Creating Affirming Services for Survivors Who Identify as Latin@

By Liz Zadnik and Enid Melendez

    Although several studies have found that Latin@s[1] do not report higher rates of victimization than other racial or ethnic groups (Black et al., 2011; Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), this diverse ethnic group has unique assets and needs that must be considered by sexual assault centers. This technical assistance guide is not intended for organizations that identify as Latin@-specific or culturally-focused, but for organizations that serve all community members. These organizations have a responsibility to respond to the changing communities they live and work in and can serve as a model for others. The intent of this guide is to help practitioners in describing ways sexual violence and inequalities affect Latin@ communities and list practical ways organizations can create more affirming spaces for Latin@ survivors. Suggested changes and efforts are not intended to be a comprehensive, but more as recommendations that allow agencies to see where they can begin to make changes in practice and policy.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN LATIN@ COMMUNITIES

    The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) found that 1 in 7 Latinas reported experiencing a completed rape at some point in their lifetime, as compared with 1 in 5 in multiracial Non-Hispanic participants (Black et al., 2011). This was also true of sexual violence other than rape – with 1 in 3 Latinas and 1 in 4 Latinos reporting as compared to multiracial Non-Hispanic participants (1 in 2 and 1 in 3, respectively). This is also reflected in the Sexual Assault Among Latinas Study (SALAS), where a large-scale survey of 2,000 Latinas found that approximately 17% reported experiencing some form of unwanted sexual activity or coercion (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010). Child sexual abuse among Latin@ communities is not often discussed or researched. When looking at SALAS participants, 7% of Latinas reported experiencing

trauma as adults, while 12% experienced it as children. Cultural and social forces prevent Latin@ children from disclosing abuse or seeking services; immigrant families are often isolated or unaware of services, offenders seek out children of immigrants because they are more vulnerable, and/or cultural norms around obedience and child-adult relationships (Fontes, 1993). These norms are not exclusive to Latin@ communities, but can give insight into the barriers present for children experiencing abuse. Sexual assault centers may incorporate these norms and values into outreach efforts with Latin@ parents and families.

BARRIERS TO REPORTING AND/OR SEEKING SERVICES

Latin@ survivors have a unique lived experience in the United States that may not always be similar to other racial or ethnic groups. Acculturation is a process, sometimes life-long, of navigating multiple cultures or cultural norms. For many Latin@s, this means navigating their family culture or country of origin's culture, as well as dominant U.S. culture. Dominant U.S. understandings of rape and sexual violence can have a big impact on how Latin@s who identify more with U.S. culture report rape, with many U.S.-identified Latinas reporting higher rates of sexual violence and sympathy for victims of specific racial or ethnic groups (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Lira, Koss, and Russo, 1999).

In addition to cultural factors, there are also external barriers to reporting sexual violence: language and immigrant status. Someone who speaks only Spanish, or any other language for that matter, or someone who is learning English after a lifetime speaking another language may be unaware of services available. This highlights one reason for outreach materials in Spanish; these materials can be placed in areas where individuals would see them. For example, place Spanish-language flyers or posters in grocery stores or markets or restaurants that are frequently visited by Latin@ families. If an individual is an undocumented immigrant or has an unstable citizenship status, they may fear deportation or interacting with systems in fear of being reported to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS).

CREATING AFFIRMING AND EQUAL SERVICES

As of 2010, at least 6% of Pennsylvania's population identifies as Latin@ - many of whom have been born in the state or country and have strong ties to their region and community (Pew Research Center, 2011). All sexual assault centers in Pennsylvania have a responsibility to serve all survivors of sexual violence. The process of becoming a bilingual or culturally-proficient center can take years, even decades (Curiel, 2013). This doesn't mean centers can ignore this growing community or not respond to demographic changes. This section of the guide outlines some steps to take in supporting this effort.

