

# Working with the Latinx Community

Luis Cornejo, LMFT & Founder of *PsychoSocial*

## What type of issues are common for First Generation Latinx?

- Imposter syndrome (belief that achievements are based on luck & not skill).
- Trauma (deportation, community violence, family separation)
- Feeling stuck in between two cultures
- Limit and boundary setting with family
- Pressure to assist family (financially, emotionally, etc.)
- Language barriers (Not all Latinx people speak Spanish, some speak different languages depending on region and history)
- Pressure to succeed ("American Dream")
- Guilt and shame
- Distrust of the system (government, police, etc.)
- Gender roles and sexuality
- Religion

The Latinx community is diverse and ever growing. With a current population of 52 million or 16.7% of the U.S population. Latinx individuals represent one of the largest "minority" groups in the country. Latinx individuals are not all from one country, nor do they share one culture. Rather Latinx is an umbrella term used and adopted primarily in the U.S as a non gendered way of referring to a group of people. There is a lot of controversy over the use of this word and it is important that we let our clients tell us how they chose to identify within their cultural context.

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## Best Practices

- Therapist/Client relationships are crucial when working with Latinx individuals. Many Latinx individuals do not trust the system and this includes health care. If you are a non-Latinx individual chances are that you will not be trusted to understand or empathize. Take time to develop a relationship and refrain from making judgements/assumptions about culture, religion, family, or the unique experience of first generation Latinx born individuals. One of the main reasons Latinx individuals don't return to therapy is because they report not feeling understood by the therapist.
- Tread lightly when discussing family. Explore patterns, relationships, expectations, individual needs vs family needs, and family trauma (ex. immigration). Refrain from making judgements about family or labeling.
- Many Latinx cultures have been healing for hundreds of years. Do not assume that therapy is their first time "doing the work." Instead ask clients how they have coped, who has motivated them, values, and any traditional/family practices that support their mental health.
- Many Latinx individuals have a variety of superstitions or beliefs that may not make sense to you, however, it's important to explore pros/cons rather than dismissing or challenging completely.
- Seeing or sensing spirits/feelings is something common. This does not always mean the individual is schizophrenic or psychotic, but may be more sensitive to energy.
- Research and have some knowledge of each individual's unique culture within the Latinx umbrella (Guatemalan does not equal Mexican).

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## Best Practices

- You cannot escape politics. Many Latinx individuals are either well versed or interested in politics for the simple reason that it affects their everyday life and their families. Create space for the client to talk about their views, opinions, and do not avoid the conversation if it is brought in. Also refrain from blaming individuals, remember the law does not benefit nor protect everyone equally. Your experience may vary drastically.
- Grief is a common reason why many individuals from Latinx backgrounds come to therapy. Many feel an especially huge sense of loss when it's a family member who holds a high place in the family (parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle). It is helpful to explore the client's beliefs about death as well and support them in finding ways to honor the lost family member. Inquire about cultural practices or do some research.
- There may be some difficulties when Latinx individuals try to express certain feelings. Many will provide the word in their language (likely Spanish). These "feelings or experiences" include:
  - **Ataque de nervios:** can best be described as shocked nerves or related to bad spirits.
  - **Colera:** Extreme version of anger/rage (mind/body experience or reaction).
  - **Susto/espanto:** Frightening experience that causes strong reaction/fear response.
  - **Mal de Ojo:** The belief that someone cursed/hexed you and is causing physical/emotional/mental harm.

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## Helpful Books

- Cultura y Bienestar: Mesoamerican based healing and mental health practice based evidence. Authors: Ricardo A. Carillo PhD et al.
  - Amazon link: <https://www.amazon.com/Cultura-Bienestar-Concepcion-Saucedo-Martinez/dp/195261502X>
- Voices from the Ancestors: Xicanx and Latinx Spiritual Expressions and Healing Practices. Authors: Lara Medina and Martha R. Gonzalez
  - [https://www.amazon.com/Voices-Ancestors-Spiritual-Expressions-Practices/dp/0816539561/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=voices+from+the+ancestors&qid=1601861446&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Voices-Ancestors-Spiritual-Expressions-Practices/dp/0816539561/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=voices+from+the+ancestors&qid=1601861446&s=books&sr=1-1)
- Children of the Land. Author: Marcelo Hernandez Castillo.
  - Amazon Link: [https://www.amazon.com/Children-Land-Marcelo-Hernandez-Castillo/dp/0062825631/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=children+of+the+land&qid=1601861552&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Children-Land-Marcelo-Hernandez-Castillo/dp/0062825631/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=children+of+the+land&qid=1601861552&s=books&sr=1-1)
- Decolonize Your Diet Cookbook. Authors: Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel
  - Amazon Link: [https://www.amazon.com/Decolonize-Your-Diet-Plant-Based-Mexican-American/dp/1551525925/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=Decolonize+your+diet&qid=1601861679&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Decolonize-Your-Diet-Plant-Based-Mexican-American/dp/1551525925/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Decolonize+your+diet&qid=1601861679&s=books&sr=1-1)

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## Other Resources

- **PsychoSocial:** We have articles in both English/Spanish that cover a variety of mental health topics by mental health professionals.
  - Website: [www.psychosocial.media](http://www.psychosocial.media)
  - Instagram: [psychosocial\\_media](https://www.instagram.com/psychosocial_media)
- **Latinx Therapy:** Founder Adriana Alejandre is the host of her popular podcast Latinx Therapy which provides discussions and guests covering various topics that impact the Latinx community such as trauma and substance use issues.
  - Podcast: <https://latinxtherapy.com/podcast/>
- Spanish inclusive apps: These apps have Spanish language accessibility and can be helpful tools:

**Mental health apps**  
**AVAILABLE IN SPANISH**

**Lumosity**  
Upon signing up with a social media account or email address, users are invited to complete a "Fit Brains" assessment that evaluates the user's response speed, attention, and memory. You will then be given one free training game per day.

**Sanvello**  
Uses principles of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to help with anxiety, depression or stress. You can track your progress over time, get personalized activities and exercises, and set yourself challenges in areas you'd like to work on (e.g social skills, building confidence). You can use the community forum to chat with other users.

**Stop, Breathe, & Think**  
Offers short meditation exercises based on how you feel when you "check-in". You can track your mood over time, which can help you identify things that might help you. Upgrading to a paid version gives access to special exercises for youth of color, stress at college, pregnancy and more.

**ONE MIND**  
PsyberGuide

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