Adaptation of the Mpowerment Project to Young Latino MSM

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Introduction

This document discusses how the Mpowerment Project (MP) may be adapted to meet the HIV prevention needs of young Latino MSM (YLMSM). The document focuses on issues related to design and implementation of the MP model for YLMSM and is part of an effort to help adapt and disseminate MP to communities in which it has not been implemented as much yet, and share best practices based on what has worked so far in the experience of the community based organizations (CBOs) which have implemented it with YLMSM. In addition, we would like to offer some generic recommendations for CBOs to consider before or during implementation of MP in order not to compromise the integrity and the potential efficacy of the intervention.
The goals of this project were:

- To identify how to adapt MP to the HIV prevention needs of YLMSM, taking into account the sociocultural context of their lives
- To develop guidelines for CBOs on what cultural, social, and economic issues to consider when implementing MP with YLMSM

The specific aims of this project were:

- To identify issues influencing HIV prevention needs of YLMSM
- To examine how MP has been implemented with YLMSM around the U.S.
- To develop suggestions on how to operationalize and integrate issues impacting YLMSM into MP

This document is the result of our research at CAPS on these issues and includes input and data that were collected from various sources, including:

- YLMSM participating in MPs at diverse programs around the U.S., who provided input via participation in focus groups or small group interviews
- Staff at different CBOs conducting MP with YLMSM who were interviewed
- A Latino Board of Cultural Experts (BOCE) we convened, which included individuals who work with diverse Latino populations across the U.S., including both scientists and individuals who work with YLMSM directly

It is important to note that this document should be used in conjunction with the MP manual (see Mpowerment.org). The manual goes into depth regarding how to implement the “generic” MP, whereas this document solely discusses how the MP should be adapted for YLMSM.

The focus in MP is to address community building among YLMSM, increase safer sex among men infected and uninfected with HIV, and increase regular and frequent HIV testing. We do not specify here the frequency of HIV testing since recommendations from the CDC are currently in flux. In 2012, we are recommending that YLMSM get tested at least every six months. But it may be recommended in the future to obtain HIV testing more frequently. Hence throughout this document, where we discuss “frequent testing,” the message to MP participants should be more specific as to frequency.
Background

HIV among Latino MSM

The diversity and ever changing demographics of Latino/as in the U.S. creates unique challenges to address health disparities and the HIV prevention needs of this population. With a 43% growth between 2000 and 2010 [1], the population of Latinos is the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic/racial minority group in the U.S. Latinos also are one of the fastest growing populations at risk for HIV; while they account for 16% of the U.S. population, they make up 17% of living HIV/AIDS cases and 20% of new HIV infections each year [2]. Late testing (defined as having an AIDS diagnosis within one year of testing HIV-positive) and limited access to health insurance create challenges to prevention, treatment and care. Thirty-eight percent of Latinos test late in their illness, compared to 32% of Blacks and 32% of Whites [2]. HIV+ Latinos are more likely than Whites to postpone care due to issues such as lack of transportation, and more likely to delay initiation of care after their diagnosis [2]. Twenty-four percent of Latinos living with HIV/AIDS are uninsured, compared to 17% of Whites; and only 23% of HIV+ Latinos have private health insurance, compared to 44% of Whites [3].

MSM are the highest risk group for HIV transmission in the U.S., with 53% of new HIV infections occurring among MSM [4]. Latino MSM represent 81% of new infections among Latino men, and 19% among all MSM [2, 4]. Youth (ages 13-29) accounts for 45% of new HIV infections among Latino MSM [5]. However, in a study conducted in 21 major U.S. cities, 46% of Latino MSM who tested positive for HIV was unaware of being HIV infected [6].

The U.S. National HIV/AIDS Strategy calls for HIV programs that reduce health inequities among both ethnic/racial and sexual minority populations [7]. Latino MSM have distinct cross-cultural identities [8] that place them into both of those categories identified by the National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

Factors Affecting HIV Risk Among YL MSM

Research with MSM, including Latino gay men, has documented different factors associated with sexual-risk, including alcohol and drug use (including injection), as well as a history of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as syphilis and gonorrhea [9, 10], high rates of unprotected anal sex and multiple partners [11], and childhood sexual abuse and a social context of discrimination [12].

Research with Latino gay and bisexual men shows that cultural influences and socioeconomic forces affect their health and sexual well being as well as their HIV prevention needs. Overlapping factors affecting HIV risk for Latino MSM, such as stigma, “machismo”, migration patterns, residency status in the U.S., language, insurance status, and educational attainment have been identified as barriers to HIV prevention [13, 14]. A sociocultural model of health shows that experiences of social discrimination, including racism, homophobia and poverty, are strong predictors of mental health.
outcomes [15]. Mental health issues such as psychological distress have been shown to increase sexual risk. Stigma around homosexuality and HIV related to traditional gender roles and cultural norms such as machismo may contribute to the perception of Latino MSM as “failed men” and add to prevention challenges. Sexual silence, homophobia and machismo as a cultural value may prevent Latino MSM from disclosing their sexual orientation and behaviors, seeking prevention services, and receiving support from friends and family, and contributing to decreased self-esteem, low sexual control, social isolation and a sense of fatalism regarding being infected with HIV [9].

Over 40% of the participants in a study of Latino MSM in New York and Los Angeles reported experiences of both racism and homophobia in the past year. Those participants who had both homophobic and racist experiences were more likely to engage in unprotected receptive anal sex, and to be binge drinkers than men who reported no form of discrimination. In the same study, low self-esteem and social support were associated with increased rates of sexual risk behaviors and unprotected anal sex [16]. Conversely, different factors have been identified as helping Latino gay men cope with difficulties in their lives: acceptance by family, social connections to family and friends, a satisfying sex life, engagement in community activities and social activism, and the presence of gay role models [17]. Research examining protective factors among Latino gay men has found that HIV prevalence was higher among U.S. born than non-U.S. born Latinos in San Francisco, while in Chicago the opposite was true [18], and that community involvement affects sexual risk behaviors, and volunteering with HIV/AIDS organizations can improve psychological stressors [19].
Among Latino gay men, risky sexual behaviors can take place even in the presence of HIV knowledge and intentions and skills to practice safer sex because of drugs and/or alcohol, as a means to alleviate depression and loneliness, or for fear of rejection. Considering that a man may be safe in some situations but put himself at risk for HIV in other situations, risk may be contextual rather than an individual characteristic. Thus, prevention needs to address not only individual factors (loneliness, substance use and low self-esteem), but also situational, cultural, and contextual factors conducive to risk [16, 17].

Research on acculturation (defined as adopting cultural ways of U.S. mainstream society) suggests that Latinos who are less acculturated may be protected by traditional Latino (sexual) values. On the other hand, greater acculturation into the U.S. culture may have both negative effects (engaging in behaviors that increase the risk for HIV infection) and positive effects (communicating with partners about practicing safer sex) on the health behaviors of Latinos [20, 21].

**Methods of Determining Adaptations**

We used a combination of qualitative research methods to gather information for this document. Qualitative methods allow us to represent the opinions, perceptions and impressions of the participants. This project was conducted in the context of research and was reviewed and approved by the Committee for Human Research at the University of California, San Francisco.

**Data Collection**

The data were collected between May 2009 and March 2011. We used several sources of data for our study.

**Secondary data or existing data.** We conducted a literature review to identify correlates and predictors of risk-taking behavior for YLMSM as well as information about subgroups of YLMSM at increased risk for HIV.

**Focus groups with YLMSM participating in MP projects.** We conducted seven focus groups or small group interviews with YLMSM participating in different MPs in Southern California, Denver, and
Washington, D.C. We asked staff at each CBO conducting MP to recruit a diversity of YLMSM participating in MP for the focus groups to include men of different ages that were either new or more established participants of MP, together with a diversity of origin and time of residence in the U.S. (either men born in the U.S. and from different places of origin in Latin America) as represented in the MPs being implemented.

We asked focus group participants to discuss their thoughts, perceptions, opinions, and reactions related to participating in MP. We asked them how they had benefited from being part of MP, and how they thought MP had influenced their community, as well as their suggestions on how they thought MP could be improved to meet their needs. The groups were conducted either in English or Spanish, or a combination of both, according to which language the participants felt more comfortable speaking. The focus groups lasted approximately two hours.

Table 1: Number of Participants in Focus Groups or Small Group Interviews with MP Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Interviews with staff at agencies implementing MP with YLMSM.
We conducted interviews with program staff and supervisors at selected CBOs implementing MP with YLMSM. In some cases, these were group interviews with two or more staff that were part of MP. We asked the staff their perceptions and impressions related to implementing MP, the adaptations they had done to MP, the challenges they faced when implementing MP, and how MP could be better tailored to meet the needs of YLMSM.

Table 2: Cities where Interviews were Conducted with Staff Implementing the MP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of staff interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meeting with the Board of Cultural Experts (BOCE)

The BOCE was comprised of 13 individuals who were knowledgeable and familiar with issues that YLMSM face. The BOCE was identified through a nomination process from our networks of providers and behavioral scientists and included staff implementing MP at different agencies throughout the country, service providers, researchers, and leaders in the Latino MSM community. The BOCE met with CAPS on March 15-16, 2011. The BOCE was asked for their input regarding: (1) socio-cultural influences and issues on YLMSM risk behavior to consider in MP; (2) how appropriate the MP as a model can be used with YLMSM, and whether the guiding principles and core elements of MP apply to YLMSM; (3) whether new components to the MP are necessary for YLMSM; and (4) the best way to attain YLMSM interest in MP. A draft of this report was sent to the BOCE for their review and input.

Data Analysis

Interviews with staff and focus groups with YLMSM were audio-recorded, transcribed, and summarized. Those summaries and the notes taken during the meeting with the BOCE were the basis for this report. The data from the interviews, focus groups, and meeting with the BOCE were compared and contrasted to find salient and relevant themes. Emerging themes from the data are presented in this report.
Findings About Adaptations of MP Core Elements & Guiding Principles for YLMSM

Our findings indicate that MP is relevant and appropriate for YLMSM. As mentioned previously, MP has been implemented already for YLMSM in a variety of places in the U.S. by different CBOs and for different groups of gay Latino men.

“Implementation Issues” in the following sections include comments and statements either from staff or participants in the different MP projects we studied. “Other Recommendations” include suggestions for implementation of the MP based on expertise at CAPS on the MP model.

Each guiding principle and core element of MP is discussed in this section, along with ideas about how to operationalize the guiding principles and core elements in order to tailor them to the needs of YLMSM. While this section reflects the views of YLMSM in the focus groups and CBO staff we interviewed, we also asked the BOCE whether the guiding principles that form the basis of MP apply and whether they need to be revised to better fit an intervention YLMSM.
Guiding Principles

Guiding principles serve as the foundation and are key to the MP model, and were initially developed for the MP from research literature on community and behavior change, and from formative research including focus groups and individual interviews. The guiding principles inform and guide all aspects associated with the implementation of the model. The guiding principles should be infused into MP throughout all the core elements and operationalized in as many ways as possible.

Social Focus

Similar to MSM of other ethnic/racial groups, HIV prevention is not in itself very motivating to YLMSM, and they are not drawn to AIDS prevention programs or messages that solely stress using condoms or getting tested for HIV. YLMSM may be more concerned with other issues related to identity, isolation, homophobia, and racism as well as economic and legal pressures, rather than HIV prevention. A successful intervention for YLMSM needs to tie HIV risk-reduction to the satisfaction of other needs, including developing friendships, social networks, and a sense of belonging, having fun, enhancing self-esteem, and the development of new skills.

Implementation Issues. The primary motivation for YLMSM to be involved in MP relates to social needs, having fun, and build community. Focus group participants at all sites reported that they had met new friends through MP. Some of them stated that meeting men of different ages, nationalities, and social strata had helped them to be more aware of their own needs and issues as well as of the diversity and the needs of other Latino gay men. Thus for some participants, MP provided exposure to other groups of YLMSM. MP participants also reported that participation in MP provides the opportunity to engage in fun and social activities with peers in a place outside a bar or “antro” (club) situation. A focus group participant stressed that he can meet gay men through his job or in church, but that MP was the only place where he could meet other gay Latino men. Both MP participants and staff concurred that in many places, MP is the only venue for YLMSM to meet and socialize outside a bar situation and without the use of alcohol. This is particularly the case for recent immigrants or other men who do not
feel comfortable or welcomed in a mainstream gay bar “full of pure gueros” (whites), or in places where there are no gay Latino bars.

**Other Recommendations from CAPS**

MP tries to incorporate other issues into events whose primary focus is social. The challenge may be how to integrate those issues and related exercises or activities into a social event either through brief additions that provide some prevention messages or more extensive discussions and exploration of a particular issue. These events need to be balanced to integrate HIV prevention into a social focus but taking into account the particularities of a specific group of YLMSM, according to age, interests, educational level, language, different levels of acculturation, and age may present challenges for implementation of MP with YLMSM. The amount of time spent on exercises, discussions and activities should be monitored carefully for its impact on the participants, so as not to drive them away as they get tired of hearing about HIV/AIDS. These issues are explored in other sections below in this report.

**Community-Building**

Many YLMSM reported significant isolation and a lack of family support for being gay and yearn for a sense of connection and belonging with similar others. A primary goal of the MP is to create healthy friendship and social support networks. The MP creates settings where YLMSM can express their identities, meet other men, share experiences, learn from each other, draw support, and take action on issues of importance to them, while building a young gay men’s community. YLMSM can feel part of something bigger than themselves and part of building a healthy community where men support each other regarding safer sex and HIV testing, helping to develop a community where social norms and expectations support HIV prevention.

**Implementation Issues.** MP can contribute to community building and be a place where YLMSM, whether English or Spanish speakers, acculturated or recent immigrants, converge and learn to appreciate each other and their diversity, and the need to take care and protect themselves from HIV. It is important to note that most MP project activities and events need to be conducive to community building. Building a community for YLMSM will need to take into account issues related to being gay and Latinos, sharing a similar culture, common roots, language, being immigrants and/or coping with common issues or difficulties.

In some cities or areas of the country, a gay Latino community may not exist. This may be the case in places where there is not an organized community of YLMSM with recognizable and visible groups of association as can be found in the mainstream gay community, and not even a Latino gay bar. While a challenge, these situations may be an opportunity for MP to help create or strengthen such a community.

Community building as part of the implementation of MP must occur within and across different subgroups of men (i.e., larger events may attract a variety of men, whereas other activities may only draw specific subgroups). Subgroups of YLMSM may be separated because of different interests, social
strata, degree of acculturation, nationality, or language. While at times it may be a delicate balance, MP may need to take into account the complexities of those subgroups and evaluate how to bring them together as part of the intervention. Some CBOs have used different ways to integrate and be inclusive of different subgroups of YLMSM into MP, while some other agencies have decided to concentrate and target specific subgroups of YLMSM, whether according to nationality, language, or socioeconomic strata.

BOCE members stated that during implementation of their MP projects they deliberately highlight common goals and conduct team building to promote unity and community building. Some of the projects conduct exercises on communication to bring together participants of different backgrounds. BOCE members also stated that they placed special emphasis on establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect, and of respect of the diversity of the participants within the project, the Core Group and the volunteers in general. The motivation and ongoing work of the Core Group is the first step towards community building.

BOCE members also stressed the importance of setting ground rules for the project as a whole, and specifically for the Core Group and at the project space. The purpose of the ground rules is both to embrace all participants as part of the project (and try to diffuse some of the “cattiness” that may exist among YLMSM), while establishing boundaries, and setting standards for sharing and mutual respect. They also stressed the importance of including Core Group members in the development of those rules in order to facilitate buy-in.