Each of the steps and recommendations listed would be best implemented with steady and consistent line items in organization budgets (Alianza Latina en Contra le Agresion Sexual [ALAS], 2004; Curiel, 2013; National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2013). Budget line items not only ensure implementation, but also send a clear message that accessibility and engaging Latin@ communities is a priority for the organization. With each of the topics discussed below, consider how and when steps could be taken to provide financial support and organizational buy-in.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS AND STRUCTURE

It can be a bit of a balancing act when first engaging in the process of being a more culturally-proficient or relevant organization. Do you focus first on outreach? Staffing? Structure? Many organizations have found it helpful to first focus on what they can make decisions about: service structure, training, and staff.

Cultural proficiency and/or relevance

Cultural relevance is different than cultural competence. Cultural competence is understanding norms and practices, while cultural relevance is an active and intentional process of incorporating these norms into dominant or common approaches. This has also been described in similar ways to cultural proficiency:

> *Cultural proficiency goes beyond mere cultural competence to a more proactive state where cultural knowledge and skills are continually sought, integrated, and utilized by individuals <u>and</u> institutions to promote cross cultural understanding, service innovation, and excellence (Rios, n.d., p. 15).*

When we think about organization and services, it is important to be proactive and informed by the people we are seeking to serve. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2013) needs assessment regarding sexual violence prevention and Latin@ communities found:

- Cultural relevance and buy-in need support from the top. Leadership and boards of directors need to educate themselves on the connection between agency and movement mission and cultural relevance.
- There is a need for agencies to move toward becoming bilingual and addressing institutional inequalities and biases.
- Agencies and coalitions develop a thorough sense of services and supports available to Latin@ communities. Referrals and community partnerships reflect the assets and needs of the people in the community.

Making sure programs and services are culturally-relevant means more than translating brochures and materials. Cultural relevance requires collaboration and communication – community values, norms, and dynamics are incorporated into services.

Bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers

A person who is bilingual can speak two languages *fluently*. These individuals can identify with any racial or ethnic group. It is important to give preference to or specifically hire individuals who can speak the languages present or prominent in the community your agency serves. However, it must be clear that providing translation or bilingual service delivery be part of their job description before they are hired. It should not become someone's responsibility to translate materials or conduct outreach because they are bilingual. For example, a counselor is hired and then tasked with providing bilingual content for brochures and the organization's website. This is tokenizing that staff member and can contribute to burn-out and unsustainable efforts. If translation and bilingual skills are added to the position, a new job description and additional compensation should be offered to the staff member. The Latino Social Work Organization recommends $4,000 as appropriate compensation for translation and bilingual staff responsibilities (ALAS, 2004).

Someone who is bicultural has spent *significant time* (i.e. years or decades) as part of or growing up in another culture. Individuals who are bicultural can bring a different perspective to service delivery and development.   For example, someone who is in data entry or finance should not be doing outreach to the Latin@ community because they are bilingual and/or bicultural. Either an education or outreach specialist

that is bilingual should be hired or additional compensation and a new job description should be offered to the staff person if outreach is the priority of the agency.

Intentional outreach and preference for bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers is crucial for a number of reasons:

- It is best practice for any community service or social service organization to reflect the community as much as possible; board members, management, staff, and volunteers look like and sound like the people they are serving (ALAS, 2004; Curiel, 2013; NSVRC, 2013, Rios, n.d).
- This process serves as a measure for agency growth and development.
- This process is mission-in-action. Sexual assault centers and the anti-sexual violence movement have an ethical responsibility to provide excellent and affirming services to all survivors and community members.

> ## Bilingual
>
> The ability to speak two languages *fluently*. A bilingual *person* can provide services to people who can speak or prefer either English or Spanish. A bilingual *agency* is an organization that conducts or can conduct all services (counseling, advocacy, internal and external training, supervision, etc.) in English and Spanish.

> ## Bicultural
>
> Someone who has spent *significant time* (years, decades) as part of or growing up in another culture.

Supervision and management are key areas to focus on as we move through this process. Bilingual supervision and staff development support individuals providing services in Spanish (Curiel, 2013). In other words, if a person is providing services in Spanish, supervision is conducted in Spanish to reflect the needs of the staff and volunteer.

