Mexican American Women's Definitions of Rape and Sexual Abuse

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Mexican American Women's Definitions of Rape and Sexual Abuse

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Focus group approach was used to explore concepts related to rape and sexual abuse among 17 Mexican immigrant women living in rural Arizona. The women discussed definitions of various forms of unwanted sexual experiences, their personal knowledge of someone who had been raped or sexually abused, and their perceptions of the roots of sexual abuse. Distinctions between rapto and violación, child versus adult rape (including marital rape), motivations for rape, and social factors contributing to victim silencing were identified. The meaning and perceived impact of rape reflected the gender relations of the culture. Keeping silent was a consistent theme, underscoring the difficulties of accurately assessing rape prevalence in Latinas. Research, prevention, intervention, and treatment programs need to recognize the social context and impact of rape and be designed accordingly. Participants reported many rape experiences, suggesting that underreporting is a major problem in estimating rape prevalence for Latinas.

Rape was traditionally defined in common law as "carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will" (Bienen, 1980, p. 174). With the rise of the feminist movement in the United States in the 1970s, this definition came under scrutiny and was broadened. Subsequent reform statutes have literally "transformed the very acts that are considered rape" (Koss, Goodman, et al., 1994, p. 159). Today, *rape* usually is defined legally as "nonconsensual sexual penetration of an adolescent or adult obtained by physical force, by threat of bodily harm, or at such time when the victim is incapable of giving consent by virtue of mental illness, mental retardation, or intoxication" (Koss, Goodman, et al., 1994, p. 159). Although there has been a traditional belief that a wife has a duty to have intercourse with her husband and thus could not be raped, by the 1990s, only a few states still maintained statutory

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spousal exclusions in their rape laws (Searles & Berger, 1987). Thus, legal definitions of rape in the United States—one expression of rape's cultural meaning— have undergone profound changes in the past two decades. Such changes have transformed societal views of rape and responses to rape victims in general. Nonetheless, traditional rape attitudes and myths persist, and traditional concepts and cultural meanings continue to shape the experiences of rape victims (Koss, Goodman, et al., 1994). In particular, beliefs that blame victims and view rape as a symptom of pathology or "sickness" in men persist across culture (White & Sorenson, 1992).

Little is known about the experiences of rape among U.S. Latinas, in general, and among Mexican American women, in particular (Koss, Goodman, et al., 1994). Unfortunately, information about violence against women is typically not presented separately by ethnic group, and when it is, "Hispanic" is the usual analytic category. Although arguably better than nothing, this approach homogenizes women from a variety of North, Central, and South American, as well as Caribbean cultures under the "Hispanic" label. The most recent epidemiological data come from the 1995-1996 National Violence Against Women Survey, which found that 14.5% of Hispanic women reported having been raped in their lifetime, compared to 18.4% of other women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Sorenson and Siegel (1992) analyzed data obtained from interviews of 3,000 adults (18 years and older) residing in Los Angeles. Respondents were asked, "In your lifetime, has anyone ever tried to pressure or force you to have sexual contact?" Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English, depending on the preference of the participant (no data on the proportion of women who exercised the option of being interviewed in Spanish are available, however). Hispanics were substantially less likely to report unwanted sexual contact than non-Hispanic Whites (8.1% vs. 19.9%). Although these researchers

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did not report results separately by Hispanic group, 95% of the Hispanic respondents were of Mexican ancestry, 56.8% of them born in Mexico. Other analyses that examined immigration status found that U.S.-born Hispanics reported rates of sexual assault similar to those of U.S.-born, non-Hispanic Whites (11.4% vs. 16.2%, respectively). For those of Mexican ancestry, the rates were 11.4% versus 3.5% for U.S. versus Mexican born, respectively (Sorenson & Telles, 1991). Whether these findings reflect aspects of acculturation (traditional women may be more hesitant to discuss such matters), selective immigration (Mexican women who experience sexual assault may be less likely to be able to migrate to another country), fear or distrust of authority on the part of immigrants (which leads to minding one's own business and not talking with researchers or other types of authority figures), or traditional Mexican culture (which may have protective elements against unwanted sexual contact) is unknown (Sorenson & Siegel, 1992). Nonetheless, these findings suggest a need to distinguish the experience of rape in unacculturated Mexican women from that of their acculturated sisters.

The majority of rapes occur during childhood and adolescence. The National Women's Study found that 29.3% of reported forcible rapes occurred when the victim was 11 years old or younger, with 22.2% occurring between the ages of 11 and 17 (National Victim Center, 1992). However, little is known about the experience of rape and sexual abuse in ethnic minority children, particularly among Mexican Americans (Wyatt, 1990). A study based on a community sample in Los Angeles found prevalence rates of child sexual victimization to be lower for Hispanics (3.0%) when compared with non-Hispanic Whites (8.7%; Siegel, Sorenson, Golding, Burnam, & Stein, 1987). Furthermore, in 1995, an estimated 1 out of 80 Hispanic children was the reported victim of child abuse and neglect, a figure lower than the 1 out of 58 reported children in general (Greenfield & Smith, 1999). When a national sample of college students was asked "During your life, have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse against your will?" 20% answered "yes," with 16% reporting that the experience first occurred before age 13; another 55% reported the experience first occurring between the ages of 13 and 18. Hispanics, who constituted 7% of the college population, also constituted 7% of both groups (Brener, McMahon, Warren, & Douglas, 1999).

To obtain more information about reported rates of childhood sexual abuse among Latinas for this article, we conducted secondary analyses of the data from The Health of American Women, a random household survey sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund (see Falik & Collins, 1996, for a detailed description of survey methodology). That survey sampled 2,550 women age 18 or older and residing in the continental United States; 16%

(403) of respondents were Latina, and the largest subgroup of Latinas were of Mexican ancestry (56%). Unfortunately, the sample was too small to analyze the data separately by Hispanic group, given the base reporting rates of the behaviors studied.

During the telephone survey, the women were asked if, when they were growing up, they ever felt sexually abused. Latinas were significantly more likely than other women to say "yes" to this question (12.9% vs. 7.8%, respectively), $\chi^2 = 5.05$, $df = 1$, $p < .03$; $r\,(2,525) = -.04$, $p = .025$. Latinas were also significantly more likely than other women to have a violent partner (18.8% vs. 12.2%, respectively), $\chi^2 = 7.81$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$. The proportions of women who reported having been raped (2.7% for Latinas, 1.8% for other women) were too small for meaningful statistical analysis, however.

Following up on the findings of Sorenson and Telles (1991), we examined the impact of immigrant status among women of Hispanic origin on sexual abuse. Women born in the United States reported higher rates of feeling sexually abused while growing up than women born elsewhere (15.1% vs. 8.1%, respectively) but had similar rates of childhood sexual abuse as women not of Hispanic origin. Although the pattern of findings is suggestive, because of the small sample size this association did not attain conventional levels of statistical significance. Being born in the United States made little difference in the reporting of sexual abuse among non-Hispanics; 9.4% versus 8.0% of U.S.- versus foreign-born respondents in this group reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse, respectively.

