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Culturally Competent Social Work Practices:

Working with Latino Populations Experiencing Domestic Violence

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Introduction

The goal of this resource is to prepare professionals to be culturally competent in practice. This information is pertinent to all individuals working with Latino populations or issues of Domestic Violence. Each section is included to raise awareness of trends in Domestic Violence within Latino Populations and explore culturally competent procedures and theories to apply to social work practice. Research and evidence based practice modules and theories are included as guides. Additional research is encouraged.

Keywords

Domestic Violence, Social Work, Cultural Competency, Latino Populations, Catholicism, Machismo, Marianismo, La Confianza, Familism, Personalism

Basic Definition and Cycle of Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence is a very broad topic. It is defined as a “pattern of abusive or coercive behavior used against an intimate partner for the purpose of gaining power and control” (Women Against Abuse, 2012). Domestic Violence is a problem that persists throughout the United States, and affects all parts of our local communities and major cities. It is important to keep in mind, throughout this paper that Domestic Violence affects all individuals, regardless of cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels. While this is true, this paper will focus on female victims of Domestic Violence, and male perpetrators, within a Latino ethnic context.
In our nation a woman is battered usually by her intimate partner, every 15 seconds (Women Against Abuse, 2012). Approximately 2 million U.S. women are severely assaulted by male partners each year, and girls and young women aged 16-24 experienced more incidents of Domestic Violence than any other age group (Fuchsel, Murphy, & Dufresne, 2012). A University of Pennsylvania research study found that Domestic Violence is the leading cause of injury to low-income, inner-city Philadelphia women between the ages of 15-44 (Otterbein, 2012). In college 1 in 5 young women will be a victim of sexual assault, and 1 in 4 college students will be involved in an abusive relationship (Women Against Abuse, 2012). Although this is true, only 3 percent of students who experience violence tell an authority figure, while 60 percent tell a friend (Facts about Violence: U.S. Statistics, 2013). Overall in the United States 1 out of every 5 women has been a victim of attempted rape, assault or Domestic Violence, even so, less than half of Domestic Violence incidents are reported to police (Facts about Violence: U.S. Statistics, 2013).

It is important to note that this topic is specifically relevant for social services workers in direct service and social workers. There is a great need of raising awareness of this issue and establishing advocacy trainings for future professionals. “Sexual violence and gender-based violence is associated with a host of short- and long-term problems, including physical injury and illness, psychological symptoms, economic costs and death” (Facts about Violence: U.S. Statistics, 2013). Domestic Violence is one of the multiple terms used to describe a repetitive violent relationship with a family member or significant other. Other terms include: spousal abuse, domestic dispute, domestic
violence, battering, dating violence, domestic abuse, teen dating violence. For this assessment Violence will be used.

Domestic Violence encompasses physical, mental, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal, and financial violence (Women Against Abuse, 2012). Sexual violence includes coercion, harassment or assault, regardless of the relationship to the victim. Emotional, psychological and verbal violence includes the use of threats and intimidation tactics. In addition violence and abuse may include the use of technology, social standing, minimizing, denying, blaming or exclusion to assert power and control. Domestic Violence is lethal, common and affects persons of all cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels. Although this is true, there are six main risks associated with increased episodes of abuse. They are relationship status, socioeconomic factors, age, childhood experience with violence, alcohol use, and race (Davis L & Saunders, D, 1995).

Socioeconomic factors have a high association with Domestic Violence. Evidence suggests that one reason women remain with abusive partners is due to economic dependence. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, underemployment, and unemployment increase stress within the home and greatly increase violence (Davis L & Saunders, D, 1995). A study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that Domestic Violence occurs three times as often in families under serious financial strain. A National Resource center on Domestic Violence study reported that 93 percent of Domestic Violence victims in shelters ask for help with financial problems (Otterbein, 2012). In addition, about half of all rape violence victims are in the lowest third of income distribution (Facts about Violence: U.S. Statistics, 2013).
While financial struggles may increase stress and violence, Domestic Violence also perpetuates financial crisis. The costs of intimate partner violence against women exceed an estimated cost of $5.8 billion dollars. These costs include an estimated $4.1 billion in the direct costs of medical care and mental health care and nearly $1.8 billion in the indirect costs of lost productivity and present value of lifetime earnings (Facts about Violence: U.S. Statistics, 2013). Domestic Violence also has a high association with homelessness, as victims attempt to leave violent situations and abusers. Although this is true, it is important to remember that Domestic Violence is not directly caused by poverty, neither is there evidence to support causation between poverty and violence, since Domestic Violence occurs in all socioeconomic classes. However, victims of violence living in impoverished environments are often less likely to have the necessary resources to leave violent situations, therefore, a risk of violence is more likely to continue.

In addition to socioeconomic factors, childhood experiences with violence often lead to increased roles as abuse perpetrators or victims. Studies show that “boys who witness their fathers’ violence are 10 times more likely to engage in spouse abuse in later adulthood than boys from non-violent homes” (Facts about Violence, 2013). Men and women who experienced abuse as a child or witnessed abuse between parents as a child are also at risk of becoming abusers or victims of abuse themselves. Witnessing patterns of violence, displays of strict gender roles and physical and psychological trauma as a child combine and make one more vulnerable of being an abused individual, or a perpetrator of violence (Davis, L, & Saunders, D, 1995).
**Domestic Violence Theories**

The Encyclopedia of Social Work (Davis, L, & Saunders, D, 1995) indicates that there are five main theories related to Domestic Violence and abuse within the home. The first, Psychoanalytic theory suggests that early life experiences create the specific pathological personalities seen in abused women and abused men. Beliefs and fears evolve and shape the perspective of the victim on the inflicted abuse. For example, women experiencing patterns of abuse as a child or in multiple relationships may believe that they are deserving of abuse. They often experience feelings of unworthiness, and may even choose abusive men unconsciously looking for relationship dynamics that are familiar with them. Patterns of abuse can also lead to fear of offending individuals who possess strength (financially, physically, emotionally) and create a coping mechanism and reaction of submission rather than resistance. This may lead to warped personalities such as passive aggressiveness, obsessive compulsiveness, paranoia or sadistic and psychopathic behaviors. A possible solution involves long-term individual counseling and psychotherapy.