In addition, BOCE members believed that while different events and mobilization activities attract different types of men, the variety of events organized by MP brings participants together to work on the same event, leaving aside, for example, economic differences. BOCE members described organizing events as opportunities to bring many different participants together. “One of the things that we do is to do an outreach event...they do a production...this has been the biggest piece in bringing in a lot of different people together...knowing how to do costumes and stuff...this bridges many gaps in change...they love drama and soap operas and stuff like that...so having a play, that includes HIV/AIDS, transgender issues, alcohol awareness...that brings so many people into the process...make-up, lighting, music, someone has a background in theatre...but it is very successful.... when it comes to welcoming everybody who brings a particular skill...that is once a year...but it is so successful.”
While most project activities and events are conducive to community building, retreats organized by the project and in some instances planned by the Core Group are opportunities to work on community building as well as providing training on a variety of issues. For example, Puntos Cardinales, a 2010 retreat, was designed around issues of importance for YLMSM who live in New York included self-esteem enhancement and social activities as well as HIV prevention education. A San Diego CBO staff member expressed that his organization would like to organize a one-day long retreat, since that would better allow them to build camaraderie and brotherhood than a two-hour group. He added, however, that they would need to be careful about choosing the place where it was held because some of the participants who are undocumented may be afraid of going because of immigration concerns.

MP could function to bring together Spanish and English speakers who would otherwise not socialize together. In relationship to community building and developing personal skills, participants in a focus group brought up the need of MP to provide free language classes (English or Spanish, as needed) to help overcome language as a barrier in general and to foster communication among participants whose main language is either Spanish or English.

BOCE members also suggested that images, videos, posters, and so forth created by other MP projects in other geographical locations could be shown to MP participants to promote a broader sense of community among YLMSM in different parts of the U.S.

Other Recommendations from CAPS

- **Integrate the concept that YLMSM can come together as a community.** The MP as a project functions like a family and provides the physical and emotional space for YLMSM to be themselves, and grow and support each other, while focusing on building a broader community of YLMSM. The MP needs to focus on reinforcing the value that YLMSM come together to support and lift each other up, when seeking further development of a Latino gay community. It is important to emphasize that the MP is building a healthy Latino gay community, not only in terms of HIV, but also in terms of various sexual health issues (substance use, STI prevention, mental health issues, domestic violence, etc.). In addition, health can be discussed in terms of healthy respect and support for each other to try to counteract gossip and lack of respect of the diversity among YLMSM.

- **Community building through addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis.** The MP needs to emphasize how YLMSM can come together and support each other regarding HIV/AIDS, considering the high rates of infection by comparison with other ethnic/racial groups. However, coming together to support each other may be challenging if YLMSM do not consider HIV a priority or a health crisis. YLMSM who are either untested or HIV-negative may not know that their friends and acquaintances (and sex partners) are HIV-positive. Considering existing stigma and fear about disclosing a positive HIV status, there is a need to talk and learn about HIV, and what it means to live with HIV. The MP can affect the perception of unity around HIV/AIDS by discussing epidemiology rates for Latino gay men in the country in general and in that geographical area in particular. This needs to be done in an accessible manner and using
terms that are understandable to YLMSM by posting information about HIV rates, having discussions or community forums to raise awareness of the threat of HIV locally.

Together with addressing HIV/AIDS as a crisis, the MP also needs to build hope by underscoring that YLMSM may support each other, be safe sexually, and if HIV-positive, can lead a long life despite having HIV.

- **Community-building through celebration of being Latino gay men.** This can also bring YLMSM together as a community by emphasizing that the MP is an institution that is part of the young Latino gay community, run for young Latino men, by young Latino men and that the MP celebrates the diversity of Latino gay men, whether in times of crisis or not, with a gay and sex positive approach.

- **Acknowledge adversity, while promoting that things will get better.** The MP needs to set a tone that supports men to encourage each other to “keep the faith,” and not give up but, instead, to learn to keep going, and remain optimistic that better things are ahead. Supporting this resiliency can be done first by discussing the difficulties and challenges that young men experience in their lives, but also by exploring what can be done about those issues, and encouraging men to take action to make their lives better. The MP needs to promote the concept that if the men are actively involved and taking action on their own behalf (e.g., by learning life skills, reducing sexual risk behavior, getting tested for HIV, and if found to be HIV-infected getting into treatment, and supporting friends to do the same), they can make their lives better. This may help the young men to increase in their beliefs that they can be efficacious in helping themselves (“self-efficacy”), and that engaging in these behaviors will lead to the outcomes they desire (“response-efficacy”).

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**Peer-Based**

The MP attempts to mobilize men to support and encourage their peers about having safer sex. The implementation of the MP core elements provide opportunities to learn, share, and discuss different issues with peers. The MP is also peer-based because how to implement the core elements relies on the decisions and joined work of the Coordinators, Core Group members and other volunteers. Thus, the project relies on participants as agents of change because youth can exert tremendous influence on their peers. Peers are credible and very influential sources of information as well as potential role models to diffuse new ideas and help change community norms.

**Empowerment Philosophy**

Empowerment theory states that people become empowered as they are able to take control of their own lives and play a role in determining their own destinies. Often this requires the ability to critically analyze the causes of their problems, and learn new skills and develop new capacities that can help them improve their life situation.

Empowerment is a process by which individuals and communities gain control over issues of concern to them, are able to influence the decisions
that affect their lives, and gain greater access over resources. Empowerment-oriented interventions include intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components and try to enhance wellness and encourage people to gain the skills and knowledge to allow them to overcome obstacles in their lives and help them develop within themselves or in the society [23].

The MP is designed to serve an empowering function. Providing a mechanism for YLMSM to discuss and analyze issues and problems they experience, come up with solutions, and design and run the intervention themselves fosters a sense of personal ownership and commitment to the project and the activities. When individuals are actively involved in finding and implementing solutions to their problems, their behavior change is more lasting.

Implementation Issues. As mentioned previously, YLMSM’s empowerment is needed in addressing issues such as low self-esteem, internal conflict about sexual identity, internalized homophobia, and the culture of sexual silence. Many of the projects implementing MP with YLMSM believed that to facilitate young men’s empowerment and ability to manage their own lives and avoid HIV transmission required providing a variety of life-skills to the project participants. MP contributes to empowerment in many different ways, by providing an opportunity, a context, and a space for men to explore who they are, discuss and share their experiences with peers, as well as learn about HIV, safer sex, negotiating safer sex, and obtaining HIV testing regularly and frequently. Some staff considered MP as a medium and a space to prepare YLMSM to better adapt and deal with life in the U.S.

Since many YLMSM may not have the experience necessary to take on leadership roles in the project without training, different areas for skills development, including language acquisition and/or improvement, were
identified by CBO staff and YLMSM participants. Hence, skills-building is necessary for the Core Group and other volunteers (as well as Coordinators, as discussed below under core elements) in order to facilitate personal and community empowerment, improve their abilities to actively participate in MP, organize events, and encourage their friends to have safer sex and get tested frequently.

CBO staff explained that they try to focus not only on how to put on condoms, but on personal development among the YLMSM so that they understand and internalize the need to take care of and protect themselves and their sex partners. This can include supporting young men to reflect about many aspects of their lives, including developing personal goals, developing a sense of responsibility, and studying or getting a job. In that context, the CBO staff helped YLMSM, for example, to develop a resume, prepare for a job interview, and interview for a job. MP needs to use every opportunity to build skills and a sense of self-efficacy to reach personal goals, including development of computer skills so that men can create their own safer sex materials, learn how to think through finding speakers on particular topics of interest to young men, organizing social events and infusing safer sex and HIV testing messages into them.

Project staff also stated that the project provides a place for participants to talk to the staff about various issues without feeling ashamed, for instance, if they have a sexually transmitted infection.

During a focus group, participants explained how almost everyone in the project was participating in organizing an MP float for that year’s Gay Pride March. The theme of the float was going to be the 200th anniversary of Mexican independence, and included a pyramid and “trajineras,” the typical canoes from ancient Mexico, and mariachi music with four people (lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual) wearing typical clothes standing on each corner of the float. They explained that the ideas for the float had originated come from all of them together with the Coordinators. Their goal was to get the first or second prize in the parade, but also to use the event as something fun, in order to educate gay Latinos, show Latino diversity, and show that someone can be a charro (Mexican cowboy) and also gay. Referring to creating the float and organizing their participation in the Pride event, project staff stated that participants feel important and valued when given a responsibility, and as a consequence become more responsible themselves.

Other Recommendations from CAPS

It is important to incorporate the concept that YLMSM need to aspire to be fully functioning adult persons. The MP can emphasize the need for YLMSM to develop themselves as people, take care of themselves, manage their lives, learn new life skills, develop a sense of responsibility, take care of their health, and support and take care of each other as a way of developing community. This concept includes promoting the idea that taking care of yourself (which is “being a man”), can include seeking healthcare services, getting exercise, eating well, getting tested for HIV frequently, preventing HIV transmission, and getting into treatment if HIV positive.
**Diffusion of Innovations**

The MP’s design also draws from Diffusion of Innovation theory, which posits that members of a group are most likely to adopt a new behavioral practice (i.e., safer sex) based on the example and previous adoption of the innovation conveyed to them by a certain number of persons that they respect and are similar to them. The MP thus seeks to develop a process by which YLMSM actively communicate with each other about the need for safer sex and encourage each other to practice safer sex so that safer sex becomes the mutually accepted norm. The combination of formal and Informal Outreach and publicity activities are designed to diffuse prevention messages together with bringing more YLMSM into the project through the M groups.

Given the diversity of the YLMSM community, it is important to consider the various subgroups and diverse social networks that comprise the community through which the messages about safer sex and testing must be diffused. It therefore is important to continually reflect upon which parts of the community are participating or are being missed in the project, and specifically recruit YLMSM from diverse parts of the community onto the Core Group.

**Gay-Positive/Sex-Positive/Latino-Positive**

The MP attempts to strengthen and nurture YLMSM exploration and celebration of their sexuality, including taking care of their health and having protected sex, as well as having pride in being gay and in being Latino. The point is to help men feel pride in who they are, rather than internalizing negative views they have been raised with regarding their sexuality and ethnicity. People who feel good about themselves have greater internal resources to reduce their sexual risks and obtain testing.
Thus, MP should promote the view that sex with other men is normal, and that safer sex can be pleasurable and satisfying. Many men have been raised to feel that sex is dirty and sinful outside of marriage to a woman, and instead the project seeks to have men feel that safer sex can be beautiful, highly enjoyable, and even spiritual.

**Implementation Issues.** Working with YLMSM, the implementation of the MP needs to take into account issues related to identity, different degrees of being out as gay, acculturation, and immersion in the heterosexual Latino community and/or the mainstream gay community. MP activities may need to help YLMSM explore some of these issues. Men who are more out may want to explore issues related to identity, including internalized homophobia and different ways to confront external homophobia, whether from their families and society, or as internally felt. Issues related to identity in relationship to being Latino and gay, acceptance within the Latino community, as well as racism within the mainstream gay community also merit exploration in the project as these issues may affect men’s ability to care for themselves and their peers.

Men who are more out may be more able to receive and promote healthy, uplifting, and safe sexuality messages. While men who are hidden about their sexuality may feel more reluctant to explore these issues, MP may provide the context to start doing so. MP needs to strive to reach all subgroups of YLMSM with these messages, while considering how they will be received by all. At more than one project, staff identified individuals who are not ready to embrace a gay identity as being unlikely to participate in the project.

BOCE members pointed out that in translation into Spanish the term “positive” (about being gay, and about sexuality) may need to be translated as “affirming” to avoid the possible connotation or confusion that the intervention is only for HIV positive men since being “sex positive” could be interpreted as the intervention only being for HIV positive men.

**Other Recommendations from CAPS**

- Programs need to consider whether MP is the right intervention for bisexual men and/or men who are transitioning into a trans-identity and/or how to integrate those men who do not have a more defined gay identity into the intervention. Men who are comfortable about being bisexual may benefit from participation in the MP, but men who are completely closeted and do not have an identity related to their sexual activities with men may feel completely uncomfortable (although they may be reached through Informal Outreach). For transgender persons the MP needs to take into account their own needs. For instance, the driving force for them to participate in MP would likely not be to socialize with other transgender women (transwomen), although they might be attracted to finding and providing support to other transwomen.
The different components of the MP are designed to work together and in synergy to address the variety of contributors to risk behavior, testing for HIV regularly, access to health care, and other unmet needs and issues in YLMSM’s lives.

New Guiding Principle: Cultural Competency

The Project Coordinators as well as the organizations running MP need to be culturally competent about Latino issues in order to effectively implement the intervention with YLMSM. While cultural competency is an important implicit issue for any MP to be relevant and accepted by a particular population of MSM, the implementation of different MPs targeting YLMSM has focused on making the intervention not only gay and sex positive but also Latino positive and culturally relevant for YLMSM. Those projects have integrated into their activities and themes issues and values relevant to the Latino culture, such as the importance of the family that YLMSM will identify with and will promote community building and acceptability of the project. Cultural competence includes taking into account that there is not one Latino community but a diversity of Latinos in the U.S. Thus, making the intervention culturally relevant includes considering the diversity, language and ages of the participants in order to implement and deliver an appropriate intervention and messages that will be appealing to many different men. For example, the way sexually related messages are approached and delivered may vary for Latino teenagers and Latino men in their late twenties.

Thus, successful implementation of MP calls for implementing agencies that are culturally competent regarding YLMSM. While a CBO already could serve the Latino community, it is important that the agency understands the needs of YLMSM as well as the rationale for MP and what will be required to implement it. Agency buy-in is essential. If that is not the case, lack of understanding and clarity could ensue when the MP Coordinators are not allowed to follow the MP guiding principles and core elements because they do not coincide with the strategic planning or even the philosophy of the organization.
Core Elements

Core elements are the essential components that need to be in place to work synergistically for MP to be effective. The next section describes each of the core elements for MP and issues to consider when implementing MP with YLMSM.

Coordinators: The Paid Staff Who Run the Project

Coordinators are the staff responsible for organizing all aspects of the project. Their job is to coordinate the different activities of the project, make sure that all components are implemented, and work to help YLMSM part of the Core Group and other volunteers make decisions and implement the intervention. A main part of their job is to facilitate the empowerment of the YLMSM who join the project as volunteers. The Coordinators are a very important element of success for MP implementation and need to have a clear vision of the project. They need to be champions of the project and firmly believe in its goals and its efficacy. Teamwork between the Coordinators as well as with the participants is crucial and the Coordinators need to have the ability to do so. The age of the Coordinator may also influence how he relates to project participants in general and the Core Group in particular.

Implementation Issues

Hiring the Right Coordinator. It is necessary to find Coordinators who can work and establish rapport with participants, represent, and/or relate well to diverse parts of the YLMSM community. Language may be a consideration here according to the specific target population of YLMSM for MP, and whether they are Chicanos, bilingual, second or more generations Latino, or recent immigrants. Successful implementation of MP calls for the need for culturally competent Coordinators. Some project staff believed that it was important that YLMSM can identify with the Coordinators.