In summary, the epidemiological picture is muddy and inconsistent, with the associations depending on the nature of the sample, how the questions are asked, the behavior specified (e.g., rape vs. sexual abuse), and level of acculturation, among other variables. The inconsistency in findings leads to the suspicion that underreporting may be a particularly serious problem for Latinas. Underreporting aside, the proportions of Latinas who report having been raped, having experienced unwanted sexual contact, and feeling sexually abused while growing up are substantial and provide powerful arguments for research on Latinas' experience of rape and sexual abuse.

Cultural Meanings and Impact

The meanings of *rape* and *sexual abuse* vary widely across cultures, with acts that are considered rape or abuse and punished in some cultures becoming ignored or condoned in others (Koss, Heise, & Russo, 1994; Rozeé, 1993; Sorenson, 1996; Williams & Holmes, 1981). Even within the United States, definitions of rape and sexual abuse have changed over time and varied

depending on a variety of factors. Such factors have included the behaviors specified (e.g., if penetration occurred), the criteria used to establish lack of consent (e.g., evidence of physical resistance), the characteristics of the individuals involved (including the nature of their relationship), and whose perspective is considered—that is, whose opinion gets to decide whether an event is defined as rape (Muehlenhard, Powch, Phelps, & Giusti, 1992). A full understanding of the experience of rape and sexual abuse thus requires how the meanings and definitions of rape and sexual abuse are similar and different for women, depending on their cultural background and context.

Cultural meanings are significant determinants of whether rape and sexual abuse are reported to the police (we use the term *sexual assault* to encompass both concepts). Among adults (18 and older), rape is the most underreported crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). When police reports and community surveys are compared, only about 1 in 3 (32.9%) of rape or sexual assaults involving young adult women (ages 20-34) are reported; for women ages 50 through 64, the figure is even lower (26.8%). The underreporting of sexual assault by adolescents (ages 12-19) is similar to that of younger adults. The "silencing" of women reflected in the underreporting data may result from a variety of factors, but one of them is that rape victims may not conceptualize their experience as rape, even though it may meet the legal definition of rape. For example, Koss, Dinero, Seibel, and Cox (1988) found that among women who had experiences that met the legal definition of rape, only 27% actually conceptualized their assaults as such.

Cultural definitions of rape can influence the victim's responses to rape in other ways as well. They can affect whether a woman will seek services at a rape crisis center or obtain victim assistance aid to which victims of reported crime are entitled. They can also affect the responses of friends, family, and community members to the victim. The experience of rape victims can be traumatic "not only by the terrifying experience of the assault, but also by public attitudes that affect the perception and treatment of the rape victim by others" (Lefley, Scott, Llabre, & Hicks, 1993, p. 623; also see Wyatt, 1990). Although positive support has only slight mitigating effects on the aftermath of rape, negative reactions can greatly exacerbate rape trauma.

Hispanics have been found more likely to make victim-blaming attributions for rape (Lefley et al., 1993; Williams, 1984). Williams (1984) found that Mexican Americans, in comparison to Anglo- or African Americans, hold conservative views of rape on several dimensions, including a tendency to question the legitimacy of rape accusations and an unwillingness to prosecute the assailants. In that study, Mexican Americans who held traditional female role conceptions were also more likely to hold conservative attitudes toward rape, with rape treated as a shameful secret, to be shared only with the

immediate family. Males were less victim supportive than females, and victims tended to use the legal, medical, and judicial support systems less than other groups.

Religious ideology and institutions can shape responses to rape in ways that foster negative reactions to rape victims and cut women off from support from the Church as well as family members. Traditionally, the Catholic Church has valued purity and virginity for women and has extolled the example of Saint Maria Goretti, the message being that a woman should resist rape even at the price of her life (Williams & Holmes, 1981). Rape victims who do not strongly resist may be viewed as dirtied, shamed, and dishonored in this context. Furthermore, rape may also represent dishonor for the husband or and other male family members who failed to protect the victim. A woman who has been raped thus fails her religious obligations as well as her husband and other male family members. Giraud (1988) has described how in Catholic tradition, the notion of injury caused to kinsmen has been important, not only because males have been responsible for the woman but also because the women represented significant symbolic wealth for the family. Thus, men seek revenge for a woman's rape because they themselves have suffered an injury and must defend their honor.

In Mexican culture, religious norms and images of women can have a strong effect on sexuality, particularly in marriage. Thus, the norms of sexual behavior established in Catholicism are considered by some individuals as the "sexual script" to be followed. The writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) were particularly influential in the formation of Catholic theology related to these issues (see Langlois, 1997; Ortega, 1987). Aquinas considered sexual relations—or carnal copulation, as he called it—between husband and wife as a duty in the service of having children. Both husband and wife share the obligation to perform this duty, and in premarital counseling, Catholic priests instruct wives in their duty to perform sex when their husband asks for it. Thus, marriage in effect provides blanket consent for sex at any time, and men can justify requests for unwanted sex on the basis of religious duty. By rejecting a husband's request for sex, a wife is not only failing to perform her religious duty but is blocking her husband's ability to perform his as well. This context may make it difficult for Catholic women to conceptualize rape occurring in a marital context.[1]

There is a burgeoning literature that examines the impact of rape on the physical and mental health of majority women in the United States (Brener et al., 1999; Briere, Woo, McRae, Foltz, & Sitzman 1997; Foa & Rothbaum; 1998; Goodman, Koss, & Russo, 1993; Koss, Goodman, et al., 1994; Koss & Mukai, 1993; Leserman et al., 1997; Petrak, Doyle, Williams, Buchan, & Forster, 1997; Stepakoff, 1998). Although little is known about the

experience of rape for women of color, particularly for Latinas, the findings that do exist are provocative. Some research has reported that Hispanic female rape victims tend to show more psychological distress than rape victims of other ethnic groups, including negative changes in feelings about men and a withdrawn pattern of functioning (Williams, 1984), obsessive/compulsive thinking, and the use of denial or avoidance as a maladaptive coping response (Lefley et al., 1993). Does rape have a greater psychological impact on Latinas, or is it that Latinas who experience stronger reactions to rape are the ones more likely to be identified? Is some other factor operating, or is some combination of factors at work?

