

# Introduction natural body image and accent. a



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## **Introduction**

“ Strength of a woman” was earlier on sung by the musician Shaggy, and is one important characteristic of the Latino women that cannot be underestimated. Although the term ‘ strength of a woman’ is relative to situations, Latino women are one society that arguably has all the characteristics that is reflective of all aspects of the strength of a woman. Their physical image and their roles in the society is a cultural asset. Latino women have body images and attractive facial features that display an attractive frame to men (Barnstable 10).

These characteristics contribute a lot towards their social interactions and political interactions in their societies and even in the whole America and the rest of the world. Most of them tend to conserve their natural body image and accent. A voluptuous female buttock is symbolic of Latino women since they tend to be more tolerant to different body sizes. Their body images are shaped by their social cultural beliefs of meeting role obligations of the family and social expectations. Their strict religious guidelines also played a

role in encouraging women maintain the natural body images. Latino women are therefore identified by their roles as mothers and wives and any woman who is perceived as not conforming to the cultural gender roles is labeled as a bad woman.

Their acceptance of different body sizes and their religious beliefs make them more tolerant to people who are overweight. This also makes them to easily meet their societal norms which are related to their physical body image, appearance and weight especially norms regarding their sexuality.

## **Roles of a Latino Woman**

The gender roles of Latino women is based on their cultural background where women were supposed to stay at home and carry out household chores and look after the children while the husband provides for the upkeep.

They were expected to be loyal to their husbands and never to brag in front of them. Although some aspects of this culture still exist, some of it has changed. According to the Flake and Forste (21), the cultural expectation is that the man is the head of the family and therefore makes most critical decisions in the family. Even women who have attained higher educational levels than their husbands are also expected to play along their masculinity lines.

According to the Latino culture, the church was the only legal institution authorized to perform marriages and help solve family disputes. According to the church, virginity was highly valued and sex was only for procreation. The church also supported women's subordination to men and greatly

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contributed in creating differentially articulating power structures that disadvantaged women in Latin America (Brusco 4).

The church also discouraged abortion. The changes in the society as well as generational change have changed their perceptions on gender. According to Aday, Andersen, Bell and Giachello (266), Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in the US although it is among the minority ethnic groups in the country. This implies that the Latino Women are on the peak of child bearing in this generation. According to Flake and Forste (20), Latin America has one of the most rigid gender norms which accepts and encourages male dominance over women. Latin America experiences violent gender based violence especially on women (Flake and Forste 19). The cultural definition of manhood in Latino culture which accepts men's machismo acts on women is the major cause of gender based violence on women in Latin America.

The roles played by women in regards to this culture also encourage men's dominance over them. They are expected to endure any afflictions from men. Women are supposed to be submissive and dependent on their husbands. They are also expected to entirely dedicate themselves to their husbands and their households. This implies that their roles are enclosed within marianismo while those of men are enclosed within machismo.

Machismo and familism in women have greatly contributed to the development of the strict gender norms in Latin America (Barnstable 11).

An ideal Latino woman places the family first before anything. This includes responsibilities as well as obligations to their immediate family members. According to Flake and Forste (20), this is referred to as familism. Besides,

Latino's masculinity is characterized by hyper sexuality while men's hyper masculinity is characterized by sexual aggressiveness. According to Flake and Forste, (20), machismo and familism makes the Latino women vulnerable to gender-based violence.

The Spanish traditional culture also embraced social values that recognized machismo and marianismo. The society had strict sexual conduct for women which ensured that they were submissive to their men. The social values recognized their roles as women and wives but restricted their ability to obtain professional qualifications. Spanish marriages were sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church which also prohibited divorce in marriage and mediated marriage disputes. Although this culture prohibited the use of contraception and abortion, it permitted prostitution. This was particularly during Franco Francisco regime in the 1940s to 1950s. However, much of this has changed. Today, a good percentage of Spanish women have entered the job market and many of them today have the opportunity to develop their professional carriers.

The Latino and the Spanish women played very significant roles during the colonial period although they were slightly varied considering that one was a subject while the other the master. The Spanish women played the machismo masculinity to their men at war (Arnold 10). Elite Spanish women did not work and only supervised the slaves who were working for them.

They also became nuns in the convents. Thus the Spanish women helped establish the Spanish dominion in America (Arnold 10). They Spanish

women who were from low socio-economic status also provided labor by helping in household activities to wealthy Spanish families.

The Latin American women on the other hand were involved in providing the needed labor by the Spanish administration. They also served their men during the period by being submissive to them and taking care of the household. These women also helped liberate the Americans from the Spanish dominion even though they did not play much political activities. They helped reform the church to accept the Latinos perform their rituals, but their cultural morals that required them to be submissive to men enabled the Spanish soldiers to take advantage of them. That is, they were sometimes sexually abused by the Spanish soldiers. However, they also helped their men to eliminate some Spanish soldiers. Their beautiful body image attracted the soldiers thus making them to easily trick the soldiers to be trapped and killed.

