

Code (one word or short phrase to summarize each section)

Focus Group – Sexual Assault Prevention in the Latino Community
July, 2015

What does it mean to be Latina in the US?

- **F: What does it mean to be Latina or Latino in the United States?**
- P2: That is a difficult question.
- F: You're right – that is a difficult question.
- P1: For me, to be Latina in the United States at the beginning was really difficult, because the relationship that Puerto Ricans have with the United States, we are perceived by the US as third class US citizens.

We come here, we don't speak English, we speak Spanish, but then to our fellow Latinos we are perceived as gringos, or you know, Americanos because we have that little stamp that says "made in USA" even though we're born in an island.

So we don't fit in with one or the other.

And it gets exhausting in the beginning when you first move here trying to make people understand our relationship with the US, which often times is very oppressive, the whole history of that.

For Latinos to understand that they come from different places and they have that immigration experience of crossing the border and risking their lives versus us getting on a plane and just going wherever we want to go. Both yet, we are Latinos.

And then exhausted in the sense of really trying to explain to people that are born here, where Puerto Rico is located, and why we are US citizens, or what is our relationship with the US. So at the beginning, it was very exhaustive.

- **F: How about for other folks?**
- P2: I still consider myself, I know we know that we are a minority, but I still, every time I say I am Latina I always guess that I am a minority.

Like it's just difficult, for me, like I am a Latina, but the stigma that I am still part of that small group that still has to work really hard where we want to be.

So yeah, we are growing, the numbers are going fast, but it's still really difficult for us to, for me specifically, to just . . . like I don't know if you read the thing that someone . . . I read her post of this actress, what's her post?

- Others: America Ferrera
- P2: When I was reading I just start crying because yes, it's like, oh my gosh, we are parents, we are people still working to be someone in the United States, but we still have to work so hard to get to that place.

It's difficult still for me. It doesn't matter that I have a good job, that I am respected in the community or probably in my own house and things like that, but it still really difficult to try to *get out* of that little bubble.

- P3: I think that being Latina, it means double the effort to be in the community – to be noticed, to be acknowledged. You have to work twice as everybody else, and then sometimes you don't get all that recognition for everything you do.

- I think it's hard, and most in this community. Even between us, we get judged.

- P4: Well, I think that the United States, historically, and in the political realm has a history of devaluing what it means to be Latino and specifically lot of times what it means to be an immigrant.

Politics doesn't tend to favor undocumented immigrants when we're built primarily from a country of immigrants.

While in my personal experiences of being Latino, pursuing higher education at, *school name*, it's really challenging going into a school when, you know, there's less than 10% of people that look like you on the whole entire campus.

And because of that, we do have to work harder and we have to work to provide events and services for us so that people like us find a way to fit in and belong to the community.

And I also see, like many times in the workforce, recently we'll be providing additional services that other providers can't provide but we'll still be getting the same amount of re-compensation for our services.

- P1: And also, it's that token piece in college, in the workplace. If you're the only Latina you're like the token of the agency. If you're the only Latina you're the token of the class, "Oh, go ask the Latina girl, she knows."

- P3: "Ask her how to say it Spanish. Ask her what that means in Spanish." (laughter)

- P1: Yeah, so, sometimes we don't even want to be noticed because of that. You know, like, I don't even want to say that I'm coming from this part of the world because then I'm going to have to take a geographic map out and point out where, like, I'm from. You know.

It's just like, I'm just Latina and that's that. Don't ask me where I'm from.

- P2: Don't ask me, "What are you?"

- P1: Yeah!

- P2: Yeah

- P1: Or, “Do you speak Mexican?” “Do you speak Bolivian?” I’m like, no, I speak Spanish last time I checked. So yeah.

- F: Any other thoughts about what it means to be Latino in the US?

- P2: For me, too, it means you have to explain yourself all the time. Like, “*other participant*” said, “Do you speak Mexican? Do you speak Bolivian?”

Why do I have to explain all the time what I do or what I am or why I eat my food this way instead of the other way?

- P1: Or those assumptions that we all came here, undocumented, that we all came here to steal jobs-

- P3: - And that we’re all from Mexico –

- P1: That we’re all from Mexico. Mexico’s the only Latin American country in the world.

- P2: Yeah. Or the assumptions that if you are here legal, you’re a citizen.

- P1: Or that you’re here legal you marry a US citizen.

- P2: You’re a citizen. When you explain you have still have to explain yourself everything.

They say, “But you are married with an American what do you mean you’re not a citizen?”

- P1: Yeah

- P2: Well, I’m not a citizen. I have to go through this process.

“Oh, and you have to pay? Oh, and you have to do that?” And it’s just like, questions and questions that you have to explain all the time.

What it means for you to be here. Like all the time.

- P1: Yeah, and you know, when you have kids, and I don’t know if this has happened to you, “*other participant*”, but when you have kids in the public school system, your kids come home asking, too.

You know, and they’re born here. “Am I Puerto Rican? Am I Bolivian? Am I Mexican?” My kids ask me that all the time, “What am I?”

You know, and really trying to explain that to bi-racial kids or multi-cultural kids is very hard for them not to get confused early on in their own identities.

And then, for some of my kids, my oldest daughter one time came home asking me about my fascinating immigrant story about how I came to the US. “Did you cross the border, Mom?” And she’s like, really excited asking me.

And I say, I'm sorry, go ask your Dad, I don't have that fascinating story of risking my life to get here. Your Dad probably has the story, I don't. And she's like, "What do you mean?"

Like – trying to even explain to my own kids what it means to be who I am is just like int-er-es-ting.

- P2: Yeah, my son asked me, "Did we cross the border?"

- All: (laughter)

- P2: Really?

- All: Yeah

- P1: It really makes you think, what are the messages that our kids are getting about who Latinos are and why are we here, and what are we doing here, basically.

And really, that starts very early on, to the point that our kids don't even want to relate or associate to being Latinos because they feel that is something bad.

So, it's an extra again. Double the work to parent, as well, to try to keep your kids safe, and at the same time, create this sense of ownership of your kids and their identity formation, too. So, very interesting.