Obtaining qualitative data can make an important contribution to the knowledge needed to develop culturally sensitive research approaches that can answer such questions. The focus group method is considered particularly well suited for "exploratory, interpretative, multimethod, and phenomenological research questions" (Wilkinson, 1999; see also Frey & Fontana, 1993). This method has been used to good effect by Sorenson (1996) to explore the experience of violence in intimate relationships of ethnic minorities. Her study included African American, Anglo American, Korean American, and Mexican American groups of males and of females. Although her study focused on battering, the emergent themes—the intersection of gender and ethnicity, the challenge of immigration and acculturation issues, the role of social institutions in shaping perceptions about violence in relationships, and the range and diversity of violence experiences and their outcomes—have application to rape and sexual abuse as well. Particularly relevant here was the identification of religious authority in shaping responses to violence and the role of norms and values in shaping support of families and peers for victims. Cultural differences in these themes that emerged from the focus groups included Mexican Americans' concern with their culture's emphasis on male sexual prowess and the role of virginity in determining the value of an unmarried woman.

This ennoblement of female chastity has been labeled as *marianismo* (see Lefley et al., 1993) and has been considered the counterpart of *machismo*. The concepts are complementary aspects of gender: "*machismo* represents the male ideology and masculinity and *marianismo*, through the cult of the Virgin, represents the feminine counterpart" (Melhus, 1990, p. 41). These are normative representations rather than a classification of actual behavior (Riquer, 1989). Nevertheless, the powerful subjective effect of these images need to be recognized and understood (Amuchástegui, 1996).

Understanding cultural differences and images requires an appreciation of the historical and religious contexts of Mexican women. Latinos hold more

traditional attitudes toward women (see Lefley et al., 1993). Also, Mexicans and Mexican Americans are more conservative and sustain more rigid expectations about gender roles than other groups (Williams, 1984). These gender constructions reflect the history of Latin American mestizo societies, in which the myths of creation of the patriarchal world depict women as responsible for the suffering of men (Palma, 1990). These images have also been shaped by Catholic sexual ideology, which came to idealize virginity and asexuality, an impossible model for actual women to achieve. (Langlois, 1997). In this ideology, the Virgin Mary has been idealized as the model of womanhood, in contrast to the figure of Eve, the temptress, who has been considered to represent the moral inferiority of women. As Judith Daniluk (1993) has observed, this dichotomous image of Madonna/whore, which is found in many cultures, has "left little room for any notion of healthy female sexuality" (p. 59).

In Meso-American societies, these figures became intertwined with the views of indigenous peoples. Women came to be mythically represented by two opposing characters: the good-mother-virgin, represented by the Virgin Mary, and the bad-traitor-raped opponent, represented by Malinche. These contrasting representations have been identified in a number of Latin American societies, including Mexico (see Lagarde, 1994; Finkler, 1997). The concrete realities of actual women are evaluated in reference to these mythical representations: the protective one and the raped one (*la violada*). Thus, Mexican women are paradoxically viewed as both subordinate and powerful (Finkler, 1997).

In addition to recognizing the influence of these cultural elements, it must be remembered that the lives of Mexican American women are "too often characterized by poverty, racism, and sexism not only in the dominant culture, but also within her own culture" (Blea, 1997, p. 49). The effects of poverty and discrimination should not be misattributed to culture. These are just some of the cultural and social complexities to consider when exploring how gender is constructed in Mexican culture and how it might shape the meanings and consequences of rape and sexual abuse in traditional, unacculturated Mexican American women.

This article uses a focus group approach to explore concepts related to rape and sexual abuse among Mexican immigrant women living in rural Arizona—women whose voices have been least likely to be represented in rape research. The purpose of this study is to understand the meanings of rape and sexual abuse from the points of view of these women and to suggest how rape research, prevention, and intervention strategies might become more culturally appropriate for them.

Method

Recruitment

A multifaceted strategy was used to identify and recruit volunteer participants having minimal facility with the English language and a Mexican cultural identification. Face-to-face recruitment included presentations to nurses (1), schools (5), libraries (3), social service agencies (5), churches (1), clinics (1), radio (1), television (1) and solicitation at a conference, "Mujer 2000." All of these presentations were in Spanish, by a native speaker, to groups of Spanish-speaking women who met at sites serving the Spanish-speaking community. An ad in Spanish was also placed in the *Shopper* newspaper. Prospective participants telephoned the recruiter who administered an acculturation measure over the telephone. All recruitment was accomplished in a 6-month period. All groups were conducted in February and March of 1998.

Sample

All of the 17 women who telephoned from the above sources met the criterion for having minimal facility with the English language, although more than a few had lived in the United States many years. Most women were born (n = 13) or predominately raised (n = 3) in Mexico. One was born in the United States but had been raised a year or more in Mexico. The majority spoke mostly or only in Spanish; only 1 was bilingual. They preferred speaking Spanish and identified themselves as Mexican (n = 12), Latin American (n = 3), and Mexican American (n = 1). Participant scores on the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980) affirmed that the participants were culturally Mexican. This scale, which ranges from 1 (*Mexican culture*) to 5 (*Anglo culture*), assesses cultural preferences in a variety of areas, including language, identity, group identification, ethnic origin, social relations, entertainment activities, and food. Participant scores ranged from 1.05 to 2, with a mean of 1.52.

Participant age ranged from 22 to 55 years (mean age = 31.8 years). Most were married (n = 12) or living with someone (n = 2). The majority (n = 12) were Catholic. About two thirds of the women (n = 12) had completed between 10 to 12 years of school; the remainder had 9 or fewer years of schooling. Participants had lived in the United States from 1 to 34 years (mean = 9.8 years). All of the women had children. Family size ranged from 1 to 6 children, with a mean of 2.32. Annual family income ranged from $4,000 to $36,000 a year. Mean annual family income was $13,065; 3 women

reported a family income that was less than $12,000, 7 women had an income between $12,000 to $15,000 dollars, and 4 had an income greater than $15,000.

Procedure

The women were organized into four focus groups that contained four to five members. The recruiter, who also served as focus group leader, provided transportation to and from the focus group site. Then she set up the tape recorder, obtained informed consent, and asked the questions listed below. Except for asking the questions, the facilitator provided no structuring of the discussion. All focus groups except the first, which refused consent, were tape-recorded. The groups lasted from 2 to 4 hours. There was a break for lunch, which was provided. In keeping with standard practice, the women were paid $25 for participating in the study.

The discussions were facilitated by a middle-age, native-born Mexican woman who had lived in the United States for more than 20 years and worked as a professional recruiter or liaison to the Spanish-speaking community. She had extensive experience in recruiting participants for women's health studies and conducting focus groups in Spanish.

Participants were asked to discuss a variety of issues related to unwanted sexual contact. Responses related to their definitions of various forms of unwanted sexual experiences, including *rapto*, *violación*, and *abuso sexual*; their personal knowledge of someone who had been sexually abused; and their perceptions of the roots of sexual abuse were analyzed here. The specific wording of the questions was as follows:

1a. How does the community understand rape or sexual abuse? (¿Cómo define o entiende la comunidad la violación o abuso sexual?)
1b. How does the community understand rape or sexual abuse? (Cómo define o entiende la comunidad el rapto o abuso sexual?)
2. Do you personally know someone who has been sexually abused? (¿Conocen ustedes personalmente a alguien que haya sido abusada sexualmente?)
3. What are the roots of sexual abuse? (¿Cuáles son las raíces del abuso sexual?)

