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Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue:
The Case of Immigrant Latinos
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Abstract

Using the writings of the late social psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró and other Latin American and Latino social scientists as a framework, this article examines the issue of domestic violence from a human rights perspective. As suggested by these writers, the antecedents, dynamics, and effects of domestic abuse are explored bringing to bear the historical, philosophical, cultural, social, spiritual, and political realities of Latino immigrants in the United States. From this ecological perspective, universal and culture-specific elements of this phenomenon are considered. Finally, Freire's idea of concientización (consciousness) is used to delineate levels of awareness and responsibility necessary to break the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence in this population.

Social scientists in the United States and Latin America have called for a broader and more in-depth analysis and exploration of people's attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and ideas, based on a more inclusive contextual framework. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), for example, called for an ecological approach to the study of human experience, cautioning against attempts to understand people as individual entities removed from the context in which they find themselves. His words have been echoed by Latino psychologists (e.g. Manuel Ramirez III, 1983) and Latin American social scientists who have for decades insisted on the absolute necessity to bring into the study of human beings the political, social, historical, economic, and spiritual realms of their reality (Cárdenas de Santamaría, 1990; Martín-Baró, 1994).

This challenge seems especially relevant in the study of domestic violence. Theories that attempt to understand this phenomenon have been derived from anthropological, sociological and psychological scholarship and thought, and could be said to have followed a developmental trajectory, although by no means a smooth one. Early psychodynamic theories focused exclusively on the abused woman or on the man who battered, giving little if any attention to the manner in which the person-environment interaction may affect the dynamics of violence. From this perspective, abused women were seen as responsible for their plight since they were (1) masochistic, (2) suffering from learned helplessness, (3) mentally ill, or (4) experiencing severe intimacy-dependency conflicts. On the part of their partners, the batterer was (1) an alcoholic, (2) mentally ill, (3) generally violent, or (4) unable to tolerate intimacy (Rounsaville, 1978).

Family systems theorists (e.g. Kurz, 1989; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) contend that the structure of the family in the U.S. is subject to societal stressors that cause family members to be violent with one another. In the same manner that society does, families accept violence as a means to resolve conflict. They suggest that abusive behavior is modeled for males in their family of origin (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Thus, violence is used by the most powerful family members to maintain their dominant position (Kurz, 1989). Systemic formulations of family violence assume that (1) wife battering is caused by an interactional context made up of repetitive sequences of transactional behavior; (2) wife battering happens in families that contain certain relationship structures, and (3) violence may have a functional role in maintaining the marital system due to circular causality or reciprocal interactions that take place (Bograd, 1984). Systemic formulations advanced the field of domestic violence theories

through their analysis of the couple's interaction and mentioning the role of society in the dynamics of abuse within the family, and the role of family as the original model for violent behavior. However, their tendency to describe incidents in mechanistic terms and allocate responsibility for battering on both partners belies both the imbalance of power and the real and severe trauma caused by domestic abuse within the family. Thus, family systems formulations have been criticized as problematic and dangerous since they do not extend their analysis of battering to include the larger context of the social, economic, political, and cultural environments in which it takes place (Bograd, 1984).

More recently, Western (European-American) feminist models of violence against women see the unequal distribution of power in the structure of male-female relationships (Bograd, 1984) as the root of wife/partner battering. Goldner and her colleagues (Goldner, Penn, Sheinber, & Walker, 1990) see battering as a man's attempt to reassert gender differences and gender dominance. Due to strict and rigid gender expectations still at work in many traditional societies, the home is still seen as the woman's place and the man is seen as primary bread winner, even in cases in which both partners work outside the home (Dobash & Dobash, 1978). This societally prescribed division of labor and responsibilities may enhance the power imbalance in the male-female relationship, and pave the way for domestic violence to occur. Western feminist formulations of domestic violence undoubtedly provide a much broader perspective from which to explore the dynamics of abuse. By bringing in issues of societal norms and values they have added a valuable tool from which academicians and service providers can not only understand more fully this extremely complex phenomenon, but also design and implement collaborative community interventions. Indeed, most generally-accepted batterers' intervention strategies and abused women's programs are based on feminist formulations of domestic abuse (see, for example, Adams, 1988; Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). More recently, however, feminist models of abuse have been criticized for being unable or unwilling to provide a conceptual framework for understanding women who abuse their children (Ashe & Cahn, 1994; Miller, 1990) as well as violence in lesbian couples. Critics argue that by concentrating solely on patriarchy as the problem in domestic abuse, Western feminists have not addressed the very real and urgent issue of women as perpetrators.

In an effort to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, antecedents, and effects of abuse, ecological formulations of the issue have been presented. For example, an ecological

approach to the exploration of domestic violence has been proposed in research with abused Latinas (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994) as well as in interventions with men who batter (Pence & Paymar, 1993). In each case, the warning of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Manuel Ramírez III (1983) and Martín-Baró (1994), among others, regarding the dangers of studying or intervening with individuals or populations without a contextual framework was addressed. The ecological framework allows the inclusion of theories and models of domestic violence that have been used successfully in research and interventions (e.g. feminist, modeling, etc.). The model provides researchers an organizing framework from which to explore the relations among variables of interest from different systems in the environment of people and families affected by domestic violence. In terms of interventions, the ecological model brings together many elements of the environment of men who batter to hold them responsible for their violent behaviors and attitudes while helping them to change to more egalitarian and non-violent ways of being.

The most recent approaches to domestic violence research and intervention strategies have undoubtedly shifted the focus from the individual problem of the abused women (or even the batterer) to a community problem that affects--and is affected by--many elements in the environment in which it occurs. The growing awareness of the enormity of this issue in the United States has placed domestic violence among the public health problems facing this country in the new millenium (USDHHS, 1990). At the same time, the universality of domestic violence in nations throughout the world (see, for example, Beasley & Thomas, 1994; Counts, Brown & Campbell, 1992; Marcus, 1994) suggests that we may need to go even further in our analysis of this phenomenon. Indeed, Marcus (1994) and Beasley and Thomas (1994) make a strong legal case for the reconceptualization of domestic violence as a human rights issue, given the similarity and close parallel between domestic abuse and terrorism. The authors note that, although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "...no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment..." (p.29), this provision has not been used or interpreted in cases of domestic violence. The reasons may include, among others, the differential application of human rights provisions between genders and the commonly held view that domestic violence is a "private" matter, and thus not falling within the jurisdiction of international human rights law. Marcus (1994) objects to the cultural contextualizing of domestic violence because of the danger of possibly rationalizing violence against women. Although, to our knowledge, in this country child abuse is

not often couched as a human rights issue, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Children contains similar provisions regarding safety and care issues of children, and might thus also be invoked in a similar manner.