MP needs to be run by staff who are Latinos themselves or who are bicultural and bilingual (if the target population is Spanish monolingual and/or bilingual Latinos). While not necessarily in the same age range as of the participants, Coordinators need to understand Latino culture in order to understand YLMSM participants and the issues they face as well. There is a high likelihood that this will be the case when the Coordinators are, in fact, gay Latino men because they will probably share the same cultural codes, experiences and values as the participants. In addition, it is crucial that the Coordinators running the program understand not only those cultural values but also the diversity of YLMSM, and the issues and needs they face.
The concept of “confianza” or trust also applies to the relationship established with Coordinators who are bicultural and bilingual and share the same values as the participants. The fact that the staff are bicultural and bilingual brings forth that confianza and facilitates rapport and the feeling among participants that the facilitators understand them. For example a program staff commented that, “the participants called him their “mamacita” (their mama, or little mother). The fact that he cooked meals for the participants when they had an MP event facilitated that confianza and empathy with the participants. As we have observed with other MPs, in some cases, Latino gay men who were first MP participants had become staff and worked as MP Coordinators. A Coordinator mentioned the great influence that MP had had on him in terms of safer sex and his vision of the future when he was first a volunteer at the project. Projects may consider how to motivate and train MP participants so they also could have access to HIV prevention jobs.

Need for Training and Skills Building for Coordinators. Some of the Coordinators may need to develop specific skills to conduct the intervention. In particular, some program Coordinators may not possess group facilitation skills, may not have sufficient information about HIV/AIDS and HIV/STI (sexually transmitted infection) prevention, and may need help with computer skills. Providing additional trainings for Coordinators as needed should be done early on so that there are norms established for behavior from the outset. This may need to be repeated over time.

The Coordinators need to understand the intervention, follow the guiding principles and monitor the implementation of the core elements, work and motivate the Core Group to organize activities, as well as providing a feedback loop to make sure the program remains active and continues to
expand to reach out other segments of YLMSM. An important issue to avoid is that the Coordinators do not end up making MP resemble them and their needs instead of being about the community, the needs of the community, and empowering and mobilizing the community of YLMSM to implement the intervention themselves.

**Coordinators as Role Models.** It is important to remember that part of the job of the Coordinators is to motivate participants and provide an example and model behaviors related to healthy behaviors and safer sex. Similarly, Coordinators need to model behaviors related to respecting participants, keeping their word, and not promising participants things that cannot be done. Organizations implementing MP need to be able to provide support and necessary supervision to the Coordinators, as well as evaluate their ongoing training needs.

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**Core Group: The Decision Making Body of YLMSM Volunteers Who Run the Project**

Consistent with the empowerment philosophy and guiding principle, the project is run by paid staff and a group of volunteers. That group is called the Core Group and consists of 10 to 20 YLMSM. The Core Group meets on a weekly basis and is empowered to make key decisions related to the project, including a name for the project, planning activities and developing materials taking into account YLMSM’s needs, and integrating HIV prevention into all activities. Other men who are not part of the Core Group also can get involved by participating in specific activities or events.

**Implementation Issues**

BOCE members emphasized that participation in selecting the name of the program and the name for the Core Group is very important to Core Group participants, because it helps to create a sense of belonging. They added that in some cases the name becomes somewhat iconic and “it is branding…” Some of the names for the Core Groups in projects with YLMSM are: Encuentros, Latinos D, and Dimension.

BOCE members shared that in their experience, YLMSM join the Core Group because they are looking for a place to hang out, relate to others, have good conversations, and do something meaningful. Based on their implementation experience, BOCE participants recommended that the Core Group meets either weekly or that contact with Core Group members is ongoing and regular in order to keep the group active and the momentum going. In one of the projects, for instance, they tried monthly meetings but found out that it was not often enough and that Core Group members did not remember what they had met about the previous time. At one project they have Core Group meetings once a week, together with subcommittees about outreach and fundraising that meet on a regular basis.

In addition, the BOCE recommended planning and offering a menu of activities in order for the members to have fun, since getting together to develop activities and have food may get tiresome and boring or may not be enough to keep their interest and motivation over time. They emphasized the need for members to feel that the Core Group is not just a two-hour
organizational meeting, but a time when they are going to have fun also. In one of the projects, they listen to music or watch videos during their meetings while performing tasks such as preparing safe sex kits, while other projects implemented a sports night. Other projects organize outings with the Core Group, deciding where they want to go.

One of the projects had two different Core Groups according to the language the members spoke. The two Core Groups had varied interests. The group with more mainstream English speaking men wanted to develop more gay-related activities, while the Spanish group wanted more Latino-oriented activities organized, for instance, around Cinco de Mayo or family-related activities.

In some cases, Core Group members may need to be trained and “groomed” so they feel comfortable or are able to come up with their own ideas. BOCE members suggested to also train the Core Group on group dynamics so they are more used to when Core Group members leave the group. A focus group participant observed that MP needs to take advantage of the talents of the men who go to MP and be able to incorporate those talents for instance to teach other participants how to saw, do art projects, develop computer spreadsheets, and search the Internet for photos of Latino men to use in materials.

The BOCE also emphasized the need for ongoing evaluation of the project in general, and the Core Group in particular, as well as to assess how the project is being seen in the community and correct those perceptions as needed through events, materials, and Informal Outreach. Related challenges are how to deal with the fact that members of the Core Group change frequently. Try to think out of the box and ask them what they want to do and what may be interesting.
Other Recommendations from CAPS

Create Formal Opportunities for Core Group Members to Develop Skills and Specialized Knowledge. It is important to develop systematic training opportunities for the Core Group. Some Core Group members may need more skills and/or experience to facilitate and lead groups, work as a team, work with a diversity of participants, design publicity materials and safer sex and testing promotional materials. They also may need additional HIV and STI prevention information, beyond the M-groups. This can be accomplished through computer and/or graphic design trainings so Core Group members can work with the Coordinators to design publicity materials and other office related tasks, facilitation skills and public speaking training, HIV trainings, focusing on HIV among YLMSM, and other capacity building activities as needed to form new leaders and in order for Core Group members to become good role models for other young men. The trainings needs for the Core Group need to be assessed regularly together with the same Core Group members.

Develop a Stable Core Group whose Members Become Empowered, Learn to Take on Responsibility, Leadership, and Mentoring Roles. The MP needs to organize and build a strong Core Group, with men from diverse parts of the community. The Core Group functions best when men are familiar with the goals and methods of the intervention, take ownership of the project, are willing and able to analyze the project’s functioning in an ongoing way to evaluate its changing needs, and are responsible and able to carry out activities.

The initial part of the program requires accepting anyone who is willing to be part of the Core Group. As the project develops and unfolds, it is best to build a group that takes on greater responsibility – but without excluding newcomers or making the Core Group into a clique. As the project develops, consider having criteria for inclusion in the Core Group in which men who are more invested or are willing to make a commitment to the Core Group become full members or have a voice and vote on issues being decided. To avoid stagnation of the Core Group and boredom or monotony for its members, the project needs to provide a space for Core Group members to develop and grow. After the Core Group has been established for some time, there could be a tiered approach or more formalized structure within the Core Group for members who have received training on various issues, want to take on additional responsibilities, or would like to provide leadership and mentorship to incoming Core Group members and other project volunteers. Without making it difficult to join the Core Group, the project needs to continually examine if there is sufficient diversity from different segments of the community in order for diffusion to occur throughout the community.

It is important to consider mentorship, since that is much needed for many YLMSM who do not know how to write a resume, understand how to have checking account, have work skills, or language skills (whether in Spanish or English). An approach can be to pair men who have more skills and/or more education with men who do not have those skills. This
could be applied to the Core Group but also when organizing other activities or events for which men need to work together.

**Core Group Members as Role Models for other YLMSM.**

Similar to the Coordinators, Core Group members may serve as role models to other Core Group members as well as to other participants in the project in terms of healthy behaviors, and protecting themselves and their sexual partners from HIV. This role can be facilitated by conducting HIV prevention activities/exercises with Core Group members to address their own HIV risk and encourage them to get tested regularly. In addition, Core Group members have an ongoing role to play in informal and Formal Outreach activities as role models both to provide impetus for others to participate in those activities and to spread the message about HIV prevention and testing.

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**Project Space: A YLMSM Community Center**

This is a physical space that serves as the headquarters of the project and a place where project meetings and activities occur, as well as a community and drop-in center for YLMSM. The space addresses the need of having a physical location to meet and socialize that promotes healthy sexual behaviors and builds community among YLMSM. The project space is essential to support a sense of ownership in the program and the process of community empowerment. Information, referrals, safer sex materials and condoms are available at the project space. A challenge, however, is to not lock the project within the project space, always with the same participants, but also do things outside the space and keep expanding and building on the concept of a healthy community.

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**Implementation Issues**

**Promoting a Sense of Belonging Through the Project Space.**

The BOCE summarized the need to promote a sense of belonging and to make the project space comfortable by stating that participants need to feel in the space as, “mi casa es su casa.” The participants need to feel that the space is their own, an outlet where they will feel safe, secure, not judged, and comfortable being themselves. A focus group participant illustrated the concept when he referred to the space by saying, “You can show who you are here, without the fear you may feel on the street.” Project staff explained that many YLMSM spend the whole day at the center because they have a lot of free time or because they do not have another place to go. The center is something stable in their lives, while their housing or family situation may not be. As a result, the center becomes like a shelter or a refuge, but also a place where to keep them busy and engaged instead of being in the streets perhaps engaging in risky behaviors. When asked what would happen if the community center did not exist, a participant answered, “There would be more perdition, going out to drink or smoke. By coming here having the mind occupied doing something productive instead.”
Project staff explained that participants feel safe in the space where they may dare be themselves and become more confident because they feel they will not be judged or criticized there. She added that some of them “loquean and se destapan” (act queeny and out of the closet) because they feel safe. A participant in a focus group, however, explained that they may be open in the space but that because culture and religion it may be more difficult for them to be open with their families with whom they need to remain more closed up without being able to come up or express themselves.

The project space must be in a location where YBMSM feel safe attending and preferably located close to public transportation for men who do not have access to cars. Careful consideration should be given to having a space in which YLMSM will not be harassed going into or leaving the space.

**The Project Space Must Have a Welcoming Look and Be Supportive of YLMSM.** Engage YLMSM in helping to decide how to decorate the space with up-lifting messages about being Latino and gay. These visuals need to be welcoming and let YLMSM feel they are not alone. Consider using images of Latino gay men, including visuals of Latino/Latin American gay musicians, artists, and writers, photos of the Core Group members, and of different activities of the project. Consider also including photos of non-homophobic Latino leaders and human rights activists and/or of gay-related events significant to YLMSM. For example, visuals of gay marriage in Mexico or Argentina might be able to be used effectively. Every image, poster, message in the space should be analyzed for the message it conveys, and should be supportive of safer sex and frequent and regular HIV testing.

The quotes and exchange below between two participants in the same focus group reflect different perspectives related to the project space and to
empowerment. A focus group participant complained that the space at the community-based organization assigned for the project was too small and had no air conditioning in the summer. “Look at these walls,” he said, “Why cannot we be like in [agencies in a gay neighborhood] where they have those walls so well painted, nice TVs that are super ‘wow.’ Why can’t we make this place to look more like home?” Another participant in the same discussion group, perhaps reflecting a more “empowered” attitude, argued with the participant above that those agencies have more resources and support from their government, “We don’t have that support because this is not our government. And we have to look for our own resources instead of waiting for them. How to take responsibility for that and being able to make this place a more comfortable place. How to come one day and plan to paint it. We all have ideas but we all need to know that without speaking out there is no money.”

**Men Must Feel Safe in the Space.** The space needs to provide a sense of safety, in order for YLMSM to feel they will be respected and that they can be themselves in the space. Men need to know that they will not be hassled and that decorum in behavior will be maintained at the space. This is important considering the potential for gossip and concerns about disclosing personal information, such as HIV serostatus, in a group setting for fear that personal information may be spread around in the community. Thus it is important to repeat the need for confidentiality in what people disclose at the space and in activities.

**Ground Rules.** Develop ground rules together with the Core Group, and include in the ground rules the specification that the space is a safe and welcoming environment for both HIV-positive and HIV-negative men, that confidentiality needs to be followed, and that no fighting, drinking of alcohol, use of drugs, and possession of weapons is allowed. Make sure that ground rules are consistently enforced from the very beginning of the project. Consider having all newcomers to the project read through lists of rules and sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the rules of the house (especially, “What is said in the house stays in the house”).

BOCE members agreed on the importance of ground rules, setting boundaries and clear expectations for the participants’ behavior in the space. A BOCE member explained that it is important for the participants to understand the ground rules and to know that if they act disrespectfully they could be asked to leave.

**Provide Referrals to Various Services.** A comprehensive referral network must be easily available for participants at the project space. This information must be posted in the project space or in the website so participants can refer to it privately, and staff and Core Group members also need to be knowledgeable and familiar with that information in order to refer participants as needed to other services. Referral information must include referrals for HIV testing, emergency housing, employment, educational opportunities (including how to get GED), and mental health services/support, substance use, domestic violence, etc.

**Increase Critical Reflection About Various Issues Facing YLMSM.** Having an opportunity to think about and analyze different issues that YLMSM face is helpful, even if not conducted as a part of social outreach events.
**Confessional Wall.** Paint a wall in the space or hang up a large dry erase board in a private place – the bathroom for example – where questions are posed to the reader and he can then respond back in privacy. For example, the wall can be used as a “confessional” – where men can write about what they’ve done that they feel concerned about. Or a question can be posed such as, “Why do young Latino men gossip about each other?” Men can see others’ responses and think about them.

**Response Poster.** Hang up a large blank piece of paper or large dry erase board in the open area in the project space, and write up provocative statements for men to respond to or think about. For example, one issue to address pertains to “whole man” issues, posing the question: “What does it mean to be a Latino gay man?” This will hopefully stimulate thoughts about cultural responses to this issue – that to be an adult man means that you are responsible for yourself, for taking care of “your business,” and that you take care of your family. Often YLMSM are uncertain that they “qualify” as adult men since it is often inferred that to be a Latino means to be heterosexual, have children, be masculine – assumptions the project wants to challenge. You can be an adult man, be gay or bisexual, and still be a responsible man who takes care of himself.

**Different Types of Spaces.** CBOs need to consider the needs of MP to function and assess what is feasible in terms of a project space in which to implement the intervention. The CBO needs to understand and secure the financial and logistic resources in their budget for the project space, including potential requirements such as security, insurance, etc. The project spaces that we observed had three main configurations: (1) a stand-alone, independent space, as recommended in the original MP model; (2) some space reserved solely for the MP or shared with other projects within the parent agency; and (3) a combination of rented space for Core Group and M-Group meetings with space to conduct small mobilization activities on the premises of the parent agency.

As mentioned, the key point related to the space is that it will allow YLMSM to feel safe and develop a sense of belonging and ownership of the place and where they feel they can be themselves. Sharing project space within an agency can become problematic in terms of the logistics related to scheduling, availability, and decoration of the space; sensitivity of other staff in the agency, especially if sharing a reception area, kitchen, and bathroom areas; and noise, music, or laughing at MP social activities that can be disruptive of other projects. If it is necessary to share space, then other staff may need to be sensitized to the needs of the project and YLMSM.

