Introduction to Special Issue on Evidence-Based Treatments With Latinas/os: Attending to Heterogeneity

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Despite the growth in research attesting to the efficacy of psychotherapy, and especially evidence-based psychotherapy (EBP), there remain significant gaps in our knowledge regarding their efficacy with Latinas/os. In particular, very little is known regarding the specific contexts in which EBPs might be effective (or not) with Latinas/os. Part of the explanation for these gaps in our knowledge base is due to the fact that most manualized EBPs do not adequately attend to the within-group variability that exists among Latinas/os, and instead take a one-size-fits-all approach. In this Special Issue on Evidence-Based Treatments for Latinas/os, we present the work from five research teams that underscores the heterogeneity among Latinas/os in their efforts to develop and evaluate their interventions. Importantly, they do so in quite different ways. Some of the teams make minimal adaptations to standard interventions, because the standard intervention has already shown positive effects with Latina/o samples. Others make more extensive efforts to incorporate culturally relevant considerations into their interventions. Together, they represent a diverse range of approaches that can serve as guides in our efforts to identify which types of EBPs work for which Latino/as with which characteristics.

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Over the past 60 years, there has been an explosive growth in research on the efficacy and effectiveness of psychotherapy, beginning with Eysenck’s (1952) seminal review in which he concluded that psychotherapy’s rate of success was not greater than spontaneous remission. This controversial article was rebutted by several reviews that reached diametrically opposite conclusions (e.g., Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975). Advances in treatment outcome methodology, as well as the advent of meta-analytic techniques (Smith & Glass, 1977), allowed for more rigorous and empirical evaluation of the effects of psychotherapy. These advances in research helped produce an empirically supported consensus that psychotherapy did, in fact, lead to better outcomes than no treatment or usual care (e.g., Weisz et al., 2013; Barlow, 2004).

Unfortunately, the field has been beset by disagreements regarding what constitutes acceptable standards of evidence of efficacy, the appropriate balance between internal and external validity, and the relative focus on particular theoretical approaches versus nonspecific therapeutic factors (Norcross, Beutler, & Levant, 2005). Moreover, there has been considerable concern regarding the effectiveness of psychological treatments with individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006; Bernal & Scharro-ndel-Rio, 2001). One fundamental problem has been the dearth of clinical outcome research that has included sufficient numbers of diverse participants to allow for conclusions about the efficacy of those treatments with those groups (Cardemil, 2010; La Roche, 2013; Mak, Law, Alvidrez, & Pérez-Stable, 2007). The limits in our understanding of what treatments work for Latinas/os have been particularly problematic, given the well-documented growth in...
the Latina/o population (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011) and their reduced likelihood of seeking and engaging with formal mental health services (Alegría, Mulvaney-Day, Woo, et al., 2007; Cabassa, Zayas, & Hansen, 2006; Villatoro, Morales, & Mays, 2014).

Nevertheless, there is reason to be optimistic about the effectiveness of psychological treatments with Latinas/os, given the rising number of clinical trials of psychological treatments that have provided good evidence regarding their efficacy with Latinas/os (Miranda et al., 2005). Some of these trials have evaluated the efficacy of a standard psychological intervention and ensured that sufficient numbers of Latinas/os were included (e.g., Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Beauchaine, 2001; Zlotnick, Miller, Pearlstein, Howard, & Sweeney, 2006). Others have been cultural adaptations of standard psychological interventions, whereby certain modifications have been made to the structure, delivery, and/or content of the program to make them more relevant and attractive to Latinas/os (e.g., Fung & Fox, 2014; Miranda, Azocar, Organista, Dwyer, & Areane, 2003; Rosselló, Bernal, & Rivera-Medina, 2008). Still others have been culturally sensitive interventions that have been developed specifically for Latinas/os (e.g., Malgady, Rogler, & Costantino, 1990). Moreover, two recent meta-analyses that analyzed effect sizes separately for different racial/ethnic groups found medium effect sizes for Latina/o samples (Griner & Smith, 2006: $d = 0.47$; Smith, Rodriguez, & Bernal, 2011: $d = 0.56$). Of note, Griner and Smith (2006) found that interventions that focused on less acculturated Latina/o participants generally had larger effect sizes than those that were focused on more acculturated Latina/o participants.

Despite these advances, critical questions remain. One area about which very little is known has to do with the specific contexts in which evidence-based psychotherapies might be most effective with Latinas/os. Given the nascent state of the field, most of the treatment research with Latinas/os has worked from a one-size-fits-all model and attended less to the important heterogeneity, or within-group variability, that exists among Latinas/os. Some of this heterogeneity can be seen in the differences in prevalence rates of disorders across Latinas/os of different national origin and generational status (Alegría et al., 2008; Vaughan, Kratz, Escobar, & Middendorf, 2013). Some of the heterogeneity is evident in different levels of acculturation, ethnic identity, and adherence to cultural values (e.g., Araujo Dawson & Quiros, 2014; Piña-Watson, Ojeda, Castellon, & Dornhecker, 2013).

This heterogeneity that exists among Latinas/os raises important questions about how best to develop psychosocial interventions that are sufficiently sensitive to capture important contextual and cultural differences among disparate subgroups. Indeed, it may be the case that more careful inspection of the intersection between treatment and context will raise the possibility that specific interventions work more effectively with some Latina/o subgroups than others. This special issue on evidence-based treatments for Latinas/os provides an opportunity to advance the field of Latina/o psychology by more thoroughly exploring these issues.

**Different Approaches to Engaging With the Heterogeneity of Latinas/os**

The five articles included in this special issue represent cutting-edge approaches to the development and evaluation of psychosocial interventions for Latinas/os. As such, all of the articles attend to the heterogeneity of Latinas/os. However, they do so in quite different ways, and we encourage readers to consider carefully the strengths and limitations of the different approaches. In particular, there is considerable variability in the extent to which the investigative teams incorporate cultural and contextual considerations into their intervention to make them more relevant for Latinas/os. Some of the teams make minimal adaptations, while others utilize adaptations that are more extensive.

