

**Christian Latino Therapists' Experiences In Integrating Psychology
And Theology While Maintaining Client Autonomy**

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Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

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Approved by:

Dr. Mollie Evans Boyd - Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to examine Christian Latino therapists' experiences integrating psychology and theology while providing therapy in New York City and maintaining client autonomy. The theory guiding this study was Martin Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of these lived experiences. The questions in the study were to determine: (a) how the participants understood their role in the provision of therapy, (b) how the participants described their experiences in providing therapy, (c) what the participants learned about themselves in the provision of therapy, (d) what methods the participants used in the integration of psychology and theology, and (e) how the participants protected client autonomy in the provision of therapy. Participants were interviewed, and their responses were collectively analyzed. Several themes emerged from participant interviews. These included: (1) making connections with clients, teaching the client that grief and the need for counseling are normal, and encouraging the client to trust in the counseling process, (2) skepticism in the counseling process and the stigma attached to counseling, (3) Christian faith and belief being essential to their practice, (4) teaching about over-spiritualizing, and accepting client beliefs without undermining psychological principles, and (5) setting boundaries and explaining appropriate limits with respect allowed both therapist and client to express themselves freely in counseling sessions.

Keywords: therapy, experience, Latino, NYC, Heidegger, phenomenology

Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to my wonderful wife and my constant encourager Noemi. Thank you for journeying with me for the past five years and being patient and understanding when I was preoccupied with my studies. Without your support and understanding, I would not have been able to make it through. I can say without reservation that your commitment and focus on my success made the difficult times bearable. I share this doctorate with you.

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List of Abbreviations

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This phenomenological study explored Christian Latino therapists' lived experiences integrating psychology and theology while maintaining client autonomy in New York City. The study was conducted with therapists currently in practice or retired who actively integrated the tenets of psychology and theology into their practice while considering clients' religious or non-religious worldviews in their provision of psychotherapy. While integrating these two domains, these psychotherapists were also careful to be aware of client autonomy and walked with great respect into their lives. The therapeutic relationship and rapport they gained with their clients led to positive outcomes for them both. This introductory chapter will provide background information on the researched topic and focus on a gap in the literature that the current study seeks to fill.

In keeping with scholarly and ethical research methods, this researcher's biases and assumptions, the researcher's motivation, interest in conducting this study, and the researcher's personal history were also considered. A problem and purpose statement will be introduced to clarify the topic under examination and provide a rationale for the research study. The significance of the study as it pertains to the current literature will be thoroughly examined, and the research questions from which the analysis was derived also will be listed for review. Definitions of some of the terms used and germane to the study will be provided to ascertain that what is being researched will be clearly understood and provide value to the reader. Finally, a condensed summary will highlight significant areas and clarify all the researched items as they are used in the study.

Background

Much has been written about the therapeutic alliance between therapist and client and how this affects therapy outcomes (Pettyjohn et al., 2020). Therapist and client compatibility is one factor that can provide a healing atmosphere and reinforce the relationship between the two. However, the effect on the therapist should also be considered, as therapy does not occur in a vacuum, and the therapist is liable to absorb much of the clients' angst. The working relationship can be a catalyst for productive change or can hinder and prevent growth. Therefore, therapists must be gentle and respectful when dealing with their clients. What this looks like through an examination of the lived experiences of these therapists is what this research study sought to examine and, in particular, what this looks like with Christian Latino therapists working in New York City.

Historical Context

Cultural compatibility in counseling is essential and merits careful consideration when a therapist is chosen to enter into a therapeutic relationship with a client. Unfortunately, there are still some cultural disparities and misunderstandings within the ranks of those who provide psychotherapy and the people they work with (Gallegos, 2020; Huang, 2018). Moreover, healthy therapist and client interactions are necessary to bolster healthy coping mechanisms and promote overall wellness (Frunza et al., 2019; Ganzer, 2018; Scott, 2018). However, the literature notes that healthy and structured collaborations between psychology and theology inform the understanding of prevalent conditions affecting many parts of society (King & Baer, 2022; Ripley, 2022). This, in turn, can lead one to consider the benefits of exploring Latino therapists' experiences integrating psychology and theology with these populations with the added benefits of similar cultural backgrounds.

