

Contextualizing mental health and resilience among Latina women: Negotiating in/visibility, acculturative stress, and identity politics

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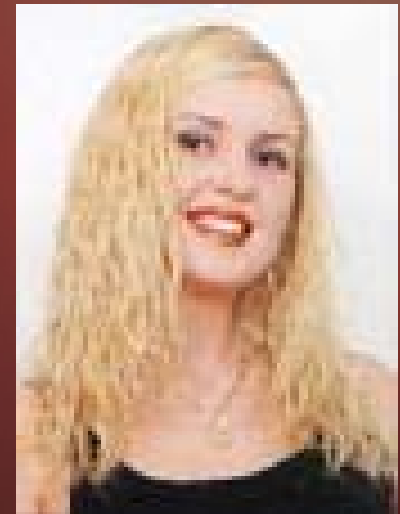
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Purpose

- **To explore the lives and experiences of Latina women in the United States**
- **To consider the structural and interpersonal influences that both empower and constrain Latinas' self-expression and sense of agency**
- **To examine factors that render Latina women (in)visible in both public and private spheres**
- **To hypothesize how these factors relate to the manifestation of psychological distress and resilience, with an emphasis on culturally-relevant therapeutic strategies and interventions for this population**

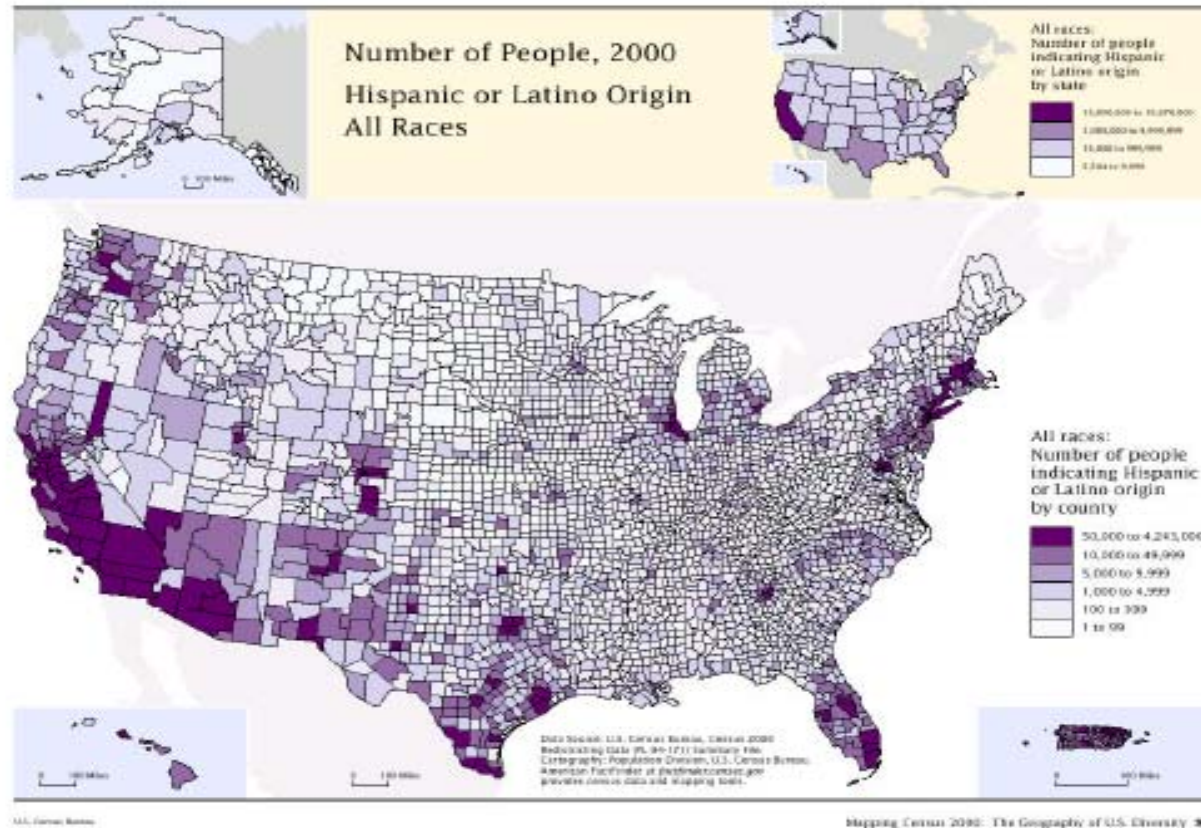
Diversity among Latinas



Diversity among Latinas

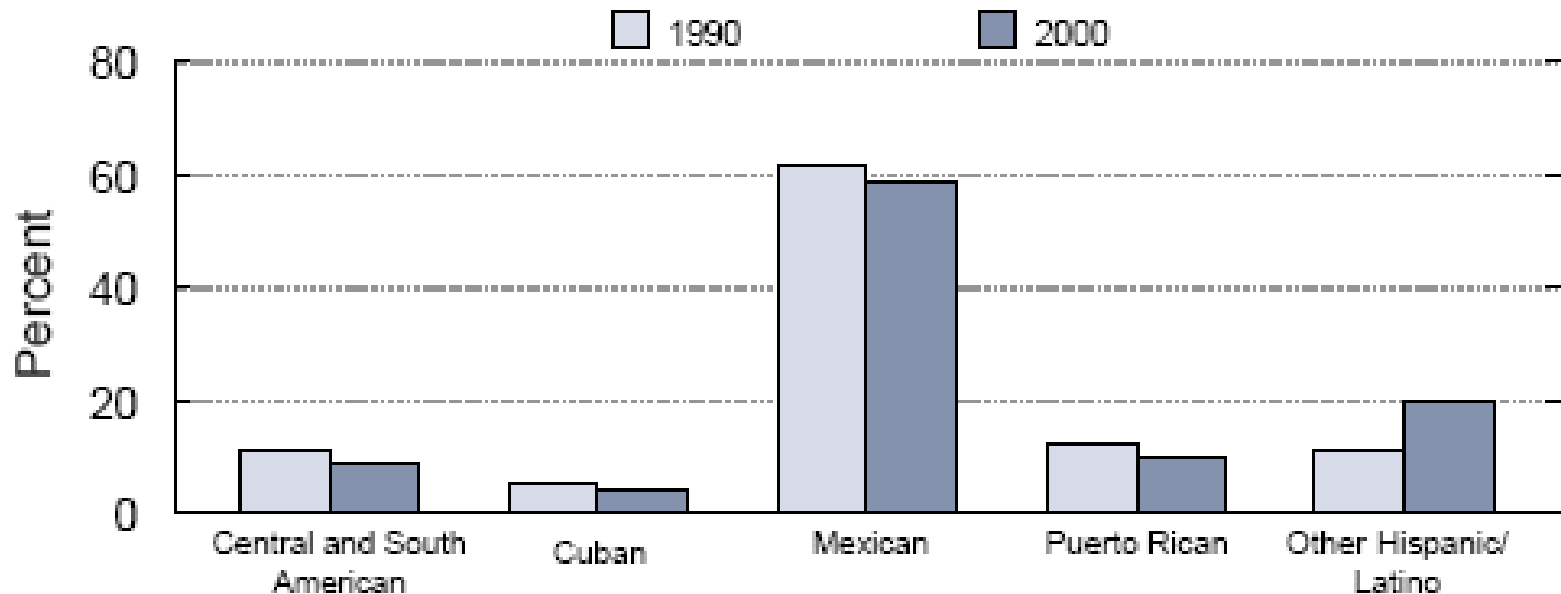


Distribution of Latinos in the US



From: *A demographic and health snapshot of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino population.*
The National Centers for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control
and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, 2002

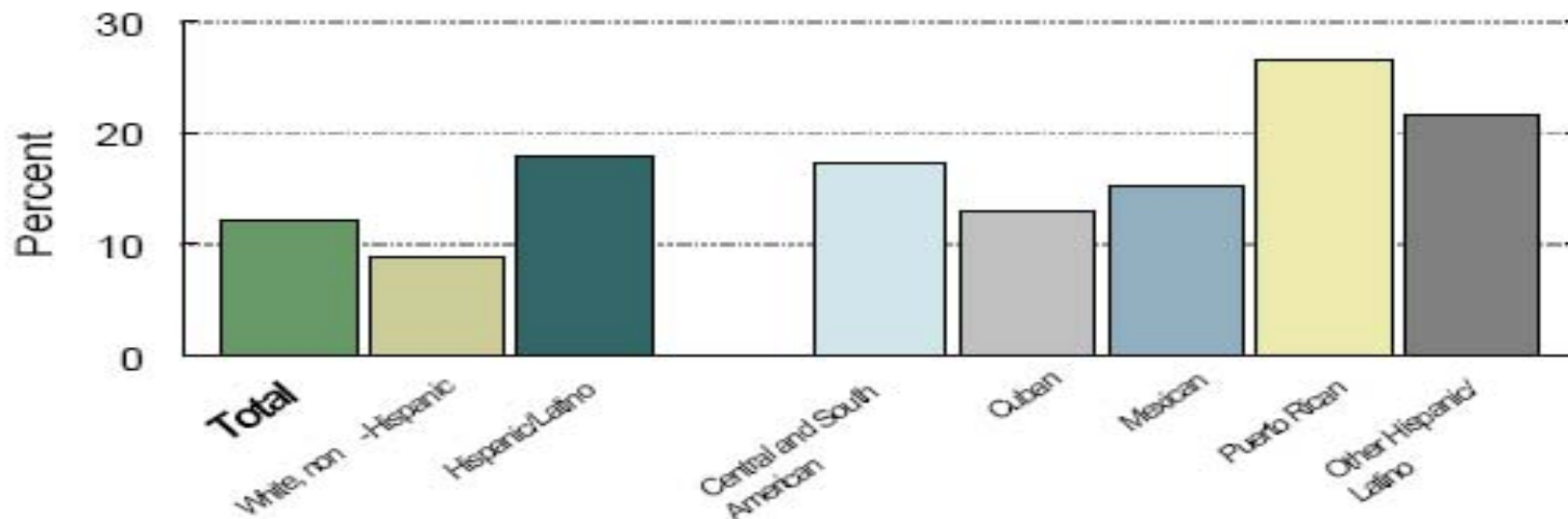
Percent distribution of the Hispanic/Latino population by specified origin: United States, 1990 and 2000