Reyes-Portillo, McGlinchey, Yanes-Lukin, Turner, and Mufson (2017) describe findings from their investigation of an unadapted intervention, Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Depressed Adolescents (IPT-A). Given the strong results of IPT-A with Latina/o samples, Reyes-Portillo and colleagues do not make any modifications to make the intervention more culturally relevant. Indeed, the authors note that the standard version of IPT-A, by virtue of its focus on interpersonal processes and emphasis on improving both familial and peer relationships, may already be in sync with cultural values like *familismo*. Therefore, these authors focus their article on exploring the possibility that IPT-A might operate via its effect...
on a salient cultural characteristic, family functioning.

In contrast, Vaclavik and colleagues (2017) incorporate cultural considerations into their cognitive–behavioral therapy (CBT) for youth anxiety in two primary ways. First, the authors attended to the language needs of their participants. Although the group CBT interventions were delivered in English, communication with Spanish-speaking parents was in Spanish and materials were translated as needed. The other intervention, a parent-involved CBT, was delivered in the language preference of the family. The second adaptation was to discuss parental control and autonomy-granting within a cultural framework, all the while maintaining respeto for parental viewpoints. Beyond these adaptations, Vaclavik and colleagues examine whether cultural factors (i.e., parental acculturation) might affect treatment outcome. In particular, they explore whether modality of treatment (i.e., group CBT vs. parent-involved CBT) might produce different outcomes depending on parental acculturation, raising the possibility that interventions could be tailored beyond ethnic background.

Two sets of investigative teams present a more detailed consideration of culture in their research. Santos and colleagues (2017), in their investigation of behavioral activation for depression, describe an adaptation of a standard behavioral activation protocol. Their adaptations include making the intervention sensitive to the life circumstances of their participants (e.g., migration stresses), expanding the focus to include family members and other support systems, incorporating certain Latina/o cultural values and beliefs, and attending to therapist–client ethnic match. Similarly, Stein et al. (2017) incorporated several important cultural considerations in the development of their patient activation intervention. These considerations included focusing on familial communication (to leverage the cultural value of familism), incorporating other cultural values like respeto, and explicitly addressing culturally relevant life experiences like discrimination and language barriers. Both investigative teams then go on to examine possible moderators of treatment engagement and response.

Finally, Acevedo-Polakovich and colleagues (2017) focus on adapting an intervention for a unique context: Latina/o youth at risk for gang involvement. The authors work with a sexual risk reduction intervention, ¡Cuidate!, that has already been adapted for use with Latinas/os and demonstrated good results (Villarruel & Eakin, 2008). Rather than simply use this adapted intervention, Acevedo-Polakovich and colleagues further adapt ¡Cuidate! in several important ways to make it as culturally relevant as possible for their population. These adaptations included focusing their intervention on youth who have not yet become highly involved in gangs, including a peer facilitator, and adding several additional modules as well as a parent session.

Taken together, these five articles provide readers with a wide range of perspectives on developing treatments for Latinas/os. Some of them examine culturally relevant mediators (e.g., family functioning), while others examine culturally relevant moderators (i.e., acculturation, acculturative stress). All recognize the heterogeneity among Latinas/o, highlighting the complexity of what it means to adapt an intervention for Latinas/os. It is clear from these articles that a one-size-fits-all model for Latinas/os is overly simplistic.

**Moving Forward**

The five articles presented in this special issue provide an excellent foundation from which to continue to grow intervention research with Latinas/os. Their collective findings do indeed suggest that the next generation of treatment research will need to attend closely to heterogeneity, and possibly adapt interventions to respond to the specific contexts in which the interventions are being delivered. This represents a significant challenge for our discipline, which historically has been reluctant to consider culture in nuanced ways. It is much easier to ignore culture altogether, or to conceptualize all members of a cultural group as a monolithic entity, than it is to grapple with the messy complexity of culture and context. The five articles in this special issue are exemplars in this regard, and they make us optimistic about our collective ability to rise to the challenge of making psychosocial interventions available, accessible, and effective for all Latinas/os.
Abstracto
A pesar del crecimiento en la investigación que demuestra la eficacia de la psicoterapia, y especialmente la psicoterapia basada en la evidencia (PBE), siguen habiendo lagunas significativas en nuestro conocimiento con respecto a su eficacia con Latinas/os. En particular, se sabe muy poco acerca de los contextos específicos en los que los PBE podrían ser efectivos (o no) con Latino/as. Una explicación parcial de estas deficiencias en nuestro conocimiento se debe al hecho de que la mayoría de los manuales de los PBEs no cuidan adecuadamente la variabilidad intragrupal que existe entre Latinas/os, y en su lugar toman un enfoque que todos son iguales. En esta “Edición Especial de Psicoterapias Basadas en Evidencia para Latino/as” presentamos los trabajos de cinco equipos de investigación que enfatizan la heterogeneidad de los Latino/as en sus esfuerzos para desarrollar y evaluar sus intervenciones. Es importante notar que ellos lo hacen de maneras diferentes. Algunos de los equipos realizan adaptaciones mínimas a intervenciones ya establecidas, porque esas intervenciones ya han obtenidos resultados positivos con muestras Latino/as. Otros hacen adaptaciones más extensas para incorporar consideraciones culturales relevantes en el desarrollo de sus intervenciones. En conjunto, estas cinco investigaciones representan una diversidad de enfoques que pueden servir como guías en el área de cómo identificar qué tipos de PBE funcionan con cuales Latino/a y con cuales características.

References


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