After the participants discussed Questions 1a or 1b, the facilitator specifically asked them if they believed that a husband could rape his wife.

The transcripts of the focus groups were prepared by a professional language service, using bilingual native speakers of Spanish. Transcriptions were verified by comparison with the original tape recording. The discussions were transcribed as they occurred with no editing of the grammar. Although it is not possible to determine the extent to which information was

withheld, reading the transcripts does lead to the belief that the participants became comfortable in expressing their views.

The transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis based on techniques suggested by Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996). First, the responses to the questions were analyzed to identify the big ideas or central themes emerging from the material. These analyses were conducted in Spanish by a native Mexican fluent in Spanish and English and the interpretations here confirmed by a native Costa Rican fluent in Spanish and English. This approach reflects the team's belief that important meaning can be lost in translation. Thus, the quotes below are presented in Spanish so that readers themselves can determine the fit between the theme and the material that illustrates it.

Once the main themes were identified, they in turn were used to categorize the information units, in this case the paragraphs, into the thematic categories. The process of categorizing brings together the units related to the same content and emphasizes agreement in the groups. But consensus does not necessarily occur for all themes, and we include descriptions of disagreements, conflicts, and alternative explanations provided by other group members as well. In keeping with the admonitions of Morgan and Krueger (1993), quantification of the data has been avoided. The focus group method enables participants to share their ideas and organizes the concepts and issues in their terms rather than in preconceived categories of the researcher. No claim is made regarding the proportions of women who hold such ideas—that is a question for quantitative research.

Results and Discussion

The central themes that emerged in each category are presented below with selected quotes to illustrate them. The intervention of the facilitator is marked with F and the participants with P. In cases in which more than one woman spoke in a fragment, participants are identified as P1, P2, and so on.

As Muehlenhard et al. (1992) observed, definitions of rape vary in terms of the behaviors specified and the characteristics of the individuals involved. As seen below, the types of rapes (child, adult, marital) and behaviors discussed (e.g., penetration) varied in the groups. Both differences from and commonalities with previous findings of research can be found in the categories and distinctions that emerged from the discussions of the participants, identifying many areas in need of future research. Although traditional beliefs related to virginity, sexuality, and victim blaming could be identified, there were signs of modernity as well. Indeed, some of the participants

explicitly declared that in the past, they had thought differently about certain issues but had developed a new way of thinking.

Rapto Versus Violación

Participants made a clear distinction between rapto and violación (words that would be considered synonymous in English meaning rape) that underscores the necessity of translating research instruments in ways that capture the language usage of the culture for whom they are designed. Initially, the facilitator euphemistically used rapto to start the discussions because asking about violación directly was perceived as causing extreme discomfort. Participant responses revealed that rapto's other meanings and connotations shaped the discussions far beyond the experience of rape, so violación was used in the remaining groups. Historically, in Mexico rapto was considered under Spanish law as "the stealing of a woman when she is taken from her home to another place with the *aim of corrupting or marrying her*" (Giraud, 1988, p. 316; italics added), and the term encompasses situations that are against the will of the woman as well as ones occurring with her complicity and consent. The facilitator reported she was absolutely certain that the participants all knew they were being asked to talk about rape. Nonetheless, when the word *rapto* was used, participants focused on women's complicity. They blamed the women involved, describing them as *locas* (loose), a word that is often used in Mexico to label women who openly express their sexuality or lustfulness. They also blamed the women's parents for not bringing the woman up properly.

P1: El rapto se entiende que pasa porque la mujer es loca.
P2: A ti te gusta el sexo.
P3: Porque te gusta andar entre hombres.
P1: Porque sus padres no le dieron buenos principios.

P1: The rapto happens when a woman is loose.
P2: [because] you like sex.
P3: Because you like to be around men.
P1: Because her parents did not give her good principles.

In addition to this concept of rapto as "woman stealing," the term can also be understood as a kidnapping, that is, the involuntary abduction of anyone from their place of residence to other place. Thus, the term is not gender specific and can be motivated for a variety of nonsexual reasons (e.g., obtaining a divorce, money, etc.). This meaning of rapto was also observed in participant responses. Interestingly, in contrast to the discussions of rapto as woman

stealing, in the cases of rapto as kidnapping, the participants viewed the act as not desired by the victims, and they did not consider victims guilty or responsible for their fate.

In contrast, the mention of violación predominately generated strong emotional responses of disapproval and disgust for the act. Even so, there were a few attempts to minimize its seriousness, for example, by making jokes. The word *violación* also held ambiguities, because some women responded with opinions related to violations of rights, of freedom, of privacy, and so forth. This may reflect women's exposure to modern ideals of equality and human rights for women. In this study, participants were asked about the definition of *violación o abuso sexual*. In future research, it may be useful to remind participants at later points in the discussion that that they are being specifically asked about *violación sexual*.

That this study was conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in Spanish enabled us to examine nuances and identify subtleties in meaning. Even so, subsequently describing the work in English posed difficulties, as the full meaning of concepts (e.g., rapto) is not easily translatable in a few words. Discussing the meanings of what was said—within Spanish and then across into English—involved a process of negotiation that demonstrated the importance of collaboration among bilingual colleagues, a model we recommend for future researchers.

Child Rape and Abuse

Two main categories of rape based on age of victim emerged: child versus adult rape. Discussions of the rape of children provided the most powerful and consistent images in response to the discussion. Child rape was a concern in these women's communities, and it provoked more expressions of disgust, horror, and anger than did sexual violence perpetrated on older victims. In every group, some participants said they personally knew a victim of childhood rape or sexual abuse. This was not true with regard to adult rape victims. The detailed stories that the women told about their experiences (their own as well as those of their friends and family members) suggested that they were more comfortable discussing sexual violence when children rather than adult women were involved.

Child rape was predominately defined by the type of sexual behavior involved: the penetration—vaginal or anal, by a penis or other object—of a child. In addition, some sexual activities, such as fondling or certain sexual remarks experienced by the child, were mentioned when discussing this definition. Although the force used by the assailant in committing these acts was vaguely alluded to in some cases, it was not central to the definition of rape

when a child was involved, and consent was not an issue. Nevertheless, the cases of raped children described depicted extreme physical violence (including homicide) as well as psychological force (as threats and intimidation).

With regard to perpetrator characteristics, it was recognized that child rapists could be strangers but that frequently the rapists are family members, including the father or father surrogates. The participants predominately reported personal experiences with family members; only one case of child rape by a stranger was described. The perpetrators in the narrated cases were primarily family members, mainly fathers or surrogates, or acquaintances.