Family systems theory sees abuse as a characteristic of the relationship itself. An abusive relationship is a product of two persons each with a fragile sense of self. Commonly the man is "frankly unaware of his own dependency conflicts, intimacy fears, need for control and social condition, all of which lead to a certain hunger for power" (Davis, L, & Saunders, D, 1995). Due to insecurities, fears and dependency on each other violence is seen as natural and is designed to thwart change within the relationship. Davis and Saunders propose marital counseling as a possible solution that identifies dysfunctional relationship patterns.
Learning theory stresses reinforcement, modeling and learned behaviors through patterns. Males who learn abusive behaviors from their male role models (both known men, such as family members and also media celebrities) may also internalize the belief that they should be in authority. Likewise, females who learn to be passive from their role models may also internalize the belief that they have no power in their abusive circumstances. Therefore, reinforcement and punishment teach both externally and internally and shape future behaviors and reactions. A proposed solution involves individual interventions that aim to examine learned behaviors and internalized beliefs and how current rewards or punishments reinforce both. This allows the client to become aware of their actions and beliefs while giving them opportunities to learn and be rewarded for new actions and beliefs.

Social exchange and control theory view relationships through costs and rewards. Abusive behaviors may lead to feelings of power and control, which reward that abusive behaviors and create a cycle of violence. This cycle of violence is not interrupted as long as the costs of violence (legal, or social) appear to be less than the rewards. Possible solutions include reducing the rewards of being violent, increasing the costs of violence and increasing the social controls of violence. For example, it is recommended to create not only individual involvement and accountability on familial and societal levels.

Finally, Feminist Psychological theory places an emphasis on distortion, dissociation and learned helplessness. "Behaviors of abused women are actually coping strategies that the women develop as a result of living in a brutalizing environment" (pg. 785). Women distort the reality of their abuse and the actions of their abusers and often dissociate from the abuse and mentally become only observers of their abusers and their
actions. Often these mindsets lead to depression and anxiety” (Davis, L, & Saunders, D, 1995).

While it is important to understand key theories related to Domestic Violence, it is also important to critically analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each theory. A professional’s beliefs in these theories affect interventions and perspectives of abuse, and its victims and perpetrators. Therefore, the causes of Domestic Violence must continually be re-analyzed and theories critiqued and updated.

Although once believed to be true, Domestic Violence is not caused by illness, one’s genetics, use of alcohol or drugs, loss of control of feelings, anger, stress, behavior of the victim, or stress within one’s relationship. Conversely, Domestic Violence should be recognized as an intentional pattern of learned behavior through tactics of control and power. The belief in causation between anger, stress, and a loss of control of one’s feelings, contrasts with the tendency of abuse to target specific people at specific times and places, within a private context. In addition, illness, genetics and the use of mood altering chemicals such as alcohol and drugs cannot be blamed for the cause of Domestic Violence since they themselves are not a direct cause of abuse, and they ignore the intentionality found within Domestic Violence relationships (Casa de Esperanza, 2013). However, these factors may influence the intensity of certain events of abuse and are important to note during Domestic Violence assessments.

Other weaknesses are to be found in theories such as the theory of learned helplessness and the family systems theory. The theory of learned helplessness indicates that victims of abuse remain in abusive relationships due to a distortion of reality for the victim (in most cases, the female). This theory does not account for the social, economic
and cultural reasons a victim may chose to stay in an abusive relationship. In addition, victims often attempt to leave abusive environments multiple times and usually act in conscious ways to minimize the abuse directed at them and their children or additional victims, these actions are not conducive to a belief in learned helplessness. Family systems theory assumes that abuse is the cause of a both parties and therefore assumes that one individual’s actions somehow justify abusive responses. This theory also encourages joint interventions of marital and family counseling. Although Domestic Violence should be addressed with both parties, joint interventions, due to concerns of safety, and dynamics of power and control within the relationship, are not to be used as initial methods of assessment.

Due to the multifaceted causes of abuse, types of abuse, and reasons to remain in abusive relationships, treatment plans should reflect a holistic approach to a victim’s well being. Domestic Violence interventions should include evaluations and support on an individual, familial and community level in relation to economic, emotional, social, physical, and psychological needs.

**Latino Population in the United States**

As a social worker it is crucial to be knowledgeable and aware of client populations. Social workers must understand how to competently work with individuals of different religious, ethnic, racial, cultural and language backgrounds. It is important to note changes within populations in order to meet clients’ needs. In the United States there has been significant growth and change within the Latino population, the population of interest in this paper.
In general, within the United States there has been a significant change and trend towards minority populations. It is predicted that by 2039, racial and ethnic minorities will make up a majority of the U.S. working-age population, and 1 in 4 people ages 18-64 will be Latino (Press, 2013). In addition, the Latino population accounts for more than half of the nation’s growth in the past decade. It is important to note that this significant growth is due to birth and not an immigration trend, and the growth is expected to continue. At a median age of 27, Latinos are the youngest population group in the country (Lilley, 2013). Due to the age of the population, more births are expected as an exponential rate. Last year alone almost a quarter of the nation’s births were to Latino women (Lilley, 2013). According to the census, in 2000 there were 35.3 million Latinos in the United States. In 2010, there are 50.5 million Latinos, making up 16.3% of the total population. Therefore, over the past decade the Latino population grew by 43% (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011). In 2011 the population growth was marked at 51.9 million.