Whereas this idea is certainly appealing and legally justified, the framework it provides lends itself better to ideological and conceptual discourse than to research and intervention. It is only when, as suggested by social scientists throughout the Americas, we bring together different disciplines to bear on a problem that possible new insights begin to emerge. Specifically, the writings of social psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994), published posthumously after his assassination with fellow Jesuits and two Salvadorian women, provide intriguing possibilities for new conceptualizations and analyses. The remainder of this article will explore the manner in which Martín-Baró's writings regarding the role of psychology and other social sciences in the liberation struggles of Latin American peoples, together with the concept of domestic violence as a human rights issue could be used to understand more fully the antecedents, dynamics, and effects of abuse on Latino populations in the United States. From this perspective I will attempt to answer such questions as: Why do Latino men batter? Why do abused Latinas stay in battering relationships? What is the role of culture in domestic violence? What is the role of the environment in which it happens? What role do spirituality, politics, immigration, education, and poverty play in the drama of violence? Why do women abuse children? What might be some social science responses to domestic violence when viewed in this context?

Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue

Marcus (1994) writes about her personal enlightenment regarding the universality of domestic violence during her travels throughout the world as a lecturer on women's rights and international human rights. She indicates that it is not just the pervasiveness of domestic abuse in many societies, but the consistent denial of its existence and incidence that has led her to believe in the absolute necessity to name the phenomenon in order to break the silence. Rather than a haven and a place of safety, the home becomes a place of terror for many women. She recognizes the Western feminist lens through which she views domestic violence in other parts of the world and the potential problems surrounding this stance. Nevertheless, she is clear in her analysis of the dangers of placing domestic violence in the context of culture. Due to its status as a "private" problem (Beasley & Thomas, 1994), cultural norms and

values may be used to deny, minimize, rename, or normalize violence against women. Indeed, in many societies domestic abuse is not considered a serious problem. It is seen as an individual and unusual happening rather than as a culturally sanctioned and systematic practice used to silence and coerce a whole segment of the population. Marcus believes that these considerations are sufficient to remove the analysis of domestic violence from the private sphere and the culture specific context into the universal realm of human rights. In this manner, universal rights would override culture specific values and norms, thus providing recourse to battered women everywhere.

In an analysis of the Doctrine of Coverture that merged the legal identity of a married woman with that of her husband, Marcus indicates that both political and economic theory reinforced the theologically ordained structure of the family in the U.S. Although some of the more severe economic restrictions for women under the Doctrine of Coverture were abolished by the end of the 19th century, it was not until the last quarter of the 20th century that the last formal vestiges of coverture were eradicated from all states. Similar laws are still in effect in many countries in which married women are seen as not having identities of their own, apart from that of their roles as a wives and/or mothers.

Marcus cites statements made by court-mandated batterers in an intervention group she facilitates as reflecting many of the daily life practices of coverture, even at the end of this century. Specifically, she emphasizes the frequency with which men minimize or deny a separate entity for the women with whom they are in relationship while asserting their role as the person in charge, who must be served and obeyed. From the man's perspective, the use of violence is simply a means to ensure that the woman will comply with his demands. These well developed ideas of power based on gender, control, and hierarchy are often echoed in a similar group of court-mandated immigrant Latinos who batter that I co-facilitate. It is clear that the universality of coverture values and attitudes is present in many cultural groups, in the United States and elsewhere.

Whereas universal human rights may be a potentially effective tool against domestic aggression, there are pitfalls about which one must be aware (Besley & Thomas, 1994; Marcus, 1994). Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights entitles everyone to "the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social property, birth, or other status" (UDHR, Article 2), they may not be applied to issues

affecting women. Thus, even though Article 5 indicates that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment,” this provision has not been applied to physical or sexual abuse of a wife by her husband. Thus, Marcus proposes the term “terrorism” as an alternative to “domestic violence.” The latter, she contends, carries a connotation of private, and thus minimizes or diminishes its importance and seriousness.

The parallel Marcus (1994) draws between domestic violence and terrorism is an interesting one. She contends that people or groups wishing to terrorize others use three basic tactics: (1) surprise and seemingly random (but actually well-planned) acts of violence; (2) psychological and physical warfare to silence protest and minimize opposition; and (3) the creation of an atmosphere of intimidation in which there is no way to escape. Since people are not ever sure when an attack will happen, there is a prevailing sense of insecurity, passivity, and defeatism. Not all people who are the victims of terrorism respond in the same manner, and there are no accurate predictors of individual responses to the violence. In the same manner as terror can be directed at a community, it can also take the form of violence perpetrated in the women’s home by her partner. In similar ways to terror, violence is designed to maintain domination and control, to increase advantages, and to defend privileges.

In a similar vein, Martín-Baró (1994) describes the effects of the Salvadorian civil war on the people of that country. Taking the issue from the individual to the collective, however, he suggests that the traumas of war and violence cannot be fully understood in theories rooted in the individual psyche, but rather in the recognition that the trauma is a collective and pervasive experience rooted in disrupted social relations. He goes on to say, “...there is no person without family, no learning without culture, no madness without social order; and therefore neither can there be an I without a We, a knowing without a symbolic system, a disorder that does not have reference to moral and social norms...(p.41). So, in the exploration of domestic violence among Latinos in the United States, what are the culture, social order, and moral norms that must serve as the context from which to ask the questions at hand?