**The Importance of Providing Food.** BOCE members agreed that it is important to have food available. Providing food, in fact, contributes to the space being safe and welcoming. A BOCE member explained that in the Latino culture, “we talk about things over dinner.” He added that all things considered, food is a small expense that makes a huge difference because it makes YLMSM feel that the project cares about them, particularly when many times meetings and events take place in the evening after work hours and participants may arrive at the space tired and hungry. At one CBO, staff stated that participants will not show up if food is not offered.
M-Groups: Small One-Time Group

These are peer-led one-time scripted meetings of 8 to 10 men. M-groups are aimed at men who come to the MP for the first time. The groups last approximately three hours and focus on personal risk behavior, serve to introduce the project as a whole, and motivate and teach men how to conduct Informal Outreach. They can take place at the project space, participants’ homes or other convenient locations. M-groups are a critical part of the MP since they are where men receive the largest “dose” of HIV prevention information and skills, and it is where men are taught about and encouraged to support their friends to be safer and get tested. The M-groups are co-facilitated by the Coordinators and/or Core Group members. The M-group activities have been designed to:

- talk about misconceptions about safer sex
- convey that safer sex can be enjoyable
- show how to use condoms correctly
- build communication skills for negotiating safer sex
- address interpersonal issues that may interfere with safer sex
- discuss the importance of getting tested regularly and/or seek treatment
- teach men to support their friends to have safer sex and get tested frequently for HIV
Implementation Issues

Some of the names used by different projects for the M-groups are: Coffee and Convo, Coffee Talks or Cafeteada, Noche de Helados (Ice cream night), Fun 101, Below the Belt, M-Group Mixer, Punto de Encuentro, and Entre Amigos.

Project staff expressed the need to introduce and explore the concept of self-worth or that “tú vales” (you are worthy) and how participants can make choices related to their health, and protecting themselves from HIV.

BOCE members expressed a few challenges related to implementing M-Groups. Those challenges included how much of the scripted curriculum could be covered considering the length of the group, and whether some YLMSM get bored, or lose interest after a few hours of meeting. BOCE members explained that covering the scripted curriculum in three hours may be difficult for a variety of reasons. Those reasons included that in some cases they had to dwell and elaborate on the concept of prevention in general since, for example, Latino men may not be used to go to the doctor, and that they may have only very basic knowledge about HIV, HIV testing, and HIV prevention, including condom and lubricant use.

Project staff stated that another challenge was gathering men in the evenings or weekends because of their work schedules. Instead, some had to conduct the M-Group within a two hour time span during lunchtime, condensing the information and providing participants information to take home, without having sufficient time to process the information or elaborate on certain issues. In addition, the staff pointed out that it takes longer to do an M-Group when some of the men speak Spanish and some English and they need to cover everything in both languages to be sure that everyone understands.

Other challenges for implementing M-Groups expressed by BOCE members related to cultural issues, such as machismo, stigma, fatalism, and sexual communication. They explained that in the Latino community it may not be so easy to be direct, assertive, and communicate about sexual issues, negotiate condom use or ask a partner about his HIV status, which has implications for how to work with those cultural issues in the M-Groups since the men may not have skills about how to do that.

BOCE members explained that one experience of attending the M-Group may not be sufficient, considering the different issues that may need to be addressed with YLMSM in order to empower them to use condoms. Several projects solved this challenge by adding other on-going groups to the M-Group, and supplemented the initial scripted session with optional and periodic groups in order to produce better results and allow for a stronger focus on HIV prevention messages. BOCE members noted that having multiple sessions allows talking more in-depth about prevention issues, and doing so provides enough time for the men to discuss their experiences. These adaptations are explained in the Adaptations Section below.
Other Recommendations from CAPS

- **Support gay pride.** Starting the M-Group with a focus on pride will be affirming, and sets the stage for positive experiences during the group.

- **Need to Use Culturally Relevant Up to Date Scenarios and Role Plays.** The scenarios and role plays that are used in the M-Groups need to:
  - be Latino related
  - include situations related to meeting men on the Internet
  - recognize that participants may have sex in exchange for food or gifts
  - acknowledge that men sometimes have sex with men who do not self-identify as gay and/or with women
  - address the need for testing (rather than solely focusing on risk reduction)
  - remind men that it is possible and feasible to change and stop unhealthy or risky behaviors

- **Safer Sex Guidelines.** The safer sex guidelines in the main MP manual should be followed, but these are also important:
  - Emphasize that being the insertive sex partner also is unsafe (most people know that being the receptive partner is unsafe, but there is often uncertainty about the insertive partner).
  - Stress that a low or undetectable viral load does not necessarily it is ok not to use condoms and have unprotected sex.
  - Remind that HIV/AIDS is still a serious issue. It has not gone away even though treatment is available and the media does not focus much on it anymore.
  - Emphasize the need to avoid unprotected anal sex, with less of a focus on transmitting HIV through oral sex, but caution that other STIs may be transmitted through oral sex.
  - Explain that alcohol and drug use can make it more difficult to stay safe.
  - Emphasize that it is important to have safer sex whether you are HIV-positive, HIV-negative, or do not know your HIV status since you are trying to protect yourself and your partners. This is a way that the men can help their YLMSM amigos.

- **HIV Testing, in Addition to Sexual Risk Reduction.** Talk about the importance of getting HIV tested every 6 months if sexually active and knowing one’s current HIV serostatus. One segment of the M-group will focus on: urging men to get tested, clarifying misperceptions about testing, discussing what to expect when getting tested, and providing informational resources about testing sites.

- **Teaching and Motivating YLMSM to Conduct Informal Outreach.** This section of the M-Group will include the reasons to encourage friends to practice safer sex, and emphasizing the positive benefits of having safer sex. Focus on caring and supporting peers and friends by talking to them about practicing safer sex. We include below
a few examples of how to talk to YLMSM about Informal Outreach and talking to peers about safer sex.

- **Inclusion of men of different HIV status in the exercises and role plays.** HIV prevention exercises and role plays need to be inclusive of men who are HIV-positive but may not be comfortable disclosing their status in the group. No assumptions should be made about the HIV status of participants in the group and PwP (prevention with positives) needs to be included in the discussions and role plays.

### Formal Outreach

Formal Outreach is a critically important component of the MP and includes developing social events, at which issues related to safer sex and testing can be discussed or addressed. Social outreach events are part of the project in order to attract YLMSM to activities that will be more appealing rather than HIV informational or educational HIV prevention activities. The social outreach events are also used as a way of building a sense of community in order to bring young men together, create a sense of camaraderie and belonging, and influence YLMSM to support each other about being safe sexually. Social outreach events are also used as a way of attracting and recruiting new men to attend M-groups and volunteer with the project. The MP uses a variety of creative and innovative social events to reach YLMSM with safer sex and testing messages. Many of the outreach events and activities that “generic” MPs implement are relevant for YLMSM, and therefore are not described here (refer to the MP Manual). For example, most projects have discussion groups that focus on topics the men want to discuss, sporting events, dance parties, fashion shows, pageantry contests or “reinados” and community forums. The elements of Formal Outreach include social outreach events, an outreach team, and outreach materials.

### Implementation Issues.

The MP includes “Themed Outreach” or using theatrics to advertise social events, promote the project, and distribute condoms and lubricants at different venues. This is accomplished by the outreach team using a theme at a venue to promote and distribute invitations to an event. For that purpose, the team can dress up using simple costumes related to a particular theme. Themed outreach is effective because it attracts attention and makes the outreach team visible at a venue. Outreach also can be fun for the team and another way of engaging volunteers in the project activities. However, there can be resistance from Project Coordinators and volunteers to conduct themed outreach.

BOCE members addressed the issue of volunteers worrying about being ridiculed by going to bars dressed up in outlandish outfits or costumes but wanting instead to fit in at a bar. Doing themed outreach does not necessarily involve having to wear a major costume but could simply mean going to a bar, wearing a few accessories, such as a hat, bright bow tie, and black-rimmed glasses, in order to be visible and be identified as a team. Then patrons will still be able to identify the outreach team, and if asked would recognize men so dressed as “the MP nerds.” In some cases wearing a T-shirt with a logo that identifies the volunteers as part of the project could be enough to attract attention to the team and the project. Critical for the success of themed outreach.
outreach is to have an engaged and outgoing outreach Coordinator who makes it “safe,” fun, and appealing for volunteers to participate in the outreach activity. The outreach Coordinator also needs to seek out and mentor young men who are more theatrical and like to attract attention. The most successful themed outreach plays on sexy and erotic themes.

Other Recommendations from CAPS

The following are suggestions for different kind of events and topics to organize as part of Formal Outreach. These events need always to include an activity or reminder about the need to protect themselves and their sexual partners from HIV and to get tested for HIV frequently.

- Weekly social outreach events can include TV nights, movie nights, card nights, and/or sports activities. Activities that involve watching TV or a video can include a discussion to analyze the show or film. For example, depending upon what was watched, a conversation can be held to analyze the depictions of drinking alcohol or equality in the relationships.

- Social gatherings can include a meal and a topic for discussion. These topics may address safer sex and HIV testing directly, or get into issues that are related to why YLMSM are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, including self-acceptance, dual identity (being Latino and gay), racism, masculinity, homophobia, and sexual silence. The following are suggested topics to include as part of events:
  - Different ways of being gay and Latino. Diverse masculinity models among YLMSM, including sexual roles and acceptance of masculine or feminine self-presentations
  - Self-acceptance and self-acceptance of others, including family or friends
  - Coming out to families and friends and how to deal with their reactions afterwards
  - Internalized homophobia and homophobia in the Latino community
  - Being gay and Latino in the U.S., and relationships of YLMSM to the mainstream gay community
  - Racism towards and stereotypes of Latinos in the U.S.
  - Beliefs about homosexuality as a sin, coping with what families and different churches say about being gay, and how to integrate religious messages with their own feelings of spirituality and sexuality.

- Talent Show events in which participants can share their hobbies, art, poetry, drawings, sewing abilities, and so forth, including sharing things they may have written on issues related to the project or about being gay and/or Latino.

- Pageants or contests, in which a diverse group of men show their talents and compete to be Mr. Latino or Mr. MP.
Latino/Latin American history Jeopardy-type game with questions and answers about Latino/Latin American and U.S. culture, geography, and history.

Addressing racial disparities in the HIV epidemic in order to help YLMSM to realize that given these high rates, extra precautions need to be taken, and to generate ideas about what solutions they might enact to protect themselves and their peers from HIV.

Forum on being a Latino gay man with a diverse panel of older Latino gay men presenting their different perspectives on manhood and what being gay and Latino means to them.

Relationship Issues to include topics and discussion related to “what we want in a man”, “how to find a man,” “how to keep a relationship going,” and “how do you deal with having safer sex when you’re in love.”

Four corners exercise to address a variety of issues regarding serosorting, relationships, drug and alcohol use, HIV testing, strategic positioning, and bisexuality. In this exercise, a series of statements is posted in each corner of the room. Participants move into the corner that best represent their response. The groups in each corner explain and defend their opinions, explaining why they agree or disagree.
Publicity

It is important to publicize the project so that as many YLMSM as possible learn about the project and participate in its activities. Reaching the entire community is needed in order for the MP to be an effective community-level HIV prevention program. The most effective publicity uses multiple strategies, has clear goals, reaches different segments of the target population, and engages staff or volunteers in their implementation. It is important to remember that the best suggestions for selecting appropriate and creative publicity messages will likely come from the Core Group and other volunteers who are familiar with their community.

Implementation Issues

A few culturally related issues were mentioned by BOCE members as they relate to publicity. The materials need to reflect the diversity of YLMSM in that area. YLMSM need to be able to relate to materials and see themselves and their community in the materials that are disseminated. Depicting a diversity of men makes the materials inclusive and shows respect for all segments of YLMSM. Showing diversity includes issues such as depicting men who vary with respect to body size, age, skin color, hair and clothing styles, and masculine or feminine appearance.

For example, the project does not want to exclude anyone by only showing sexy bodies. Using photos of men in the Core Group, if they agree to that, may be a way of showing the diversity of the participants in the MP. BOCE members explained that in some projects participants wanted to write about their own stories and issues, and how the project had changed their life. BOCE members felt that it was important to include statements from participants, and relay their feelings and perceptions about the project, including how the MP had influenced them. This is not to say that visuals of attractive men should never be used, but a diversity of ways to depict the project should be included.

The materials also need to reflect the language, verbiage, and literacy level of YLMSM in the area. It is important to vary this however, because different slang is used by different groups of men, often relating to their socioeconomic backgrounds.

According to the language spoken by the participants, materials will need to be written in English or in Spanish. In some cases, projects used either “Spanglish” or they wrote their materials both in Spanish and in English.

BOCE members stated that when designing materials they had to find the right balance to attract YLMSM, build community and promote the project, while being creative and competing with other sexy messages and the “meat market” in other materials or publications targeting gay men.

BOCE members pointed out that it may take time to design and finalize the materials, especially if they need to be processed or approved of by their funders or go through a CDC-required materials review (for directly funded organizations). In some cases, the projects needed to find a balance between what the Core Group wants, and how graphic those materials could be and what materials the funders are willing to approve. At times, the projects needed to train or do advocacy work with the funders, or even within the
Latino “parent” agencies which may not have had gay programs before, to show them why the materials need to have a sex and gay positive approach.

BOCE members also pointed out that it is necessary to know in advance to which publications to send materials. For example, they cautioned that in some cases they needed to consider the potential homophobia of Latino publications when sending materials to them.

In order to get together a team that would go to venues (e.g., bars) to publicize upcoming events, at least one of the projects provided volunteers with gas cards so they would be willing and able to afford attending the publicity activities.

Other Recommendations from CAPS

There are few newspapers that reach the YLMSM community, and many men do not attend bars and clubs (or are too young to do so). There are relatively few venues where to conduct publicity “zaps” (entering into a venue and leaving within a short period of time). Hence, alternative means that are more likely to reach young men may need to be used.

- **Increase Online Publicity.** Create a website or a facebook page that always has a current calendar on it in order to promote social outreach events. Develop an e-mail list of every young man who comes to the center or any events. Conduct online outreach (and if possible, advertising via banner advertisements on Adam4Adam, etc). Keep up with the current popular Internet methods that young men are using. Review the project on Yelp and other popular sites. Make a project entry in Wikipedia. Link the project’s website to the websites of other local service providers. Do not solely rely on sending e-mails since many YLMSM do not have e-mail addresses, and if they do, may not check for messages very frequently.

- **Use Text Messaging.** Text messaging can take place at different levels and for different purposes. For example, Coordinators could ask Core Group members to “blast” their address books with text messages about up-coming project events. Consider using a common short code number in the project so YLMSM in the community can receive information about the project, educational messages, and up-coming events by texting a word to a CSC number. For example, include a tagline on every flyer that says “text ‘EVENTS’ to 74335” and then the people receive messages about the upcoming event that is stored on their phone. They are also asked if they want to sign up for announcements of similar, up-coming events. Or, include a tagline on all HIV prevention materials that says “text ‘TIPS’ to 74335” and then they receive an HIV-prevention message. They are also asked if they want to sign up for periodic announcements of similar events. Or, include a tagline on all HIV testing materials that says “text ‘TEST’ to 74335” and then they receive a message about where to get tested (or times and locations of upcoming testing events at the project space). They should also be asked if they want to sign up for periodic announcements of similar events.

Text messaging also can be used to follow up with M-Group participants. Ask everyone at the end of the Informal Outreach section of the M-groups
if they are willing to sign up to receive conversation reminders. Then, they receive a monthly message saying something like “Don’t forget that HIV is a major issue for Latino gay men. How many friends have you talked to about safer sex in the last month?” The recipient could reply to the message, and the project could keep track of the data.

Informal Outreach

Informal Outreach involves project participants talking with friends and acquaintances about the importance of safer sex and knowing one’s current HIV status. YLMSM are motivated and trained on how to talk about safer sex with their peers in the M-groups. Informal outreach is encouraged and reinforced throughout other project activities. Informal Outreach can occur at events sponsored by the project or in their own time. Informal Outreach is an integral part of the MP in order to create a caring and supportive community of YLMSM.