Currently Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States, and are predicted to continue to grow to be the largest group in the United States surpassing the white majority in the early 2040’s (Reddy, 2011).

The Latino population is a very unique and diverse population demographically. The 51.9 million Latinos in the United States trace their heritage to more than 20 Spanish-speaking nations worldwide. This creates a vast representation across a broad spectrum of cultures and countries. According to Pew Research of Hispanic trends, the largest identified Latino population of origin is Mexican. There are approximately 33.5 million Mexicans within the United States both foreign and native born, this group accounts for 64.5% of the Latino population. The second largest identified Latino
population of origin is Puerto Rican. Comparatively to the Mexican population this is a much smaller group with approximately 5 million Puerto Ricans within the United States (not including the providence island of Puerto Rico). Other groups, listed here in descending order of population, include: Salvadorians, Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Spaniards, Hondurans, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and Argentineans (Reddy, 2011).

Currently, 75% of the Latino population is considered a U.S. Citizen, meaning they are U.S. Citizens by birth or naturalization. Although, overall 36% of Latinos are foreign born (they are born outside of the United States or its territories and neither parent was a U.S. citizen at the time of birth). It is important to note each individual’s country and culture of origin, for there are distinct cultural practices and beliefs held by each country. Likewise it is important to note that individuals may identify themselves by multiple titles such as Latino, Hispanic, Chicano or by their country of origin. Each Latino individual is unique and first generation Latinos in the United States may identify differently than second or third generation individuals. Typically first generation immigrants identify strongly with the country of origin while second and third generations begin to identify with other Latino groups.

Geographically two-thirds of Latinos live in just 5 states: California (28% of the population, 14 million), Texas (19%, 9.8 million), Florida (8%), New York (7%) and Illinois (4%) (Lilley, 2013). By 2020 eight more states are projected to join the list of majority minority populations; Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey and New York (Press, 2013). Within these top states two top
counties stand out. In Miami county Florida there are approximately 28,600 Latinos and in Los Angeles county California there are approximately 19,500 Latinos.

While the Latino population continues to grow, economic prosperity for this group does not follow the trend. Due to the association between poverty, and lack of resources to escape from circumstances of Domestic Violence, it is important to note the socioeconomic status of Latinos within the United States. Currently, about 35% of Latino infants are born into poverty, while 26% of the general Latino population lives in poverty. Unfortunately, this economic struggle is not predicted to end in the near future. Harvard economist George Borjas projects that by 2030, Latinos will particularly struggle because of high rates of poverty, lack of citizenship, and lower rates of education (Press, 2013). Presently, the median household income for Latino families is $39,000. While this number does not specify the average number of persons in a family or household, as stated earlier Latino families are statistically larger than non-Latino families. Therefore following the 2013 poverty guidelines, a family of six would be meet the national standards of poverty with a household income of $31,590 and a family of eight with a household income of $39,630 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

In regards to Latino education attainment; only 27% of the population aged 25 and older have obtained a high school diploma, while 13% have obtained a Bachelors Degree or more. In addition, 66% of individuals (ages 5 and older) are English proficient. This means they speak only English at home or speak English very well (Reddy, 2011). Although lower rates of education are predicted in the future currently there is a positive trend towards education acquisition within the Latino community and Latinos are the largest minority group in college campuses (Press, 2013).
In relation to Domestic Violence there is a high percentage of reported cases within the Latino population. In fact, there are above average rates of wife abuse among minority populations, specifically, African American, and Latino Families, with twice as many severely abused Latina women as non-Latina women. This statistic is closely related to the socioeconomic status, of these minority groups (Davis, L & Saunders, D, 1995).

**Latino Values and Gender Roles**

Working with a Latino population requires cross cultural competency and a background understanding of Latino values. While each individual is different and it is important to accurately discuss values with clients during an initial assessment there are a few key cultural concepts that may assist in practice with Latino populations. Cultural competence refers to the ability to apply both knowledge, and skill appropriately in interactions with clients. ‘Cultural’ is the adjectival component of the term, while ‘competence’ refers to the enactment or application of knowledge (Srivastava, 2007).

Given the growing size of the Latino population in the United States, social workers must be cognizant of the uniqueness of this culture to practice effectively and respectfully (Fuchsel, Murphy, & Dufresne, 2012). Culture represents the “values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave and make judgments about their world” (Chamberlain, 2005, pg. 197). Due to the various components of culture this paper will only explore four topics of interest. These four areas of exploration include: religion, specifically Catholicism, gender roles, family beliefs and roles, and ethnic identify, as well as their affects on individual Latino beliefs and cultural values.
Religion: Catholicism

The prominent religion among Latino Populations is Christianity, specifically Catholicism. Due to a Gallup poll taken earlier this year 54% of Latinos within the United States identify as Catholic while 28% of Latinos identify as Protestant. Of the identified Latino Catholics, 43% describe themselves as ‘very religious’, and of Latino Protestants, 60% describe themselves as ‘very religious’ (Newport, 2013).

