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Latinas Attemping Suicide: When Cultures, Families, and Daughters Collide

Luis H. Zayas

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Since 1991, surveys conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have shown that Latina teenagers attempt suicide at a far higher rate than other American youth in the same age group; one in seven Latinas attempt suicide while one in ten black and white girls do. While these numbers came as a shock to the general public, many urban clinicians have long suspected this disparity without having the data to confirm the problem or draw attention to it. Here, in a compelling account of a troubling trend that draws on interviews conducted both with girls who attempted suicide and those who did not, Luis Zayas begins to unravel the mystery of why young Latinas attempt suicide in such great numbers.

Beginning with a description of the U.S. Hispanic population and the many values, beliefs, norms, and child-rearing practices that Hispanic families share in common, Zayas goes on to look at the development of young Latinas, girls caught between two cultures, struggling to reconcile them. By drawing on developmental, cultural, and family psychology and acculturation and immigration theory and research, Zayas' in-depth research forms a conceptual basis for understanding Latina suicide attempts. He illustrates with the girls' own words, and those of their parents, how social, psychological, family, and cultural factors come together into a flashpoint. The result is a startling look at the nexus of influences that make Latina adolescence a particularly risky time.

This book presents the anatomy of experiences before, during, and after suicide attempts and suggests new ways of understanding them. More importantly, it offers researchers and clinicians a model for understanding and working with young Latinas and their families in a compassionate, culturally sensitive manner.

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