



**What We Do**  
Center for AIDS Prevention Studies

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## **Hermanos de Luna y Sol**

### **An Empowerment HIV Prevention Program for Spanish-Speaking Latino Gay/Bisexual Men**

Latino gay/bisexual men in the U.S. have been highly and [disproportionately affected](#) by the AIDS epidemic. The program "Hermanos de Luna y Sol" (HLS) was designed as a culturally-appropriate HIV risk-reduction intervention that targets [immigrant, Spanish-speaking gay/bisexual men](#) in the San Francisco, CA Mission district.

The aims of the program are the following:

- Provide experiences of social support, social belonging, and enhanced self-esteem in the context of a Latino gay identity and community;
- Promote critical awareness of social and cultural forces that impact and shape participant's social and sexual lives'
- Increase participant's sexual self-knowledge, with particular emphasis on sexual contexts and situations of personal vulnerability that limit participants' ability to practice safer sex, and;
- Facilitate community involvement and activism to support a sense of increased personal agency and self-efficacy (instead of fatalism and victimization) in response to oppressive social forces in participants' lives.

HLS consists of three types of interrelated interventions:

1. Bar outreach and recruitment activities;
2. Six-week initial [discussion workshops](#) with structured sessions designed to promote self-esteem, social support and sexual self-regulation; and
3. A set of follow-up resources and activities targeted to the maintenance of safer sex behavior over time, including participation in ongoing peer support groups, specialized workshops and retreats, and access to individual risk reduction counseling services.

Based on [research findings](#) about Latino gay/bisexual men, Bandura's theory of self-regulation, and principles of empowerment education, HLS aims to intervene in a culturally-appropriate manner with four factors that weaken the enactment of safer sex intentions:

- low self-esteem
- perceptions of low sexual control
- lack of social support
- fatalism regarding inevitability of HIV infection

By providing opportunities for group reflection and critical self-observation within the domain of sexuality, by providing a network of peer social support for the practice of safer sex, and sponsoring activities that support self-esteem and pride for being Latino and gay/bisexual, the program intervenes with and attempts to modify factors that promote HIV risk behavior in this particular population.

[Testimonies of participants' reactions to the program](#)

## **Hermanos de Luna y Sol Program Activities**

We have developed culturally-sensitive materials to advertise the program in outreach and recruitment activities.

We are conducting recruitment with Latino gay/bisexual men at Latino-identified gay bars in the Mission district and surrounding areas in San Francisco and the Bay Area at large. Recruitment serves three purposes:

1. An opportunity for communication and reflection about the impact of HIV and the practice of safer sex;
2. Advertisement for the project; and
3. Signing up participants for the group meetings.

We are conducting six-week initial [discussion workshops](#), with 8-10 Latino gay/bisexual men each. Based on principles of empowerment education and psychospiritual growth work, the groups are facilitated by two Latino gay men professionals in a non-directive way to encourage participants' critical reflection, self-observation and commitment to action with respect to cultural barriers and difficulties in the practice of safer sex.

We provide ongoing social support to graduates of the six-week initial discussion workshops for the maintenance of safer sex practices over time in the form of

- self-monitoring tools and strategies
- ongoing weekly social support meetings for graduates of the six-meeting cycles
- skills-building sessions, sexual abuse workshops, and weekend-long retreats also for graduates of the six-meeting cycles

- one-on-one risk-reduction counseling for participants who need more individualized support
- program update newsletters
- social/artistic activities such as "Encuentros" for program graduates.

We are conducting an ongoing evaluation of the program, including quantitative data on participants' satisfaction and the program's impact on self-esteem, social support, self-efficacy, perceptions of sexual control, and safer sex behavior.

Please see the [latest report of the program evaluation for HLS](#) from January 1, 2001.

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## Hermanos de Luna y Sol

### Group Meetings

Men who enroll in the program participate in a six-week small group intervention. Sessions last two-hours each and take place on a weekly basis, for a total commitment of six weeks of participation. The groups are facilitated by Latino gay men trained health

educators, and are conducted using principles of empowerment education and psychospiritual growth work. As suggested by these models of intervention, facilitators do not "transmit" information nor resources (unless specifically requested by the participants). Rather, facilitators engage participants in reflective dialogue and experiential exercises that promote critical thinking and self-observation about matters of crucial importance to the group.