Source: 1990 Census Summary File 3, Census 2000 Summary File 1, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

**From: *A demographic and health snapshot of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino population.*
The National Centers for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control
and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, 2002**

Percent of households that are headed by females* by race/ethnicity and specified origin: United States, 2000

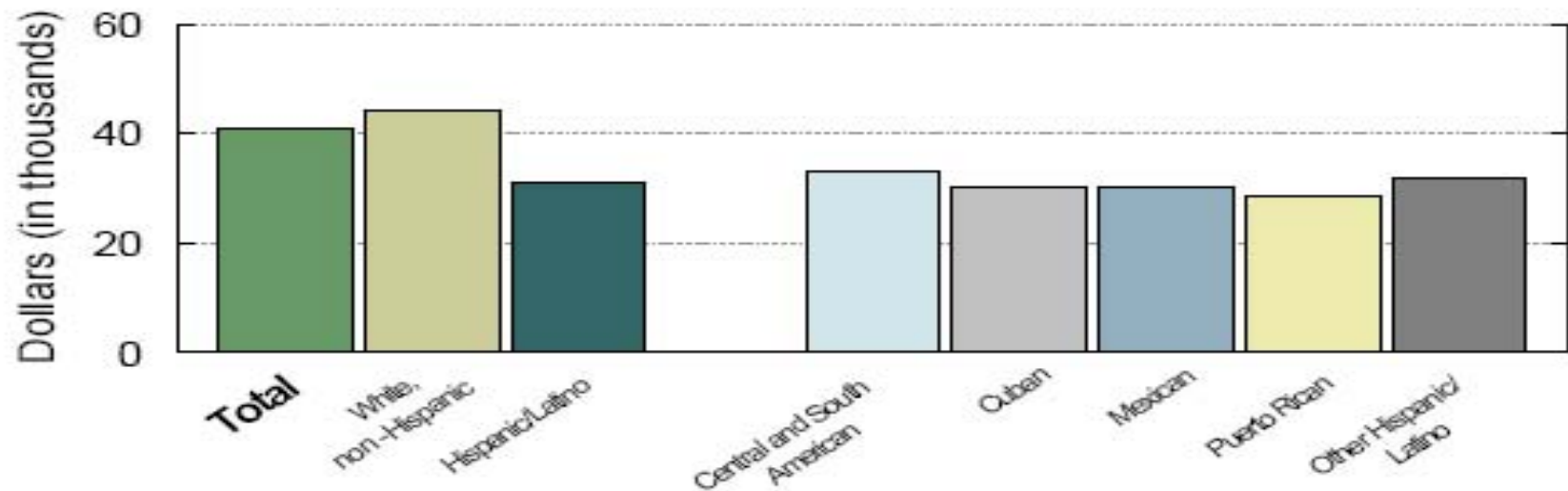


*No spouse present

Source: Census 2000 Summary File 2, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

From: *A demographic and health snapshot of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino population.*
The National Centers for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control
and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, 2002

Median household income by race/ethnicity and specified origin: United States, 2000



Source: Current Population Survey, March 2000, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

From: *A demographic and health snapshot of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino population.*
The National Centers for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control
and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, 2002

Living on the edge of the borderlands...

