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**Book Review: Akhtar, S. & Bertoglia, M. (2015). The latino american: Psychodynamic perspectives on culture and mental health issues. Rowman and Littlefield. Contemporary Research in Disability and Rehabilitation**

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## Book Review

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# **The Latino American: Psychodynamic Perspectives on Culture and Mental Health Issues**

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### **Abstract**

Understanding and working with culturally diverse populations is an important component of counseling and allied helping professions. Many professionals receive some training as a part of their graduate programs on multiculturalism, but this is only the beginning and typically scratches the surface. From this point, professionals are expected to continue their awareness and learning about the needs and issues of the people they serve; for some this includes expanding their understanding of ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse individuals. Professionals wanting to better understand the experience, perspectives, and mental health concerns of Latino Americans may find this edited book informative and of value in helping them achieve this goal. The book, *The Latino American: Psychodynamic Perspectives on Culture and Mental Health Issues*, is comprised of 10 chapters and topics (i.e. immigration history, child-rearing, gender roles) as explained by a number of contributors.

*Keywords:* Latino, Latino American, Culture, Mental Health, Counseling

## **Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 pertains to the history of Latino immigrants within the United States. In this chapter, Lopez (2015), the author, explains the expansive diversity involved in working with Latinos; much of which is evident as people leave their native country and move to the United States. Understanding immigration history, family challenges, and decisions made within the family in pursuit of a better way of life, and the ways such a move affects everyone in the family are essential as these are individualized and likely to influence peoples' perception of themselves, their set of circumstances, and their ability to cope. For example, throughout the immigration process Lopez (2015) explains that individuals and their families may experience legal issues, discrimination and racism, cultural assimilation difficulties, employment concerns, separation of family members for long periods of time (i.e. mother being away from her children for years before being reunited), poverty and economic distress, language barriers, and political hardship – all of which can individually or collectively affect the coping process and well-being of Latinos.

## **Chapters 2 & 3**

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on child-rearing practices and ethnic identity. Authors, Fallon and Quintana (2015), explore intricate family values of the Latino family and how these values influence childrearing practices and expectations. Familial closeness, cohesion, and respect are important values; thus, when families are separated and reunited (as discussed in Chapter 3), due the relocation process involved in moving from one country to another, family members may experience personal issues on both sides which affect them individually and the family as a whole. For instance, in Chapter 3, Bullon and Alfonso (2015) share that when the parents move first and the children are left behind

with grandparents or extended family members, the children may experience separation difficulties. Later on, often several years later, when the family is reunited in the United States, parents find their children may not respond to them as previously expected. Some children may have underlying issues about being left behind and separated for all those years and in the meantime, they have developed a different identity than that expected by their parents.

Reunification of the family and its associated issues are only one set of concerns counselors and helping professionals must consider. Families face many other barriers and issues both within the family and in relation to the external environment. More specifically, Latinos must consider if or how they will honor their native customs and values within the context of now being confronted with the reality of being a part of an individualized nation. Finding a way to honor their own value in the midst of a vastly different culture is not an easy process. Parents and their children may have quite different ethnic and cultural identities which oftentimes causes stress and disharmony within the family. Part of this is related to language, exposure or lack thereof to American values and customs, peers and schooling, gender role socialization opportunities (i.e., male versus female), and education, just to name a few.

## **Chapter 4**

Professionals wanting to understand more about Latino gender roles, ways these influence interactions and personal and societal perceptions are encouraged to delve into Chapter 4. As a part of this chapter, Fallon and Bauza (2015) discuss language as defined by the Latino culture, gender role expectations, factors that affect gender roles, cultural value clashes that may exist between first and second-generation immigrants, and

personal changes that may occur following divorce.

