

**California Women, Children & Families Technical Assistance Project (CaWCF)**  
 A Project of Children & Family Futures funded by the California Department of Alcohol & Drug Programs  
 In partnership with  
**The Women's Constituent Committee and**  
**Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services**  
 present

## The Role of Migration and Transculturation in Substance Use for Latinas

*Yvette G. Flores, Ph.D.*

## Training objectives -

- Review and understand Latino/Chicano/Hispanic cultural values and patterns without essentializing, stereotyping, overgeneralizing, or offending (too much)
- Appreciate the diversity of Latino people and cultures
- Examine the impact of migration and transculturation on Latina substance abuse and misuse

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## La America Latina



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## Latino Cultural Diversity- *Quienes Somos?*

- Over 21 countries in Latin America
- Each has its own unique economic, racial, social and cultural characteristics
- Language and religion are points of commonality
- As of 2000 census, the majority of Latinos in the U.S. are U.S. born, but a significant number are immigrants, principally from Mexico
- Mexican Americans are a diverse group, many of whom did not migrate, but were incorporated by expansion of European immigrants to the west
- Each immigrant group has its own story of migration, reasons for leaving, and for staying in the U.S.
- Latino immigrant groups have faced different levels of acceptance by other groups in the U.S.
- Latino groups experience different ecological niches depending on education, class, and geographic locale
- Latino families represent multiple racial/ethnic/cultural groups

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## Who are we?: ethnicity and race

- By definition, Latinos are largely mixed race- mestizo- indigenous and Spanish
- Also influenced by the diasporic migrations of persons from Europe, Asia, South Asia and Africa
- Latinos are a racial tapestry

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## Culture and class as determining variables

- Latino diversity derives from differences in class, education, and value systems
- Families can be studied in terms of their adherence to traditional, transitional or contemporary values
- Families are influenced by their relationship to the means of production
- At any given time, values and class interact to influence specific family behaviors, attitudes or practices

Source: Bernal & Alvarez

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## Values

- Values can be viewed as mirrors of the culture: they can be traditional, transitional or contemporary
- Values can be viewed as idealized, ideal, and enacted
- Idealized values refer to the cultural scripts of how things “should be”
- Ideal values refer to conduct and behaviors the family and/or individuals aspire to or prefer
- Enacted values are what people actually perform

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## Domains of values

- Among Latinos, idealized values include virginity before marriage and fidelity thereafter for **women**, but not necessarily for men
- Other idealized values are respect for elders, solidarity (*compañerismo*), cooperation, collectivism
- With increasing acculturation and modernization, individuals' behaviors mirror less and less idealized values

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## Cultural values

- Can be traditional, transitional or contemporary
- Depending on education, social class, type of employment, place of origin (rural vs. urban), years in the U.S., level of acculturation
- Can be manifested through traditions and practices, including rituals

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## Latino Cultural Values

- Core values typically ascribed to Latinos include:
  - *Familismo*
  - *Machismo*
  - *Marianismo*
  - Collectivism
  - *Personalismo*

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## *Familismo*

- Family takes a central place
- Elements of familismo include obligation, interdependence, loyalty and mutuality
- Family may be defined as a unit consisting of multiple generations (abuelos, tios, primos, etc.) not just parents and children
- Family needs are considered more important than individual's
- These values are believed to persist regardless of generational level or degree of acculturation to other cultures

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## *Familismo*

- Degree of adherence to traditional family values may depend on generational level, education, social class
- Familismo influences family relations and family organization
- Traditional families tend to be more hierarchical
- Elders are supposed to be honored and revered
- Children owe their allegiance to the family first
- Children are a gift from God
- The family can be a source of support, strength or the site of problems and dysfunction

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## Gender roles:

- *What does it mean to be a woman?*
  - In traditional families she is the heart of the group in her role as mother, grandmother, wife, sister, hermana, comadre
  - She is defined by her relationships more than what she does for work
  - In families with contemporary values her role as worker may have more importance

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## What does it mean to be a man?

- In traditional families, he is the head
  - Responsible
  - Chivalrous
  - Loyal
  - Hardworking
  - Honest
  - Stoic
  - Strong

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## Marianismo

- Emulation of the Virgin Mary through behaviors that reflect traditional values
  - Abnegation
  - Sacrifice for others
  - Submissiveness
  - *Aguantar*

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## Machismo

- Cultural value of male supremacy
- Code of conduct reflecting chivalry and potency
- Positive manifestations include selflessness and protection of the family
- Negative manifestations can include violence, abuse of male privilege and excesses in behavior
  - Drinking
  - Womanizing

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## Machismo and Marianismo

- Is it fact or fiction?
- What do you think?
- Where do you see examples of positive aspects of these behavioral manifestations?
- What are some problematic examples?

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## Personalism

- Code of interpersonal conduct reflecting the values of
  - Respect
  - Interdependence
  - Harmony in relationships
  - Mutuality: *hoy por ti mañana por mi*

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## Class

- Historically, family organization was influenced if not determined by the type of economy:
- Agricultural families: small and large landowners, peasants, itinerant workers, migrant workers
- In rural settings these are still the predominant classes, these families tend to be larger, extended, with more children and depend on seasonal nature of agriculture
- *Tiempo muerto*: time of year when there is no cultivation of crops, could lead to migration of males and young adults to follow the crops

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## Class, cont.

- Industrial revolution brought about mass migration and shift from agricultural economies to wage labor: families became less extended, with fewer children, and more rigid sex-roles
- Rise of class structure that was not necessarily land based: upper class, middle class, working class

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## Class, cont.