Pat Mora (1983). **Legal Alien**. In Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by radical women of color* (pp. 376). New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

- Bicultural identity → improved mental health for Latinos in the US
- Often difficult to negotiate
- May feel rejected from both sides

Skin-color and internalized oppression

- **Álvarez, Julia. (1998). A White woman of color. In C. C. O'Hearn (Ed.), *Half and half: Writers on growing up biracial and bicultural* (p. 139-149). New York: Patheon Books.**

Growing up in the Dominican Republic, I experienced racism within my own family—though I didn't think of it as racism. But there was definitely a hierarchy of beauty, which was the main currency in our daughters-only family. It was not until years later that I realized that this hierarchy of beauty was dictated by our coloring...It was clear to us growing up that lighter was better, but there was no question of discriminating against someone because he or she was dark-skinned...All Dominicans, as the saying goes, have a little black behind the ears. So, to separate oneself from those who were darker would have been to divide una familia, a sacrosanct entity in our culture. But being black was something else. Black was not so good, kinky hair was not so good, thick lips not so good. There was no segregation of races in the halls of power. But in the aesthetic arena—the one to which we girls were relegated as females—lighter was better. Lank hair and pale skin and small, fine features were better (p. 139)

Race and Gender in Vicimization

- **Intersectionality, the interface of race and gender, and the impact of multiple identity stressors (Crenshaw, 1995; DeFour et al., 2003; Settles, 2005)**
- **Racialized Sexual harassment (Buchanan, 2005; Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Martin, 1994; Texiera, 2002)**
 - **Sexual Racism**

Latina Mental Health Disparities

- **Culturally relevant concerns when working with this population**
- **Barriers Latinas face when accessing mental health treatment**
- **Clinical Interventions**
- **Additional considerations for future research**

Mental Health:

A Report of the Surgeon General

Some of the key themes of the report included:

- Mental health disorders are disabling conditions**
- Mental health/illness require the broad focus of a public health approach**
- The stigma associated with mental illness is a major obstacle preventing people from getting help**

"Even more than other areas of health and medicine, the mental health field is plagued by disparities in the availability of and access to its services. These disparities are viewed readily through the lenses of racial and cultural diversity, age, and gender."

(DHHS, 1999, p.vi)

Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity

- **Minorities are underrepresented in mental health research**
- **Minorities have less access to, and availability of, mental health services.**
- **Minorities are less likely to receive needed mental health services.**
- **Minorities in treatment often receive a poorer quality of mental health care.**

Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

- **Financial barriers**
 - **Lack of Insurance**
- **Shame associated with mental illness**
 - **Lack of trust for mental health services**
- **Stereotypical attitudes and sex role bias**
 - **Women should be devoted to their families**

Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

- **(Un)Availability of ethnic minority therapists**
 - Fewer than 7% of graduate students are psychology majors
 - Only 1% of practicing psychologists are Latina/o
- **Language**
 - Lack of bilingual therapists prevents clients from accurately expressing their feelings

Culturally Relevant Concerns

- **Familismo**
 - Interest of the family over the individual
- **Personalismo**
 - Values close interpersonal relationships
- **Simpatia**
 - Values interpersonal harmony—no conflict
- **Respeto**
 - Denotes respect for authority figure

Culturally Relevant Concerns

- **Acculturative stress**
 - **Loneliness**
 - **Isolation**
 - **Alienation**
 - **Depression**
- **Marianismo & Machismo**
 - **Constructs that organize gender roles**
 - **Women are spiritual, pure, and all suffering**
 - **Men protect and provide for the family**

Clinical Interventions

- **Assume the role of family intermediary**
 - Encourage compromise and negotiation
 - Translate cultural behavior/expectations
- **Engage the extended family**
 - Use the built in support system to help cope with mental illness or behavioral problems
- **Address acculturative stress issues**
 - Grief and loss
 - Loneliness and isolation
 - Ambivalence about being “Americanized”

Clinical Interventions

- **Use the Caseworker approach**
 - **Assisting clients to find/access resources**
 - **Navigating through red tape of social service agencies**
 - **Processing through possible citizenship/documentation concerns**
- **Use personal narratives and storytelling**
 - **Develop a more personal connection**
- **Discuss spirituality and religion**
 - **May affect therapy or cause conflicts**

Additional Considerations

- **Few therapy outcome studies address people of color--even fewer examine Latinos/as at all**
- **Unique intersections of race and gender experienced by Latinas are virtually ignored in both clinical practice and empirical research**
- **The invisibility of race and gender → an environment where other intersecting, and perhaps less visible, identities are dismissible (e.g., sexual orientation, ability status, social class).**

Some final thoughts.....

- **Cherrie Moraga, Chicana Feminism as "Theory in the Flesh" (1981)**

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives-our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings-all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.

Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience.

*We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
We are often the lesbians among the straight.
We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words."*

- **From Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1981.**

Intersecting v. ranking oppressions

- **Cherrie Moraga, "The Danger Lies in Ranking the Oppressions" (1983)**

"In this country, lesbianism is a poverty-as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression. The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base. Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place." (Moraga, 52-53)

- **From Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years/lo que nunca paso por sus labios* Boston: South End Press, 1983.**

Contact us & Send your work!

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