The Latino culture as context

Latinos are currently the second largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States and by the year 2010 they will become the largest ethnic group in the country. Despite this impending shift in the racial/ethnic composition of the nation's population, there is still the tendency, even among researchers, academicians and practitioners, to couch the issue of racial/ethnic relations in terms of a Black/White dichotomy, ignoring the increasing complexity of diversity issues in the U.S. (Romero, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Ortiz, 1997). Romero and her colleagues point out that Latinos challenge the ideas of the "white" and "non-white" labels so often used in this country since Latinos use not only genetic and physical characteristics to construct ethnic identity, but also class, language, phenotype, and even neighborhood association. She indicates that the terms Latino and Hispanic are usually generated on the basis of physical appearance and that the term "Hispanic," although coined by the government for census purposes, has taken a life of its own. Latinos, as a people, are thus difficult to define due to their diverse historical, economic, political, religious, and social characteristics.

Manuel Ramirez III (1983) writes about a mestizo worldview held by people (e.g. Latinos) who are the product of two or more different cultures. Within the context of diverse political, economic, religious, and historical variables, mestizo culture contains elements such as the importance of individual uniqueness, emphasis on generational status, strong identification with family and culture, and a pluralistic identity. Latinos in the United States are a very diverse group and their degree of acculturation varies greatly within the community. Some Latinos have adapted to the majority culture, adopting its language, customs, and values. Others still live in ethnically monolithic communities whose values and norms closely resemble those of their country of origin. As the increasing Latino presence in the United States continues to change the face (as well as the language, music, and color) of this country, their presence is being felt in cities that traditionally had not had substantial populations of Latinos. Moreover, the composition of the Latino populations in these new areas mirrors the changing migration patterns (both external and internal) and often do not resemble the populations of other major U.S. cities. It then becomes even more crucial to attempt to understand the dynamics of domestic violence and the manner in which different elements in the environment may affect its occurrence.

Family and gender roles

Despite the heterogeneity of Latinos, however, and perhaps due to the shared mestizo identity, there are certain basic cultural values that are held in common and have a strong impact on this population. The centrality of family and the distinct gender roles are two aspects of Latino culture of special relevance to the understanding of domestic abuse. The family is a central focus for Latino people, and family members share strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity. Latino families are usually highly integrated, and the extended family serves as a strong social support system for family members (Westberg, 1989). Along with its positive, protective, supportive qualities, Abalos (1986), among others, has described the Latino family as a "sealed container" (p. 64) that provides safety for its members but does not necessarily allow people to be their own selves. The Latino father has traditionally been perceived as the head of the family, the sole provider, the protector, and authority figure. He has been the decision-maker and thus is accorded a great deal of power due to his wisdom and knowledge. Traditionally, on the other hand, the mother has been the moderator, the interceder, and the heart of the family who is well respected by her children. She is the person in charge of child rearing and of the well being of her family and is thus abnegated and ready to take care of others before herself (Abalos, 1986; Ramirez, in press). Although these traditional values are still held by some Latinos, most especially immigrants from rural areas of some countries, some recent studies of Chicano/a dual-earner families suggest that important changes are taking place: Latino families are undergoing important changes in terms of family roles and responsibilities with a somewhat more egalitarian stance between the partners, while still maintaining a marked gender difference in their ascribed roles. The authors note that, even in families in which mothers have authority over daily activities, there is still a facade of patriarchy in the respect and honor given to the man as head of the household (Coltrane & Valdez, 1997). A. Ramirez (personal communication, December, 1998) also points out that when the mother is the principal figure in the home it is to provide her resources and services. Thus, patriarchy continues to be the axle around which the family revolves.

Children in Latino families are pampered and overprotected when measured by mainstream standards (Queralt, 1984). As young children they are treated with some permissiveness, an element that changes with the onset of puberty. The child's relationship with the parents is generally quite close, although it varies with the age and gender of the child and the gender of the parent. Mothers seem to be

attached to both sons and daughters, whereas fathers are somewhat distant, especially with male children. Children are expected to be respectful, obedient, and loyal to their parents and other family elders (Triandis, Marín, Hui, Lisansky, & Ottati, 1984).

Traditionally, gender roles in the Latino culture have been clearly defined. Male and female children were--and in some subgroups, still are--socialized differentially from an early age (Triandis, 1983). Little boys are eagerly awaited even before their birth, in contrast to girls, whose birth often signals a heavy burden for the family, who must protect the family honor by protecting her virginity. Latino boys are given more resources, priority and freedom than those given to Latina girls. They are encouraged to run, explore, and question, while their sisters are kept at home, learning to take care of the house and younger children, if they are present. There are different expectations of what boys and girls can and will do that are directly related to the gender roles they will be expected to carry out when they become adults (Abalos, 1986; Ramirez, in press). Strict delineation of tasks deemed appropriate for each gender serves to increase gender role inflexibility. Socioeconomic level and country of origin of the subgroup, however, affect this gender role rigidity (Marin & Marin, 1991). Moreover, as an immigrant culture, Latinos have had to undertake the process of acculturation, which in many instances has partially eroded the strict gender role differentiation (Coltrane & Valdez, 1997). At times due to economic realities, at times because of direct confrontation with majority culture values, the roles and expectations for males and females in Latino communities appear to be undergoing important changes. Whereas these changes may increase gender role flexibility, they may also affect the stabilizing influence of traditional gender roles on the family. Indeed, a recent study of Central American women in Washington, DC found that the progress of migration deeply affects the family relationships among this subgroup of Latinas. They reported finding support for pursuing their educational goals and legal protection from physical abuse, while experiencing a great deal of concern about the effect of mainstream cultural values and norms on their children (Repack, 1997).

Machismo

In addition to traditional family and gender roles, certain cultural scripts affect the interaction between Latinas and Latinos. One such script is *machismo*, the set of expectations for males in the culture. It is important to note (as does Villar-Gaviria, 1990, among others) that although this term has

been used with Latinos in general and Mexicans in particular, machista attitudes and behaviors are present in many cultures of Asia, Europe, and Africa, as well as the Americas. In a series of analysis regarding this construct, machismo is seen as an expression of the exaggeration of maleness to the detriment of the feminine constitution, personality, and essence; the exaltation of physical superiority and brute force, the legitimization of a stereotype that uses unjust power relations (Lugo, 1985). Díaz-Guerrero (1996) defines it as a ratification of the cultural supremacy of men over women and Reyes-Navares (1970) points out that machista beliefs are self-affirming attitudes and behaviors in which a man engages in front of peers, in relation to his woman is never a solitary action, and it does not point to hypothetical or interchangeable figures; it is always directed towards his specific partner.