> Yo tuve una sobrina que fue violada, pero la mataron. . . . Tenía como 10 años. Y fue al pan. Era la tarde, eran como las 5 y nunca regresó y el otro día le avisaron a la policía, hasta el otro día. Muy dejada la mamá. Y, y resulta que en las noticias oyeron que habían encontrado una niña abajo de un puente, y era ella. . . . Y resulta que despues encontraron al que la había violado y fue su padrastro. Tomaba mucho.
> I had a niece who was raped, but she was killed. . . . She was about 10 years old, and she went to buy bread. It was around 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and she never came back. They notified the police the next day. Her mother was very careless. They heard on the news that they had found a girl under a bridge and that girl was she. . . . Later, they found the man who raped her, and it was her stepfather. He drank a lot.

It was also mentioned that perpetrators could be female but that men rape and abuse children much more frequently than do women. Being mentally ill or crazy was the principal explanation given for child rape. Interestingly, no one pointed out that girls were more frequently abused than boys.

The increased awareness of child rape and abuse in the community was viewed positively. The participants reported that before—that is, during their own childhood—their parents were less aware of these situations and did not communicate the risk of being abused to their children. They believed that some of the previous gaps in communication between parents and children have been overcome, however. They reported a heightened awareness of the risks of sexual assaults to their children and were more vigilant in comparison to their own parents. They expressed more concern about their children's risk of being molested by acquaintances. Interestingly, some participants reported reinterpreting their own experiences as abuses, leading them to have a more critical view of some behaviors considered as "normal" or "not important" when they were growing up.

> En una ocasión yo dormía con un, con una prima mía. Estábamos chiquillas. . . . Y había una persona en la casa, un señor que era mecánico, que mi papá lo . . . lo llevaba. Y le hacía confianza que durmiera. Pues no había puerta ni (x)

¿verdad? Y este señor, en la madrugada andaba ahí gateando y tentando las piernas a mi prima. . . . Y pega un grito mi prima, y, y se levanta mi papá y mi mamá (x) ¿no? en el siguiente cuarto, y el señor todavía lo miramos cuando iba en cuatro pies, pero digo yo, todavía le siguió permitiendo dormir ahí. Es lo que yo no entiendo, que mi papá y mi mamá lo hayan dejado a esa persona. O sea no, no, no le daban importancia o no sé.

Once I was sleeping with a female cousin. We were kids. . . . There was this person in the home, a man who was a mechanic that my father sometimes invited to our house. He trusted him and let him sleep there. Because there was no door or (x) . . . you know? Early one morning, this man was creeping up and groping my cousin's legs. . . . My cousin screamed, and my father and my mother got up(x), you know?, they were right next door. We all still saw the man on all fours. But, I tell you, he still let him sleep there. I don't understand how my dad and my mom let him, that person [stay there]. I mean, they didn't think it was important or I don't know.

Clearly, issues of child rape and abuse were important to these women and should be a central part of any research agenda for studies of the sexual victimization of Latinas. These discussions also suggest strong support for dissemination of information about child sexual abuse, which may prove helpful for rape prevention or intervention efforts aimed at Hispanics.

Adult Rape and Abuse

Rape was defined mainly in terms of three dimensions: the specific behaviors involved, the nonconsent of the victim, and the level of force exerted by the perpetrator. Sometimes these dimensions were considered separately and sometimes in interaction.

Penetration. One of the most prevalent images of rape was penetration: vaginal, oral, or anal. No other element was needed to specify that a rape had occurred.

F: ¿Pero qué pasa en el acto de la violación? ¿Qué es lo que constituye una violación, según tú?
P: Pues que hubo penetración se imagina uno luego luego.
F: ¿Por la vagina?
P: Por la vagina o por . . . ¿como se dice? . . . que . . . Por la boca, o . . . ¿como se dice? por el ano o por cualquier lugar.

F: What happens during a rape? What constitutes a rape to you?
P: Well, right away you think that there has been penetration.
F: In the vagina?

P: In the vagina or in . . . how do you call it? . . . in the mouth, or . . . how do you call it? . . . in the anus or any other body part.

The role of penetration in defining rape requires more exploration in the context of Mexican culture. For example, what is the relationship of the concept to traditional beliefs, such as the ideals of women's modesty, purity, and virginity? Does the invasive nature of the act make it more susceptible to construction as something that cannot be "washed off" easily—as something that leaves a "stain" (hence "spoiling" the victim permanently), for example. Also, to what extent does the power of the image of rape as penetration make recognition of other definitions of rape more difficult, contributing to the underreporting of sexual victimization on the part of Latinas?

Nonconsensual sexual activity. Yet, even these highly unacculturated participants also agreed to definitions of rape as something sexual that is performed against the victim's will or desire, including not only penetration but also other sexual behaviors such as fondling or sexual remarks. Furthermore, nonconsent was defined primarily in terms of the victim's state of mind. The women agreed that rape implies an act that is not desired, is unwanted, or is suffered against the person's will.

F: ¿[Cómo defines] un rapto sexual, una violación sexual . . . ?
P: Una violación sexual ¿Cómo lo defino? Pues . . . por el sólo hecho que hagan con uno lo que uno no desea, yo creo que ya es.

F: [How do you define] a rape . . . ?
P: A rape. How do I define it? Well . . . just by the fact that someone does to you what you do not want, I think that's it.

The use of intimidation or threats against the victims was mentioned but without clear links to physical or psychological force. Participants used several terms related to force: *fuerza*, *a fuerzas*, or *ser forzada*.

F: Así es lo que . . . [tú piensas es]?
P: Pues [que es] el sexo, que le haga ese hombre a la fuerzas, ¿no?

F: So that is what [you think it is]?
P: Well, [it is] sex that a man makes you do by force, isn't it?

Interestingly, the participants did not necessarily raise the issue of extreme physical violence, another dimension found in traditional concepts of rape. Thus, despite the cultural message found in the life of Saint Maria Goretti, these women did not present a clear view that nonconsent had to be

accompanied by a concrete physical or verbal expression of resistance. Furthermore, a clear definition of force—physical or psychological—did not emerge from the discussions.

In general, participants' ideas supported the belief that a "woman knows whether or not a given genital contact was wanted or unwanted, chosen or unchosen, although she may not use the limited cultural label rape to describe her experience" (Rozeé, 1993, p. 512). Although a very traditional definition of rape emerged—with penetration as the main criterion—the participants debated other definitions that have been influenced by feminism and other nonconservative views. In these discussions, women considered definitions involving sexual behaviors beyond genital contact and were influenced by the idea that women should not be forced to do something against their will. These views are in contrast to those reflected in conservative societies in which rape laws continue to place an emphasis in the demonstration of nonconsent. In such societies, women must show evidence of resistance (Rozeé, 1993) or that they did not resist because of extreme fear (Campbell & Johnson, 1997). Indeed, they are more in keeping with the views of those feminists who define "any situation of coercive sex as rape, regardless of the behavior or characteristics of the principals involved" (Lefley et al., 1993).