Implementation Issues

As one of the core elements of the MP, Informal Outreach is an important part of the project, but one that could be easily overlooked as a component since it is challenging to monitor or measure. There was some uncertainty among BOCE members about whether the main purpose of Informal Outreach is for participants to bring other participants into MP or to speak with their friends. While it is important for men to bring their peers to the project, Informal Outreach are the supportive
It’s important to use the same kind of language their friends speak in order for peers to listen to them.

conversations they have with their friends about safer sex and HIV testing. Projects may need to make a special effort to ensure that Coordinators and Core Group members are clear about the purpose of Informal Outreach and that Informal Outreach occurs in order to diffuse safer sex messages throughout the community of YLMSM.

Based on the responses of focus group participants, it is clear that Informal Outreach does take place. During our focus groups, we asked MP participants how they had found out about MP and whether they were talking to friends outside the project about HIV prevention. Many of them answered that they had been invited to MP by friends. They stated also that they had learned a lot about HIV as part of MP, and that as their comfort level about talking to friends about HIV prevention and condom use had increased, they were indeed talking to their peers about those issues. A focus group participant explained that it was important, when conducting Informal Outreach, to use the same kind of language their friends speak in order for peers to listen to them. Another focus group participant observed that he talks to his friends because in the past he would have liked to have someone to talk to him about condoms and risk.

Regarding their friends’ responses, focus group participants said that some friends now see a more mature and educated side of them. They reported that they are surprised at how much they know now or how “conscientes” or aware they are about HIV issues and protecting themselves and their sex partners, and ask to bring their friends condoms. Focus group participants also said that some friends may not pay attention or laugh and say they are crazy to waste time talking about those things or going to MP. A participant in a focus group explained that some guys do not want to know their HIV status because they are afraid and that is, for instance, why they will not get tested. Focus group participants explained that even if friends do not pay attention it is important to sow a seed and use oneself as an example as a reference of something, “you didn’t know or could not do before that is what you tell your friend, and that the way you learned it was by being at MP.”

Other Recommendations from CAPS

Confidentiality and privacy concerns. The concern and respect for the confidentiality and privacy of the participants’ personal information needs to be ongoing and reinforced by the Coordinators throughout the project. In some cases, the importance of privacy and confidentiality of the information, the concerns about loss of confidentiality, and the need to respect people’s “boundaries” about their personal information may not be concepts that YLMSM are used to thinking about. By making them explicit and explaining them to the participants, the Coordinators are setting a precedent and establishing trust with the participants, between the participants themselves, and in the project.

The distinction between supporting friends by encouraging them to protect themselves and their sex partners from HIV and gossiping and spreading other men’s business needs to be made often and in every possible way, such as in discussions with the Core Group, discussions
individually with participants by the Coordinators, and as part of the M Groups. In relation to that, it is important to remind participants that Informal Outreach does not require asking of friends to disclose their sexual activities or inquiring what a friend does sexually, but does require encouraging friends to be safe and take care of themselves and their sex partners by having safer sex.

Texting friends about being safe sexually. Texting is a very common way for young men to communicate. The project can create messages that men would be encouraged to text to their friends periodically. The men could come up with their own statements to tell their friends and could be encouraged to make a commitment to text a certain number of friends who are not a part of the project, on certain intervals of time. For example, it could be that once a month it is, “Text your buddies day: Show your caring for your friends and community.” The suggestion to do this could go out through a listserv once a month, with ideas about messages to give friends. Subsequently, men could be asked to write the number of safer sex promotional text messages they made on a chart in the space, so it would be seen how much the project is reaching out through the community.

Community Advisory Board (CAB): Optional Core Element

A CAB serves as a resource to the whole project in general and the Core Group in particular. The CAB meets with the Core Group on a regular basis and provides support, information and access to different resources. The CAB is comprised of individuals knowledgeable or with positions of power within the community.

Recommendations from CAPS

Skills training. Use the expertise of CAB members to provide workshops or focus on various topics, such as resume building and writing, interviewing skills, how to look for and keep a job, applying for school (college or technical school), and where to go to find help/guidance on professional development. Role plays on some of these could be done as well (e.g., how to apply for a job), with a CAB member giving feedback.

Role Models. Many YLMSM may not have a vision of what it is to be an older Latino gay man. CAB members can provide a vision of what adult Latino gay/bisexual men’s lives are like by organizing a panel in which CAB members or professionals talk about what they do for work and how they got to these positions. They can talk about their vision about life as a Latino gay man, and how they live their lives in accordance with this vision. The goal will be to show that it is possible to grow up as a Latino gay man and have a satisfying life as an adult. These discussions may include how CAB members have coped with homophobia from their families and community, coming out stories, as well as what they do to protect themselves for HIV.
Various Additional CBO Adaptations to the MP

The multiple economic sociocultural issues and unmet needs that YLMSM face influence MP implementation, as does the considerable diversity of YLMSM in the U.S. Different challenges were mentioned by project staff and BOCE members related to the design of MP, adhering to its guiding principles, and implementing its core elements with YLMSM. We describe in the following some of the challenges to implementation and possible solutions to these issues.

Distance From Project and Other Challenges in Getting to the Project Space

An implementation challenge related to adhering to the guiding principles and core elements was that it is hard for some of the participants to attend because they worked many hours or because of the distance they had to travel. CBO staff discussed the need to figure out how to better integrate those men into the intervention. Focus group participants who lived in small towns far from a metropolitan area (but still came to MP) referred to the need to have something like MP in their small communities. They added that MP activities could be organized somewhere else, such in bookstores, and in small and conservative communities where YLMSM have no resources or places to go. Focus group participants in a different geographical area also mentioned the difficulty and the expense of having to travel by bus or train from other adjacent states to attend MP activities.

A “mobile version” of MP was suggested by the BOCE to circumvent the long distances that some participants may have to travel in some cities to attend
MP activities. One of the MPs was planning to have two drop-in spaces in different locations of the city, realizing that that decision has logistics implications in terms of financial and human resources (both paid staff and volunteers) needed to be in both spaces either at the same or different time. BOCE members also suggested that if men cannot go to a Core Group meeting because of distance or time, they could be involved and kept engaged by doing other things.

Using the Internet as a virtual alternative to face to face meetings was also suggested, but BOCE agreed that because of the nature of MP, the social interactions, meetings, the safe space that MP provides to be gay, and events should still be the preferred way to implement the intervention, although the Internet could still be used to complement the intervention, provide information, facilitate community interaction online, and promote MP as many projects already do (see section on Internet use). Project staff also pointed out that some participants with fewer resources may have more limited access to the Internet or laptops and just have text messaging when they own a cell phone.

Adaptations to Core Elements

Some CBOs have made adaptations to the core elements in order to address unmet needs of YLMSM. As stated by a project staff member, these adaptations strike a balance between being faithful to the model while thinking of the needs of the community. Adaptations to the MP, while may be necessary, merit special consideration since they do make the intervention more complex to implement and will require human and financial resources. Staff at different CBOs explained that there is a need for a context to talk about other issues of importance to YLMSM (such as dating, family issues, and coming out). Considering that the Core Group is about planning, M-groups are a scripted one time skills building and learning about HIV and safer sex, and formal events are social, there is an additional need in the MP structure to talk about those issues. Some MP projects solved this by implementing other activities to have more time to explore other issues relevant to YLMSM and address their needs (such as weekly discussion groups). Such additions are entirely within the realm of “fidelity” to the intervention since they can be considered outreach social events. None of the projects discussed dropping Core Elements, but instead, adding some components.

Unfolding the M-Group into Two Different Groups. A few projects divided the M Group into two different groups. The initial group follows the originally scripted M-Group format and is for first timers to the project. The second group is ongoing and open to anyone, and different kind of issues are explored and discussed in those regular groups. In one project, for instance, they focus on basic HIV prevention concepts with new participants in the initial meeting and then invite them to the ongoing group.

A BOCE member explained that the ongoing groups function, in a sense, as support groups, trainings, or skill-building workshops without calling them as such. These adaptations, however, also could be thought of as small ongoing mobilization activities facilitated by experts to deal with specific issues. These activities would avoid that the Core Group becomes a support group, allow time to explore various issues, and provide another means of
attracting men to the project besides or after the initial M-Group. These activities could consist of providing a space to talk about them and then have resources ready or places where participants can be referred.

In one of the projects, for example they implement 5 M-Groups a month. One is for new members (with an average of 20-25 new men per month) and the other four include either issues recommended by participants or discussions about safer sex issues, condom negotiation, and relationships. They use role plays and open discussion to make them dynamic and interactive. In another project, the beginners’ M-Group includes the basic “HIV-101” and meets once a week but only for an hour since 3 hours was too long to keep their attention. The second level M-Group is for established participants and issues such as drug use, legal rights, and domestic violence are discussed there. Both MP participants and staff recalled the “Cuidado del hoyito,” (Taking care of your hole) as a recent topic of significance addressed at the second level M-Group.

Adding a Support Group. Staff saw the need to develop a thread that connected all participants in the MP. Because of that, they added a support group open to all participants. Their meeting structure is as follows:

- The Core Group meets once a month to evaluate what they have done during that month and plan for the following month.

- The M-Group with new participants meets once a month to talk about HIV prevention and safer sex. Regular participants can also attend the M-Groups.

- The support group meets every week and all participants are invited to attend. These meetings are very open and flexible. Activities or issues that cannot be finished or talked about in the M-Group get taken up during these meetings. They first have an activity or topic, such as self-esteem and then they talk about safer sex. This group attracts many participants and it is an opportunity for everyone to participate and share thoughts and feelings. Project staff explained that it is their best “hook” to attract participants to MP and retain them. These meetings also serve as large events.

Integrating Counseling into the Project. A few projects provided counseling or Comprehensive Risk Counseling and Services (CRCS) to try to meet mental health and other social service needs of the participants and provide referrals related to health, legal issues, domestic violence, etc. At one of the projects, a CRCS counselor works with participants to make them aware of their legal rights, facilitate referrals to lawyers, accompanied participants to translate for them at STI services or to court in alcohol in cases related to domestic violence, alcohol, drugs, robbery, or prostitution. To various degrees, those services were incorporated into the MP model itself, and staff providing them were actively involved in most other project activities and exposed to regular interactions with all participants—in some cases, these staff were key in developing adaptations and project activities, thanks to their access to individual case histories.

One of the projects included an Individual Level Intervention (ILI) in which MP participants needed to complete a risk assessment. This consisted of an individual interview to talk about particular issues, including sexual risk,
in their lives with a follow up a month later. For one of the focus group participants at that site, while the group activities were important, the one-on-one interview made him analyze his own life and feel responsible for what he wanted to change. Another participant seconded this opinion and provided the example of a participant who, because of the ILI, had started counseling and changed some of his HIV risk behaviors. A third participant in the same group, however, argued that some men may be afraid of being judged and not be open to answering intrusive questions from a stranger. Thus, CBOs may need to carefully assess the need for an individual level intervention, and the specifics of its implementation, including how to build rapport for it, and whether to make it mandatory or optional for MP participants.

While not an adaptation per se, a Coordinator acknowledged that he does work one-on-one with some of the participants if he sees they need help, they have personal issues to deal with, or to help them develop as an adult. To prevent the Coordinator from being burnt out, his supervisor has weekly check-ins to review how the MP group of participants is doing and whether any of them need to be linked to other services within the agency or referred outside the agency.

### Age Range of the Participants

The MP was originally designed and tested with MSM between 18 and 29 years old. Some CBOs, however, have implemented MP both for younger and older MSM. While we have heard through different Latino staff in the U.S. and in Latin America that in Latino culture separating men according to age may not be relevant because they are all part of the same community and socialize together. This may have to do with the number of gay men in a particular location and a need for cohesiveness and mutual support in a small community. Implementing MP with a wider age of participants may be doable, but careful consideration must be given to the age group that MP will target with the intervention, since age differences within participants may also translate into different cultural needs, values, and interests. Different levels of acculturation may couple with age to produce different needs.

The projects that included adolescents had to address the needs of high-school age youth who are still legally dependent on their parents or other adult caretakers. Besides having less autonomy, and less access to venues such as bars and clubs, these implementations also had to address teenagers’ maturity levels that sometimes make it difficult for them to take on long-term volunteer commitments. Moreover, there was the likelihood that they had not acquired the organization skills necessary to run a multicomponent program like the MP. It is noteworthy that faced with this obstacle, most CBOs ultimately chose to focus on the older end of the age range; many excluded minors outright, while others mostly targeted individuals who were at least 16 years old, and only a few persisted, despite the difficulties, in trying to attract and work with younger individuals. The programs that included the entire age range of adolescence and young adulthood also had to struggle with how to run events that would be age appropriate for both adolescents and adults. This also affected the treatment of the topics discussed in M-Groups, which require frankness about sexual relations that may be unsuitable for individuals in their early teens.
It is worth pointing out that whereas in most of these programs the agency staff initially had serious concerns about creating an environment that might facilitate (in their words) “predatory” sexual behavior on the part of older participants. Special precautions should be taken to ensure that this kind of behavior does not take place. Fortunately, at least one project reported that the older members often take a protective “older brother” attitude towards younger participants, sharing their life experiences so that younger members can learn to protect themselves during risky situations.

While adolescent Latino MSM may be in great need for an intervention like MP, a legal challenge for CBOs may be having those young men participate in the intervention, if the adolescents still live with their parents and are minors. In relationship to this, staff brought up their worries about what to do if older participants have sex with other participants who are under 18 years of age, and whether the agency would need to report such occurrence.

Formal Outreach in bars may be an activity that appeals to men of different ages, but smaller activities may need to be designed with a more specific age bracket in mind. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that participants should have a say in what activities are designed for which age range and that may be influenced by how they define community. On the other hand, staff and the Core Group may influence how participants view and define community according to age. A BOCE member whose MP included men between 20 and 35 years of age observed that what works for them is to focus on sharing experiences and respecting each other independently from age, and teaching participants not to patronize people just because they are younger or older.
Project staff related that they promoted the older men to their Community Advisory Board and integrated younger members into the Core Group as a way of not losing and incorporating the experience and viewpoints of community members whose age may put them outside the inclusion criteria for the intervention, while making room to bring younger YLMSM into the Core Group.

**Incentives for MP Participants** In the original MP design, participants in the Core Groups, M-Groups or mobilization activities do not receive a financial incentive, although refreshments and food are provided at meetings. Some CBOs implementing MP with YLMSM, however, have provided financial incentives and/or transportation vouchers to participants in order to address barriers to recruitment and retention. Staff from one of those CBOs in the East Coast commented that the response from the Core Group when told about the need to stop the incentives because of budget cuts was that they were not in the group for the incentives, that they believed in the objectives and the mission of the group, that they get a lot in return from participating, and that it was their way of giving back to the community: “That is the reason why we call them leaders.” Moreover, the same staff added that the previous year Core Group participants had raised $15,000 through events and that their goal for the current year was to raise $50,000. He added that, ‘…they are very motivated...if we empower them and they own the project...they offer everything.”

One of the projects also used to provide incentives to the Core Group. Staff related that currently, also because of budget cuts, the “goodies are gone” and they only provide condoms and lube. Nevertheless, participation in the Core Groups is ongoing. Considering that their space is in an industrial area with no bus line running after 7 PM, the participants started a car pool so they could attend the meetings. Another CBO in the West Coast also did not provide financial incentives, but do provide items such as clothing that participants wear with pride and become hot items in their community. However, because of geographical distance and lack of public transportation, they do provide gas cards. While providing financial incentives may be required, the need and implications of providing incentives need to be carefully assessed.
Translation of MP Terms into Spanish

As already mentioned regarding translation of the term gay positive to gay affirming, other terms such as Core Group may need to be adapted to render a translation that is understandable and culturally appropriate and acceptable. Similarly, the Spanish used in the materials needs to be both culturally appropriate for all YMSM while generic enough to appeal, be understood and accepted by men of different nationalities and social strata. Several projects have translated either the whole manual or parts of the manual into Spanish. Please see mpowerment.org for the latest translation of the entire MP Manual.