Although having bilingual staff available is an important and necessary step, it does not mean the agency is bilingual or providing culturally relevant services (NSVRC, 2013). This is a step in the process and one that needs cultivation and support.

SERVICES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Affirming and relevant services come with time and this process requires patience and humility. To avoid overwhelming existing staff and volunteers, as well as supporting sustainable efforts, select one of these areas to begin and then plan for implementing others as part of a multi-year effort.

INTERPRETATION

Language is a major barrier to Latin@ survivors accessing support. Many staff may not be bilingual while building a bilingual agency. This means staff will work with interpreters to provide services to individuals who speak only Spanish or prefer speaking in Spanish. Many public agencies that receive federal or state funding must serve everyone who walks through their door – this means interpretation is a necessity.

A helpful first step in offering interpretation and working with interpreters is training all staff on the importance of language access (ALAS, 2004; NSVRC, 2013). Part of annual training and ongoing education can be an interpretation training and accompanying session on language access and social justice.

How does providing interpretation reinforce agency mission and values? How does having an interpreter available strengthen each counselor and advocate? How does this service support an affirming space for healing?

OUTREACH

People cannot access your services if they do not know you are there. Research and surveys among Latin@ communities have found that services are not accessed due to a lack of knowledge or awareness they are available (Acevado, 2000; Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Curiel, 20-13; Fontes, 1993; NSVRC, 2013; Rios, n.d.). It is critical that outreach be conducted in a thoughtful and intentional way; meeting people where they are – literally and figuratively – is an excellent place to start. For agencies offering culturally-specific or culturally-relevant services as part of a more general service approach may need to build trust and mutual respect before seeing an increase in visits and disclosures. This is a process and will require patience, humility, and openness to learning.   This may mean engaging faith communities and developing messaging with them that incorporates spirituality and faith into messages or organizing outreach during celebrations or social gatherings.

Messaging and content should also reflect the realities of the community – talk to Latin@s in your community or Latin@ community organizations to build messaging that reflects the lived experience of those you are serving. This is best practice for all community organizing and prevention strategies. It is important to give preference to or specifically hire individuals who are bicultural and reflect the community or communities your agency serves. Part of that messaging may be presenting sexual violence and other forms of personal power-based violence as contradictions or damaging to the cultural values of Latin@ families and community bonds (Rios, n.d).

Interpretation

This is typically for spoken words or in-person communication. Professional interpreters are skilled in communicating in a specific or multiple languages.

Translation

This is typically for written or virtual communication. For brochures and websites, it is best to create content in Spanish at the same time content in English is being created – this is slightly different than simply translating a document after it has been created.

ENDNOTES

[1]The @ symbol is used to represent that feminine (Latina) and masculine (Latino) versions of words in order to promote a more inclusive approach to language.

CREATING AFFIRMING AND EQUAL SERVICES WORKSHEET & SUMMARY

This worksheet can be used as a way to set priorities and plan activities. Work through the questions and focus on achievable and sustainable goals. Training and technical assistance is available to all sexual assault programs in Pennsylvania by contacting the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape.

The charts below are intended to be used for brainstorming priorities and identifying specific aspects of those activities.

- *Resources available: Does your agency have a relationship with a local Latin@ community-based agency? Do you have regular all-staff meetings, which might offer time for trainings or strategic planning? Do you have a policy or funding opportunity that could support this work?*

- *Mission or Core Value: How does the work of creating affirming spaces for all connect to your agency mission? What core values support these efforts? If there aren't any clear connects, see where some could be created.*

- *Timeline: When will goals and benchmarks produce results or be accomplished? This fiscal year? By the end of the calendar year? Will there be quarterly or consistent check-in meetings?*

- *Staff and Leadership responsible: These efforts cannot be the responsibility of a single staff person, nor would they be effective if that is the case. Who on the board would be willing and able to work on this? Who in leadership? Who among the staff? How will these individuals receive recognition and support from others?*

