

Angie Chabram-Dernersesian and Adela de la Torre, eds. *Speaking from the Body: Latinas on Health and Culture*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. 264 pp.

Diabetes, hypertension, breast cancer, obesity, depression, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, dementia, Parkinson's, lupus, and hyper/hypothyroidism all assume center stage in bridging the gap between health and culture in the book *Speaking from the Body: Latinas on Health and Culture*, edited by Angie Chabram-Dernersesian and Adela de la Torre. Essentially, Latinas speak from the body and heart as well as mind, with depth and detail, about dealing with health care and cultural factors when suffering from these diseases. The *pláticas* contained in this book are not only narrations within specific social contexts and family relationships, but also reflect different voices that identify Latinas as agents of representation of diverse health states.

Speaking from the Body can be placed in a "must read" list as it relates to a current debate on public health issues. While presenting living examples of Latina health, illness, community, and identity, it also recognizes that Latino families need culturally sensitive and responsive primary-care providers who incorporate emotional support.

Innovatively, this book foregrounds Latina expressive speech as a cultural representation related to health issues. The editors, Chabram-Dernersesian and de la Torre, draw attention to the significance of orality by placing it at the heart of coping with disease and describing it as a way of "cleansing through deep conversation." Whereas the different narrators speak about their own or their mother's experiences with a certain illness, the book highlights the tribulations and efforts of these women in trying to understand and make the best out of living with disease. More importantly, *Speaking from the Body* provides many examples of "communities of caring" and their key role in the healing process. Its emphasis on spirituality, family support, and *pláticas*, as essential in making the healing experience livable, is a common thread in the Latina experience with health issues.

Speaking from the Body is a well-written book whose introduction, narratives, and concluding analyses take the reader through diverse visions of Latina health, illness, community, and identity. It acknowledges that the new threads in scholarship place Latinas at the heart of the healing and health studies policy agenda. Its individual narratives come "out of the shadows and family," uncensored, to resonate with the illness experiences of other social groups whose health states may also be affected by factors such as race, class, gender, and culture. Overall, this book's wide-ranging relevance can

encompass from Chicana/o and women's gender studies scholarship to public policy, medical narrative and cultural studies in general. Its audience can include health-care professionals, academics, students, Latinas, and others from many walks of life.

Readers may relate to the different stories, their humor, and the various cultural and professional perspectives. The easy-to-follow format first introduces the reader to statistics, medical facts, and risk factors about one of the illnesses. The description that follows, of the stages, symptoms, and ways to understand the illness, carries the message that "information is power." Acquiring knowledge, understanding the illness, exposure to it, its causes and prevention can all serve as a means of awareness at the personal level. Specifically, each story renders the narrators' cultural and medical perspectives, family changes, collaborative ways of coping, dealing with doctors, physical problems, feelings of shame, and life expectations and disappointments. Even more, these experiences exemplify the dynamics of support and decision-making regarding treatment options and dangers, while raising questions about dealing with chronic pain, depression and what Anzaldúa calls "symptoms as signals of growth."

One of the book's strong points is its lesson in courage and might, which focuses on the women's inner-strength. It gives voice to the Latina experience of disproportionate amounts of psychological distress due to family structures, the environment, and the tendency to remain silent and not seek treatment. Remarkably, for some of these women who have been afflicted by family deaths, poverty, lack of medical attention, constant migration, separation from children, pesticides in the fields, or even domestic abuse, health is a process attained through positive attitude. Furthermore, this book relates how career stress affects women's health, i.e., how the identity of these women is affected by their bodies. Life changes and adjustments point to the energy spent on their illness instead of their career, teaching, reading and writing.

Overall, with these narratives Chabram-Dernersesian and de la Torre bring a voice of hope, inspiration, and strength to readers afflicted by illness as well as to a general audience. Likewise, the book serves as a means to reflect upon one's own strengths and achievements with a sense of empowerment and self-determination.

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