Catholicism creates a common group identity composed of shared experiences. Catholicism’s long-standing history allows individuals, families and communities to develop identities based upon its religious values. It established a foundational set of beliefs that help people find meaning. In numerous countries in Central and South America, government systems have close affiliations with the Catholic Church and echo religious beliefs in laws and practices. For example, in 2004 Chile became one of the last countries in the world to grant married couples the right to divorce. Until this year it was deemed illegal, due to Catholic influence in the government. While divorce may be legal in most countries, universally the Catholic Church disagrees with divorce and Catholics may not view divorce as a plausible option, no matter the situation.

For many Latino individuals identification as a Catholic is comparable to an analogy of one’s last name. It holds importance in identification, and is passed down from generation to generation. Overall, it is a representation of family heritage, without necessarily requiring an active practice of the religion. Although Catholicism may not be a religion practiced by all Latino individuals, it is important to note cultural concepts related to Catholicism and Christianity for these concepts shape Latino perspectives and values.
Gender Roles: Machismo and Marianismo

One distinct element of Latino culture is the historical importance of gender roles, or generally and expectation of what it means to be either male or female. Gender roles are never concrete for every individual across all cultures; they are dependent upon context and cultural perspectives. Generally Latino culture is known for its emphasis on masculinity. While this may be true, the definition of masculinity is unclear and it differs from Latino culture to another. There are many terms to describe masculinity, some are negative and some are positive. It is important to create awareness for terms that are used to describe a population or culture in order to understand implications of assumptions and context.

According to Mirande, common adjectives to describe masculinity include: Ambitious, aggressive, has leadership abilities, dominant, individualistic, competitive, acts as a leader, willing to take a stand, strong personality, makes decisions easily, assertive, willing to take risks, independent, self-sufficient, defends own beliefs, self-reliant, athletic, analytical, masculine, forceful. In contrast, common adjectives to describe femininity include: warm, tender, affectionate, compassionate, sympathetic, loyal, understanding, eager to soothe hurt feelings, cheerful, does not use harsh language, feminine, sensitive to needs of others, loves children, flatter-able, childlike, gullible, gentle, shy, soft-spoken, yielding (Mirande, 1997). Some of these adjectives can be viewed as positive or negative, depending on the cultural context and perception of an individual. While these terms are not an exhaustive list they demonstrate a foundation of cultural assumptions and gender roles.
Machismo is defined as a set of behaviors among Latino males, generally having characteristics of being dominant, superior, and strong in relationships (Fuchsel, Murphy, & Dufresne, 2012). The complete dictionary of sexology defines machismo as the concept and cultural rules associated with masculinity in Latin American cultures; the Latin American word for the mystique of manliness. Machismo emphasizes male physical aggressiveness, high-risk taking, breaking the rules, and casual and detached sexual relations with women. Though useful to describe extreme male chauvinism, the term as used by non-Latinos to some extent represents a stereotype with deep-rooted value judgments and cultural assumptions. The term is derived from ‘macho’ in the classical Aztec language, meaning "image", "reflection of myself." (Mirande, 1997)

Often Latino men are depicted as individuals driven by "machismo and an obsessive concern with masculinity and hierarchical gender relations" (Mirande, 1997). The term 'macho' has recently been integrated into American popular culture to describe athletes or other male celebrities. When the term is used in this context it has a positive connotation of "strength, virility, masculinity, and sex appeal" (Mirande, 1997). But when the term is applied to certain groups of people, for example Hispanic or Latino men, the term ‘macho’ is often negatively associated with "male dominance, patriarchy, authorization and spousal abuse" (Mirande, 1997). Although both of these meanings signify strength and power, the Americanized 'macho' is a positive description while the later is negative.

A few negative “connotations” of macho are: a synthetic self-image or exaggerated masculinity, male dominance or authorization, violence and aggressiveness, and self-centeredness or egoism. A few positive conceptions of the term are:
Assertiveness or standing up for rights of others, responsibility and selflessness, abiding by a general code of ethics, sincerity and respect. Machos follow to a code of ethics that highlights humility, honor, respect of oneself and others, and courage. Being 'macho' is not demonstrated by outward qualities such as physical strength, and virility, but by such inner qualities as personal integrity, commitment, loyalty and most importantly, strength of character (Mirande, 1997). In the context of Domestic Violence it is important to discuss these internal characteristics of masculinity and use these as strengths to encourage constructive, positive behaviors.

There are four main beliefs that address traditional Latino culture and appropriate behavior for men. The first is related to sexuality, women are seen as pure and as needing protection, men are seen as inherently promiscuous and they are the protectors of women. The next belief is that men should be the dominant figure in the home, while the third belief emphasizes the importance of maintaining honor and integrity in the family. Finally, there is a notion that men should be tough and not cry or be too emotional. These beliefs are not concrete; rather they vary depending on context, culture and individual perspectives. For example, while Latino men are required to be examples of strength they often display emotions passionately. Latino culture is described as a “hot culture”, this often means Latino men are allowed to show strong emotions such as crying when feeling sad, yelling when feeling angry and laughing or shouting when excited. Along with these four beliefs are three of the 'worst or lowest' things a man can do, the first is physically harm or abuse someone (especially a woman or child), second is to use others, lie, brag or have no dignity or self-respect, and finally not supporting or abandoning one's family is deeply looked down upon in Latino and Hispanic culture (Mirande, 1997).
Likewise, Latinas are conflicted in their gender role expectations. “Latinas are presented as both innocent virgins and sexy vixens” they are to be “docile and domestic” but also “sensual and sexually responsive”. In many contexts Latina’s identities are defined on the basis of their roles in the home as mothers and wives. “Those within the Latino community expect Latinas to be traditional, and to exist solely within the Latino family structure. A Latina must serve as a daughter, a wife, and a parent and prioritize the needs of family members above her own” (Rivera, 1994).