In summary, these women's views of how their community defined rape reflect a mixture of traditional and modern ideas. Although the participants were unacculturated and in many ways lived traditional lives, they were also influenced by exposure to the larger cultural context and, themselves, recognized that cultural beliefs had changed over time.

Causes of Rape

The explanations that emerged for rape motivation focused on the perpetrator, including the ideas that rapists need to satisfy their sexual needs, are sick or mentally ill, are under the influence of drugs, or have something wrong inside (problems, a desire for revenge, etc.).

> Pues, yo pienso que eso es, yo pienso que esas personas que hacen eso están enfermas nomás. Eso es lo que, lo que verdaderamente se me viene a pensar ¿no? que es por eso. Gente que ya está mal de la cabeza y, y lo hace una vez y lo vuelve a hacer, y lo vuelve hacer y lo vuelve a hacer.
> Well, I think that it is. I think that people who do that are just sick. That is truly what comes to my mind, you know? That is why it happens. People who already are sick in the head and, they do it once, and do it again, and again, and again.

So, although the participants blame men for rape, they also offered explanations to remove or mitigate the responsibility of the rapist, viewing

him in turn as a victim of some external circumstance or internal problem. The only explanation that provoked strong disagreements was the idea that rapists— especially child rapists—were raped themselves during their own childhood.

Although in general, rapists were blamed for their behavior, in one group, participants did comment that sometimes women—particularly the young ones—may provoke rape because of the way they dress, lead men on, or take risks by going out alone or to dangerous places.

> Yo pienso que también, no todo el tiempo ¿verdad? Pero muchas veces puede ser también como se visten las niñas, ahora ya últimamente casi andan sin ropa y ese es un factor también importante que a los hombres les atrae.
> I think so too, but not all the time, you know? But many times, it can also be how the girls dress. Nowadays, they run around almost naked, and that is also an important factor that attracts men.

With regard to perpetrator characteristics, the women agreed that although adult rape can be committed by a stranger, it is more frequently performed by acquaintances. Their views were in contrast to the traditional stereotype that stranger rape is the most frequent and serious type of rape, in comparison with acquaintance or marital rape (Wiehe & Richards, 1995). There was no clear agreement about the gender of the victim, however. The women discussed victims in a gender neutral way when talking about their opinions of rape and raped people.

Wife Rape

Participants recognized that husbands frequently performed behaviors against their wives that could be labeled as rape. Interestingly, in the initial discussions, the women distanced themselves from the behaviors, for example, by prefacing remarks with "I have heard that . . . ." After awhile, however, some talked about personal experiences or experiences of other women whom they knew personally. For some women, the criterion of nonconsent was sufficient to talk about wife rape, but for others, the use of force was necessary before the situation could be defined as "rape."

Nonconsent. A key criterion for wife rape was having intercourse (penetration) with the husband when the woman does not want to or against her will. Nonetheless, the women also recognized other practices wives may dislike, such as oral and anal sex, or having sex during menstruation as instances of rape.

P: Yo sí [creo que hay violación marital], porque hay veces que uno no tiene ganas o el humor ¿no? y ellos sí, aunque nosotros no y pues para no hacerlos sentir mal nosotros nos estamos ahí con ellos. . . . porque luego se ponen que de mal humor, que te tratan mal o . . . yo he visto mucho eso.
F: Pero lo que pasa es que tú piensas que un esposo sí puede violar?
P: Ajá (en acuerdo).
F: en ciertas ocasiones.
P: Sí porque lo haces en contra de tu voluntad.

P: I do [believe in marital rape], because sometimes you don't feel like doing it or aren't in the mood, you know? And they want to, although we don't. But we do not want to make them feel bad, so we stay there with them . . . because if we don't, then they get in a bad mood, they treat you bad. I have seen a lot of that.
F: So, what happens is that you think that a husband can rape?
P: Aha (in agreement).
F: On some occasions.
P: Yes, because you do it against your will.

As in the case of rape in general, the definition of *nonconsent* was not clearly articulated. Women talked about the state of mind of the woman, as when the wife engages in unwanted sexual relations without saying anything to her husband. In fact, women were frequently described as engaging in unwanted sexual relations with their husbands to avoid marital conflict. It was not clear whether nonconsent encompassed situations in which the wife does not want to have sexual intercourse and clearly communicates her wishes but then engages in it anyway.

As Muehlenhard et al. (1992) point out, the term *consent* is very problematic when defining rape, particularly when interpreted as a state of mind. How is a man to know the woman's state of mind, given that traditional sexual scripts dictate that women should not directly indicate their sexual interests or be easily involved in sexual acts? (see Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1998). Given that most sexual scripts do not involve expressed verbal consent, it may be difficult for men to request it, even in marriage.

This "script" seemed to begin to be challenged as participants recognized that having sex against their will was a criterion for wife rape. Nonetheless, they still recognized difficulties in expressing their wishes, particularly because they feared a negative reaction from their husbands.

Use of force. Some participants emphasized wife rape as engaging in sexual relations or certain sexual behaviors when the woman is forced to do so.

F: Bueno tú . . . ¿piensas que un esposo puede violar a su esposa?

P: Pues en muchas ocasiones sí, porque . . . yo no he pasado por eso pero he oído que a la misma esposa la forzan a tener el sexo con ellos y para mi ver no esta bien eso, que si están compartiendo una vida juntos, tienen que estar de acuerdo para poder tener sexo bien, no nada más de que él tenga ganas y ahora sí la mujer no tiene ganas y la esté forzando.

F: Well . . . do you think that a husband can rape his wife?
P: Well, on many occasions yes, because. . . . It hasn't happened to me, but I have heard that they force their own wife to have sex with them, and in my view, this is not correct. Because if they are sharing a life together, they have to be in agreement to have healthy sex, it should not be that if he wants to and the woman does not want to, he forces her.

As in the case of rape in general, the meaning of *force* was unclear. Some participants only said *fuerza* but did not specify if this force referred to a direct physical violence or other type of force. Such ambiguity in women's conceptions of force in the context of a relationship has been documented in the literature with Anglo women (Mahoney & Williams, 1998). In fact, Finkelhor and Yllö (1987) have identified four types of coercion: physical force, threats of physical force, interpersonal coercion (threats by husband that are not of a physical nature as in withdrawing money or threatening to leave her), and social coercion (societal messages about appropriate sex roles for men and women within marriage). Future research needs to explore the meaning of force for Latinas. In a collectivistic culture, social factors may play a larger role in defining force in a rape context.

The discussions of the focus groups mainly focused on physical force, although there was diversity of opinion about its importance as a criterion for rape. Some participants considered wife rape to only occur when the male exerts overt physical violence. Unless the man beat his wife or performed an act of physical violence, the sexual act performed against the woman's will would not necessarily be labeled as "rape" (although in fact, the husband could have exerted some other type of "minor" force).