The role of the facilitators is five-fold; namely, they

1. ask questions that promote critical thinking and self-observation;
2. encourage the orderly and fair participation of all members of the group;
3. reflect back to the group the major points of convergence in response to the questions and exercises;
4. respond to the group's questions about specific information and/or resources; and
5. present to the group factual information (such as documented rates of HIV infection and unprotected intercourse in Latino gay men) to stimulate discussion and elicit the group's reaction to data about their community.

Sessions typically end with questions about possible solutions or potential actions that address (with concrete action) the problems raised by the discussion.

HLS Initial Cycle Group Meetings — Revised June 2001

**SESSION 1 is devoted to identifying some of the main issues participants face as Latino gay men, including experiences of rejection/abuse for being gay, issues of coming out to family, sources of social support and community, lover/boyfriend relationships, and related hardships of immigration, poverty, and minority status.**

Facilitators pose open-ended questions such as "What is the most difficult thing you have had to deal with as a Latino gay man?" There are three goals for the session. The first goal is for participants to understand and appreciate the ground rules of the HLS program as an ethical code of mutual respect to facilitate the formation of a healthy community of conscious Latino gay men. The second goal is to create a space of acceptance and free expression in which participants are able to share openly and sincerely about their life experiences as Latino gay men. The third goal is to promote an experience of communality around a variety of feelings and experiences among Latino gay men.

**SESSION 2 is devoted to an exploration of participants' strategies of survival in the face of oppressive factors.**

Facilitators pose questions such as "How did you survive as a child in your family knowing that you were different?" "What was your relationship with your parents like, and how did they react to your being different?" The first goal of this session is to validate the survival strategies of all participants as Latino gay men. The second goal is to begin to understand the impact of factors such as homophobia,

family rejection, machismo, and forced migration in the psyche of individual participants, and the behavioral patterns and self-identifications that they developed as a result.

**SESSION 3 is devoted to a sharing about sex, and its role and meanings in participants' lives.**

Facilitators pose questions such as "What does sex mean to you?" and "What are your favorite sexual activities with another man?" The first goal of this session is to break the silence around sex (particularly sex between men) imposed upon Latino gay men. The second goal of this session is to encourage participants to reflect about their own sexuality and sexual practices.

**SESSION 4 is devoted to an exploration of the salient emotional and communication issues that participants have faced in their sexual experiences.**

Facilitators pose questions such as "When you have sex with someone, what fears or concerns come up for you?" and "What patterns have you observed in your sexual behavior?" The goal of this session is to encourage greater self-awareness of participants' sexuality, including patterns, fears, practices, and preferences.

**SESSION 5 is devoted to an in-depth examination of the impact of AIDS in participants' lives, including their sexuality.**

Facilitators pose questions such as "When was the first time you heard about HIV?"; "How has the AIDS epidemic impacted you personally"; and "Are there some aspects of HIV/AIDS that you feel confused about?" The first goal of this session is for participants to reflect about and share how HIV has impacted them personally and socially, including their concept of self. The second goal is to elicit potential areas of confusion regarding means of HIV transmission and modes of prevention that require further information and clarification.

**SESSION 6 is devoted to an exploration of the diversity of responses to the possibility of HIV transmission in participants' lives.**

Facilitators pose questions such as "What are some of the factors that make it more difficult for you personally to use protection when you have sex?"; "How do you negotiate the use of condoms with a partner?"; and "What has been your actual experience in terms of using (or not using) protection during sex?" The first goal of this session is to validate every participant's experience in making an effort to deal with the reality of HIV. The second goal of this session is to help participants identify situations and contexts of personal vulnerability to unsafe sex practices and HIV risk, including sex under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, anonymous sex in public cruising places, and sex within relations of unequal power. The third goal of this session is to help participants articulate and construct strategies that might address the barriers and difficulties identified, including the

possibility of avoiding those situations and circumstances that undermine their sense of personal control over sexual behavior.

Participants who attend all six sessions receive a t-shirt with the program's name and logo. In addition, to encourage on time participation, refreshments are served during the 30 minutes prior to the beginning of each group meeting.