

Issue Brief: Latino Women and Gender Issues

Key Words (4-6)

- Machismo, Marianismo, The Maria Paradox, Traditional, Stereotypes, Acculturation

Description (2 Sentences)

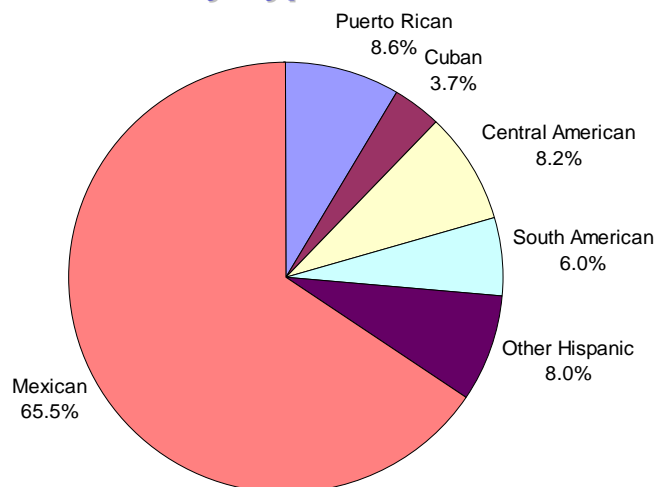
The following brief centralizes on the gender issues of Latinos, more specifically the Latina Women. Two of the main issues reside in traditional domestic relations and a variety of National stereotypes.

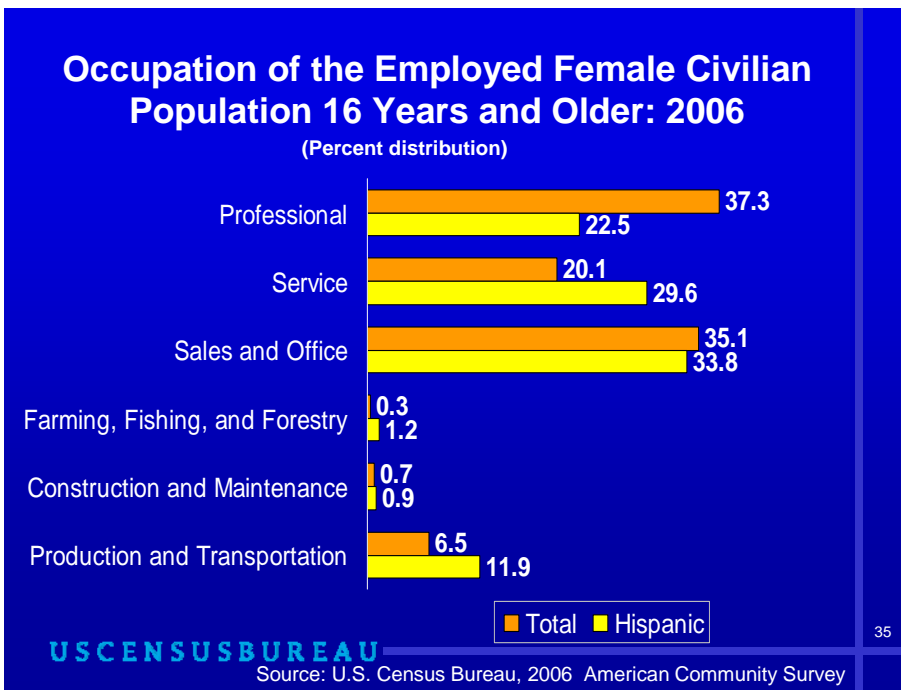
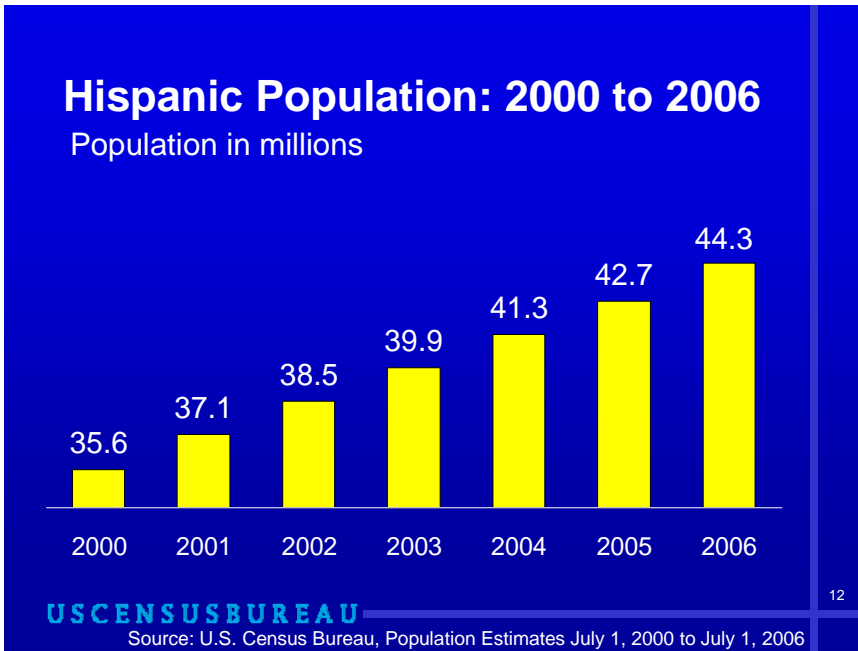
Key Points (4-6)

- Hispanic culture traditionally is associated with distinct gender roles for men and women
 - a. Primary role of males is economic protection
 - b. Primary role of females is caregiver and mother
- Level of traditional lifestyle is influenced by how acculturated families (individuals) are into US society
- National stereotypes of Latino households include high levels of domestic violence
- National stereotype of a Latina women is housewife or housekeeper (The Maria Paradox)

Images (2-4)

Percent Distribution of Hispanics by Type: 2006





Brief (500-700 words)

The Latino population in the US is the fastest growing of any ethnicity and has the highest total population of any other minority group. Like most ethnicities, Latinos have strong cultural roots that often come with them when they emigrate from other

countries. This cultural bond transcends into gender relations and roles which are called machismo and marianismo which distinct gender roles for men and women. Machismo (similar to male chauvinism) refers to characteristics of the male which include dominant, virile, and independent, while marianismo depicts females as submissive, chaste and dependent. Traditionally, a Latino male is the economic provider while the Latina female is responsible for the domestic roles, most notably the caretaking of the children.

These traditional gender labels can benefit domestic relations but can also destroy them. Machismo can encourage males to work hard, protect and to provide for a family who depends on him for economic support. While not necessarily considered nurturing, male members of the family can be quite protective over their other family members descending from cultural roots and church ties. Men often are considered strict and are cautious in accepting outsiders. On the contrary, this sense of empowerment can cause men to express dominance and superiority inside the home. This idea of domestic dominance is rooted in the traditional belief that providing the means to live takes precedence of all other responsibilities when concerning the family hierarchy.

In a traditional Latino family, the women's primary role is mother and a close circle was created between the extended family and church relations. However, due to these close family ties (familismo), women tend to define themselves through their family and children rather than independently or as a couple. The level to which this traditional role defines Latino gender relations is influenced by how long they have lived in American society. Often times the men in the family assimilate into the mainstream US culture by arriving in the country before other family members and through their occupations. On the other hand, women without jobs tend to take longer to be

acculturated into American society due to less frequent visits taking place outside the home. Once accustomed to this lifestyle, it becomes hard for women to separate themselves from their family as they are now often economically dependent on their husbands.

Latina women who are employed, integrate into society quicker than those who are not. While helping to provide for themselves and their families, these working women are subject to criticism and stereotypes by people of the same culture and by American society as a whole. Within this traditional culture, these women can be perceived as masculine and neglecting their domestic responsibilities. In national media they can be stereotyped as either an uneducated domestic provider or portrayed as having modest professions such as a maid or fast-food clerk. This myth has been engrained into the national psyche and has been coined The Maria Paradox.

Many Latinos in the US and native Spanish speaking countries are concentrating on eliminating this cultural behavior. Machismo-based family relations can inhibit Latina women from being considered truly equal to male Latinos. This will prove to be a difficult task due to how rooted it is in their culture. Even the native language of Spanish has evidence of masculinity taking priority over femininity. Yet it has been argued that by incorporating Latinos into American society, this can help solidify equality between male and female Latinos. Additionally, increased Latinas in the workforce coupled with productive lobbying for equality can help Latina females reach equality. By eliminating stereotypes and strict gender roles within the Latino community, this will greatly affect and reduce the national stereotypes as portrayed through the media.

General References (3-5)

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http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/hispanic_pop_presentation.html