Marianismo is a traditional and idealized gender role of Latina women that is heavily influenced by Catholic religious doctrine and is rooted in the impersonation of the Virgin Mary (Jackson, 2007). This religious connection affects roles in regards to sexuality, birth control, and emotional and psychological beliefs. (Rivera, 1994) According to marianismo desirable characteristics of Latina women are as follows: virginity, chastity, sexual naiveté, modesty, and self-sacrifice for the sake of one's partners or children’s needs (Jackson, 2007). Traditionally conceptualizations of marianismo include submissiveness, sacrifice and domesticity. Self-sacrifice is a very important concept in marianismo. A woman who suffers is considered virtuous, moral, noble and respectful. In Latino society, in areas that strongly support the concept of marianismo, topics such as Domestic Violence are very controversial. Suffering is idealized to the point that a woman is expected to keep personal and familial matters in the home, and humbly accept violence as a way to overcome suffering and reach a more virtuous state. Overall, is important to view marianismo as a culturally bound dynamic construct while understanding that cultures change over time (Jackson, 2007).
Family: Familism

Gender roles are also closely related to the concept of familism. Familism is defined as “highly integrated families with supportive extended family members” (Fuchsel, Murphy, & Dufresne, 2012). Within Latino culture a family unit is often comprised of more than nuclear family members. It is not uncommon for extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins to reside in the same household. Latinos often express a great fear or concern about losing connection and support of their family and community. “The breakdown in the family is seen as the loss of a means of support and nurturing for it’s children” (Flores & Carey, 2000, pg 15). Therefore it is not uncommon to seek approval from multiple individuals within one household to make a decision other cultures may deem as ‘personal’, if it is seen as affecting the family and it’s relationships. This cultural belief in collectivism allows proximity of family members to be viewed as strength, and should be a place of encouragement, not judgement. An individual identity is dependent on the group, other focused instead of individualistic emphasis of needs. When working with families it is important to work with the family’s natural strengths and resources, which will encourage the integration of services and maintain familial connections.

Within the family system, as indicated in gender roles, males hold power in Latino society. "Patriarchy is grounded in relations of power as well as in the biological differences between the sexes. It consists of a social system that establishes the shared interests and interdependence among men and enables, if not requires, them to dominate women. Under patriarchy, some men have more power than others and while all men benefit from patriarchy, privileges vary sharply by class and race" (Davis L. & Saunders,
Societal beliefs and social norms of sexuality, gender roles and power along with deviant labels applied to individuals who do not conform create an environment conducive to male power and control over women. Historically, in American society there are three key elements of the family ideal, belief in the privacy of the family, belief in parental rights, and the belief in the preservation of the male-headed family (Davis, L, & Saunders, D, 1995).

**Ethnic Identity**

Although ‘Latino’ is used as a term of identification it is important to understand that cultural identity often depends on linguistic differences and labels. ‘Latino’ is only one of many equally ambiguous terms used to refer to people of Spanish-speaking and Latin American heritage. Latino, Latino/a, Hispanic, hispano, Latin American, latinoamericano, “Spanish,” “Latin,” and La Raza are among the labels used to identify or self-identify people who share recent or historical origins in the Spanish-speaking, Latin American world” (Community Advisory Committee, 2004).

Identity labels are not fixed descriptions, but are fluid, shifting, and dependent upon context. This fluidity is what makes ‘Latino’, ‘Hispanic’, and other labels confusing and often frustrating for those wanting to use the appropriate term to describe friends, strangers, or refer to communities and populations. The use of such labels to describe oneself and others vary from one person to another depending on context and relationships. For example, an individual of Venezuelan descent may consider himself to be “Venezuelan” among his family and during Venezuelan celebrations. On official paperwork, he may check the ‘Hispanic’ box but refer to himself as ‘Latino’ when
interacting with a wider population of both Latinos and non-Latinos. When visiting Venezuela, however, he may refer to himself as ‘Venezuelan American’ or just as an ‘American’ (Community Advisory Committee, 2004).

Some terms do not exist in certain cultural contexts or countries. Each country holds its own cultural perceptions due to linguistic qualities. Slang, non-verbal communication and linguistic cues indicate identity and affinity with others. As one immigrant commented during an interview “Hispanic is a new word for me, it doesn’t exist in Mexico or Chile” (Community Advisory Committee, 2004). According to researchers Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Mariela M. Paez, “the very term Latino has meaning only in reference to the U.S. experience. Outside of the United States, we don’t speak of Latinos; we speak of Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans and so forth. Latinos are made in the USA” (Community Advisory Committee, 2004).

