Feminist Therapy with Latina Women

Feminist Therapy with Latina Women highlights the principles of feminist and multicultural counselling and therapy with Latinas and Latin American women, providing both theoretical approaches and applied frameworks. The authors are all experienced therapists and researchers with a deep understanding of the issues relevant to this particular population. In presenting their expertise, they discuss individual concerns and social context, applying it concretely to the personal and collective lives of Latina women. Chapters focus on the intersecting principles of feminism and multiculturalism, providing a much needed contribution to the field, with topics including domestic violence, eating disorders and body image, addictive behaviours, sexuality, immigrant and refugee experiences, and balancing the multiple roles of work and family.

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Integrating the Personal and Social Voices of Latinas in Feminist Therapy

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After Debra and I (Oliva) finalized our co-edited special issue of *Women & Therapy* on Asian and Asian-American women, it became evident to the both of us that we needed to do the same for Latinas and Latin-American women. Our collaboration had been productive and enjoyable, and we were ready to embark on another project together. The result of that work is this special issue you are holding in your hands. We hope it provides readers with an overview of the latest in research and practice with Latinas. Needless to say, there is much more that could have been included in this issue. Indeed, we had to maintain strict limitations in size that prevented us from including other contributions.

Obviously, the content of this issue is close to my heart and experience, and I (Oliva) am delighted that Debra wanted to join me and even take the lead. Just as this is an area of life work for Oliva, I (Debra), too, have had a long time commitment to feminism and social justice and was pleased and honored when Oliva suggested that we continue our journey together. Although I had not worked previously on Latin American psychology or on issues specifically relevant to Latina women, I knew the importance of this project as it provides the opportunity for the voices and untold lived experiences of these women to be heard and illuminated. I feel privileged to have been able to make this vision a reality and appreciative of the development and learning that it has provided me.

The issue starts with a section that focuses on research with Latinas. Stephens, Fernández, and Richman investigate the impact of parental messages
regarding skin color on Hispanic women in the United States. The next two articles focus specifically on Mexican-American women. Kuba, Harris-Wilson, and O’Toole assess the complicated relationships between weight, cultural weightism, gender identity, assimilation, family factors, and eating disorder symptoms to develop a culturally discrepant gender identity theory, while Flores, Zelman, and Flores present results from life narratives of five Mexican immigrant women with moderate to severe chronic pain and the implications of culture and gendered imperatives on their health care and behavior. This section ends with a narrative by Oliva Espín who discusses the complexity of multiple identities, particularly being Latina, female, and lesbian, and the process of integration of these identities. Through research and her own personal experiences, she shows the struggles and possibilities in negotiating this process of self-definition and briefly discusses its implications for therapy.

Feminist therapeutic approaches then follow. Carranza illustrates an innovative cross-border family therapy approach for therapists working with Latina immigrant and refugee women who live in different countries from their own family members. A case study that shows the therapist’s flexibility and creativity in working with a Salvadoran refugee woman in Canada is presented. Next, from a relational cultural theory (RCT) perspective, Ruiz illustrates the use of RCT concepts in understanding and working with Latina immigrants. Lastly, Díaz-Lazaro, Verdinelli, and Cohen demonstrate how principles of empowerment feminist therapy (EFT) can be effectively applied to therapy with Latina immigrant clients.

The last section highlights interventions that emerged within communities where Latinas live and the subsequent responses developed and implemented within them. The article by Perilla, Serrata, Weinberg, and Lippy presents Caminar Latino, a comprehensive domestic violence intervention for Latino families created on the basis of the lived experiences of Latinas survivors as well as ecological frameworks, feminist therapy principles, and Freire’s adult education model. Next, Meléndez, Cortés, and Amaro present qualitative findings about the acceptability and cultural fit of spiritual self-schema (3-S) therapy for Puerto Rican women with addiction disorders. To end, Shapiro and Atallah-Gutiérrez examine the sociopolitical implications of ecosystemic and participatory health promotion practice. They utilize an event where massive workplace raids occurred to inform their strengths-based, collaborative work with community-based organizations. The authors attempt to link politics of everyday life, culturally meaningful gender justice, and social and personal change.

We hope to have accomplished our goals and to have presented a variety of approaches to the lives of Latina women that will whet readers’ appetite and encourage them to pursue more in-depth information. We also hope that the articles in this issue will be a tool to enhance the therapeutic practice of feminist therapists working with these women.
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