

Department of Sociology & Anthropology Spring 2023 Colloquium

**SOCIAL MEDIA, BIAS & BREASTFEEDING:
A LATINX PSYCHOSOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**
ANGELA VERGARA, PH.D.



Dr. Vergara holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Central Florida and a M.A. in Experimental Psychology from St. John's University. She will discuss the methodologies and findings of her research on representations of breastfeeding targeting Hispanic/Latinx populations on social media. She will also talk about her own path from Psychology to Sociology as she developed her academic and professional expertise on medical sociology, the sociology of mental health, social inequalities, reproductive health, gender and sexuality, and minoritized populations.

April 24, 5-7 PM - University Center, Suite D

Co-sponsored by the Psychology Department, CLACS & WGSS - St. John's University



Social Media, Bias, and Breastfeeding: A Latinx Psychosociological Approach

Angela Vergara, PhD




Social Media and Bias

Social bias refers to the inherent prejudices and stereotypes that individuals harbor towards certain groups based on their identity markers. These biases can manifest in various forms, including microaggressions, discrimination, and exclusion, and can be perpetuated through social media platforms.

Social media and public health

Social media has the power to disseminate information to a large proportion of the population in real time, it is an emerging tool for public health education.



Understanding representations of health-related issues on social media illuminates not only how those issues are portrayed to given populations, but also how members of the populations portray it to each other.

Latinx and Social Media

Latinx are underrepresented in social media. When they are represented, it is often as stereotypes. This reinforces negative biases.



Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is a vital part of maternal and infant health. This presentation explores the Latinx experience with social media and breastfeeding, and how it is affected by social biases.



Breastfeeding



The World Health Organization (WHO) advocates breastfeeding as the ideal form of infant feeding, associated with positive short- and long-term health outcomes for mothers and their children.



Governments and medical organizations are increasingly participating in breastfeeding promotion efforts, as breastfeeding represents a relatively inexpensive method of improving population health.



Social Media

Social media can perpetuate misinformation and biased attitudes towards breastfeeding, impacting Latinx mothers' decisions and experiences.

We examine representations of breastfeeding on social media targeting Hispanic/Latina populations.

We seek to identify themes and patterns in the representations shared on the social media application Instagram that use the hashtag #amamantar (exact English translation: breastfeeding)

The present study



Methodology

Our study uses a psychosociological approach to analyze how Latinx communities experience bias on social media platforms.

We employ a qualitative content analysis of breastfeeding experiences and representations on Instagram among Latinx women.

Data Collection

- Instagram
 - 944 images with #amamantar were selected
 - Each image was categorized into the themes
 - The images within each theme were examined for similarities and differences

Maternal Love

- Images showed both mother and child, with emphasis on a maternal-child emotional connection.
- In these images, breastfeeding is an activity that facilitates familial relationships.





Maternal Love

Breastfeeding Education

- Images focused primarily on the child. The breast is often present in these images, but the only part of the mother is displayed.
- The mother as an individual is invisible in these images, and the breast itself is presented as an autonomous vessel for nutrition.
- Images are accompanied by text embedded within the image relating to an educational purpose targeted to the mother.



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Breastfeeding Education





Breastfeeding in Public Settings

- Images shown are of women breastfeeding in groups, in public spaces, and at work.
- These images present breastfeeding as an activity that need not be delegated to the home but can be integrated with public life.

Breastfeeding in Public Settings



“Lactamor”



Discussion

- All images are shared for the same purpose, the normalization of breastfeeding.
- Additionally, most of the images represent the thin white women ideal, breastfeeding white babies.
- Taken together, these images portray an idealized image of breastfeeding that coincides with dominant western European ideals for women's bodies and motherhood.

- Latinx individuals are underrepresented in social media.
- Social media algorithms can perpetuate bias and stereotypes
- Awareness and education can help combat bias in social media.





Breastfeeding is highly valued in Latino culture, but there are also cultural, social, and economic barriers that can impact success.

By addressing social media bias, we can empower Latinx mothers to make informed decisions about breastfeeding.



Conclusion

Celebrating diversity in breastfeeding practices and supporting Latinx mothers is essential to promoting health equity and social justice. Latinx individuals face social media bias, stereotypes, and microaggressions online. Analyzing and discussing these issues is crucial for progress.





From Psychology to Sociology

- Medical Sociology
- Sociology of Mental Health
- Reproductive Justice
- Hispanic/Latinx Social inequalities
- Qualitative Researcher
- Social Media Analysis





Thank You!

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