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Tuesday, October 15, 2013

DIS Blog Carnival - Latino / Hispanic Health: Science and Advocacy

Welcome to the [Diversity in Science Blog Carnival](#) in honor of [Hispanic Heritage Month!](#)

[National Hispanic Heritage Month](#) occurs every year between September 15 and October 15. The date range was chosen to include Columbus Day as well as the independence dates for 8 Latin American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Chile, and Belize.

The purpose of Hispanic Heritage Month is to celebrate the heritage and culture that we brought to this country. And there is lots to celebrate! Music, language, fashion - just to name a few. And, of course, we can't forget the food!

Unfortunately, there are is one feature of our community that is cause for concern, Latino Health, which is the focus of this carnival. Latinos in the US are disproportionately affected by many diseases. We [\(most research focuses on Mexican-Americans\)](#) are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes and die from diabetes-related complications, for example, compared to non-Hispanic whites.

Another issue that is given less attention is mental health (Alzheimer's, or Type III Diabetes, is another less publicized issue, but that's a topic for a future post). [I wrote about my own experience with anxiety and depression in a SACNAS newsletter article last year.](#)

My story is not unique. In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, Cynthia Y. Rodriguez published the first of a three-part series on Latino health disparities on CNN.com about the [prevalence and causes \(including immigration and acculturation\) of mental health issues in Latino communities and lack of culturally appropriate resources.](#)

Elizabeth Lindau's contribution to the series focused on similar issues with cancer. [Latinos have a greater prevalence of cancer, but paradoxically higher survival rate compared to non-Latino whites.](#) The [final part](#) to this amazing series, again by Cynthia Y. Rodriguez, focuses on obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

There are lots of theories out there for the causes of Latino Health disparities. The CNN series outlines quite a few of them.

I often wonder how much these conditions are related to nutrition, as was the case for me. Fernando Gonzalez at [ScienceSalsa](#) found the theory that your [health and life expectancy are not only determined by your diet, but also your grandfather's diet as a kid,](#) particularly fascinating and gives a [personal account of the effects of his own grandfather's diet on his health.](#)

Most studies of nutrition that inform food policy in the US are based on non-Hispanic Whites, however. Adele Hite at [Eathropology](#), gives a really great and powerful summary of how [scientific information on the interaction between race and nutrition, especially for Latinos,](#)



About Me



Elisa

I am a Mexican-American marine biologist. I spent my entire life in Southern

California until January 2010, when I began a postdoc at Harvard. In May 2011 I was diagnosed with hypoglycemia. Since then, as a result of dietary changes, I feel as if I've experienced a metamorphosis. This blog is an attempt to document my new life by sharing my discoveries in science and nutrition.

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- ▼ [2013](#) (1)
 - ▼ [October](#) (1)
 - DIS Blog Carnival - Latino / Hispanic Health: Scie...
- [2012](#) (22)
- [2011](#) (48)

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is sorely lacking.

Finally, Marcelo Vinces at [SoScience](#) also gives us a personal account of his experience with [23andMe](#). 23andMe gives predictions about medically relevant traits, but assumes only European ancestry and **doesn't take into account other aspects of his Hispanic ancestry due to inadequate information**.

My goal for this blog carnival is to bring awareness to this topic in order to inspire more research. One organization that I feel has the potential to accomplish this task is [NuSi](#), the Nutrition Science Initiative, which makes it possible for researchers to conduct experiments that will directly address the causes of obesity-related chronic diseases.

Only with good scientific research will we uncover the true causes of Latino health disparities and add another piece to our heritage that is cause for celebration.

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