

The Anti-Rape Movement *without Latinas?*

Laura Zárate, Arte Sana Founding Executive Director & ALAS Facilitator, March 2006

Recently the Alianza Latina en contra la Agresión Sexual or ALAS, a national Latina-led membership network of victim advocates, took on the topic of Latina representation at state and national training events. In order to address the issue, an informal survey was administered online. Responses are shared throughout this article. A special *gracias* to ALAS members for sharing their valuable experiences, insight and concerns, and to Marta Sanchez, Aline Jesus Rafi, Aimee Loya, and Jessica Coloma for their valuable editing support.

Although according to the Census Bureau one of every seven people in the United States is Hispanic, with the Latino population at 41.3 million and growing and Spanish as the second most common language spoken in 43 states and the District of Columbia (U.S. English Foundation 2005), victim services have not been able to keep up with the rapid growth of this diverse group. Consequently, many Spanish-speaking survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence have been rendered anonymous and beyond the reach of victim advocates, social services, the criminal justice system and others who could help them. Latina victim advocates have worked to draw attention to specific victim access issues, including the lack of bilingual direct service staff (trainers and volunteers), and ineffective outreach to Latinos. Despite these efforts, Latina victim advocates continue to be significantly underrepresented in the anti-sexual assault movement.

While Latinas have made some inroads in the anti-domestic violence movement, they continue to have less presence and limited leadership roles as sexual assault victim advocates. In order to create the “Existe Ayuda” directory, an online catalogue of victim services offered in Spanish, Arte Sana conducted nationwide research from 2003-2004. As a result, the challenging and at times exploitive nature of Latina victim advocacy work was revealed. The search for resources showed that often one Latina will serve as the sole bilingual staff, expected to tend to every Spanish-speaking victim in a center’s coverage area, while also providing ongoing ‘in-house’ translation services without any additional compensation. This over-extension and lack of validation, combined with the not-so-subtle tokenism in some cases, has contributed to a revolving door for Latina victim advocates, many of whom are new to the anti-sexual assault movement.

Nowhere is the absence of the Latina victim advocate's voice more evident than in the victim advocacy professional training arena. An informal survey of Latina victim advocates across the nation and a review of sexual assault conferences (two national in Los Angeles & Pittsburg, and three statewide in California & Texas) revealed that only **nine** out of the **total 345** workshops offered directly or indirectly addressed the impact of sexual violence, prevention or intervention strategies with Latinas or Latinos.

At least four of the nine workshops covered Latino issues solely in the context of immigration. One respondent asserted, *"I have seen several workshops on diversity and serving immigrant and refugee victims, but those are usually stand alone workshops that usually take a general approach to serving the immigrant and refugee population."*

When asked how many Latina keynote speakers at mainstream state coalition or national conferences had addressed Latina/o victim issues specifically within the last two years the average response was "zero."

The Need for a Proactive Response by Victim Advocates

The increase in the number of underserved Latina/o victims of sexual and domestic violence is not only due to limited funds and staff overextension, but also to the lack of political will for effective outreach and inclusion. Without a consolidated national effort to develop Latina victim access programs and materials, many more individuals, families, and communities across the nation will unnecessarily suffer the devastating impact of ongoing trauma and re-victimization.

Hispanic women are a rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population, with especially large representation in younger age groups. By 2050, Hispanics are forecasted to comprise nearly one quarter of U.S. women according to the research report, "Hispanic Women in Profile 2005," recently released by Hispanic Business Inc. Without Latina role models and the inclusion of sexual violence issues that relate to our diverse Latino communities in formal statewide and national conferences, Latina victim advocates as well as the anti-sexual assault movement will continue to suffer the consequences of institutionalized marginalization.

SIX Recommendations for the inclusion of Latina/o issues in training events

The following recommendations are based on the experiences and observations of Latina victim advocates, trainers, conference organizers, and members of ALAS.