P: Bueno, (in reference to being raped by the husband) siempre y cuando haiga cierta, cierto roce, o sea, cierta violencia. . . . Por eso le digo, siempre se impone algo de fuerza bruta ¿no? con el esposo hacia ella.
F: OK.
P: Yo a eso le llamaría violación.

P: Well (in reference to be raped by the husband) only when there is some act, some contact, you know, some violence. . . . That is why I say that some sort of brute force is always required, from the husband toward her.
F: OK.

P: I would call that a rape.

If sexual relations are unwanted, but the woman does not physically resist the husband's sexual requirements, the sexual intercourse or other sexual practice performed is not necessarily defined as rape. Thus, for some women, wife rape is not committed if the husband only ignores woman's verbal or nonverbal refusals.

> Pero, por decir, sí se te fuerza con su marido, ¿no? Si se te ofreciera él, él va a insistir, pero será una cosa muy sutil, ¿no? no va a llegar . . . quizás en algún momento uno se sienta que, bueno, que está siendo violento, ¿no? pero eso, se va a calmar, no sé, de alguna manera. Pienso que bueno.
> But, let's just say that her husband forces her, OK? If he wants to, he is going to insist, but it will be a very subtle thing, right? He is not going to . . . perhaps in some moment, one can feel that, well, that he is being violent, you know? But he is going to calm down. I don't know, but somehow (he will calm down). I think so.

Mahoney and Williams (1998) mention that in fact, "Many wife rape survivors believe that because they choose to give in rather than fight, the experience is not rape even if they have made very clear their desire not to engage in sex" (p. 128). As the next excerpt demonstrates, although some women found it is difficult to define rape in the context of a marriage, attitudes are beginning to change.

> P: Pues yo digo que si (the wife rape occurs), porque yo ya pasé por ahí, y . . . yo a veces que no quería hacerlo y mi marido quería a fuerzas y pues ya despues opté por mejor dejarme, o sea porque que decía yo bueno, de todos modos me va a pegar o me va a agarrar a fuerzas, pues mejor me dejaba aunque yo no me satisfaciera, ni siquiera sentía nada, o sea sólo lo dejaba que se satisfaciera él, entonces yo digo que sí.
> F: ¿Pero él se forzaba en ti, también golpeándote?
> P: Sí.
> F: Y tú consideras que te estaba violando.
> P: Pues yo antes no, no lo miraba así. . . . Pues yo pensaba que, . . . que era mi obligación pero, decía "bueno si yo soy su esposa pues yo creo que yo tengo que hacerlo" porque yo lo miraba así, no pensaba que fuera una violación, pero a través de documentales que he visto y reportajes en la televisión y todo eso que he visto y he oído otras pláticas entonces yo he catalogado de lo que a mi me hacían era una violación aunque era mi esposo.

> P: I say that yes (that wife rape occurs), because I experienced it, and . . . I sometimes didn't want to do it and my husband wanted and forced me to. And well, after I decided to let him do it, I mean because I used to think Well, he is going to hit me or he is going to take me with force anyway. I'd rather let him do it

although I was not satisfied, I did not feel anything, I mean I only let him satisfy himself, so I said yes.

F: But he forced you also by beating you?

P: Yes.

F: And did you think that he was raping you?

P: Well, before I did not see it in that way. . . . Well, I thought that, . . . that it was my obligation. I said, "Well if I am his wife, I think that I have to do it" because I used to think that way. Back then, I didn't think it was a rape. But through documentaries that I have seen and reports on TV and all of the things that I have seen and heard in other conversations, what was done to me I labeled as rape, even though he (the rapist) was my husband.

The participants clearly perceived sexual coercion within consensual unions as occurring very frequently. Their views were congruent with the findings of researchers such as Frieze (1983) and Heise (1995), who have pointed out that although marital rape is most likely to occur in a relationship that is violent in other ways as well, in nonviolent relationships, the presence of sexual pressuring is very high and the experience of sex for women is often humiliating and degrading. The prevalence and impact of such behaviors in the lives of Latinas is unknown, but these women's concerns suggest that it is an important area for investigation.

The debates in these groups establish how even among unacculturated Mexican American women, some will recognize forced sexual relations in marriage as rape. The old meanings persist as well, however. The group commented on women's uncertainty about what constitutes normal sexual relations, attributing it to lack of sexual education. They pointed to the difficulties virgin women have in engaging in sexual relations on their wedding night (*noche de bodas*). They expressed the view that the wedding night experience continues to be traumatic for some women because of shame related to their bodies and to sexuality in general. Such views are not exclusively reflective of Mexican culture. As Mahoney and Williams (1998) point out, "Perceptions about a woman's role in marriage, uncertainty regarding what constitutes normal sexual relations, ambiguity regarding what constitutes 'force,' feelings of guilt and responsibility for the abuse and having no words to describe their experience" (p. 125) can all influence whether a wife applies the label of rape to her experience, regardless of culture.

A related issue that emerged in the groups was date rape, a topic scarcely researched in Latina populations. Women were viewed as blaming themselves in date rape situations and fearing family shame resulting from the experience, particularly when the woman (and the family) placed a high value on virginity. Men were seen as continuing to value virginity and to view it as proof of love, in that the woman "saved herself" for him.

P: Y él (el novio) estaba terco en casarse. Y en una de esas veces él, él me forzó a mí a, a tomar una decisión. El me dijo que si yo no me iba con él, que íbamos a terminar, y dije ¿qué voy a hacer si terminamos? O sea, se me cerró el mundo pues. Yo quizá encerrada en mi problema, y dije pues, me voy a ir con él. Y le dije que sí. Y me fui con él. Por eso decía yo que una violación no siempre tiene que ser violenta. Cuando ya estábamos en el lugar donde él me llevó. Yo no quise, yo me sentí muy sucia, sentí que no me estaba dando mi lugar, y sentí que, que estaba abusando de mi, de mi cariño, ¿no? Entonces yo, yo quise negarme ¿no? y ya no pude. El no me golpeó, pero sí cuando yo quise quitarme, me caí de la cama y él en lugar de ayudarme. . . .
F: Te detuvo?
P: No, pues, yo digo que él me forzó ahí. Para mí fue algo muy duro. Yo no lo pude platicar con nadie.

P: And he (the boyfriend) was obstinate to marry me. And in one of those occasions, he forced me to make a decision. He told me that if I was not going to go with him, that we were going to end the relationship, and I thought, what I am going to do if we break up? I mean, I felt that my world was falling apart. Maybe I was trapped in my own problem. . . . I thought, "Well, I am going to go with him." I said "yes," and I went with him. This is why I said that a rape is not always violent. When we were in the place where he took me. I did not want to. . . . I felt very dirty. I felt that he was not giving me my place, and I felt that he was abusing me, abusing my love, you know? So, I did not want to refuse, you know? And I couldn't. He did not hit me, but when I wanted to move, I fell from the bed, and he, instead of helping me. . . .
F: He held you?
P: No, he forced me (to have sex) there. For me, it was very difficult. I couldn't talk about it with anyone.