- In the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, economic shifts gave rise to working poor and, as a result of the welfare system, a non-working class, and homeless families
- Families may share more similarities with families of the same class level from different ethnic or racial groups, than with families of the same ethnicity of higher or lower classes
- For the most part Latinos are working class (particularly Mexican, Puerto Rican and Central American immigrants and their descendants)

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## Intersection of class and culture

- At any given time, families can be “plotted” in terms of class and culture, thus producing great within ethnic group diversity
- According to Norma Williams, with increasing upward mobility, the gender and family roles of Chicana/os change significantly
- Women for example, may define themselves more in terms of professional than family role
- All these factors are influenced by generational and acculturation level

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## Contextualizing families

- Cult of virginity
- Shift in women's roles
- Changes in rituals as reflections of cultural and class changes
- Family structure and sometimes functioning largely influenced by class level
- Influence of migration and acculturation

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## Critical analysis of culture

- To avoid stereotyping and overgeneralizing
  - It is important to value the uniqueness of every human being
  - To understand the context of every person
  - To examine the degree of adherence to traditional values
  - To examine how one's beliefs may contribute to the oppression of others
  - To assess whether one is using cultural values as an excuse to misuse or abuse power

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## Latina Substance Abuse

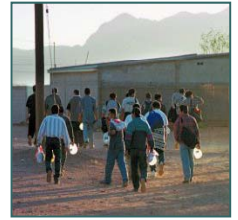
- Migration is a risk factor because of the changes to the meaning systems
- Loss of traditional sources of support
- Needing to adopt to a new cultural context- culture shock
- Legacies of migration affect US born Latinas

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## Migration

- Despite policy changes and the increased militarization of the U.S.- Mexico border, thousands of men continue to make the journey north
- Generally the migration is motivated to improve the living conditions of their families left behind
- Post migration alcohol and drug use is likely to increase
- Migration is considered a significant risk factor



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## Female Migration

- Increasingly women migrate to the North
- Many come from Central Mexico and Central America looking for work opportunities in the *maquila* industry
- Often they cross when the promise of work is not attained
- Often the women leave children with their own families
- Reunification may not occur for years, sometimes decades
- In the U.S. women consume more alcohol and may begin illicit drug use

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## Understanding Latino families

- Falicov offers the multidimensional ecosystemic comparative adaptive model (MECA) to assess, treat, and prevent the challenges facing Latino families irrespective of origins or socioeconomic status
- The model is grounded on respect for the diversity of the Latino population and the heterogeneity of experiences Latinos face in the U.S.

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## The impact of migration on the family

- Changes in the meaning systems
- Geographic
  - Social
  - Cultural
- Changes in value systems
  - Role changes
  - Role strain
  - Transgenerational changes

Source: (Falicov 1998)

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## Types of migrations

- Type of migration: voluntary, coaxed, forced
- Often there is a subtle, gendered and generational line between voluntary and coaxed migrations
- Many immigrants are not equal participants in the decision to migrate
- Coaxed participants may be children, elderly, and women in non-reciprocal relationships who follow their husbands\*

\*Falicov, 1998

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## Ambivalent and unprepared migrations

- Confluence between pre-migration events and life cycle stresses such as illness, old age or loss of spouse/partner
- This often leads to confusion and ambivalence over the readiness to migrate
- Ambivalence also created by lack of welcome or acceptance by the host culture

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## Migration and meaning systems

- Migration involves the uprooting of at least 3 meaning systems: physical, social, cultural
- Physical meaning system: geographic change with loss of familiar places, people, things, often results in the need to create a metaphoric home and/or in psychological homelessness
- Creates a vulnerability to alcohol use

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## Social meaning system

- Social uprooting compounds sense of physical alienation and intrapsychic confusion
- Social marginality and social isolation leads to reduced self esteem, depression, anxiety
- It is critical to connect or reconnect with compatriots or create new systems of support

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## Cultural meaning systems

- Cultural uprooting leads to changes in meanings as these are changed or lost
- Uprooting of established ways of thinking and doing, and the abrupt and massive exposure to a new language and way of life can precipitate psychological distress or culture shock
- Culture shock: reactive process resulting from the simultaneous exposure to the new and the loss of grieving of the old and familiar

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## Role changes and role strain

- To be a woman means to *sufrir y aguantar*
- *Ser fuerte*/ to be strong for oneself and others
- To be a role model and the heart of the family

Source: Flores & Valdez (2005)



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## Role changes and role strain

- To be a man is to be stoic
- Hardworking
- Strong
- Responsible
- To do whatever it takes to help the family
- To risk it all for a better life



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## Transgenerational Phenomena

- That which is not resolved by migrating generation will be manifested in the children
- Cultural cut-offs
- Loyalty considerations
- Intergenerational and/or gender conflicts
- Difficulties in making commitments (jobs, schools, relationships)
- Legacies may transform into family dysfunction(s)

Source: Sluzki, 1979

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## Migration related challenges

- Vary depending on life cycle of individual and family
- For children and youth major challenges include forging a strong sense of identity, sense of belonging and learning to deal with discrimination in its multiple forms
- For adults, survival and negotiation of a new cultural terrain are paramount
- For women, it may entail shifting roles and negotiating new cultural milieus without the traditional sources of support
- Creating a family as immigrants or children of immigrants poses challenges as well
  - What of the culture of origin will be passed on?
  - Are cultural teachings passive or active?
  - What does it mean to be a "*Latina/o*" in the U.S.

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## Identities

- *Tomando todo en cuenta*
  - *Who are we?*
  - *What makes us unique?*
  - *How are we different and similar?*
  - *How can we use our similarities to bridge our differences?*
  - *How can we use our cultural strengths to get sober and stay sober and help others find sober living?*

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## Reflections

- What do others need to know about Latinas to help Latinas heal from addiction and despair?
- How can we use our cultural knowledge and cultural capital in our work?
- How can we integrate the information obtained or reviewed today enhance our work?

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