1. Avoid stereotypical assumptions about Latinas/os
2. Address the potential “Broken Borders” backlash in victim services
3. Beware of the metamessage in conference scheduling
4. Include Latinas and other Women of Color as plenary speakers
5. Compensate speakers equitably
6. Offer victim advocates equitable access to state and national training events

1. Avoid stereotypical assumptions about Latinas/os

A common assumption has surfaced in workshop selection: “Latina/o = immigrant.” This is reflected in the titles of the few Latino-inclusive workshops presented at the sexual assault conferences, which indicate that Latina/o issues are rarely included outside of the context of immigrant issues. A Pew Hispanic Center report released in 2005 dispels the popular stereotype of undocumented migrants as mostly uneducated single males who perform manual labor in agriculture or construction. Most of the unauthorized migrants live in families; work in many sectors of the U.S. economy, a quarter have finished high school, and another quarter have some college education. A one-size-fits all approach to addressing victims of color, is an example of aversive racism, which according to the authors of “Color Blind or Just Plain Blind” is “the inherent contradiction that exists when the denial of personal prejudice co-exists with underlying unconscious negative feelings and beliefs.” (Dovidio et.al 2005)

The majority of Latina/o U.S. residents do not identify as immigrants

While immigration has been key to the growth of the Latino population in the United States, with thirteen million “first generation” immigrants comprising 40% of all Hispanics (Pew Hispanic Center 2002), it is important that conference planners also consider the characteristics and needs of the 60% of non-immigrant Latinas/os.

Not all Latina victim advocates or survivors are of Mexican origin

While two-thirds of Latinos In the U.S. are of Mexican origin, the remaining third includes other national origin groups and subcultures that can claim over two dozen countries of origin and a rich ancestry that includes mixtures of Spanish blood with Native American, African, German, and Italian, to name a few. The Latino population is highly concentrated in the southwest and western areas of the United States.

New Mexico, California, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, and Colorado were the six states with the highest percentages of Hispanic residents in 2002. Together these states accounted for nearly 60% of all Hispanics in the U.S. About three of every four Latinos in this region were of Mexican ancestry. Two other states with large Latino populations - Florida and New York - had much higher percentages of Latinos of Central or South American or Caribbean ancestry. In New York, according to the 2000 Census, 37% of all Latinos were of Puerto Rican origin, and 16% were from the Dominican Republic. In Florida, Cubans made up 31% of the Latino population.

Not all Latina advocates are sympathetic of the plight of Mexican immigrants

According to the Pew Hispanic Center "native-born Latinos are less enthusiastic about immigration than the foreign born." Another source, a Time magazine poll published in 2005, asserts that 61% of Latinos rated illegal immigration a serious problem. (Navarrette 2005) While an assumption might be made that Mexican Americans, because of their history and ancestors' experience, would be the greatest defenders of immigrant rights, they, along with other working-class communities, have also been influenced by the ongoing manipulation of economic fears by high profile, anti-immigrant politicians, organizations, and the media (Smith et. al 2005) On the other hand, many Latinos are not ready to identify with the anti-illegal immigration movement that includes extreme or abusive "remedies" such as building a 2,000 mile wall, stationing the National Guard on the border, and to denying U.S. citizenship to the U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants.

2. Address the potential "Broken Borders" backlash in victim services

While limited Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funds have kept many victim service agencies in a state of overextension, with the demand far exceeding service capabilities, anti-immigrant hysteria fomented by the ongoing "broken borders" political and media hype have also contributed to a generalized "help our own first" philosophy. For example, despite the relevance and timeliness of the following workshops offered at four separate statewide and national training events, they only yielded a total of 30 participants, or an average of 7-8 attendees per workshop.

"Developing Outreach with Latinas on Campus in Sexual Violence Prevention"

"Development of Sustainable Programs for Victims of Sexual Assault in the Latino Community"

"Domestic Violence in the Latino Community"

"The Power of Promotoras (Community Health Workers)"

In an increasingly negative environment in which immigrants are scapegoats, portrayed as a threat to national security, a health service burden, and responsible for the erosion of both the English language and America's national identity, the need for training opportunities that address effective outreach to, and engagement of, marginalized communities is even greater.

3. Beware of the metamessage in conference scheduling

Organizers of training events in which certain populations are vastly underrepresented should take into account the metamessage or how the overall message is interpreted based on the nature of the relationship of the sender and receiver. Avoid the "they're all the same" meta message regarding Women of Color and 'Diversity' tracks. They say that timing is everything, and while those of us who plan conferences and training events believe in the importance of every one of the sessions and speakers, there is a major assumption that cannot be denied: The larger the session (i.e. keynote or plenary) the greater the importance of the topic or the presenter.

By scheduling multiple workshops which address cultural competency, social justice, or specific community needs issues simultaneously, conference organizers run the risk of limiting attendance, pitting underserved groups against each other, and minimizing critical issues which affect marginalized survivors of sexual violence. In the past five years as a Latina trainer, I have rarely been able to attend workshops by other Latinas because we are usually scheduled at the same time. In one instance, four workshops addressing Latina/o victim outreach were offered simultaneously at a national domestic violence conference, so consequently, the audience was dispersed and limited.