Causes of Wife Rape

The attributions related to this topic were not discussed deeply, so we can not talk about common beliefs. Nonetheless, it was clear that the wives were not viewed as deserving or provoking rape. The blame was unanimously attributed to the husbands, particularly for their lack of tolerance in understanding wives' motives for refusing to have sex with them. Men were seen as less rational than women, behaving in impulsive ways to fulfill their sexual desires in ways that made it impossible to reason with them. These views suggest that information about male and female sexuality and a focus on male-female communication may be useful activities for rape prevention or intervention programs.

The Silencing of Victims

Keeping silent was a consistent theme, particularly when talking about the experiences of child sexual abuse and date rape. Fear, shame, and self-blame were mentioned as the main motives for silence in these contexts. The self-blame resulting from date rape in particular was viewed has having a silencing effect. Thus, talking about the experience with the family, for example, was almost inconceivable because the event was *defraudar* (to cheat, disappoint, and/or betray) the confidence of the parents.

> Nunca pude decírselo a mi mamá porque yo decía "yo soy culpable porque yo acepté." Aunque yo me arrepentí en el último momento, pero yo acepté. "Es mi culpa" pensé ¿no? Entonces me sentí que yo no tenía derecho de decirle eso a mi mamá porque yo sentí que la defraudaba porque ella confió en mi. . . . Yo por lo que yo no pude decir nada es porque yo decía ¿cómo le voy a dar ese dolor a mi mamá? decía yo.
> I was never able to tell my mother what happened because I used to think, "I am guilty because I accepted." Although I repented at the last moment, but I accepted. "It is my fault," I thought, you know? So I felt that I had no right to tell that to my mom. I felt I was betraying her because she trusted me. . . . The reason why I couldn't say anything is because I used to think, "How I am going hurt my mom?"

Forced sexual relations with a boyfriend was a sensitive issue for these participants because rape was also viewed as an offense against the males of the family. Participants commented that the possible consequences of talking about what happened included family shame and the desire for revenge on the part of family males close to the victim. They emphasized that women can never be sure about what the reaction of the family will be, particularly when the abuser is an acquaintance. In the case of rapes committed by family members, the opinions and experiences related by the women show how the women themselves can come under suspicion, or conflicts—including separation, hate, and revenge—can appear in the family.

> Yo tengo un familiar que fue abusada por su primo hermano, el vivía en casa de los padres de ella, o sea que estaban viviendo en la misma casa y el la amenazaba, por mucho tiempo la usó. Ella no le gustaba ni quería hacerlo, pero él la obligaba. Cuando ella salió embarazada, después de muchos meses, él se fue de la casa de sus padres, por miedo. La muchacha se siente muy culpable pues ella dice que el pecado más grande que ella cometió, fue decirle a sus padres, pues su papá quería vengarse, creo que el padre acabó en la cárcel.

> A family member was abused by her first cousin. He lived in her parents' house, I mean that they were living in the same house. He used to threaten her; he used her for a long time. She did not like it and did not want to do it, but he forced her. When she got pregnant, after several months, he left her parents' home because he was afraid. The girl feels very guilty, she says that the biggest sin she committed was to tell her parents. Her dad wanted revenge. . . . I think her father ended up in jail.

Such difficulties aside, the women nonetheless commented that in the old days, it was more difficult to talk about these kinds of situations, suggesting that targeting such attitudes may be a helpful prevention or intervention strategy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the themes that emerge from the focus group discussions suggest a diversity of attitudes, with a mix of very traditional values, concepts, and beliefs, along with modern values of equality and free will. This underscores the importance of avoiding stereotypes about Mexican women, including women who are not acculturated into U.S. society. In a study related to virginity in Mexico, Amuchástegui (1996) found that diffusion of modern culture and the collision of traditional and modern values had generated an interaction between different views and values around sexuality and around the relations between genders. Furthermore, she observed that the coexistence of *traditional* and *modern* meanings depended on the individuals' contact with urban culture and urban education. Although used to explain change in Mexico, this analysis helps us to understand why the voices of these unacculturated women blend very conservative opinions with modern ideas influenced, for example, by feminism. Contact with Anglo urban culture may be a factor, but contact with changes occurring in Mexican urban culture may also be contributing to the development of such attitudes.

Thus, the modern values and beliefs held by these women should not be automatically or solely attributed to the influence of Anglo culture. Indeed, according to the results of the world-values survey, Mexicans are less likely than Americans to hold conservative attitudes in many areas—and indeed are more likely than people in the United States to agree with the statement that "new ideas are generally better than old ones" (38% vs. 20%; Inglehart, Basañez, & Moreno, 1998). In the past three decades, women's rights have been nationally debated, and Mexican society has undergone a number of changes in its penal code as well as in public attitudes related to the status of women. In fact, Mexico is a signatory of the United Nation's Convention on

the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women—a convention that the United States as of 1999 has yet to sign.

The blending of the traditional emphasis on children and their well-being with a modern awareness and concern about sexual abuse and its risk in the family and with acquaintances illustrates this process of evolution, whatever its source. The participants were exposed to information about these issues, recognized their own experiences of abuse (or the experiences of family members and acquaintances), and came to challenge the beliefs that normalized or minimized these behaviors. They clearly recognized that things had changed with regard to these issues. It is not appropriate to either stereotype them or to consider their views as static and unchanging just because they are not acculturated into U.S. society.

In many ways, the views that emerged from the groups were similar to those that would emerge if a group of Anglo women were asked to discuss these issues. The cultural meanings of rape, however, clearly emerged in the theme of silencing and underscore the difficulties of obtaining an accurate portrait of rape prevalence among Latinas. Furthermore, the women's concern about the meaning and impact of rape on their male family members, in particular, reflects the gender relations of the culture. The discussions of these women suggest that in the context of the Mexican collectivistic culture, the social impact of rape takes on increased importance. Research, prevention, intervention, and treatment programs must recognize this fact and be designed accordingly.

Researchers can facilitate this process by scrutinizing their approaches for cultural appropriateness and by being aware of the importance of language issues. Many of our participants had lived in the United States for many years yet were not acculturated and communicated mainly or exclusively in Spanish. Their voices are typically left out of national surveys and presentations of rape statistics, yet, they clearly had many experiences—of their own and of family members—with rape and sexual abuse. Their experiences suggest that underreporting may be a major problem in estimating rape and other abuse prevalence among Latinas. We cannot wait for the population to acculturate several generations from now to document the prevalence and impact of rape; we need methods for assessing rape prevalence in culturally appropriate ways that will work with Spanish language populations today.

Note

1. Marital rape has been included in the Mexican Penal Code since 1991 in Article 265, which specifies, "If the victim of rape was the wife or partner, the sanctions imposed will be the

same as in other cases." Nevertheless, in practice, the law is differentially enforced depending on circumstance and area of the country.

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