In a recent study of Latino males, Mirandé (1997) found support for the idea that the machismo ethos contains both negative and positive elements side by side. His data suggest that there may be two different and opposite views of masculinity: The first stresses external characteristics such as physical strength, aggressiveness, sexual prowess, heavy drinking, and power. The second emphasizes internal attributes such as honor, responsibility, respect, and courage. Other researchers had previously pointed out this dichotomy, indicating that machista ideals included being strong and in control, responsibility as a good provider for his family (Marín & Marín, 1991), and a sense of honor and respect, generosity, and loyalty (Coltrane & Valdés, 1997). A. Ramirez (personal communication, December, 1998), however, argues that the machista role is always negative because it lacks internal/external consistency. He points out that if respect for other persons is part of one's culture, this respect cannot be selective. One must respect one's partner in the same manner as one would respect a sports or political figure, something that of course does not happen when violence is present in a relationship.

The construct of machismo deserves a closer look in terms of its elements and history, both because of its common occurrence and because it might serve as a unifying theme regarding domestic violence across cultures, Villar-Gaviria (1990), in a summary of Latin American writers and social scientists who have addressed the topic of machismo, cites Gutierrez de Pineda (1968) who provides a historical perspective on the issue. She writes that with the arrival of the Spanish invaders, their use of absolute power and control to establish themselves as masters while destroying the native cultures, made a tremendous impact on society at that time. Some Mexican writers (e.g. Paz, 1973) have

addressed the topic by indicating that while machismo appears with the advent of the Spaniards and the beginning of the mestizaje (mixing of Spaniards and indians), it is important to remember the subservient status of indigenous women in many of the native cultures before the conquest. Santiago Ramirez (1966) suggests that the dualism of male/female, action/passivity found in other cultures takes on a remarkable and dramatic aspect in mestizo culture. The woman becomes the object of violent and sadistic conquest and possession, and her intimacy is profoundly violated and wounded. He indicates that for the mestizo male child, machismo begins at an early age. He sees machismo as a man's baroque virility, an insecurity of his manhood. Paz (1973) points out the importance of popular language in the expression of violence against women. Popular songs, both old and new, reflect many of the beliefs and attitudes regarding the machismo ethos.

Respeto

Another cultural script of importance to the dynamics of domestic violence is the issue of respeto (respect). As mentioned above, Latino children are socialized since early on to show deference and respect for their elders, including parents, grandparents, older siblings, extended family members, and people in power. Antonio Ramirez (in press) writes that the father in Latino families must be accorded utmost respect, regardless of his actions. Díaz-Guerrero (1996) reports the results of a cross-cultural study in which he explored the meaning of respect for Mexican and U.S. college students. He found that for U.S. natives, the concept of respect had to do with issues of equality, whereas for Mexicans it dealt with a highly emotional, interdependent net of obligations within an authoritarian pattern. Not surprisingly, Latino social scientists (see Abalos, 1986, for example) have cautioned parents against the use of power against their children as a misunderstood form of respect. In our own work with Latino immigrant families for the past nine years, we have found that the feelings of respect and fear are closely associated, in both abused Latinas and Latino batterers, with memories of their parents, especially their father.

Similarly to the construct of machismo, the concept of respect carries both positive and negative aspects in the Latino culture. Whereas at times the issues of respect and fear appear closely linked and are thus a potentially detrimental element in relationships, the respect that must be accorded to people in positions of power (such as clergy and members of the court) can potentially be used to enhance domestic violence interventions with Latino batterers.

Why Do Latino Men Batter?

The issue of why Latino men batter is not a rhetorical question. It cannot be simply a theoretical and intellectual exercise that has meaning only within the context of academia. As Ruiz (1998) points out, a review of the literature produces few and unclear data regarding prevalence rates of domestic violence among Latinos, quite possibly due to both methodological issues and the heterogeneity of the Latino population. It is believed, however, that Latino prevalence rates may be similar to those for other ethnic groups in the U.S (Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski & Aldarondo, 1994). Thus, the enormity and urgency of the problem makes it imperative that we understand as broadly and deeply as possible, the circumstances and elements--including the historical, political, economic, spiritual, and social, as well as the individual ones--that affected that man's decision to batter. The inclusion of so many elements of his environment into our understanding must not, at any point, be seen as an attempt to rationalize, minimize, or excuse his violence. Rather, the intention is to become aware and learn in more depth the circumstances of his decision, and invite him to own and understand them so that, if he so chooses, he will change his behavior.

Men batter for a variety of reasons, but three basic premises underlie the occurrence of abuse: (1) men learned that violence is an option; (2) it works, and (3) the consequences are minimal or non-existent. In the case of Latinos, Rouse (1988) found support for the modeling theory of abuse. In a study of abuse in dating relationships in three ethnic subsamples, he found that men and women were equally likely to have witnessed violence in their family of origin and that Latinos experienced more father-only violence as children. Preliminary data from our current study of an intervention with abused Latinas and their court-mandated partners support Rouse's findings. Approximately 92% of men in the batterers' group and 85% of Latinas in a support group report having witnessed their father (or stepfather) physically abusing their mother. In terms of the effectiveness of violence, it is interesting to note the consistency with which batterers report that they stopped the battering as soon as they obtained the desired service or response from their partner. The reliable outcome of the physical abuse undoubtedly serves as a reinforcer for this type of behavior. The negative consequences of the violence, on the other hand, are sporadic and rare. Villar-Gaviria (1990), in a study of working-class families in Bogotá, Colombia, found that the issue of domestic violence was a salient social problem. He maintains that the

use of force against women has been reserved for males; control and force are at his disposal, to be used with impunity most of the time. Indeed, many countries in Latin America (as well as the rest of the world) have no laws that specifically protect women from violence in their own homes. Moreover, in those countries in which such laws do exist, their enforcement is haphazard at best, due to the lack of appropriate infrastructures. Immigrant Latinos and Latinas are often surprised that such laws exist in the United States and many Latino batterers claim ignorance as a defense for behavior that went unnoticed and/or unpunished in their countries of origin but landed them in jail in the United States. Even in this country, however, the differential enforcement of domestic violence laws and the inconsistent or insensitive manner in which some courts treat these cases still minimizes the effectiveness of such legislation as a deterrent.