**Ethics and Values to Influence Practice**

Thus far we have reviewed Domestic Violence theories, demographics and cultural values of Latino populations. The following section will discuss direct practices that may be helpful in relation to Domestic Violence. It is important for social workers to be aware of theories related to Domestic Violence and how cultural factors within Latino population’s impact social work practices. In addition it is important that social workers are continually aware of the profession’s mission, values, ethical principles and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. The goal of social work is to meet the basic needs of and improve the well being of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of populations whom are vulnerable, oppressed, and
living in poverty (NASW, 2008). This goal reflects six core values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

Social workers strive to ensure access to information, services and resources as needed, they believe in the equality of opportunity and meaningful participation in decision making for all people. Social workers also understand that relationships between and among people are critical for change. Therefore clients are seen as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to “strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities” (NASW, 2008). Social workers strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and apply them to practice. Competence is also connected to cultural competence, which requires a cultural awareness in practice, and the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Social workers treat each person “in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences, and cultural and ethnic diversity” (NASW, 2008). They promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination and seek to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. The four components of cultural competency consists of an awareness of one’s own cultural worldview, an awareness of one’s attitude towards cultural differences, a knowledge of key cultural practices and beliefs, and finally, a development of cross cultural skills (NASW, 2008).
Preparation

When meeting a client for the first time it is important to prepare for any questions or issues that may arise. A social worker should pay particular attention to possible cultural issues that could pose as a barrier to practice. If possible, a social work professional should review the file of the client to identify if the client has any special needs or accommodations. Primarily noting information related to client language acquisition. If English is not the first language of a client a interpreter may need to be contacted. If the social worker is not bilingual or competent in Spanish, they should seek the assistance of an interpreter in their agency. Due to confidentiality, a friend, relative, or child of the client may not be an appropriate interpreter and should not be used. There is no guarantee that these individuals, regardless of relationship to the client, will abide by a code of confidentiality, or are not perpetrators of violence themselves. If necessary, interpreters may be accessed through Domestic Violence hotlines such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline or Casa de Esperanza. Contact information for these agencies are listed in next section. Remember, any information regarding a client’s country of origin, education level, ethnic background, religious background, and nationality that are not included in the clients file, but could affect services, may be addressed during the initial session.

It is equally important to take this time of preparation for self-analysis. Reflecting on earlier sections in this paper related to Domestic Violence and Latino Population, a practitioner should analyze their own perception of Domestic Violence. How do they perceive victims of violence? How do they perceive perpetrators? What comes to mind when they think of a Latino individual? What is their perception of the client? Are there
any assumptions they have towards this population or past experiences that could affect their professional ability to assist the client? It is important to ask such questions, and analyze one’s own perceptions of their culture and the culture of others, and Domestic Violence, to identify possible areas of weakness related to cultural competency, and assumptions that could harm a professional relationship.

**Legal Resources**

A practitioner should familiarize themselves with laws and polices in relation to immigration and Domestic Violence. Legal resources are key to Domestic Violence cases. Abuse is a crime and therefore a familiarly with legal protocol, and necessary police report information will assist in client sessions. Depending upon the nationality of the client, the client’s family, the perpetrator, or close community members, there may be issues or questions related to immigration, legal status, and protective orders. For example, “In Mexico, a law called ‘abandono de hogar’ punishes women who leave their homes, even to flee violence. Women convicted of ‘abandoning the home’ often lost custody of their children. Some Mexican women who immigrate to the United States erroneously believe that this law applies here” (Women of Color Network, 2006).

It is quite possible that the threat of discrimination, incarceration, or deportation could deter a client from seeking help. Also, the inaccessibility to information and resources in the victim’s native language, or the distrust of legal and political structures may prevent many clients from seeking appropriate services. Therefore, it is critical to clarify each client’s rights as a victim and as a client under the NASW code of ethics.
This resource will not go into great depth in regards to legal processes and policies related to Domestic Violence. Instead, a social worker should contact the legal department of their Domestic Violence agency and research state specific policies and federal laws. A social worker should also speak to their supervisor regarding agency policy. Due to time constraints or lack of resources a hotline may be used to address specific questions of the client during a session.

Some resources include:

- The National Domestic Violence Hotline, a 24-hour resource, interpreters available, 1-800-799-7233.
- The Legal Resource Center on Violence Against Women, 1-800-556-4053
- WomansLaw.org, an online legal resource with information available in both English and Spanish.
- Casa de Esperanza, 24-hour crisis line, interpreters available, immigration information, 1-651-772-1611

In order to encourage a client to seek help and combat possible fear of deportation inform your client of legal options and support systems. For example the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) allows certain victims of abuse experiencing Domestic Violence and who are married to US citizens or lawful permanent residents to get their residency without having to rely on their abuser to petition. Other options available to victims include, WAWA cancelation of removal, conditional residence and battered spouse waiver, U visas (non-immigrant visas available to victims of serious crimes), and T visas (for cases of human trafficking). Due to the legal implications of immigration, an immigration lawyer is an important resource all social workers should contact if
necessary (Department of Homeland Security, 2013). Regardless of immigration or citizenship status, all people in the United States are guaranteed basic protections under both civil and criminal law such as the right to obtain a protection of order for the victim and their child(ren).

**Initial Session**

The Social work professional is often the first contact and or advocate for a victim or survivor of Domestic Violence. Therefore, in order to evaluate the level of crisis a client may be experiencing, and to establish a supportive helping relationship, a comprehensive initial assessment of Domestic Violence and the construction of client rapport is critical in the initial session.

**Introductions and Personalism**

Personalism (personalismo), relates to relationship building and reflects cultural elements of the Latino Population. It is a term that refers to a distinct interpersonal style of communication that places an emphasis on the human person. It is considered a core value of Latino culture and is conceptualized affectively, cognitively and behaviorally (Ortiz, 2009). It is the prescribed expectation for people to be interpersonally warm and affectionate, an expectation present in most collectivistic and relational cultures. People and personal relationships are prioritized over tasks and time. In fact, tasks are more likely to be successfully completed due to relationships that have been established based upon respect. Therefore, relationship formation must be established before a task can be accomplished (Flores & Carey, 2000).
Several verbal and nonverbal behaviors of personalism involve a preference of face-to-face contact and communication, close and informal attention, greetings involving shaking hands or kissing cheeks, and hugging to express closeness. In addition, formal and informal forms of address are used in Spanish (usted versus tu) to demonstrate respect, affection and close relationships (Ortiz, 2009).