### **Chapter 5**

Professionals working with Latinos may find it helpful to also understand the coping process and strategies utilized as some are hesitant to seek assistance. In Chapter 5, the author, Laria (2015), explains that for some Latinos, religion and spirituality is a strong value and component of peoples' lives. Too often, this group has been categorized as being Catholic but Laria (2015) stresses that this may or may not be the case. In fact, a number of Latinos are Protestant (i.e. Evangelical, Pentecostals, and Baptists). Additionally, some report to have other religious or spiritual affiliations (i.e. Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism) or none at all. Thus, it is imperative for professionals to learn and understand the religious and/or spiritual values of the person or family they are working with as this is likely to vary. Being open to peoples' personal values and belief systems is essential because as Laria (2015) explains the strong role religion and spirituality play an important role in peoples' lives. For many, this is a source of strength and people believe that God does not care about money, economic status, or prestige but is instead a "loving" entity who is understands hurt, pain, difficulties (i.e. natural disasters, political oppression, and poverty) and is available to all people who seek His presence and guidance. Having this "loving" entity to help them to be strong and spiritually centered is a key coping strategy in being resilient during difficult times. Further, Latinos who have strong religious or spiritual beliefs and practices find they are also provided with a sense of community and support from others pursuing similar beliefs. All of this adds additional support which can aid in facing, enduring, and overcoming difficulties experienced.

### **Chapter 6**

In Chapter 6, authors Akhtar and Aguiló-Seara (2015) remind us that it important for professionals to understand that many within group differences exist. Some of these differences are touched on in Chapter 6 when the topic of gender roles and differences in gender identity are explored and discussed through the use of movies. Similar to other cultures, Latino Americans express personal and familial conflicts when a family member has self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. To help illustrate some of the situations that may occur within the family, case studies are presented.

### **Chapters 7 and 8**

Chapters 7 and 8 are summarized together because each of them addresses mental health, issues pertaining to psychosocial risks or barriers to accessing mental health, and concerns affecting treatment among Latinos. More specifically, in Chapter 7, the author Torres (2015) reiterates Latinos are a diverse group and vary "in heritage, race, ethnicity, religion/spirituality, family dynamics and cultural identity" (p. 127). Furthermore, Torres (2015) discusses issues pertaining in misdiagnosis due to misunderstanding various cultural aspects and help-seeking behaviors (i.e., culture-bound syndromes, somatization, suicide attempts).

Chapter 8 is comprised of topics that may be of great value to clinicians working with this population. Pumariega, Cagande, and Rothe (2015) help the reader understand the impact of acculturation and personal stress associated with this process and how concerns related to acculturation can negatively affect peoples' physical and mental health and personal problems (i.e. depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicide, and familiar distancing). In addition, the Pumariega and colleagues (2015) educate professionals about the presence of mental

health disparities and provide some suggestions regarding therapeutic approaches professionals can consider as a part of practice.

### **Chapters 9 and 10**

Chapters 9 and 10 cover content pertaining to individual and sociocultural dynamics that may be included as a part of treatment when working with Latinos as well as helpful tips and vignettes on being a Latino psychotherapist. These last two chapters give professionals less new information and more exposure to case scenarios and examples that help illustrate ways they can improve their effectiveness in working with this diverse of individuals. Professionals wanting to learn more about these issues are encouraged to refer to these final two chapters.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

While the book explains the many issues experienced by Latinos and their family, very little information is discussed about how disability or how the presence of disability is viewed and experienced by the family. Such information would also be helpful to professionals because that is an important component of many peoples' lives and cultural family beliefs and expectations vary from one to another. Additionally, because the contributing authors present a lot of valuable information essential to understanding this population from a holistic and practical perspective, having additional information about working with people from a holistic perspective within the context of

disability would be of value in enhancing professionals' knowledge and understanding.

Understanding peoples' experiences and ability to access mental health services is vitally important to the care people receive. Some people may be hesitant to ask for or to access mental health services; thus, it important for professionals to do all they can to assist people in connecting with helpful supports and services. Professionals working with Latinos may find it helpful to review some of the culture-bound syndromes covered. Understanding culture-bound syndromes is important as some of these may influence the mental health diagnostic process. Also of importance is for professionals to consider and select, when possible, culturally sensitive and responsive approaches to better meet the needs of Latinos and their families. Having a comprehensive understanding of therapeutic challenges, barriers, and approaches is essential to aid professionals in providing the best help and support possible. Collectively, this book provides a thorough look at the needs and issues of Latinos along with strategies and approaches helping professionals can use to increase their effectiveness.

#### **Author Note:**

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