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS AND STRUCTURE

	Activity	Resources Available	Policy or Core Value	Timeline	Staff and Leadership Responsible
Cultural proficiency and/or relevance	*Example: Two board trainings per fiscal year on cultural relevance and skill-building.*	*Example: Board retreat occurs every January – part of that day will be training. Add another training to schedule of meetings.*	*Example: Social justice and trans-formation are core values.*	*Example: Upcoming January meeting will be identifying needs and trainers.*	*Example: Executive Director, board Chair, and Volunteer Coordinator.*
Bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers	*Example: Revise Latin@ Communities Specialist job description and secure funding for compensation.*	*Example: Local foundation focused on community engagement releases RFP.*	*Example: Social justice and transformation are core values.*	*Example: Proposal for funding will be submitted and job description revisions will be complete by next quarter.*	*Example: Executive Director, board Chair, and Direct Services Supervisor.*

SERVICES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

	Activity	Resources Available	Policy or Core Value	Timeline	Staff and Leadership Responsible
Interpretation	*Example: Incorporate language access and working with an interpreter into sexual assault counselor training.*	*Example: Sexual assault counselor training, interpretation service, and one volunteer with experience working with the interpreter.*	*Example: All survivors are to receive services that are relevant and appropriate to their needs.*	*Example: Next training is schedule for six months from today – begin planning scenarios and presentation to try with upcoming group.*	*Example: Volunteer Coordinator, volunteer, and Direct Services Supervisor.*
Outreach	*Example: Identify Latin@ community organizations, businesses, and media.*	*Example: Local Latin@ radio station, market, and community center.*	*Example: All survivors are to receive services that are relevant and appropriate to their needs.*	*Example: Call community center and schedule meeting to discuss services and opportunities for promotion.*	*Example: Education specialist, board member, and volunteer.*

About this resource

This resource was authored by Liz Zadnik, PCAR Education & Resource Coordinator, and Enid Melendez, PCAR Training Projects Specialist. The authors intend for this resource to be used by agencies and practitioners in the anti-sexual violence movement in Pennsylvania and beyond.
The authors would like to acknowledge Chiara Sabina, PhD, for her invaluable contributions to this resource and efforts to support Latina survivors of sexual violence.

RESOURCES

2011 Language Mapper
http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/language_map.html
Interactive map from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey

Limited English Proficiency – Interpretation and Translation Services
http://www.pccyfs.org/practice_resources/Limited-Eng-Prof_Interpretation-Translation_082007.pdf
Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth, and Family Services

Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center
http://www.pirclaw.org/contact_us
Legal services organization

REFERENCES

Acevedo, M. J. (2000). Battered immigrant Mexican women's perspectives regarding abuse and help-seeking. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work, 8,* 243-282. doi: 10.1300/J285v08n03_04

Alianza Latina en Contra le Agresion Sexual. (2004). *Eliminating barriers to services for Latina/o survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence: A position statement.* Retrieved from Arte Sana: http://www.arte-sana.com/alas_position_statement_2004.pdf

Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., … Stevens, M.R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 summary report.* Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf

Cuevas, C. A., & Sabina, C. (2010). *Final report: Sexual Assault Among Latinas (SALAS) Study* (Document No. 230445). Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/230445.pdf

Curiel, Y. (2013, August). *Becoming a bilingual (English & Spanish) rape crisis center.* Presentation at the National Sexual Assault Conference, Los Angeles, CA.

Fontes, L. A. (1993). Disclosure of sexual abuse by Puerto Rican children: Oppression and cultural barriers. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 2,* 21-35. doi:10.1300/J070v02n01_02

Jimenez, J. A., & Abreu, J. M. (2003). Race and sex effects on attitudinal perceptions of acquaintance rape. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 50,* 252-256. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.50.2.252

Lira, L. R., Koss, M. P., & Russo, N. F. (1999). Mexican American women's definitions of rape and sexual abuse. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 21,* 236-265. doi:10.1177/0739986399213004