Based upon this information the therapeutic relationship a Social Worker has with a Latino client should emphasize characteristics of personalism. Personalism does equate to unprofessional behavior. To the contrary, by using personalism in practice Social Workers use client centered therapeutic techniques and empower clients in their identity. In general, it is important to note agency norms. Unless clearly indicated by an agency a social worker should not approach a client with a hug or kiss upon the cheek, unless it is deemed appropriate. Instead, it is appropriate and preferable to extend a handshake and warmly welcome a client. When in doubt, it is always better to consult a supervisor. Overall, a social worker should prioritize face-to-face communication, and eye contact, and respectfully ask the client what they would prefer to be called. This allows a client to set boundaries, and indicate their level of preferred formality.

**Rapport and La Confianza: Beginning a Helping Relationship**

A social worker should ask a client various identity questions. As outlined before many cultural differences and social characteristics may exist in relation to “language, national origin, religion, self-ascription, and immigration and citizen status” (Castex, 1994). Although this is true, each client is an individual with unique needs and values and it is important to clarify client preferences and beliefs in relation to all topics. Asking
client their beliefs and values clarifies research, builds rapport and respect and creates an environment of empowerment and support. The fear of the unknown can greatly affect the probability that the Latino community will reach out for help on an issue that is extremely controversial and personal. Often "a Latina must decide whether to invoke assistance from an outsider who may not look like her, sound like her, speak her language, or share any of her cultural values" (Rivera, 1994). For this reason a development of confidence, rapport or otherwise known as “la confianza” is critical in order to maintain a helping relationship. In addition, once there is a clarification of values and beliefs, a social worker is able to conduct specific research to influence practice.

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an ethical principle of Social Work and necessary to begin a helping relationship. In the beginning of the initial session a Social Worker should outline confidentiality polices. All information, whether written or spoken between a Domestic Violence program advocate or a social worker and a victim of abuse or client, is confidential. This includes communication made by or to a linguistic interpreter assisting the victim, counselor or advocate in the course of the relationship. Exceptions to this policy include mandatory child abuse reporting and imminent danger of harm to self or others (PCADV, 2005). It is important to identify quiet, confidential areas to conduct an interview or session with the client. If the client arrives in company of other parties, plan for separation. It is necessary to consider spaces that are safe and confidential for any children, relatives, or additional persons who may accompany a client. It is not appropriate to interview someone about abuse or assault in front of his or her children or
in the presence of other individuals. Regardless of relationship, as outlined previously, the same applies to interpreters (PCADV, 2009).

**Cross-cultural Communication: Use of Interpreter**

Due to language differences an interpreter may be necessary to conduct individual, family, or group work with Latino populations. It is important to empower clients and give them options related to interpreters and communication within a session or interview. While some clients need interpreters during all sessions, some clients have varying levels of language acquisition and vocabulary, and therefore only need an interpreter during specific portions of the interview. Other clients may speak English but prefer to use Spanish to describe highly emotional events or details. “Emotions are a type of language, they tell the story of our fears and affections, and are expressed differently in different cultural groups” (Flores & Carey, 2000, pg 20). Although a client may indicate that they are conversationally fluent in English or bilingual, does not mean that they would prefer to have a conversation in English. There are contextual and cultural elements that may be easier to express using a native language. It is important to create an environment of support and empowerment, and give clients multiple options depending on their preferences and needs. Ask a client what they would like to speak.

It is key to remember the importance of language when communicating with a client. Language is the structuring mechanism that is used to make sense of events and create understanding. The ability to explain and understand events and convey meaning to others creates a sense of power. Translations or interpretations often take this power away and create a dependency on others to convey emotion, description and context.
During interpretations "alterations diminish women's power to represent abuse, and the transformations their narratives undergo constrain the potential their stories might have at affecting systemic change" (Trinch, 2003). When dealing with Domestic Violence victims it is important to empower clients and realize that due to violence, power has been asserted over them in multiple manners, on multiple occasions. In most cases violence perpetuates fear and dependency. By creating a dependency on helping professionals victims shift their focus and needs and often do not gain independency and autonomy. It is recommended that interpreters act as a ‘fly on the wall’, and translate without interrupting nonverbal communication between social worker and client.

It is critical to note a client’s non-verbals and ask clarifying questions related to wording. “Cultural and linguistic differences can change the meaning of a word, sentence or story. Therefore translations can differ from person to person. Slang words and descriptive terms, body language, can be misinterpreted due to cultural norms. Narratives are extremely important in law and in court, and changes in narratives are often seen as a misconception of the truth. Therefore changes in translation can result in a negative perception of the client and legally affect the ability for change (Trinch, 2003). Research conducted on “battered women suggests that women from different ethnic, racial and socio-economic backgrounds define Domestic Violence differently, suffer from different levels of post traumatic stress and vary in response to and utilization of institutional services” (Trinch, 2003).
Crisis Intervention

In Domestic Violence situations it is important to assess the extent of abuse before the conclusion of the first session. This is important in order to address the immediate safety needs of the client. Before a practitioner can identify abuse, they must allow a client to define abuse in their own context. Studies have shown that Latinos are more tolerant of abuse. For example, at times physical violence, such as hitting or verbal abuse had to occur frequently to be considered abuse. In other studies, some Latinos did not consider a failure to provide adequate food and shelter abusive. In other studies, an act was not considered to be abusive until a weapon was involved (Grossman & Lundy, 2007). Therefore the questions listed below should be tailored according to abuse definitions, and more direct questions may be more appropriate.

Questions to keep in mind:

- Is this patient currently being abused? Has she been abused in the past? Is she still at risk?
- Who is the perpetrator? What kind of access does the perpetrator have to the patient/victim?
- Is it safe for her to go home? How much danger is she in? If she stays? If she leaves? Is she suicidal, homicidal or otherwise in danger? Is her partner?
- Are there warning signs that allow her to anticipate impending danger? Does she have a safety plan? Can you or someone else help her develop one?
- What does she need? Information, support, shelter, counseling, support group, legal advocacy, mental health services, and access to other resources? Can she manage this herself, or does she need more help with the initial steps?
- What resources are available in your community that could help her deal with the abuse: shelter, safe homes, counseling, support groups, legal advocacy? Are they sensitive to cultural issues, mental health problems, substance abuse, to gay and lesbian issues? Are they accessible and bilingual? (Warshaw, 1996, pg 60)
In order to begin a conversation regarding abuse it is important to make the client feel comfortable and explain that these situations are not the client’s fault. Often abused women minimize or deny abuse because they blame themselves for its occurrence or are embarrassed. Due to feelings of shame or guilt a client may hesitate to disclose information or react defensively related to violence or abuse questions. In these circumstances statements can be used to normalize questioning as routine. For example, a practitioner may say “I have found that a number of my clients (have concerns about their relationships, fears that can be difficult to talk about), so I ask these questions of everyone I see”. It is important to approach Domestic Violence victims in a compassionate and non-judgmental manner and remain calm and respectful throughout the session. A few examples of questions to ask are as follows:

- Has anyone made you feel uncomfortable?
- Tell me about your relationship. What is good… and no so good… about it?
- Is there anyone in your life you are afraid of?
- Have you ever been afraid for the safety of your children?
- Does this person threaten to harm you?
- Has this person ever hurt you? If so, how? (PCADV, 2009)

Due to reporting for screening it is important to encourage clients to give behavioral descriptions of what happened rather than evaluations of the event. Avoid using terms such as Domestic Violence, battering, abuse, in order to encourage self-disclosure. For example, it is important to know ‘who did what to whom?’ rather than statements of ‘were you abused?’ This also helps clarify physical events instead of resulting in confusion of ‘what is defined as abuse, and to what extent?’ (Ganley & Hobart, 2010). If
possible social workers should ask questions to receive a detailed description of the 
pattern of abusive or coercive tactics, the impact of these tactics on the victim, impact on 
children, and an assessment of the lethality of the abuse. It is important to assess how 
dangerous the identified violence is for the victim, children, or the perpetrator themselves 
(Ganley & Hobart, 2010). It is important to consider the trauma that occurs due to 
violence, and the relationships the client has with the perpetrator and individuals in her 
family and community. Affirm the client, condemn the violence, not specifically the 
person who hurt them.

It is important to recognize and encourage the victim’s protective strategies and 
support victims to increase their capacity for protecting their children, their family and 
themselves. A client may be more willing to talk about the safety of their family or their 
children then themselves. They may question, what will people say? What about my 
children? What about my family? Remember, if abuse poses a direct risk to the safety of 
children, or children are victims of abuse social workers are mandated to report this 
violence. After an assessment is made a practitioner should work with the client to create 
a safety plan, which addresses both immediate and long-term safety threats to both adult 
victims and children (Ganley & Hobart, 2010). Acknowledge the victims expertise about 
a plan to increase their safety and the safety of their children and family.

Suggestions for starting conversations with victims about safety planning:

- What ideas do you have for increasing safety for you and your children?
- Who do you trust to help you?
- What have you done in the past to protect your children and yourself? How has 
  this worked?
**Referrals and Personalism**

When making referrals it is important to retain personalism. A Latino client may be more accepting of referrals and recommendations given by family, friends, known community members, and individuals with whom they have built rapport and a relationship. Therefore, if possible, social workers should personally refer clients. This may present itself in multiple ways. A social worker may introduce clients in person to the individual or agency of referral, whether this is a hospital, clinic, police station, another social worker, or other form of referral. If this is not possible, a social worker may want to consider calling the agency or person of referral to allow the client to ‘greet’ and speak with the person of referral instead of merely receiving a paper referral. This allows for a smoother transition and more personal view of care. Usually, a client is more inclined to feel rapport with a referral if they have previously built rapport with their current social worker and have been personally recommended or transferred. In addition, personalism indicates that Latinos may feel more comfortable beginning relationships from ‘knowing someone who knows someone’. It allows for both the continuation of service and relationship, and helps with termination that may occur in services.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

As indicated previously Domestic Violence affects individuals of all cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels. This paper primarily assesses relationship dynamics of heterosexual couples, in which the male figure is the perpetrator of violence and the female is the victim. Therefore, this paper cannot accurately portray Domestic Violence and its complexities. It is
recommended to explore other aspects of Domestic Violence such as the role of men as victims within Domestic Violence situations, and the role of women as perpetrators, or agents of abuse. Likewise, it is important to explore and research different types of relationships such as homosexual relationships, and additional family and relationship dynamics. In addition, while this paper provides information related to Domestic Violence and Latino populations, it is meant to be used primarily as a guide and a tool to create an awareness of cultural barriers, and questions that may arise during practice. Further research is encouraged in all areas, especially related to immigrant populations, legal policies, and the use of interpreter, and crisis intervention, as these areas relate to agency, state and federal law and policy which changes frequently.
References