Although the co-occurrence of domestic violence and alcoholism has been well-documented (Campbell, 1993; Kaufman Kantor, 1990), a one-to-one relation between these two phenomena has not been established. There are many heavy drinkers who never abuse their partners, while many batterers do not drink or use drugs. Regardless of the exact nature of their connection, the frequency with which substance abuse and marital violence appear together make it imperative to consider the former when addressing the latter. Studies conducted with males of Mexican descent have found high prevalence of heavy drinking among subgroups in this population, which may be strongly associated to their acculturation level (Aguilar-Gaxiola, personal communication, 1998; Caetano & Medina Mora, 1988). Similarly, there is some evidence that frequency of intoxication of the male partner is a strong predictor of wife battering among immigrant Latinos (Perilla et al., 1994; Repack, 1997). Cultural sanctions for males to be heavy drinkers have been well documented by social scientists, literature, and popular lore throughout Latin America (see, for example, Díaz-Guerrero, 1996; Villar-Gaviria, 1990). Indeed, for many Latino men the very definition of maleness includes the notion of heavy alcohol consumption. In an interesting study of Latinos in the U.S., Mirandé (1997) found that participants often used heavy drinking as a descriptor of the negative aspects of being muy macho (very manly). Although domestic violence was not one of the specific themes of this research project, it is interesting to note the references to domestic violence and heavy drinking that appear on the same quotes by participants of this study.

Inherent in the definition of domestic violence is the exercise of power of one person over another. Martín-Baró (1994) sees power as one feature of relationships between persons or groups. Each relationship is defined in great part by the power present in the interaction of the actors and their particular interests. Although power resides in the actors, it does not exist in isolated individuals, but only insofar as they enter into a relationship. Power is the condition that makes it possible for one actor to make his or her will or goals prevail. It is based on the resources available to each actor in a particular relationship. Although resources are not power, they are the basis of power. The more and more varied the resources, the greater power one may have in social relations. The father of the family may have resources for prevailing in his own family but not over his boss at work. This lack of social power at work may lead him to become very authoritarian in his relationship with his partner at home (Martín-Baró, 1994). Power is thus the disparity of resources that occurs in human relationships and that allows, in this case, the man's objectives and interests to prevail over those of his partner and/or his children. The exercise of power in relationships has been found to be closely related to aggression (Campbell, 1993). Díaz-Guerrero (1996) asserts that one of the fundamental problems with Mexicans as individuals, as families, and as a society is the failure to distinguish between love and power. This confusion is expressed symbolically by mariachi music where, in a dramatic way, the distinction between the love object and the power exercised over it (her) is confused. Possessiveness is thus not an expression of love, but of power. This observation about Mexican cultural norms echoes Marcus' (1994) assertion regarding the failure of men from many societies to see a woman as a separate entity that has her own rights and privileges.

Martín-Baró (1994) states that "...the oppressors not only perceive the world from a perspective of domination and superiority, but feel that in the natural order of things--both objects and persons--belong to them..." (p. 76). Although the author was specifically referring to a political situation in which the ruling faction was oppressing an entire segment of the population, his words mirror perfectly the situation in a family in which domestic violence is present. Abalos (1986) writes about the manner in which he, like other Latino males, inherited from his family and from his culture "the drama of possessive love" (p. 72). Latino men (like men of many other cultures) learn from early on that their gender provides them rights and privileges that they perceive as the natural order of things. A man's wife/partner and children are his

possessions and they must attend to his needs and expectations. He will carry the burden of sole breadwinner and protector of his family, as long as he is accorded his rightful status: that of *jefe de la casa* (head of his household) who has absolute power and control over his family. Anything less than this is perceived as a serious threat to his sense of manhood.

Possessive love often takes the form of extreme jealousy, a common rationalization batterers use as a reason for their violence. For a Latino male, the idea of his partner engaging with another man in any type of behavior that could lead to sexual involvement is a direct threat to his exclusive right to his partner's sexuality--and hence to his own hombra (manhood). Abalos (1986) points out the double standard many Latinos use in terms of opposite gender friendships. Many men forbid their partners to have male friends while reserving for themselves the right to have friendships with women. The early burden of the family to preserve the virginity of the daughters is translated as a need to control the potential sexuality of the woman outside the relationship--by whatever means necessary.

The exclusive and unquestioned right of the man over the sexuality of his partner also translates into a situation that is highly prevalent but little discussed: marital rape. The occurrence of marital rape in Latino relationships appears to be disturbingly high. Although, to our knowledge, no data have been collected systematically in Latino populations about this issue, our own experience and anecdotal information suggests that between 80-90% of abused women with whom we have worked have experienced marital rape. When Latino batterers are confronted with sexual violence as a separate and serious form of abuse, many of them confess having used sex as a form of control and power. When delving deeper into the issue it becomes clear that they often received overt or covert messages from their fathers, male relatives, and friends regarding their sexual rights over "their women." The idea of women having rights and privileges over their own bodies and sexuality--even within the context of marriage--then becomes another element in the man's awareness and understanding of more egalitarian relationships.

Why do Abused Latinas Stay in Battering Relationships?

The extent and degree to which women are battered world wide, despite existent universal human rights, makes it imperative that we understand more fully the dynamics of domestic abuse. It is not sufficient to explore the reasons why men batter. It is also important to attempt to view this social problem

from the point of view of the battered woman. The question that is most often raised--and one that carries a strong value judgment--is why abused women stay in battering relationships. The implication, of course, is that if women would leave the relationship, domestic violence would not be an issue. It is interesting to note that this question is most often asked by people in Western societies for whom the issue of autonomy and independence on the part of the woman is closely tied to their concept of the dynamics of violence. In many parts of the world, especially in those places in which the status of woman is lower than that of males, the issue of wife battering becomes one of cultural norms. Battering of wives is an expected and accepted part of marriage, an area in which human rights do not apply.