Rather than offering Latina presenters plenary slots that would guarantee a larger audience for the outreach message, organizers often ask Latina presenters to present the same topic twice. It is also not unusual for the few workshops that address Latina/o issues to be scheduled in the last session of the last day of a conference. Survey participants reflected similar experiences:

"I have been scheduled two times as the very last workshop of the day on the last day of conference."

"One Latina was not listed on the Agenda other than: Team from the Advanced Institute. The other Latina was listed as the plenary speaker on the last day towards the end of the conference when most participants had taken early flight, or were now sightseeing."

Of the seven plenary/keynotes offered during the Third National Sexual Violence Prevention Conference, only the last one offered on the last day of the conference was presented by a Latina. Workshops scheduled the last session of the last day of a conference run the risk of limited attendance due to travel schedules. The duration of a conference and whether the last day is also a half-day can also impact workshop attendance.

The metamessage or how the overall message is interpreted based on the nature of the relationship of the sender and receiver, is especially important for organizers of training events to consider when choosing the conference hotel. According to the findings of a Pew Hispanic Center survey the number of unauthorized migrant Mexican workers in hotels and restaurants has risen from 16% to 20%. The fact that seven out of 10 do not speak English and 82% have no U.S.-issued identification makes them easy prey for exploitation. (Pew Hispanic Center 2006) Conference organizers would do well to take into consideration the negative consequences of perceived insensitivity to conflicts in which abuse and exploitation have occurred.

4. Include Latinas and other Women of Color as plenary speakers

Cultural competency in victim services is an ongoing process that requires an actively engaged and committed audience. By scheduling Latina and other Women of Color advocates and allied professionals as plenary speakers, conference planners can model just how important access and inclusion issues are.

“Representation is definitely lacking at conferences. And I have to say that it is not just Latinas/os that are unrepresented, but many other communities of color aren’t given much direct attention.”

Of the 89 workshops presented at the Third National Sexual Violence Prevention Conference held in Los Angeles in 2004, only ten addressed communities of color. Of the ten workshops that focused on communities of color, four included issues affecting Latinos in the U.S. Of the four Latina workshop presenters (two workshops had co-presenters), only three appeared to be sexual assault victim rights advocates. Of the six panel topics that addressed communities of color, three focused on Latina issues. While the three Latina-focused topics were worthy areas, these panels also reflected the absence of the Latina advocate’s point of view and experience.

Conference panels that (somewhat) addressed Latina/o issues:

“Working with Hispanics – International Research on Sexual Violence Against Women”

“The Health Service Response to Sexual Coercion/Violence: Lessons from IPPF/WHR Member Associations in Latin America”

“Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence in Minority Communities” (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control)

It is also very important to honor the work being done in your own back yard. Often times academic credentials and level of popularity take precedence over direct or grassroots experience, as conference organizers opt to sponsor a trainer/presenter from another state while excluding or denying workshop applications from local Latina victim advocates. While the value and worth of the handful of well-known Women of Color presenters who are recycled by mainstream conference organizers is not being questioned, the ongoing exclusion and lack of validation of the countless unsung heroines is.

“I attended a statewide conference on Domestic Violence in which a well-known Latina was a keynote speaker. Although there are some Latina caseworkers and service providers, not many of them seem to attain a level in their organization (professionally) that allows them to become leaders and speakers. I see them as experts in their field, but usually in conferences and trainings you will see Executive Directors or Faculty members as speakers. I would love to hear more from the people who have the hands on experience.”

During Arte Sana’s Nuestras Voces (our voices) National Latina Training Institute held in 2005 many Latina victim advocates from across the nation were given plenary, panel, and co-presentation opportunities. Comments from institute attendees include:

“It’s important to be validated & empowered, educated on what Latinos are thinking, feeling, believing.”

“As an advocate who works directly with the Spanish speaking population, and particularly as a white woman, I was honored to participate and share in the movement for Latinas – I learned a lot about the women I serve and the difficulties Latina women I work with face in the work place.”

5. Compensate Speakers Equitably

If financial compensation is offered and the level of professional and direct experience is comparable, organizers should offer women of color presenters the same level of compensation and speaking conditions as Anglo presenters.

"I have been asked to present the same workshop twice in one day for the same fee as others who were only asked to present once. I kinda felt bullied into doing it."