When most of their men were killed they took up the roles of their men in their respective families (Kellogg 7). The roles of the Latino woman make them suffer due to imbalances in relationship power. The woman is expected to be submissive to the husband who determines the type and frequency of sexual intercourse with the woman since the cultural values of Latin Americans are derived from a machista society (Beckman, Browner, Harvey and Sherman (para. 3). Therefore they may not be able to negotiate for safer sex practice with their partners. According to Beckman, Browner, Harvey and Sherman (para. 1) Hispanic women are disproportionately affected by STDs and AIDS. According to them, a case study conducted in 1999 reported AIDS

infection rates on Hispanic women was more than three times that of non-Hispanic whites.

This implies that their roles expose them more to HIV/AIDS and other STDs due to their lack of control on unhealthy sexual behaviors. Today Latin American Society experiences the changing roles of the Latino woman. The Latino woman is gaining more individual autonomy and female emancipation. There have been socio-legal changes in family and marriage related issues and behaviors. The machismo stigma and the traditional role of maintaining the family by the Latina woman has changed. The formation of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin which incorporated sorority in US was the beginning of changes in the traditional gender roles of the American woman (Campbell et al 959). The organization actively involved in social, political as well as community service.

The organization enabled women acquire a sense of belonging that helps them achieve their highest potential. It has helped produce women professionals of many Latino ethnicities, race and creeds. Perceptions and attitudes towards women's participation in politics and economic activities; their gender roles in marriage, and even morality in family behaviors have changed. Today, some Latino women are economically empowered and even support themselves singly.

The media, particularly television has played a major role in showing a powerful identity of the Latino woman including the obstacles which they face in their roles. It has created awareness of the Latino culture through television programs and soaps which display the beauty, talent and skills of

the Latino woman. It has played a major role in creating stereotypes and images of what a Latino woman is. They normally show the Latino woman's dependence on a man in whichever roles that they play in the soaps.

They normally present a function of men's ambition in the soaps and in most cases; they are confined to erotic, romantic characters in the soaps. The TV shows normally depict the Latino woman as sex symbols, hot tamales or even as firecrackers. Despite many Latino women having graduated from colleges and universities with mass communication and journalism courses, they are still underrepresented in the media organizations. Besides, they still have a limited access and participation in media production and news anchorage. They are also not been fully integrated into the decision making process in the media industries. Most of these is normally done by the white American woman; a clear sign of racial discrimination in the media industry.

The Latino women are given limited opportunities to anchor news or even to present the weather forecast thus limiting the potential exposure of the Latino woman. However according to Mendible (2), the voluptuous buttocks of the Latino woman has given them the advantage in advertising campaigns particularly in the men's magazines or even in music videos. Americans seem to be enjoying the "bootyful women" (Mendible 2). One such celebrity Latino woman with a "bootyful" butt is Jenifer Lopez, the musician. Puerto Rico and Chicana Latina are some of the Latin American countries which embrace these cultures. Gender in is a significant factor in the working experience in both Puerto Rico and Chicana Latina.



Both of them are characterized by racism and social class as well as feminism. However, most Chicana Latina women prefer to work at home or in the private sector. Latino women's beautiful physical image is also said to play a role in politics today.

According to Mendible (4), the Michelle Obama's beautiful physical image played a major role in the election of Barack Obama as the American president. Americans enjoy fling butts and therefore Michelles's beautiful body image attracted most Americans to elect President Obama.

## **Latino's Health**

Generally, the health of the Latinos is affected by many factors. According to Escarce, Morales and Rumbaut (362), the Hispanics health and health behaviors is complicated by a number of factors which among them include their countries of origin. According to them, foreign-born Hispanics have better health and health behaviors than US born Hispanics.

However, the Hispanics have higher death rates than their white counterparts in the US (Escarce, Morales and Rumbaut 365). Hispanics' mortality rates also differ depending on their countries of origin, for example, according to Escarce, Morales and Rumbaut (365), women of Mexican origin have the highest mortality rates seconded by women of Cuban origin and then women of Puerto Rican origin. Another factor that affects the Latinos lives is their difference in socio-economic status. Those from low socio-economic status are more vulnerable to diseases due to their inability to acquire appropriate medical health.

Generally, mortality rates are higher for Hispanic men than women.

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## Conclusion

Gender roles and the culture of the Latino women have made them to be admired even outside America. Their culture embraces practices that most conservative men in the world would love to experience. However, it is important that the American society give opportunity to the Latino woman in every aspect of the society.

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