



## **Latinas: Building Support Within the Culture**

By Cristina Correa

Family. Community. Religion

These are the very components of Latino culture. These are the elements that bring us together, that offer us support, that provide strength. They let us know we are never alone, that we are always welcome.

Growing up as a Latina in California, I experienced a sense of pride when I watched members of my family and community rally around young, unmarried women to insure Latino children are raised in a caring and loving environment. For young women making decisions about pregnancy and parenting, the ability to count on one's family to play an active role in raising a child, is significant.

It wasn't until I was much older that I learned how many Latinas make the decision to have an abortion. Unlike the decision to bear a child, this decision was often made *en secreto*. Because abortion remains taboo and because many of our families, communities and churches tend to be anti-abortion, Latinas who have abortions often feel they must repress their feelings, "act normal," and never discuss having had one. As a result, Latinas who have always looked to these important elements of our culture as places to receive love and support, all too often feel isolated from them.

I began working in the reproductive and sexual health field because I wanted to work with Latinas to create safe places to talk about and make decisions about traditionally taboo subjects, like abortion.

The Latinas who have told me their story of abortion, whether in my work with *Promotras*, providing abortion services or as a volunteer on the Exhale talkline, have talked about the silence and lack of support after an abortion and how this hurt them emotionally. They told me how they myths and social reactions to an abortion can make the process more difficult.

The silence around abortion has not stopped Latinas from having them. It has also not stopped them from going to church and needing the support of their families and communities.

As a caller to the Exhale talkline once described, “the abortion was the best decision I could make. It was hard to not tell my family. It will always be mi secreto and I will always have mi familia, mi comunidad, mi espiritualidad.”

The same culture that makes the decision of abortion so difficult can also be the place of comfort and support to break the silence.

It is crucial that all of us work to create safe places, in our families, in our communities and in our places of worship, so that all women and girls who have abortions can know that their culture is a source of love and unconditional support.

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*Cristina Correa is the center manager of Choice Medical Group in Sacramento, California and has been a counselor on the Exhale talkline for two years.*