The Latin@ population in the United States is projected to increase by 115% by 2060 (US Census 2015), and the enrollment of that population in post-secondary, degree-granting institutions is also projected to increase (see Figure 1). Narrative therapy has been used championed by competent counselors in/for multiple areas (e.g. academic, career); however, little research is available on narrative therapy’s efficacy specifically concerning a Latin@ college-aged population. Featured here is a review of literature on this population, on counseling this population, and on using narrative interventions and techniques to do so. We conclude with a brief discussion of need for further inquiry.

Findings: Latinos in Higher Education

Hispanic college students often attend two-year colleges (see Figure 1) and enroll for less than full time in order to meet familial and financial responsibilities (NCES, 2015). “Hispanics represent the largest and fastest growing minority population in the United States, yet their college access and success statistics remain alarmingly low” (Pyne & Means, 2013, p.186).

Many demands and stressors placed on the Hispanic student can be overwhelming and lead to higher drop-out rates, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems (Cervantes, Minero, & Brito, 2015).

Counseling may benefit the Latino student in adjusting to college life, transitioning from a community college to a university, and integrating the student’s new and fluid identities with their family and culture (Berrios-Allison, 2011; Garcia & Alexander, 2012).

Findings: Unique Problems

Latin@ clients often face experiences and challenges unique from that of college-aged members of other origin or culture groups; these include:

- Different generation levels of immigration (Ojeda & Flores, 2008)
- Undocumented status (Cervantes, Minero, & Brito, 2015)
- Not mastering the English language (Morales-Campos, Casillas, & McCurdy, 2009)
- Lack of role models (Rivera, Blumberg, Chan, Ponterotto, & Flores, 2007)
- Racial discrimination (Rivas-Drake, 2011)
- Microaggressions (Gloria, Castellanos, Segura-Herrera, Mayorga, 2010)

Narrative Therapy: Approaches and Techniques

Narrative therapy helps clients tell their stories, discover themes and meaning to “identify alternate ways of being that promote their goals” (Gibson, Shurts, 2010, p.173).

Because a major tenet of narrative therapy is externalizing the problem, it is useful for Latin@ clients who have internalized biases. The narrative approach can be used in conjunction with group counseling (Berrios-Allison, 2011). Some specific NT techniques that may work well with college-aged Latin@-s:

- Critical Race Theory (Pyne & Means, 2013). This perspective focuses on the structural nature of social problems and the ways in which narratives can be used to address systemic issues.
- Care teams and leagues can work together to create collective documents while individuals can collaboratively contribute to the development of narratives that reflect their experiences.

References

Rivera, L. M., & Brito, E. (2011). Multiple areas (e.g. academic, career); however, little research is available on narrative therapy’s efficacy specifically concerning a Latin@ college-aged population. 

Conclusions

Counselors may employ narrative approaches with clients because they are culturally sensitive, externalize problems, and can normalize experiences by creating communities that can learn from each other’s abilities and skills. However, little quantifiable evidence exists to conclusively posit narrative therapy or techniques as effective practices for college-aged Latin@s or other populations.

Therefore, a need exists for practitioners to work together to collect data on reduction or maintenance of symptoms or problems, goal attainment, and participant experience with a narrative approach to counseling.