Use of the Internet for MP Implementation

Different MPs for YLMSM have integrated technology as a way to refocus some of their efforts to do outreach, disseminate information, provide prevention messages, promote frequent HIV testing, and reach out both to new YLMSM and engage existing participants who may not always be able to attend different project-related activities.

The list below provides different examples of how different projects are using the Internet and social networking.

Latinos Diferentes (D) located in New York City, NY uses many social networking and media sites to get the word out about their project. They use a lot of social media strategies to promote events and create new norms around HIV testing and safer sex, and have been very successful in creating a consistent, on-going publicity campaign.

- Facebook Fan Page: http://on.fb.me/qUJ3we. They have 1648 ‘fans’ as of 10.20.2011, which is one of the largest Fan Pages of any MP.
- Blog spot: http://www.latinosdiferentes.blogspot.com
- Host the First of any MP (Latino or otherwise) podcast: http://twitter.com/#!/Mpowermentaids. They have 161 followers.
- Latinos D videos are featured on a youtube account: http://www.youtube.com/user/hugoovejero#g/a
- Survey monkey for input and voting (such as for the Mr. Latinos D contest): http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FGXSCH3
- Weekly /bi-weekly e-mail updates feature photos and links to all of the above.

Somos OC is an agency located in Orange County, California and uses the following social media methods.

- Their Fan Page has 209 ‘fans’: http://on.fb.me/p8k1KQ
- Their website is interactive: http://www.somosoc.org/

Latinos Salud has an MP program for young men called Somos. It is located
There is enormous diversity among YLMSM living in the U.S. This diversity encompasses socioeconomic status, recent immigrant or born and/or raised in the U.S., degree of acculturation and integration into U.S. society and culture, legal status and possibilities to find employment, educational level, level of bilingualism and language skills in English and/or Spanish (when participant’s mother tongue is not Spanish but an Indian language, such as Maya), country of origin, and level of outness as gay and integration into the local gay and/or Latino community. Participants in a focus group identified different groups of gay Latinos according to whether they had been born and raised in the U.S. or had arrived in the U.S. when older, had grown up in an urban or rural environment, had legal documents to live in the U.S., and their language and/or level of bilingualism.

YLMSM may self identify differently, whether they think of themselves mainly as Latino, Chicano, or from their country of origin, as well as how they identify in terms of sexual orientation, or in some cases gender, such as transwomen, or men who are along a continuum to become transgender. In some cases, YLMSM may identify as white, or of mixed race when someone is black and Latino. Men who come from either an urban or more rural location, whether in the U.S. or in their countries of origin, may have a different history of exposure to and association with gay communities, and more or less ease being part of a gay group.

For YLMSM, being Latino and gay may be like being a minority within a minority. A focus group participant stated that is hard to fit in both the Latino and the gay communities. A participant in a different focus group explained that it is difficult to have different identities at the same time. He added that, “being Mexican American you have to show that you are even more American than the Americans, more Mexican than the Mexicans and being gay it is another challenge because you have to also probe that you know who you are, or that you are not less...” And he added, “Estamos pisando tierra estadounidense pero el corazón es mexicano y la sexualidad es gay.” (We are on American soil but your heart is in Mexico and your sexuality is gay). Having a Spanish accent when speaking English was repeatedly mentioned both by MP participants and staff as a marker of difference, and even stigma, either because YLMSM’s own perceptions or because the U.S. population in general, including U.S born gay men, may also perceive them as different and even less-educated simply because of having an accent. As a staff we interviewed said, “My mind does not have an accent, my speech does. “

There also are significant differences regarding the target audience
of YLMSM among different MP projects. Some projects target recent immigrants, or cross-border migrants, and reach mostly Spanish-speaking individuals from Mexico and/or Central America. Other projects in Southern California, Chicago, Denver, and New York targeted a mix of men from different backgrounds and nationalities, including men from Mexico and Central America but also from South America and the Caribbean and born in the U.S., with different levels of acculturation into the mainstream U.S. society. Staff from an MP project in Puerto Rico commented that Puerto Ricans do not think of themselves as Latinos but as Puerto Ricans and the issue of being documented or undocumented does not apply to them since the island is a U.S. territory. Diversity issues arise though in terms of differences between Puerto Ricans brought up in the island or in the U.S., together with language proficiency in either Spanish or English and cultural differences between being raised in the continental U.S. or in the island.

In general, the target audiences of these projects reflected the composition of the local urban populations of YLMSM of lower and medium low socioeconomic strata. In some cases, the projects, as in Florida, included Brazilians, who spoke Portuguese were “brought into the fold.” YLMSM’s age as an inclusion criteria also varied somewhat among the different projects. The different names of MPs exclusively for YLMSM across the country include, among others: Somos, Empodérate, Euforia, Unidad, Latinos D, Somos Latinos, UNO.

It is essential to consider the diversity of YLMSM that may participate in MP and consider how that diversity is manifested into the core elements and in the implementation of MP. The diversity of YLMSM participating in MPs may present different challenges to MP implementation. These challenges relate to how to make the intervention appropriate to different subgroups
of YLMSM, including all socioeconomic backgrounds, language, and level of acculturation to the U.S. Some of the biggest issues to attend to while implementing MP relate to socioeconomic background/class issues: some men will come from middle class backgrounds and others will be from lower income backgrounds. An MP participant in a focus group stated that social class issues may get expressed by, “Yes, I’m wearing a name brand and you’re not,” while staff commented that YLMSM may associate the class difference with whether they can speak English or are documented. Young men from different SES backgrounds may be unwilling or disinterested in socializing together, and different types of activities may appeal to the different men.

A similar challenge may arise when activities need to be designed and implemented simultaneously for YLMSM who are recent immigrants and monolingual in Spanish or are English monolingual and second or third generation Latino in the U.S., and thus much more acculturated to U.S. society. Recent immigrants have particular needs and may be interested in certain activities while acculturated Latinos who are U.S. citizens and more immersed in mainstream society and gay culture may have other interests or needs.

Yet another challenge is that the composition of MP participants may change over time, so that MP needs to adapt to the evolving needs of the participants. One of the guiding principles of MP is diffusion of the messages. In order for the intervention to adhere to that principle, MP needs to reach out to different sectors of YLMSM. A continual awareness of reaching and including YLMSM who are very diverse should be emphasized and continually evaluated. Ongoing process evaluation, conducted by the Coordinators and Core Group, may help to examine these issues and assess what is working or what needs to be improved.

Staff at one of the projects tried to reframe diversity and differences among the participants under the concept that YLMSM are a minority within a minority and the need for YLMSM to come together with one collective identity in order to take care of their health and community. It was very important that different groups of YLMSM and countries of origin were represented in MP for project staff and participants in a large metropolitan city with a very diverse population of YLMSM. Because of that, the Core Group had members from 12 different countries. For social events, the project tries to represent the different countries in different ways. They also try to represent different subgroups of YLMSM in their publicity campaigns. Staff at that same project explained that because it is a large metropolitan area, YLMSM have the expectation that they are going to meet people from other countries, which the project uses to its advantage to show and promote diversity and teach participants to respect that diversity.

BOCE members expressed the need not to just understand cultural diversity but to be crafty in order to incorporate those cultural elements into MP by showcasing different kinds of regional food dishes for instance and asking participants to research the cultural significance of a particular dish. Similarly, project staff emphasized the importance of teaching participants the context, significance and meaning of a cultural event. For example, even within Mexico, Día de Los Muertos may be an important date for someone from Oaxaca in the South, but not for someone from Northern Mexico.
Because of that, the project tried to engage participants and illustrate *Día de Los Muertos* through the work of painters such as Frida Khalo and Diego Rivera who have dealt in their work with the cultural significance of that date.

Diversity among YLMSM part of the MP projects also relates to different kinds of identities. Depending on the type of community, geographical area, type of social environment and the issues they have to deal with, YLMSM may be more identified as Latino or as gay. For instance, CBO staff explained that in Los Angeles YLMSM may be more acculturated and have more of gay identity while in San Diego, because it is a border town, many men are monolingual Spanish speakers and cling more to their roots and Latino identity.

Diversity also needs to include a range of sexual diversity and expression. For instance, CBO staff stated that some of their participants are very open about how they talk about sex, while other men are not used to candor and openness when discussing what they do or like to do sexually.

Attracting diversity of participants often times requires having some rules in order to celebrate that diversity, respect each other independently from their background, social class and legal status, and avoid cliques, bullying or judgment among the participants.

CBO staff also thought that it is very important for funders and project officers to understand the diversity among the Latino community in general and YLMSM in particular.

**Unmet Needs**

A diversity of participants in the MP also entails different unmet needs and factors that influence their HIV risk. Taking into account that HIV as an issue may not be a top priority for YLMSM, staff pointed out that other pressing needs, such as housing or substance abuse, need to be attended to first. Addressing those needs, in fact, becomes part of HIV prevention. Project staff emphasized the importance of having clear goals for the project and considering the myriad needs of YLMSM and what the staff and the project are able to do to address those needs.

It is important, however, to recognize that the intervention is meant to be tailored by the young men themselves, according their own and the community needs. Thus, the ways that different issues are addressed will ultimately be decided by the men themselves, although the project staff needs to encourage a focus on particular issues relevant for HIV prevention and the needs of YLMSM. In addition, as mentioned by CBO project staff, it is important, as part of the process of empowerment that the program needs to foster at all times, to utilize the resiliency the men have used in order to survive and help them recognize the strengths that many of them already have. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that many of the participants will come to the project with a wide range of issues and likely to need support beyond the scope of the MP (e.g., job training, temporary housing, mental health counseling). In those cases, the projects need to be ready to provide referrals or facilitate linkages to other services, whether within the same agency or outside. The challenge, however, may be that in
some locations those resources may not exist, particularly for monolingual Spanish speakers.

The BOCE referred to the difficult task of trying to address YLMSM’ needs while addressing issues the men may have never discussed before and/or trying to change some of the social norms related to what the men consider normal, at the same time giving the message to be safe and protect themselves and their sex partners from HIV. YLMSM, for instance, may not have talked before about domestic violence or even HIV prevention previously if they come from a culture where HIV/AIDS and prevention is not discussed. Similarly, they may consider certain practices, such as dressing up and going out drinking alcohol, completely normal. Staff referred to their Coordinator having to be like a triage nurse, “to deal with so many issues...immigration, language, the individuals that you hire have got to be able to use the resources available out there...to find good referral agencies...there are so many people at different levels of coming out too...you have to acknowledge all these levels that exist in the community...”

Across focus groups, MP participants mentioned many different issues as their motivation to participate in MP, including having fun, meeting new friends, socializing with people with whom they felt identified and in “confianza,” finding support from the staff, listening to and being listened to by other participants, doing something healthy, learning information and how to protect themselves from HIV, how to respond when their family has erroneous information, and helping friends understand their risk and support them to use a condom. In addition, for participants MP functioned as a physical, emotional and mental space in which to grow, get help, be oneself, be comfortable, “say or shout what you think or need,” go to when “you have nothing to do or need somewhere to go,” “get condoms without feeling ashamed,” “desahogarse” (find relief, feel better, at ease), and think about something else besides the daily problems.

Participants in a focus group mentioned that MP group activities helped them through discussions, sharing, and games, not only to grow and better develop as persons, but also to be more educated and to “tener más conciencia” (be more aware) about HIV issues. One of those participants related the need of YLMSM for more education to realize the value of their own life, “so they are aware of the value of their life and how they can become infected just with one drop of semen. So, if they have 3 beers in themselves they will be able to be aware of risks and still make good decisions regardless of how horny they are.”

Our findings suggest that recent YLMSM immigrants, undocumented and monolingual Spanish speaking YLMSM may have more unmet needs than more established or acculturated YLMSM who were born in the U.S., and are second or third generation Latinos in the U.S. The needs of recent immigrants, for example, may be very tangible and immediate and focused on survival or making a living. Recent immigrants may feel displaced or marginalized because of the language, not having documents to work legally in the U.S., being gay, and not knowing or not having services easily available in Spanish. In the absence of other culturally appropriate and specific HIV prevention programs, the more unmet needs among YLMSM call for an MP...
specifically targeting them. The needs of the more acculturated YLMSM (in terms of speaking English, having been born in the U.S., being part of mainstream white gay culture, and accessing services) may not be very different from the needs of European-American participants and thus more easily met by a more generic MP. Regarding this point, CBO project staff discussed that at the beginning of their MP implementation they tried to target both recent immigrants and acculturated Latinos, that is, the “YLMSM who listen to Thalia and the ones who listen to Britney Spears.” As time went by, he added, only the Spanish speakers remained in the MP because the more acculturated ones have more options and resources available to them. CBO project staff, however, commented that some of the “chicos” (guys), particularly the younger ones, do speak English and were born in the U.S., but that, except for immigration issues, their needs are similar to the ones of recent immigrants, because they may still be in the closet about their sexuality with their families.

**Different Ways that MP Projects have Addressed Unmet Needs of YLMSM**

The MP’s core elements and guiding principles are designed to embed HIV prevention within activities that meet participants’ other needs. The multi-level design of the intervention was developed to encourage each program to identify and tackle relevant issues in the lives of the participants and draw them and their peers into shared ownership of the project. Following the model’s approach, CBOs can identify their target population’s most salient needs and implement the project in a way to address them along with HIV prevention. The majority of projects reported targeting predominantly YLMSM who are socially and economically unprivileged, although even those from privileged families may struggle with different issues such as self-acceptance of their sexuality and/or gender identities, coming out, and homophobia and stigma. Addressing unmet needs of YLMSM also has meant that some projects are imbued with social justice principles. The following include how different MP projects have addressed YLMSM’ specific needs.

**Social and economic circumstances as determinants of risk**

Unlike most participants in the original MP research, YLMSM, similar to other gay men of color, are not only affected by disproportionately high HIV seroprevalence rates but also confront socioeconomic disparities and social exclusion. Socioeconomic disparities include: high rates of functional illiteracy, low educational attainment, unemployment or under-employment, unstable housing or homelessness, lack of economic resources, barriers to access to healthcare, personal or familial substance abuse, violence, unstable family lives, a dearth of trustworthy relationships with adults, social isolation, low self-esteem, and other mental-health problems, as well as legal problems, including lack of documents to be in the U.S., and incarceration. At projects working with recent immigrants these problems were reported as being compounded by language barriers and legal problems pertaining to their status vis-à-vis the U.S. government, as well as by extra financial responsibilities to provide for their families. Project staff, for example, reported that participants bring letters or voice mails in English they do not understand for the staff to translate for them.
Overall, projects developed specific life-skills curricula; offered formal and informal classes or tutoring on topics such as independent living, basic hygiene, respect for others, résumé writing and budgeting, and in a few cases provided counseling. Some projects offered organized job training and job placement programs, access to computers to assist with job searches, and bulletin boards with job postings. When the project itself did not have the expertise about an issue, the project would bring in outside speakers, sometimes CAB members, to help teach participants new skills. Other projects strove to help MP participants develop marketable skills via their participation in implementing project activities (e.g., graphic design, group facilitation, computer use, DJ skills, budgeting, community organizing) that they can use to enhance their résumés and assist them with their job searches. It is important to mention that both CBO staff and participants perceived that with the MP they were developing the next generation of community leaders. In at least a couple of CBOs, staff explicitly stated that MP helped prepare YLMSM to be able to better function within the mainstream society or even to foster their acculturation process into U.S. society. Project staff working with recent immigrants reported social and economic circumstances as being compounded by language barriers and legal problems pertaining to YLMSM status vis-à-vis the U.S. government, as well as by extra financial responsibilities to provide for their families. Project staff in one city reported that, because they are in the U.S. and even if the YLMSM are poor themselves and undocumented, they may be expected to send money to their families abroad.

