

**Lillian Comas-Diaz: A Trailblazer in Multicultural Psychology**

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In this poster, we highlight Comas-Diaz’s journey from Chicago, to Puerto Rico, to Washington, DC, and how her personal experiences have influenced her work as both a psychologist and an activist. We also emphasize future directions and applications of her research in an effort to advocate for increased multiculturalism and inclusion in the teachings, and future, of psychology. In line with this effort, we will provide resources and introspection questions for students, instructors, and clinicians in hopes to continue the dialogue that Dr. Comas-Diaz has created.

**Childhood History**

Lillian Comas-Diaz was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1949. At the age of six she relocated to Puerto Rico with her family, where she was introduced to a new culture. Through her early education, she was exposed to an array of cultural influences, which contributed to her appreciation of diversity, multiculturalism, and syncretism (“Award for Distinguished,” 2000).

**Educational History**

Comas-Diaz’s tenure at the University of Puerto Rico to receive her bachelor’s degree coincided with Puerto Rico’s political movement for independence, which bolstered her interest in oppression (Pama, 2019; “Award for Distinguished,” 2000). Comas-Diaz worked with individuals in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship and saw how important it was to work through socio political issues (“Gold Metal Award,” 2019). This prompted her to develop an ethnocultural approach to therapy, which included cultural, historical, socioeconomic, geopolitical, and ethnic aspects that she utilized when working with victims of political repression (“Gold Metal Award,” 2019).This interest, along with the difficulties of marginalized populations, was expanded due to her work with transplanted Puerto Ricans who experienced racism before and after their return to Puerto Rico. Comas-Diaz continued her education at the University of Puerto Rico, where she obtained her master’s in clinical psychology in 1973; it was here that she was introduced to a systemic orientation of psychology (“Award for Distinguished,” 2000). Comas-Diaz then moved back to the United States where she began working in the field. Her work led her to realize the mass amount of unrepresented people in need of care (Pama, 2019). This inspired her to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, in which she completed her doctorate in 1979. During her time at the University of Massachusetts, she created programs involving areas such as cultural awareness, antiracism, empowerment, and prevention (Pama, 2019).

**Research & Work Contributions**

These topics became focal points of her work moving forward. Following graduation, Comas-Diaz began work with the American Psychological Association (APA) in Washington, D.C. In 1986, she helped found Division 45, the Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race. Along with this new division, Comas-Diaz facilitated the creation of an accompanying journal, *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health,* to disseminate their perspectives and research (Pama, 2019). This journal is now called *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology.*

Comas-Diaz went on to author, collaborate, and edit a prodigious amount of academic contributions. One such work, *Women of Color: Integrating Ethic and Gender Identities in Psychotherapy,* became a focal point in studying gender and race in psychotherapy (“Award for Distinguished,” 2000). Lillian Comas-Diaz’s professional contributions continue to this day. In her affiliations with George Washington University School of Medicine and Transcultural Mental Health Institute, she is furthering her research in racial trauma, microaggressions, and multicultural therapy (Pama, 2019). In 2019, her efforts were recognized by the achievement of the American Psychological Association Gold Medal Award for life achievement in the practice of psychology (“Gold Medal Award,” 2019). Comas-Diaz’s work continues to inspire therapists to strive for cultural competence and inclusion. Specifically, her contributions to understanding racial trauma and its implications have generated considerable research interest.

**References**

Pama, D. (2019). Lillian Comas-Diaz. Psychology’s Feminist Voices. Retrieved from http://www.feministvoices.com/lillian-comas-diaz/

Gold medal award for life achievement in the practice of psychology: Lillian Comas-Díaz. (2019). *American Psychologist*, *74*(5), 525–526. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000496

Award for Distinguished Senior Career Contributions to the Public Interest: Lillian Comas-Díaz. (2000). *American Psychologist*, *55*(11), 1317–1319. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.11.1317

**Future Considerations**

1. Why do you think history and systems classes rarely discuss the history of multiculturalism when it is something that has evolved and advanced the field?
2. Why was there a trend of multiculturalism in the past that has since faded away?
3. Is diversity good enough or should we be looking towards inclusion in order to become more competent psychologists?
4. Why is work in multiculturalism often unnoticed in the field of psychology?
5. For teachers/professors of psychology: What can you take away from this presentation that might help your students?
6. What are your takeaways from this presentation?