It is important that conference organizers balance training goals, expenses, and presenter conditions, for they are as diverse as the trainers themselves. While some presenters are state coalition or national organization staff, others are from smaller agencies or are independent consultants without established travel budgets.

Other means of compensation and consideration:

- *Cover the travel expenses or at least compensate for some of it.*
- *Offer free attendance to the conference.*
- *Offer free information/vendor table or exhibit space.*
- *When possible, avoid venues with a history of discrimination or labor exploitation.*

6. Offer victim advocates equitable access to state and national training events

According to one Latina victim advocate's response, in over 2 ½ years of employment with her agency she has yet to attend a state conference. Additional survey responses include:

"I attended one state conference, which presented one workshop focused on Latino outreach."
"Because of our budget, I typically attend local trainings that local agencies put on. I do my best to attend those that are focused on the Latino population because that is the population that I serve. Unfortunately all the trainings I attend have to get approved by the chain of command (all my supervisors) so I don't always get to attend those I really wish to."

The sad reality is that the level of exclusion of women of color in some national anti-sexual assault meetings necessitated the implementation of mandated attendance criteria in which directors are required to bring women of color staff.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau projections by 2025 the Latino population will grow from 35 million to 61 million, at which point it will represent 18% of the U.S. population.

Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee registered very fast rates of Hispanic population growth between the censuses of 1990 and 2000 and continue to outpace the national average in the most recent census estimates.

The numbers don't lie and the challenges will be even greater if the leaders of the sexual and domestic violence victim rights movements do not assume a proactive role in addressing this nation's growing Latina victim access needs. Contrary the "passive Latina" myth; in Latin America women are agents for change. As members of many social movements, organizations, and through cyber activism, they have drawn attention to women's human rights violations and have contributed to a notable achievement; the ratification of the most important international human rights instrument on women's rights. Latina mobilization has led to the ratification by every country in the Americas - except for the United States - of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). While still not adequately represented in the victim rights movements, U.S. Latinas with decades of experience in grassroots organizing, research, social justice, cultural competency, *and* victim advocacy, are ready and willing to join forces to combat sexual and intimate partner violence.

DISCLAIMER

While the information gathered for this article was not derived from formal research and is not representative of all victim service training events, the data was collected from two of the states with the largest concentration of Latinas/os and two national training events, and is thus representative enough to shed light on the level of exclusion of Latina victim advocates and issues in sexual assault victim service professional development.

The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably throughout this article.

The workshop information was gathered from online conference schedules and program notebooks for the following training events:

- The Third National Sexual Violence Prevention Conference Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), in coordination with the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CalCASA) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) held in Los Angeles (2004)
- The CalCASA Statewide Leadership Conference, "Prevention is Key" held in Sacramento (2005)
- The Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) Annual Conference, "Advocacy, Awareness and Action" held in Austin (2005)
- The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape National Conference on Sexual Violence Prevention and Intervention held in Pittsburg (2005)
- The TAASA Annual Conference, "Begin by Believing" held in South Padre Island (2006)

Works Cited:

Dovidio, John F. and Gaertner, Samuel L., "Color Blind or Just Plain Blind?: The Pernicious Nature of Contemporary Racism." Winter 2005. 12(4). [The NonProfit Quarterly](#). March 10, 2006 <<http://academic.udayton.edu/race/01race/racism10.htm>>.

Navarrette, Ruben Jr. San Diego Union-Tribune, "Not all Latinos are soft on illegal immigration." August 24, 2005. March 11, 2006 <www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/08/24/EDGFREBJAV1.DTL>.

Pew Hispanic Center, "U.S.-BORN HISPANICS INCREASINGLY DRIVE POPULATION DEVELOPMENTS." January, 2002. February 10, 2004 <<http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/2.pdf>>.

Pew Hispanic Center, "Pew Hispanic Center Offers Fuller Portrait of Unauthorized Migrants." June 14, 2005. March 11, 2006 <<http://pewhispanic.org/newsroom/releases/release.php?ReleaseID=33>>.

Smith, Barbara Ellen, Williams, Susan and Johnson, Wendy. "Across Races and Nations: Building New Communities in the U.S. South Conflict and Collaboration: Our Internal Challenges." 2005. March 10, 2006. <http://cas.memphis.edu/isc/crow/race_nation_pubs/organizational_analysis_ARN.pdf>.

U.S. ENGLISH Foundation Inc., "Many Languages, One America." 2005. May 6, 2005 <www.usefoundation.org/foundation/research/lia/>.