Marcus (1994) points out that in the same manner as individuals and communities affected by terrorism, women who are abused live in a world of trauma and catastrophe, and experience threats, humiliation, stalking, surveillance, coercion and physical violence. From this perspective, it is irrelevant whether the violence is culturally identified as a means to exert discipline, a strategy to govern the family, or an act of masculinity. The results are the same. Women learn that they can be kept in the place and role ascribed by their culture through threat or physical injury. As in communities targeted for terrorist attacks, for abused women the threat of violence is at once expected and unpredictable; the perpetrator becomes all-powerful; there is constant fear for the safety of loved ones; and there is a sense of detachment and isolation from social networks. The consistent presence of these elements in her life builds a violent and inescapable world for the woman who is the target of such violence. The reaction to these events is often more than just fear for herself and for her children. The trauma often leaves her shocked and paralyzed, unable to make decisions and act rationally.

Although targets of terrorist attacks and abused women both display an array of responses to the violence, women in violent partnerships often do not elicit sympathy or respect for their oppression (Marcus, 1994). Rather, they are often asked what they have done to "provoke" the attack, having been removed from the social, cultural, economic, and political context of the domination. Marcus suggests that the questions should be: Who benefits from the violence? What structures does domestic violence reinforce? What explains the strong denial of the violence?

Many stumbling blocks make it difficult for any abused woman to seek help and make the most of services available to her. Abused women in general often minimize or deny the abuse; often blame

themselves for its occurrence; carry shame and guilt about speaking to anyone regarding the abuse; may be psychologically unable to ask for help; and are often intimidated by the threats of their abusers (Walker, 1994). Additionally, it is important to note the added complexity of this issue among battered Latinas in the United States. Latinas may, in many cases, be responding in ways that are both universal and culture-specific.

In most cultures children are socialized since infancy into strict gender arrangements that have great impact on their functioning as adults. While young boys are taught and encouraged to acquire skills and knowledge that will serve them in their adult role in the outside world, girls are limited in their movements, their education usually focused on the internal world of the home. At the same time young girls are taught that marriage is of utmost importance and essential to their identity. Within the marital structure, the woman becomes increasingly dependent on the man, while the man becomes more independent. The woman thus becomes more isolated from outside contacts and very subservient to the man.

As in other cultures, in traditional Latino society becoming a submissive wife is a highly valued role for a woman, and the process by which socialization is acquired is a subtle one. Social scientists and others (e.g. Gil & Vazquez, 1996; Triandis, 1983) have written about the concept of marianismo (the cultural counterpart to machismo) that defines the traditional roles expected of Latina women. The term is derived from María (the Virgin Mary) whose attributes of self-sacrifice, abnegation, passivity, and sexual purity have been traditionally equated with the characteristics of una mujer buena (a good woman). Traditionally, a Latina would derive her sense of identity and self-esteem from fulfilling specific cultural mandates. Among them, some of the most important were remembering her place as a woman, being responsible for passing on cultural traditions, putting other's needs before her own; standing by and supporting her husband, regardless of his behavior; being a good mother; and keeping the family together. Being too independent, discussing personal problems outside the home, or expressing dissatisfaction with her husband/marriage could cast a negative light on her family.

As Gil and Vazquez (1996) point out, however, the inflexibility of these traditional ideals is being challenged in both Latin America and the United States. Economic needs and changing social norms are slowly transforming these scripts. In the United States, it is usually among immigrant women--mostly from

rural areas and small towns--that one finds these values to a significant degree. However, vestiges of these expectations and attitudes can be found in many Latino subpopulations, regardless of country of origin, level of acculturation, and socio-economic status (Coltrane & Valdez, 1997; Fernández-Kelly & García, 1997). In addition, many women throughout the world grow up witnessing and/or experiencing domestic violence in their families of origin. Latinas are no exception. Many learn from early on that domestic abuse is an expected--even necessary--part of marriage/relationships. Either explicitly or silently, she is given the message that being battered is very probably her lot in life. Debe aguantar (she must endure). Resisting will only make matters worse. There is little recourse and no consequences for the violence. Sexual violence from her partner has no name, other than one more way in which she must submit. It is the price of being a good woman, a wife and mother. It is the legacy that many Latina women pass on to their daughters and they in turn to their own children.

In addition, the role of the church in the socialization of many Latinas is a strong and important one. The emphasis placed on the family and the indissolubility of marriage, at whatever cost, is found in Catholic as well as many fundamentalist churches, the denominations to which most Latinos belong. Although it is slowly changing, the salient message that Latinas receive from many members of the clergy and religious representatives is that domestic violence is at best a miscommunication between the couple, at worse the fault of the woman who must amend her ways to safeguard the family. Using the Virgin Mary or biblical passages to support their assertions, church representatives often silence the voice of women who have taken the difficult first step to tell the truth regarding their relationship. For many Latinas who still subscribe to traditional beliefs and values regarding the church, the message they receive often has lasting and dangerous consequences.

Within the context of Latino gender role socialization, the dynamics of abuse in this population become somewhat clearer. Apart from the universal difficulties battered women encounter, abused Latinas must also contend with cultural scripts and traditions that often add a burden to their decision-making process. If she saw domestic violence in her family of origin, many Latinas consider this the natural order of things. She may have heard from her mother, aunts, older sisters, and/or mother-in-law that battering--physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal--is simply part of the dynamics of a relationship. It is a private matter that is best left unnamed, so as to guard the relationship/marriage for the sake of the

children, for the good of the family. Having derived her identity from her role as wife and mother, it becomes an almost insurmountable task to take action that might end in divorce or separation. Qué dirán (what will people say?) becomes another barrier Latinas encounter in their help seeking. Having been designated as the family preservationist, and hence responsible for its functioning, many women continue to seek ways to save la familia. In addition, abused Latinas seldom know their rights regarding protection against domestic violence; often have little knowledge of existing services; and lack English fluency. Most importantly; Latinas are often reluctant to use programs that, although directed towards their safety, do not take into account the cultural mandates regarding their responsibility as wives and mothers.