National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2013). *Preventing sexual violence in Latin@ communities: A national needs assessment.* Retrieved from http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_assessments_latina-needs-assessment_0.pdf
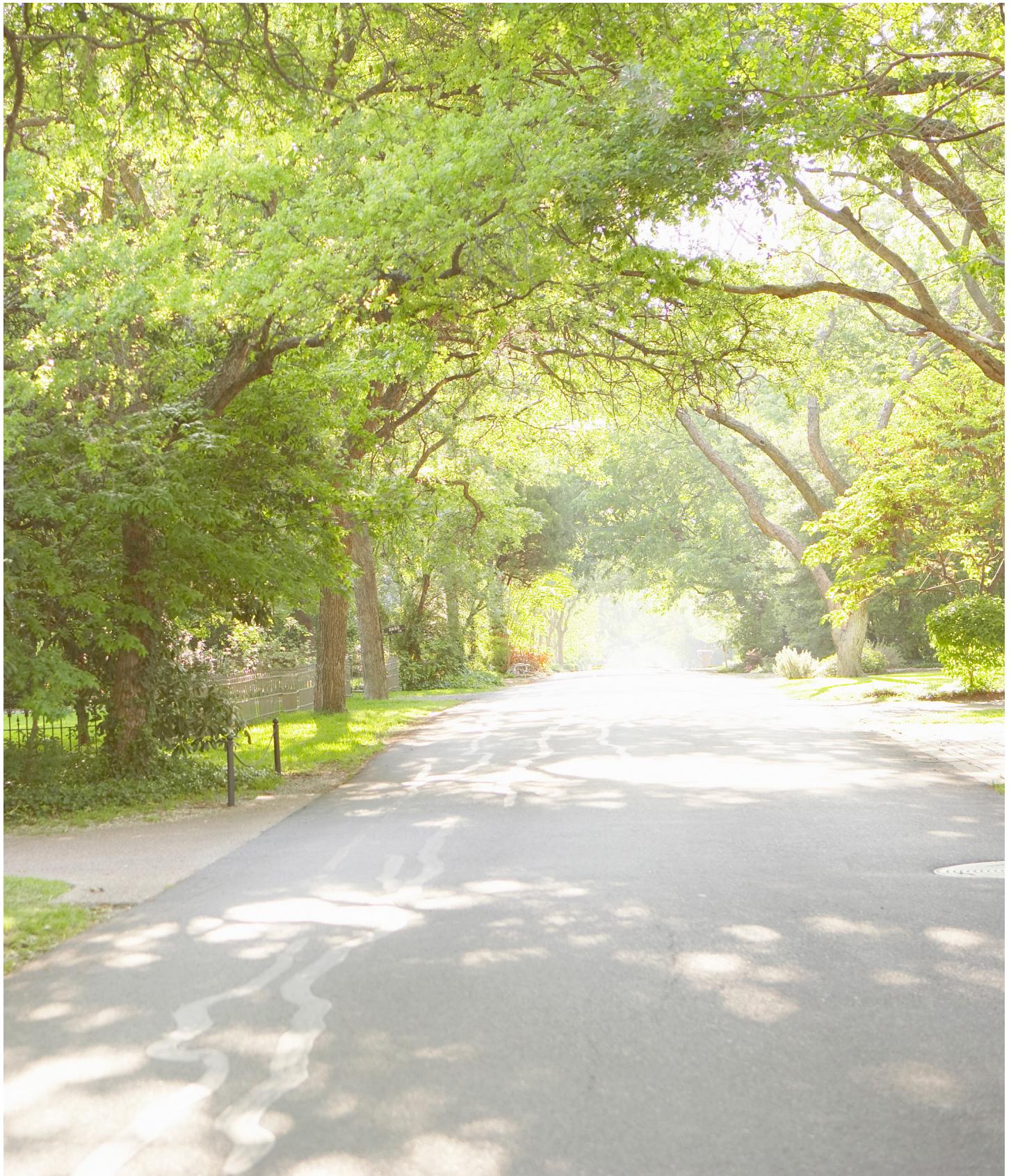
Pew Research Center. (2011). *Demographic profile of Hispanics in Pennsylvania, 2010.* Retrieved from http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/state/pa/

Rios, E. A. (n.d.). *On the road to social transformation: utilizing cultural strengths to end domestic violence.* Retrieved from http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/rios1.pdf

Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women* (NCJ 183781). Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf