Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives
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INTRODUCTION: Sociologists have long studied the social and cultural changes among immigrants. More recently gender and sexuality has attracted scholarly attention in these analyses.

BACKGROUND: Mexican societies are fascinating sources for studying gender and sexuality because they reinforce regional patriarchies leading to femininities and masculinities that promote different levels of gender inequality within these societies. These local hegemonies celebrate the Foucauldian notions of power that is decentralized across a region, makes social forces fluid in all directions, and even generates resistance when they are interacting with each other. As a result Mexican men and women follow sexual moralities and expressions of hegemony that are diverse, fluid, and malleable, but at the same time are regionally uniform.

LITERATURE REVIEW: Extant studies view gender and sexuality of the Mexican immigrants mainly through the Western theories of feminism and gender. This often leads to stereotypic representations of gender and “historically reductive” binaries of oppressions wherein men are necessarily macho and exploiting, whereas women are necessarily exploited. These analyses not only offer simplistic solutions to the problems of gender based oppressions, but also reinforce ideology, rather than analytics in the conclusions that are derived from studying these contexts. Also, scholars in these areas—many “prompted by [the] HIV/AIDS concerns”—have largely ignored the heterosexual love and sex. Though some studies have tried to close this gap, this cluster still remains silent on several substantive issues of heterosexual Mexican immigrants, such as how the sex lives of Mexican immigrant women is affected by the life in the United States, and how and why the sexual ideologies and practices from Mexican societies get changed in the new social contexts of the United States.

ARGUMENT: Different regional patriarchies in Mexican societies create different patterns of hegemony on women. For example, a woman’s premarital virginity is assigned different values depending on the socioeconomic context she grows in. As a result, she constructs her sexuality by negotiating with her sexual agency and pleasure she is entitled to and the control and danger she is subjected to. These paradoxes are complicated by the life in the United States that exposes them to flexibility and modernity, albeit with their perils. Therefore, it is important to learn about the heterosexual Mexican immigrants’ sex lives from a relational perspective inclusive of the social, economic, historical, cultural, and psychological complexities that create Mexican masculinities and influence the expressions of women’s sexualities.

RESEARCH DESIGN: The author followed a qualitative research design. Her earliest primary data came from informal participant observations in the meetings of a Latina support group that she led in an elementary school for ten months. These observations helped her design a guide for the open ended interviews of Mexican immigrant women and men that made the bulk of her primary data. She recruited forty female and twenty male participants. One of her female participants came from the support group. The rest came through a snowballing technique from four community-based clinics and three elementary schools they were employed at. These organizations served Latino/a families in Los Angeles. She recruited her male participants from the same organizations but she claims the independence of her female sample from the male sample. The author also met the representatives of hometown associations, community organizers, and leaders of employment centers for day laborers at the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles— the information thus gathered served as secondary data at several places in her findings.

The author conducted all interviews in Spanish. Her interview design focused on 1) reconstructing past events through storytelling and 2) seeking personal reactions to vignettes whereby she sought responses to passage(s) that she read to them. She transcribed the interview audios and translated their Spanish quotes to English herself. She used qualitative coding techniques to identify recurrent themes that she used to develop her theoretical analyses.

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