The issue of agency is an important part of the question of why abused women do not leave their batterers. A failure to leave the relationship is seen by many mainstream agencies and court systems as a woman's failure to do something for herself and her family. Agency is directly equated with leaving and staying is perceived as victimization. This simplistic way of viewing the intricate and complex process in each battered woman's life belies the myriad ways she may be actively working on her own and her children's behalf. As Mahoney (1994) points out, when a woman is battered she may assert herself in a variety of ways. She may seek help formally or informally, flee temporarily, return to the relationship under certain conditions, etc. All of these show agency, since she is choosing to exercise her options, be an agent of change in her own life. On the other hand, if she stays because she is unaware or uncertain about her options, her ability to subsist financially, her ability to survive on her own, or because of depression or fear that leaving will trigger or escalate the violence, she is being held captive. In this case the image of domestic violence as terrorism becomes real.

The question of why battered women do not leave their abusers ignores the fact that a majority of abused women who are seriously hurt or killed had already left their batterer. Having left the relative safety of extended family and social networks in their country of origin, immigrant Latinas must take the very difficult first step into totally unknown circumstances. Their vulnerability in terms of language, documentation, education level, knowledge of laws and services, and work skills is often used by their abusers as ammunition in their terrorist practices. Threats of losing their children if they call the authorities or reveal the abuse to anyone often keep many Latinas silent and invisible. The lack of recourse against domestic violence that kept their mothers and grandmothers from speaking out in their

countries of origin has taken on a different face in this new country. It is, however, no less effective. The question then becomes not “Why do women stay?” but rather, “How can the cycle of violence be stopped? How can it be prevented from going into the next generation?”

What of the Children?

The plight of immigrant children and of children of immigrant parents has been the subject of interest as it pertains to school performance, psychological adjustment, drug and alcohol use, etc. It is clear that these children face both developmental challenges encountered by mainstream children as well as issues specifically pertaining to their status in this country. The children of immigrants often have a great deal of difficulty discerning their ethnic identity. They frequently find themselves in hostile environments that more often than not give them very negative messages about themselves and their culture. At the same time, children of immigrant families are often cut off from their countries of origin and the strong support and comfort of extended family. Due to their economic situation, both parents often work long hours outside the home, and have little time and energy to pass on the cultural traditions, values, and rituals that traditionally have kept the family as the center of a Latino person's sense of well-being. Children of immigrant families thus often find themselves without strong roots from which to grow in the new and strange environment in which they find themselves and which requires new skills and behaviors that their parents are unable to model. Because they are usually the first to learn English, Latino children are often called upon to be cultural interpreters, not only translating for their parents, but also helping the family navigate new systems and strange situations. This role provides the family with an essential survival tool due to the lack of appropriate bilingual services in the community, but at the same time creates a dangerous and almost inevitable dynamic. The traditional hierarchy of family roles is reversed and the parents lose authority and power as the children gain more independence and control within the family. Feeling out of control, and in an effort to re-establish their ascendancy as adult family members, Latino parents often resort to physical punishment, a traditionally accepted method of discipline among many groups throughout Latin America.

The effects of domestic violence add to the plight of children of immigrant families in which abuse is present. These children, in their roles as witnesses and often victims of the abuse, are deeply affected by the violence perpetrated in their own home. Until recently, however, little attention had been given to

their plight (Wagar & Rodway, 1995). Some research suggests that children may act out aggressively, while others may draw into themselves, and present with somatic disorders, anxiety, sleep problems, etc. (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; Hughes, 1988). Children who witness violence in their home often have feelings of guilt, shock, responsibility, insecurity, and lack of confidence. Furthermore, children may learn early on that violence is a normal method for solving conflict, that family interactions contain violence, and that violence is an accepted method of stress management (Jaffe, Wilson, & Wolfe, 1988). Dutton (1995) argues that the impact of early experiences of violence on a child is serious and long lasting. He contends that the experience or witnessing of violence in his or her own home at a young and vulnerable age, take a toll on child's self-concept, ability to self-soothe, as well as her or his capacity to modulate anger and anxiety and even the elaboration of brain opiate receptors. In the overall framework of domestic violence, the modeling of violence for children in their homes has important consequences for their behavior and attitudes in later life. As pointed out above, research indicates that one of the strongest predictors of marital aggression is having experienced violence in the family of origin as children (Kalmuss, 1984).

Although, to our knowledge, there are no studies of the effects of domestic violence on Latino children, it would appear that the centrality of family and the strict family roles found in this culture may play an important role in Latino children's understanding of domestic abuse as well as in their coping strategies. Latin American social scientists provide some interesting insights into this issue. For example, as mentioned previously, Díaz-Guerrero (1996) contends that in Mexican families there is a failure to distinguish between love and power since, because of historical happenings, Mexican males are expected to exercise power while females are taught to use love, thus creating a serious confusion on the children. Although this author does not make the connection between power and domestic violence, his analysis is quite useful for our purposes. Abalos (1986) writes about the Latino family and calls for parents to exercise legitimate authority over children, allowing children to develop their own sense of self. He urges parents to ask themselves if they are exercising authority for its own sake or for the development of each child's personhood. In a culture in which *respeto* (respect) is a central value, parental expectations often confuse fear with respect. Children are learning to show deference and obedience not as an act of love or respect, but as a safeguard against retaliation. To this effect, Martín-Baró (1994) provides a sobering warning. He states, "...the group that should command our attention

most is the children, those who are constructing their identities and their life's horizons in the fabric of our present social relations..." (p. 118). In homes in which domestic violence lends a scenario reminiscent of a war zone, children are learning the dynamics of power and control in the name of family love.

It has been said that 100% of men who abuse their wives also abuse their children (Men Stopping Violence, personal communication, November, 1998). Although all male batterers may not use physical violence against their sons and daughters, the witnessing of violence against their mother is clearly emotional abuse. To add to the trauma suffered by the children, in this environment of violence, the victims sometimes become perpetrators. As our work in the past 10 years suggests, some abused women against whom the fury of domestic violence has been used, begin to use similar tactics against their children. Often in isolation and without social or family support, abused Latinas (as battered women of any group) can resort to physical, verbal and emotional abuse with their sons and daughters. Love and power have been used interchangeably against them and they resort to the same tactics with individuals who have even less voice than they do: the children in their care. This is not the case for all abused women, however. Indeed, many women who are battered continue to be caring, loving, and conscientious mothers who provide for their children in remarkable ways given their circumstances.

