that we don't risk hurting the next generation. Helping the men and families to heal will provide a positive example for our young people, who need to learn respect, honor, and dignity.

The strict gender and family roles found in many Latino families make it difficult for boys to learn essential differences between love and power. Latino boys often hear their parents and other adults reinforcing beliefs such as those about masculine privilege and entitlement and the idea that girls should be subservient. All too often, Latino boys also learn that they must not show emotions. Adult males in their lives must serve as role models who teach and mirror acceptable and healthy behaviors within intimate partner relationships.

Unfortunately, due to a multitude of factors much of the emphasis in reference to children has been to assure a sense of safety by removing the male perpetrator and focusing energy on providing services to the children's mother, an approach that is hoped will trickle down to address the needs of the children. What has been found is that the healing of the mother alone does not filter down to the children and that the cycle of violence continues, especially among boys. Latina women often struggle when raising boys. Even when boys have been raised by mothers and grandmothers only, it is disheartening to see these young men

developing the same attitudes and behaviors as their abusing father.

In those programs that have attempted to address issues of male youth witnesses and victims of domestic violence much time is spent on strategies that emphasize the "say no" approach to eradicating sexist, violent prone, oppressive attitudes and behaviors. Seldom is it recognized that these boys need to recover from the violence they have experienced and for many of them, grieve the abandonment of their father. Also, the boys must learn the true sense of honorable manhood and develop a sense of security through their association with honorable men, since insecurity creates higher risk for relationship violence.

At the same time, it is important that any intervention and/or guidance that are given to these young men be done in a positive cultural context in order to balance the negative cultural experience they received in their traumatic family relations. These important lessons must be modeled by positive role models who look like them so that the young men can know that non-violent men do exist and that they come from similar circumstances. The most impacting of these efforts are programs that provide a rites of passage journey for young men to guide them across the manhood bridge while creating "Circulos"(adult and peer networks) that serve as the reinforcing environment for healing and learning these lessons. This approach, used successfully by the National Compadres Network's DV and Joven Noble Program [Noble Youth], has been replicated in 20 states.

The reality is that this is not a new approach in that the true way of indigenous communities who have been able to maintain the honor in relationships have done this with their children since the beginning of time. The problem is that when wounded communities never heal and the oppressive society takes more "control" over the lessons being learned by the children, what is passed on are wounds of oppression and not lessons of honor and the sacredness of relationships.

It is important to not only recognize the need to place more emphasis on our youth, but to make them a priority in breaking the cycle of violence. The question is not whether we make working with young men a priority or not, but where we will meet them. Will it be in a rites of passage program, or in jail, in the gang, and in court where we see another generation of wounded men passing on their hurts to all those around them?

Alianza is now engaged in providing spaces in which young people will have the opportunity to dialogue among themselves about their ideas for how to engage other young people in challenging systems, institutions, and practices that sustain patterns of violence in their lives, and how they can provide guidance for the development of creative solutions.

Schools and programs that serve youth must address such areas as dating violence prevention, development of skills for creating healthy relationships, bullying, and sexual harassment. Outreach efforts must include youth voices at every level in order to increase safety and respect on school campuses and support youth leadership in violence prevention.

### How do we go forward?

Creating approaches to domestic violence intervention and prevention that do not fit existing models is not an easy task. There continues to be great resistance to breaking norms that have been used for more than three decades in this country. As stated previously, however, Alianza believes that in Latino communities it is essential that we continue to strive to do just that: create ways of relating across gender, class, country of origin, urban and rural location, sexual orientation, age and the many other categories that have kept us apart. Drawing from the strengths, experiences, and assets of our communities, we have the capacity to approach the issue of domestic violence in ways that are relevant, respectful, and effective for our people. In order to do this, however, we will need to keep in mind some important considerations.

- The safety, well being, and reality of women and children have to be at the center of our work with men.
- One size does not fit all. Given the tremendous diversity among Latino communities, it is important that programs and strategies take into consideration not only Latino cultural codes and norms, but also the needs and strengths of specific communities.
- The innovation that Alianza proposes goes beyond using traditional models of services, interventions, and strategies that simply have Latino/a staff and clients. True social change requires a profound belief that from the strengths and assets of Latino/a people and communities new and effective models can emerge that speak much more clearly and powerfully to the people with whom we are doing the work of eradicating domestic violence in our communities.

As Patricia Castillo, an Alianza board member who has worked for many years in the Latino community in San Antonio states, "our people have a knowing that comes from generations that tells us instinctively that the perfect launching pad to do this work is by working together, *Hombres y Mujeres*, working together *Juntos/Juntas por nuestra reverencia a la familia, a la cultura, al respeto, a nuestra fe, al amor, a nuestros hijo/as. Eso es nuestra historia, nuestro espíritu, descendencia y herencia. Es el legado y la lucha que nos han puesto en las manos para*

*cultivar, proteger, criar y lanzar al mundo.* " [..working together, men and women, out of reverence for the family, the culture, for respect, for our faith, for love, and for our sons and daughters. That is our history, our spirit, our descendants, our inheritance. It is the legacy and the struggle that they have put in our hands to cultivate, protect, nurture, and launch into the world]. Alianza wholeheartedly agrees.



**As stated earlier, we want to know how the content of this paper matches your experiences and principles. Part of Alianza's mission is to promote dialogue. We invite you, then, to think aloud with us. Please send your comments/feedback to Rosie Hidalgo, Alianza's Director of Policy and Research at [rhidalgo@dvalianza.org](mailto:rhidalgo@dvalianza.org)**

**For more information about the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza) please visit our website: [www.dvalianza.org](http://www.dvalianza.org)**

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## End Notes

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