Lack of access to stable housing is a challenge to many low SES young adults, especially after they turn 18 years of age, and can cause young people to be more vulnerable to HIV. Some project staff reported that several of their participants are marginally housed, “bed or couch-surf” (i.e., spend a few nights as temporary guests of a friend or acquaintance before moving on to the next friend), and occasionally end up homeless and living on the streets or resort to sex work to spend the night with their customers. Shelters are very seldom designed to accommodate young gay/bisexual men or young transwomen, and youth often avoid them because of homophobia, transphobia, and violence.

Homophobia and transphobia

Both staff and MP participants mentioned that, in this era of globalization in which social norms are changing everywhere, including the U.S. and Latin America, MSM are breaking barriers, compared to older generations of MSM who had to be more fearful of being killed or sent to jail because of their sexuality. An MP participant expressed this by saying that one the one hand, the new generation, “les vale la mera madre” (they just do not care), and they go everywhere they like and they know their rights, while on the other hand they are becoming a little dull because of sex, alcohol and drugs. Another participant in the same focus group, however, added that someone first needs to accept himself and accept others and that YLMSM create their own barriers before others do, because they have low self-esteem, do not respect themselves, may be afraid, or because of their own “verguenza” (shame).
Project staff reported that some participants faced social isolation and mental-health problems because of stigma and homophobia, including HIV stigma even among the men themselves. Social isolation and low self-esteem, resulting from homophobia and heterosexism, are among the issues that the MP model is designed to address. Consistent with the MP model, a goal of all projects was to help participants embrace their sexuality and sexual identity and develop skills to cope with the anti-gay stigma, homophobia, and transphobia to which they are exposed. Hence, mobilizing YLMSM to counter these insidious forces was a frequent goal of all projects. These activities included: discussion groups about these topics; organization of civil action and protests against anti-gay initiatives; marching in LGBT Pride parades as an MP contingent; and working with transgender youth to organize events which allowed them to present themselves in public accordance with their gender identity.

Project staff were often role models for participants of how to live life openly as gay men or transwomen. By setting an example, the staff showed participants a healthy identity, helped accept themselves, and become visible members of both the LGBT community and the Latino community. In this respect, staff and participants alike expressed discontent with the label “men who have sex with men” (MSM), which they perceived as reducing them to sexual behaviors, ignoring their sexual identities and making them invisible as gay men within their own communities.

Throughout their involvement in MP, participants reported increased comfort about their sexual orientation and, if they were not out prior to becoming involved, association with the project often gave them the courage and resources to develop self-acceptance of their sexuality and gender. Many MP participants interviewed identified the social and emotional support received by the staff and other participants, physically expressed in the safety of the Project Space, as essential in helping them become comfortable in their
skin, express their gender identities and sexual orientation openly, and feel embraced instead of rejected. In the words of many participants, “the MP is like home or family.”

### Racism

To help participants cope with racism and discrimination, which can be expressed from outside the individuals but, like homophobia, can also be internalized, most projects fostered their participants’ pride in both their sexual and racial/ethnic identities. Staff at a couple of sites talked about their efforts to help participants embrace and express pride in both their gay/transgender and their ethnic identities. This may be a very apt strategy, given the psychosocial conflict that the target populations may often experience between those identities. Project Spaces were decorated with images of gay and transgender Latino/a and people of color, and with combined symbols of racial/ethnic and gay/transgender significance.

Projects strived to provide participants with exposure to and knowledge of role models who were both gay/transgender and Latinos by showing films by and documentaries about artists, activists, and intellectuals who shared their sexual and racial/ethnic identities, reading books written by gay men of color, or inviting accomplished adults from the local communities talk about their lives as out Latino gay men. Group attendance as MP participants to cultural-heritage events was encouraged (e.g., Cinco de Mayo celebrations), participants were encouraged to create art or written works about their cultural and/or sexual/gender backgrounds, and field trips or outings were organized for participants as a group of out gay/trans youth to attend cultural events or visit public sites and help them gain confidence to be out as individuals of both identities.

A focus group participant in San Diego observed that gay bars are divided and men may only be involved with men of other races sexually but not socially. He observed that “the clubs in Hillcrest do not have a sign that says no Guatemalans or Mexicans, but we just assume that or go to other bars because [they play] different music, etc.” And he added that “…we also discriminate ourselves because we do not open up to the variety of cultures, we limit ourselves not to learn what is outside just thinking that this a group of “gueritos”, but instead of doing that we could be opening doors....in order to feel freer and break barriers and open doors not just for yourself but for others.” Another participant in the same group in San Diego thought that Latinos need to present themselves as a community that is prepared and educated to counteract the assumption from some European-Americans who perceive Latinos to be less intelligent or educated because of language differences or by being undocumented.

### HIV Stigma

HIV stigma is still prevalent in society overall, and CBO project staff reported that it may be even more problematic in the Latino community. Staff at some sites reported high HIV seroprevalence among the participants in their programs who were not open about their HIV status.
Even though many of the project participants reported having first-hand knowledge of HIV, they also stated that most of their friends were not open about disclosing their HIV-positive status. A participant in a focus group in Denver thought that, “Culturally we are finger pointers and discriminatory, and being HIV-positive is shameful.” Project staff observed that only a handful of HIV-positive participants felt comfortable enough to disclose their serostatus to other participants. At one of the CBOS, one of the implementation staff was very open about being HIV-positive and that helped provide a role model for some of the participants who sought his advice or talked to him about being HIV-positive.

Projects attempted to address HIV stigma in different ways. Some projects tackled HIV stigma by addressing topics of importance to men who were potentially HIV-positive members, such as disclosure during their regular group discussions. Most projects address HIV stigma as it affects HIV-positive individuals in their program, by providing individual counseling and specific support programs for them, which were generally offered at the implementing agency. In more than one case, HIV-positive staff attempt to be role models for program participants, as well as outspoken advocates for people living with HIV/AIDS. They not only spoke about being HIV-positive within the context of the project but also in the community at large, in television and radio interviews, at national conferences, and at other very public events.

**Substance Use**

Substance use (especially alcohol) was reported at many MPs as being ubiquitous and considered part of the Latino culture. Focus group participants in Denver reported that guys want to be in a fun environment and alcohol is considered a booster to that. Even participants who were not personally engaged in substance abuse frequently had close friends and family members suffering the negative consequences of substance abuse in their lives. An MP participant in San Diego stated that MP was the only place to socialize as a gay Latino man without the context of alcohol. Projects adopted different approaches to deal with substance use and abuse. All projects had prohibitions against any substance use in the Project Space. Some projects referred participants who needed help with their substance abuse to external programs, and others had group discussions that included a focus on substance abuse.

**Lack of Adult Role Models**

Project participants frequently lacked healthy role models in their lives. Many grew up without knowing any out Latino gay or transgender adults. In fact, CBO project staff occasionally reported that few project participants had any positive and caring relationships with any adults in their lives at all. Staff responded to this situation by becoming role models for the participants, even though this goes above and beyond the duties outlined in their job descriptions. Dedicated project staff, as well as other staff members at the agencies, often became “aunts,” “uncles,” or “older brothers or sisters” to the participants. They also reported that they perceived the staff of the MP and other adults at the agency as family because they provided the participants with acceptance, respect, and love.
Social isolation among YLMSM is an issue on which the intervention focuses. Overall, the different projects appeared to be able to address social isolation with the model’s tools: community building and social events, Core Groups, M-groups, and a variety of discussion groups. Participants in one project mentioned that they had no other gay Latino friends before getting involved in the project, and participants in some projects reported that they had come to view the projects as their family. A concern reported by both staff and participants was where the participants would turn to for social support once they age out of the MP.

Self-esteem

Project staff and MP participants reported that the lack of condom use among YLMSM was because of having low self-esteem, and therefore not caring enough about themselves to negotiate condom use or to see the importance of using condoms to protect themselves and their health. They also reported that many YLMSM stop using condoms after being in a relationship for more than two months because they feel they are in love and can trust their partners, they are in abusive relationships involving violence, they have sex in the context of alcohol or drugs, or they may get paid more for not using condoms when having sex in exchange for money or transactional sex.

All projects reported that they discussed issues related to self-esteem in general and more specifically related to sexual health, protected sex and condom negotiation during project meetings, and/or during individual or group counseling sessions.

Participants in one project noted that they were “moved” that the agency reserved, furnished, and decorated a room just for them. This recognition boosted their feelings of self-worth, and they felt good that the agency really listened to what they wanted and felt respected by the high quality furnishings, computer(s), sofas, and entertainment system that were provided to them.

Relationships

A critical issue for YLMSM is the desire to date and to form and maintain intimate relationships. CBO staff reported that some YLMSM, “los bonitos” (the pretty ones), were commonly involved in relationships with “sugar daddies,” for the most part older white men, sometimes double their age, who may be married to a woman, and whose lives made them emotionally unavailable to the YLMSM. Sexual violence and substance use may be part of those relationships. This was significant among recent, Spanish-speaking immigrants, young men whose financial straits led them to rely on transactional sex or sex work for sustenance, and young transwomen who could not find a job. Project staff at a few sites stated that the project tried to prepare YLMSM to take care of themselves instead of depending financially on their sugar daddies. Project staff in Washington, D.C. pointed out that when domestic violence occurs there is less likelihood of using condoms if the partner does not want to use them or will question why they need to use condoms. Project staff in Washington, D.C. emphasized that participants need to learn what to look for in a relationship and to recognize whether a relationship may be healthy or abusive. The projects...
strived to address relationship issues by providing group discussions and forums on these issues.

**Community Mobilization for HIV and Non-HIV/AIDS Issues**

MP is a community mobilization project, as it seeks to mobilize men to reduce their sexual risk behavior and increase their HIV testing, and help their friends to do so as well. In different areas of the country, the MP projects have participated in other advocacy activities and events as well. Examples of those are the National Latino AIDS Awareness Month, Latino events such as a Cesar Chavez march, rallies against HIV related budget cuts, and LGBT parades. In some cases, project staff were also actively involved in coalitions for the homeless and LGBT, or lobbied for culturally appropriate services for YLMSM, such as working on campaigns against domestic violence, trying to form a Spanish-speaking chapter of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gay People), or developing STI and substance reduction services that are gay Latino friendly and in Spanish.

**Immigration**

Men who are not documented to live legally in the U.S. may feel a need to be invisible and not to bring attention to themselves for fear of being found by “la migra” (immigration services) and detained or deported. Staff at projects targeting recent immigrants felt that it was imperative to assist participants in tackling immigration concerns. Staff reported that these concerns could negatively affect participants’ health by creating a barrier to seeking prevention and health services, such as fear of getting tested for HIV, going to the Emergency Room at a hospital, and having health insurance, as well as being problematic for the program because they adversely affected participant retention in the program. These projects address these issues through educating participants about immigration issues, as well as providing referrals to appropriate community legal resources, interpretation services, and support to participants going through the immigration and asylum process. The staff reported that addressing these critical issues in participants’ lives increased individuals’ desire to be involved in the program.

**Spirituality and Religion**

Different from what we have found for black participants in the MP, YLMSM participants themselves rarely mentioned their spiritual or religious needs during the site visits, with participants in a focus group in Denver stating that spirituality is not at the forefront of what is important to their community. They felt that it was a private and personal belief, and it was best to stay away from it because it could end up alienating participants. One focus group participant said that, “you can end up insulting someone. If you have Jesus you need to have Buddha.” Another participant added, “I don’t want to see the Virgin Mary after I see her at home.” This may reflect what was expressed by a BOCE member when he said that YLMSM may say they are Catholic but they do not go to church. Similarly, project staff in San Diego mentioned for example that on Ash Wednesday no one showed up to the group because they had
to go to mass but as a family or cultural situation, because it is “costumbre” (the custom) or because they had to go with their mother, rather than from their own religious conviction. Project staff, however, explicitly discussed the subject to relate how YLMSM may be affected by sociocultural contexts and religious institutions that often stigmatize homosexuality, homophobic religious beliefs regarding homosexuality, and lack of acceptance or explicit rejection within their families. This led to concomitant isolation from vital support systems, as well as internalized shame and guilt for being attracted to men. In some cases, it was the agency’s leadership that reported the difficulties of operating a gay-supportive project in religiously conservative communities.

Programs developed several mechanisms for participants to integrate religion and spirituality into the projects, while helping them heal from stigmatizing treatment they had experienced from faith-based organizations. These included organizing discussion groups on these issues (sometimes facilitated by gay-friendly spiritual leaders); incorporating religious icons and traditional art into the project space; and helping transgender project members produce a traditional women’s dance for the entire agency in memory of those lost to HIV/AIDS on World AIDS Day.

**Transgender Youth**

It is anticipated that MP implementations will reach at least some individuals whose gender identity is not clear-cut according to a binary model. There are also youth who are truly experimenting with expressing a transgender identity, or who are already on a transitioning path. Such trans-identified youth face prejudice and transphobia, not just in the society at large, but even within the gay community.

A critical barrier to adapting the MP for young Latina transwomen who are sexually attracted to men is that the original model leverages the desires of young gay men to socialize with other young men they may potentially date and/or with whom they can form supportive friendships. This implicit motive is often leveraged in the MP’s Publicity that uses sexy images of men to appeal to the target population, or images that show young gay men socializing together. In contrast, young transwomen are frequently neither romantically nor erotically attracted to each other, and thus they are not drawn to the social aspect of the project part of the original model. A project that targets both young gay men and transwomen has to come up with new ways to appeal to the two groups, such as generating social support from each other by sharing common experiences or by sharing advice about various issues that are important to them (e.g., discussing beauty and fashion tips such as one might find in mainstream publications for female teenagers or women). Another barrier to implementation of the MP for these target populations is that transgender youth are often not part of existing social networks of peers. This makes it difficult to actualize some of the model’s theoretical underpinnings, such as Diffusion of Innovations, or to implement the core element of Informal Outreach. The lack of established social networks and social venues also makes it challenging to identify places where to conduct Formal Outreach.

In considering how to address these issues, the project staff above indicated that they wished they could have included participants older than 24
years of age, since older transwomen are more likely to have formed social networks and attend community venues by this age. At that site, pre-existing programs at the implementing agency for older transwomen were actively involved in informing the adaptation. However, the exclusion of older participants from a previous MP adaptation generated some resentment in an already underserved community. That project was implementing the MP for both transgender and gay youth. Even though they initially tried to run separate implementations for each group, they ultimately decided to merge most of the activities at the request of the participants. Reportedly, young gay men and transwomen became each other’s allies, supporting each other’s recruitment efforts and organization of social events. Transgender participants at this MP reported that the opportunity of socializing and running the project with young gay men enabled them to gain confidence to embrace their identities as transwomen and to become comfortable relating to men as women. Before participating in the MP, they were only presenting as women when going out to clubs or performing in drag, but the chance to do so regularly within the context of the MP activities with gay men gave them strength to express their trans identities comfortably, even in public. However, we also observed friction between gay men and transwomen who were part of the same focus group. This seemed to be related to whether the project targeted, gave preference to, or provided more services to gay men or transwomen. Transwomen accused gay men of “tirar veneno,” (scatter poison) while the latter accused transwomen of not relating well to others and not knowing their place as “señoritas,” insinuating that because they enjoy wearing a skirt they also needed to act submissively.