The closeness and interdependency that characterizes most Latino families may in some cases provide fertile ground for a dynamic that may be quite detrimental for the children and that has been studied in other ethnic groups (Jurkovic et al., in press). Anecdotal data suggests that in many cases Latino children and adolescents of families affected by domestic violence take on adult roles, especially as it relates to the physical defense and emotional support of their mother. In some instances the abused woman may be relieved to find support among her children and begin to have expectations that far exceed their developmental capabilities. In these families, it appears that the role reversal found in many immigrant families and referred to above takes on an even greater importance. To date it is not clear how this will affect the adaptation and behavior of the next generation of Latinos.

What elements in the Latino culture might help to address domestic violence?

The same elements that are used to explore the occurrence of violence in Latino communities can be used to identify specific elements that may be helpful in addressing the problem in this population. Martín-Baró (1994) poses an interesting question regarding the view our society has taken of issues such as urban violence, domestic violence, child abuse, violence against women, and juvenile gangs. He points out that these have been taken as problems that require individual rehabilitation, rather than being seen as symptoms of a greater malaise that calls for a collective intervention. Indeed, as pointed out before, it is essential to view these issues--specifically domestic abuse, in our case--from a broad ecological perspective from which to explore the manner that other elements of the environment are affecting its occurrence. The role of the churches, most especially those that teach rigid and stereotypic gender roles and the mandatory permanence of marriage at whatever cost often adds an unintended burden to a woman's plight. Conversely, the churches in Latino communities can have an important and positive effect when the clergy and religious speak out against domestic abuse and collaborate with programs and agencies in its eradication.

Martín-Baró (1994) borrows from Paulo Freire (1971) the term concientización (critical consciousness) and insists on the necessity for people to be aware of themselves and their place in the world in order to be active participants in their destiny. For Freire concientización is the process of personal and social transformation experienced by oppressed people when they become literate in their world. It is not simply to understand the written word, but above all to learn to read the reality that surrounds us and to write our own history. Antonio Ramírez (personal communication, December, 1998) points out that we must shift our subjectivity, becoming aware of our internal reality within that history—Who am I in this history? In order to do this, one must take hold of one's fate, and take the reins of one's life, which means ridding oneself of false consciousness and achieving a critical understanding of ourselves and where we stand.

Concientización is the knowledge of the historical and social conditions in our countries of origin that will help us understand more fully the dynamics of migration to this country. It is a recognition of the tremendous inequality between rich and poor, women and men, boys and girls, in our society. Critical consciousness demands an understanding of the historical roots of oppression that created the social

structures under which we were born and raised and into whose values and norms we have been socialized. It also calls for an awareness of our status as mestizos who can trace our roots to both colonizers and colonized and thus carry with us the dichotomous feelings of oppressor and oppressed. It is an appreciation of our options and potential to effect change in our environment and thus in our community and world. Concientización is about reinventing our culture in light of the new reality of this new country, creating a mestizo culture that includes both the old and the new.

In terms of domestic violence, the concientización of Latino males includes an awareness of the false roles and expectations that norms and values have imposed in men and women, boys and girls in our culture. It has to do with a cultural redefinition of what it is to be a real man, based on the positive attributes of the machista ethos and a dismantling of its negative and extreme attitudes. It involves the knowledge of individual physiological markers that signal to a man that he is about to commit an act of violence. It is an awareness of attitudes, beliefs and expectations that create a climate in which unmet demands for services from his partner and children are used as an excuse or rationalization for violent behavior. It is also knowledge about alternative behaviors and situations that require accountability and respect on the road to non-violence.

Concientización for Latino men requires recognition and acceptance of the fundamental human rights of their partner and children to a life free of terror, violence, and abuse. It is also an awareness and respect for their integrity and individuality as separate human beings with a right to self-determination. A critical consciousness for Latino men who batter must also include a clear understanding that domestic abuse will not be tolerated under any circumstances and that the entire community--including the church and the courts--will hold them responsible for violent behavior.

In terms of abused women, concientización has to do with the acquisition of knowledge regarding resources, laws, and options available in this country. It is also a realization and acceptance of the fact that their plight is not an individual issue, but rather one that belongs to the entire community.

Concientización for battered Latinas is a joint exploration of their common and unique experiences and of individual and collective strengths and possibilities. It is about exercising the tremendous power inherent in the use of this newfound knowledge and agency. Critical consciousness for Latinas also has to do with an awareness of the right to have their decisions respected, regardless of the beliefs or attitudes of

others. It must also include a redefinition of their identity as partners rather than victims, so that they can claim a place as equals in any relationship into which they choose to enter or remain. Concientización also requires a careful examination of cultural traditions and values, so that the most positive and effective ones can be passed on to the next generation, while discarding the most negative and/or destructive ones. Concientización for women also pertains to the use of their individual and collective voices to speak against what had been silenced.

For children of families in which domestic violence has been present, concientización has to do with providing models in which egalitarian relationships and more flexible and effective gender roles are the norm. It is the possibility of enjoying their time as children, without the burden inflicted by domestic chaos. It is about providing homes in which non-violence is a daily reality. It also has to do with access to educational opportunities, to information about resources, and to medical, dental, and mental health care. Concientización for Latino children is also about the responsibility for parents and other adults in the community to pass on the history, traditions, mythology, stories, art, and folklore of their cultures so that they will be nourished by strong and deep roots into their past. It has to do with the respectful stance of adults for each child's individual journey towards full personhood.

A human rights stance regarding domestic abuse must include an analysis of elements in the environment of people affected by the violence. If one conceptualizes domestic violence as a violation of a human being's most basic right, the focus becomes an ecological perspective. Concientización of individuals affected by this phenomenon must be accompanied by a recreation of societal structures, laws, and attitudes that are impinging on fundamental human functioning. It is only at this level of analysis and intervention that this problem has the potential to be eradicated. It is only then that we will heed Martín-Baró's (1994) words regarding the recognition that "...trauma is a collective and pervasive experience rooted in disrupted social relations..." His invitation to restore stable and lasting social relations by means of a historical memory and creative community involvement is indeed a collective call to action.

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