To make transwomen more comfortable in the project, transwomen had a dedicated room just for themselves within the larger project space. Staff pointed out the need to provide a safe space for some of the individuals who are transitioning, and to ask what pronoun they preferred to be used in addressing them. Staff also stressed the need for other participants to accept people who are transitioning instead of criticizing them. Similarly, there also needs to be accepting of those who decide not to transition but just want to wear make up, long hair, and feminine clothing. They can experiment with self-presentation, without feeling pressure from other participants that they need to take hormones or go forward with bodily modification and transitioning. When needed, the staff tried to help participants with getting I.D.s that reflected their female names, and referred them to a clinic to access hormone use, instead of the transgender youth purchasing hormones on the street.

**HIV Testing** With the CDC’s emphasis on HIV testing, and considering that YLMSM may not get tested for HIV or test late, many MPs provide testing with the intervention. Not testing or delaying testing may be related to HIV stigma or thinking that if they are HIV-positive they would not be able to seek health care if they are undocumented or have a green card. Importantly, the MP methods (Informal Outreach, Formal Outreach) should be used to promote frequent HIV testing. CBOs need to assess where YLMSM
will feel comfortable getting tested for HIV, whether at the same project space, or through referrals within or outside the agency. On the one hand, YLMSM may prefer to get tested at other places because of concerns about confidentiality issues, stigma and gossip. On the other hand, they may prefer getting tested at the same space or CBO because of trust and rapport with the project staff.

**HIV-Positive YLMSM**

The U.S. National HIV/AIDS Strategy is promoting particular attention on HIV-positive people, including Prevention with Positives, linkage and maintenance of care, and support for adherence to treatment. Some of these issues can be addressed through application of MP methods, whereas some specific needs of HIV-positive YLMSM may merit some separate activities for them, particularly if some or many of them do not feel comfortable publicly disclosing their HIV status to other participants in the project.

**Implementation Issues**

One of the projects is implementing a support group for HIV-positive men separate from other MP activities, which is only open to HIV-positive men. For privacy reasons, and since most YLMSM are not open about their HIV status, the group meets at a location other than the project space.

**Recommendations from CAPS**

With respect to sexual risk reduction among HIV-positive men, it is important that safer sex materials are framed as reducing sexual risk behavior regardless of one’s HIV status by “protecting yourself and protecting your brothers and your community.” In addition, some materials (and posters hung in the project space) can promote sexual risk reduction specifically for HIV-positive men. It should also be clear when promoting Informal Outreach that men are reminded to talk to their friends about sexual risk reduction regardless of their friends’ HIV status.

Often young men disclose their positive status to CBO project staff. When this occurs, the staff should, in addition to providing support to the men about their emotional issues regarding being HIV-positive, assess if the
individuals are linked into care and receiving treatment. If the CBO already provides treatment, then the young men should be referred to that part of the organization. If the CBO does not provide treatment, it is important to make referrals to other organizations that do. Importantly, however, the staff member should stay actively involved until that linkage is complete. In other words, it is not adequate simply to give the HIV-positive participant the name of an organization, but instead it is necessary to be involved in assuring that the young man actually get to the treatment facility. Then over time, the young men should be provided support to remain linked in treatment, which may involve the staff periodically inquiring how it is going to be obtaining treatment. At that time, the staff can also ask the young man how it is going in taking his medications, and if he is able to take them every day in the way that it is prescribed for him, and if not, remind him of the importance of regularly taking his medications and refer him back to the clinic. Again, Informal Outreach and the Project Space can be used to promote taking medications regularly.

This ties into previous recommendations that were made about developing good referrals. It is especially important to identify clinics that will provide culturally sensitive services for YLMSM, and that have good reputations in the community for addressing Latinos in general, and specifically men who are undocumented.

If it seems possible to develop groups specifically for HIV-positive individuals, which require a sufficient number of men being willing to let others know that they are positive, discussions can focus on a variety of topics, including:

- Coping with and normalizing and living with HIV
- Health issues and health management
- Getting into treatment and treatment adherence
- HIV/AIDS stigma & marginalization
- Prevention with positives, including safer sex and STI prevention for themselves and their partners, and relationship to being in treatment to reduce viral loads and infectiousness
- Emotional support from HIV-positive peers.

It is also possible to address some of these issues in periodic community forums. When the issues are discussed in a small group of HIV-positive men, confidentiality needs to be taken into account. This includes considering whether meeting somewhere else besides the community space or in hours when the space is not open to other participants would be important.
Overall Presentation of the Project

There are overarching themes and issues that need to be incorporated into MP to increase its relevance for YLMSM. Integrating cultural themes and values, considering social issues, and paying attention to the identity and diversity of YLMSM and their multiple needs will help to better position and ensure the acceptability and the efficacy of MP. The content of the activities and the presentation approaches of MP need to integrate and reflect Latino cultural values. Those values also need to imbue the relationships not only between project staff and participants but also among participants. A BOCE member summarized the key concepts to be imbued in MP to include “respeto, cariño y calidez, atención y cuidado, bienvenida, and confianza” (respect, affection and warmth, care, welcoming, and trust).

A focus group participant reflected on the importance of trust and the cultural relevancy of the project:

“Being in a place where you can feel that “confianza” and something you identify with, without being in a place where culture is different and no one is trying to impose their culture on you. The importance of culture and language. Because of Día de los Muertos, Día de las Madres, Mexican Independence Day, you feel at home, “como en casa.” If not the same language, or culture you do not feel that confianza.”

Some of those values have been associated with “familism” or the significance of the family, “simpatia” or the context in which social interactions are smooth and positive, “personalismo” or the preference for relationships with members of the same ethnic group, “confianza” or the presence of a trusting bond with other people, and “respeto” [24, 25, 26]

Other issues to consider in order to develop a culturally appropriate intervention include an understanding that the beliefs and perceptions about health, illness and their causes as well as health seeking behaviors are influenced by culture [27, 28]

**Concept of Latinidad**

Those values can be considered under the concept of Latinidad. The social construct of Latinidad can be defined as a shared or common identity that represents people whose origin are the Spanish-speaking countries of Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. While Latinos from different countries are diverse, that shared identity is expressed through a sense of belonging and place, as well as solidarity and reciprocity ties in social relationships, with Spanish as the
native language of origin. The concept of *Latinidad* is mainly defined in the context of Latinos in the U.S. being a minority sharing historical, political, and cultural processes, united by race and language, and facing particular challenges such as stigma, racism, and immigration-related issues. A project staff referred to how once someone crosses the border, “we are lumped into this group called Latino...whether we like it or not...” The concept of *Latinidad* has been greatly influenced by the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements in the U.S. [29, 30, 31].

Activities and events that integrate and embrace Latino cultural values need to be considered, such as organizing events for *Día de los Muertos, Posadas, Día de Reyes*, including “Rosca the Reyes” (Three Wise Men’s/Epiphany, including the traditional bundt cake eaten that day), *Fiesta de la Candelaria*, and Twelve Candles. Some of these celebrations, while originally having a religious connotation, may not signify that now for participants but still maintain the cultural relevance of the celebrations. This may have a particular significance for YLMSM who are estranged from their families or do not have family in the country or in the area but still associate that date with family activities, so having the MP celebrate that date may be important to them. In addition, projects need to consider organizing activities for other festivities celebrated in the U.S. such as Christmas and Thanksgiving, as well as activities related to being gay, such as Valentine’s Day or Gay Pride.

**The Intersection of Homosexuality, Identity and Ethnicity**

There is diversity among MSM in Latin America with respect to different sexual identities and social and sexual roles. A number of authors have observed and described a dichotomy in the way male homosexuality is organized in other Latin American countries: MSM who have a gay identity and MSM with a more traditional and heteronormative view of homosexuality, including Prieur in Mexico City [32], Maiale in Oaxaca, Mexico [33], Fernandez-Alemany and Murray in Honduras [34], Schifter and Pana in Costa Rica [35], Kulick in Brazil [36], Howe in Nicaragua [37], and Cáceres and Rosasco in Peru [38]. The first group is primarily comprised of urban, middle-class men who identify as gay, participate in gay communities, frequent gay spaces, and relate equally and share a social and sexual reciprocity with other gay men [39]. These men are likely to be sexually “versatile” (taking either the insertive or receptive role). They sometimes call themselves “modernos” in Peru, or “internacionales” in Mexico to reflect the idea that they are not following traditional gender or sexual roles in their relationships. This construction of homosexuality corresponds to a more globalized and growing conception of gay identity [33, 40, 41]. The second group of MSM views homosexuality according to a heteronormative perspective where homosexuality is associated with stereotypically feminine attitudes, behavior, and gender and sexual roles (submissive/receptive/“passive”) [42]. This more traditional (and perhaps shrinking) view of homosexuality may still be predominant among lower income MSM both in urban and rural areas throughout Latin America. These constructions of homosexuality correspond to what have been defined as a Mediterranean model of sexuality, which only identifies as homosexual the man who is the recipient of insertive sex, while in the
contemporary American or Western European model a homosexual man is anyone who has had homoerotic contact with another man, either insertive or receptive, while gay is anyone who has homoerotic desire, independently from sexual acts [43, 44]. Foster suggests that Latino MSM may feel compelled to live within both, somehow contradictory systems in the way they define heterosexual and homosexual behaviors and relations [45].

Different theories have tried to explain the development of a gay and lesbian identity, and the shift of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior from a dominant heterosexual culture to those of a minority gay and lesbian culture. Ethnic identity models also have tried to explain the processes and relationships between a dominant Anglo culture and minority ethnic cultures. However, research that examines the cross-section of ethnic and gay identities is limited. Morales [46] pointed out that Latino gay men live their lives as part of the gay community, the Latino community, and mainstream heterosexual and white community, and that all of these communities have different expectations. Those differences often force gay Latino men into conflict as they attempt to meet the pressures, expectations and challenges. For many Latino gay men, managing these differences may determine how they choose to self-identify and how they identify with each of their other respective identities.

Foster [45] observes that sexuality needs to be studied in the context of race, ethnicity and class. The concept of Queer Latinidad, although mainly defined and expressed through literature and art, attempts to offer insights and provide a view into the perspectives of gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer Latino/as and their life experiences at the confluence of race, ethnicity, and gender and sexual orientation. Rodriguez [47] defines queer Latinidad as localized in a time-space framework, in which the identities, history and desire of Latino/a LGBTQ express themselves through social and cultural and linguistic interactions, including specific aspects related to immigration laws, activism, and HIV prevention. Those lived expressions of Queer Latinidad help also construct, redefine, transform, and imagine the identities of Latino/a LGBTQ [48].
The Concept of “Familia” and the Importance of the Family in Latino Culture

A concept to take into account for MP implementation and adaptation for YLMSM is the importance of the family in Latino culture, with its related components of reciprocity, support, and respect, together with traditionally defined gender roles, machismo, and religiosity. While these are fluid, particularly because of changes both in Latin American societies in the last few decades and the process of acculturation affecting Latino families already established in the U.S., the importance of the family in Latino culture continues to have both positive and negative influences on YMLSL that should be kept when implementing the MP.

Considering the importance of the family for YLMSM is important both in terms of how families impact YLMSM and also for MP adaptation and implementation for YLMSM. At the individual level, the concept that families are important to YLMSM needs to be considered in terms of the families’ reaction to the YLMSM’s sexual orientation. Latino families’ acceptance, support, or rejection of YLMSM’s sexual orientation relates to YLMSM’s sexual silence, having to hide their sexual orientation, internalized homophobia, self-esteem, and even HIV risk. YLMSM who live with their families, may need to hide the fact they are gay from their relatives. They may need to do the same if renting or sharing a room with someone else. Even being away from their families may affect YLMSM emotionally and/or materially. For example, YLMSM who are recent immigrants may need to send money to help support their families in other countries. Project staff in Washington, D.C. pointed out that while these issues also impact other gay men, recent immigrant YLMSM may feel caged in, without support and resources and in a country they do not consider their own.

Family also relates to broader concepts part of Latino culture, the importance of extended family, home, warmth in social relationships, and trust or confianza to be integrated into the MPs. The project needs to consider the importance of family for activities that will be nurturing to participants and incorporate that concept of family in order for the project itself, and/or the staff and other MP participants to become family that one can trust and relate to, while the project space becomes a home, a familiar place of refuge where YLMSM can be themselves and express themselves.

The concept that families are important to YLMSM needs to be considered in terms of how the families’ acceptance or rejection of their sexual orientation may affect YLMSM, how being away from their families may affect them and their HIV risk. Another expression of the concept of family in a broad sense of the word include integrating the diversity of all YLMSM part of MP, and that every Latin American country that participants come from is represented and respected within the project. This was accomplished at some of the sites by having flags of the countries participants originally came from posted around the project space, and organizing events in which food and or music from a particular country was showcased.

The project also needs to consider the importance of family for activities that will be nurturing to participants and incorporate that concept of family in order for the project participants and staff to become family-like. There
is a strong cultural value that family will be there when support is needed, but family can be a mixed bag and may only be there for YLMSM as long as they remain silent about their sexuality. This can be a heavy price to pay for that support. Some families of origin are not supportive of their gay sons/brothers, or are ambivalent in their support. Given these cultural values, the intervention should be cast in a way that capitalizes on the importance of “relying on gay/bisexual friends or peers for support,” but focusing it on support for having safer sex and getting tested, and motivating participants to support friends and peers about sexual safety and testing. The impact of the family of origin could be a topic or the focus of discussions or a forum. For example, MP could have a panel discussion about different ways of dealing with families, coming out to relatives, etc. A related topic could be how, in the absence of support from their families of origin, YLMSM can create their own families, including MP.

Language

Language may be seen both as a barrier and a facilitator for implementation of MP. MPs need to assess the preferred language of communication of YLMSM in the area and whether the intervention will be implemented in Spanish or English or both languages.

Both staff and MP participants referred to a separation and lack of interaction in their communities between Spanish and English speaking YLMSM. In some cases those groups do not mix because of differences in language and other cultural differences, such as taste, the way they dress, the music they listen to, and so forth. Foster states that speaking Spanish, besides being their native language and the one they are fluent and comfortable communicating, may be used by some speakers to underline a representation of the world, to protect an identity against the acculturating and homogenizing effects of English, and to express a nostalgia for real or idealized roots. Knowing or being able to communicate and function in English may reflect levels of acculturation and easiness of functioning in mainstream U.S. society. For some Latinos, the interplay and switching between using both English and Spanish constitute an expression of two different worlds with which they are familiar [45].

The perception of staff and participants in several MPs was that YLMSM who are recent immigrants and do not speak English are more limited in their choices of places to go because they feel intimidated by English speakers, feel less important, do not feel that they belong, feel discriminated against, and may not understood others or are unable to communicate in those places. For example, some of those men only attend Latino gay bars whose ambiance is Latino, where only Latino rhythms and styles of music are played, and where many of the patrons speak Spanish. For men who are bilingual, where they go and whether they socialize with other Latino men depends on their level of acculturation. Some Latino gay men who only speak English may not go to places where only Spanish is spoken.

Participants in one of our focus group thought that while a challenge, MP could be a bridge which could facilitate communication between Spanish and English speaking Latino men where both could learn from each other. For them, MP could help close the gap between the groups and facilitate community building between Latino English and Spanish speakers.
References


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Download a PDF of Adaptation of MP for YLMSM, at
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