Social Context

Given that the growth of Spanish-dominant groups in the United States is increasing rapidly (Jalisi et al., 2018; Pew Research Center, 2016; Sevilla et al., 2020), the necessity of Spanish-speaking therapists continues to grow to meet this critical need. In addition, many of these groups seeking refuge in the United States are fleeing oppression, poverty, violence, and unstable governments, which results in high levels of psychological distress (Jalisi et al., 2018). Therefore, given their training and diversity, Latino therapists are uniquely positioned to provide mental health assistance to this population. It must also be reinforced as it is a matter of record that even within Latino communities, many cultural differences must be understood sensitively (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2022). Latino therapists' experiences were explored to enrich the literature through these skills and strategies used in integration with their clients.

Theoretical Context

Therapeutic relationships that appear unbalanced due to cultural, religious, or language differences are challenging to maintain. However, therapists who have developed the skills and strategies to work within these circumstances usually have an excellent rapport and healthy therapeutic relationships with their clients (Hook, 2020; Huang, 2028). Effective therapists can examine their work objectively and use proactive self-reflection to provide clarity and understanding when exploring their work practices (Loosemore, 2021; Reis et al., 2019). Bridging this gap between cultural compatibility, language differences, and similar experiences is the unique ability of the Latino therapist. Examining the themes accrued through exploring these experiences within the counseling context shed more light on the mechanisms by which the therapists practice.

Situation to Self

My motivation and interest in conducting this study are primarily educational yet practical in seeking knowledge that can be generalized and possibly transferred regarding the relational compatibility between Latino therapists and their clients by examining the therapist's self-described experiences. The practicality and mechanisms of integrating have long interested me through engagement in academic and religious situations, which have proved efficacious in working towards this integration. Snider et al. (2022) found clinical wisdom in the relationship between psychology and theology. My experience in seeking integration partially drove this study to extract more generalizability in other therapeutic relationships, with the understanding that the limited number of research subjects involved limited aspects of generalizability and transferability.

As a third-generation Puerto Rican born and raised in the South Bronx, New York City, I was interested in exploring the therapeutic dynamics experienced by Christian Latino psychotherapists in New York City with their clients. However, not only is there an ethnic similarity, but also the choice to be involved in the process of therapy through counseling, social work, and psychodynamic assessments is something I was interested in examining. This is important to me as I have practiced social work in New York City for the past twenty-five years through the Department of Education. These lived experiences have come to mold and synthesize skills and abilities in me and other therapists that help navigate clients through a sometimes rigid and challenging system that can easily discourage someone from seeking help and undermine their mental health needs.

There is also the fact that I identify as a Christian and do not divorce myself from this category when counseling while not imposing my view upon clients in session. Those therapists

chosen to participate in this research study also share this Christian identity. Exploring their methods of integrating theology with essential and fundamental psychological help for clients intrigued me. Some of the questions I hoped to have answered in the research study are: How is integration done without imposing therapist worldviews on the client yet still exemplifying Christian virtues and affect in session? Does the therapist overtly discuss their religious beliefs or wait for a client to bring them up? What effect does integration have on the client, the therapeutic process, and the therapist? These questions will provide a qualitative framework to explore their experiences in integration.

Finally, I considered that the integration of psychology and theology is a necessary endeavor. First, I accept the Bible as still relevant today for salvation and stable and resilient mental health while believing in psychology's efficacy in understanding the human condition. Second, I believe that these two domains of psychology and theology are helpful and essential in providing principles for living and functioning in our complex society. I was privileged to teach a course for five years titled *Psychology and Theology* at a master's level counseling school in New York City. This experience further piqued my interest in the dynamics and mechanisms of integration. However, I am still learning how this integration can be done systematically. The research encapsulated in this study provided greater insight into how these domains work together and provided further clarity for others in the field seeking to add this important integration into their counseling toolbox.

Problem Statement

The problem is that the relationship between client and therapist is exciting and vital while simultaneously challenging to both parties. This research study hoped to shed some light on how Latino therapists work through this reality while engaged in therapy in New York City.

Even though there is some momentum in Latinos providing psychotherapy, the vast influx of migrating Spanish-speaking populations necessitates an understanding of the work these therapists provide (Gonzalez et al., 2015; Sevilla et al., 2020).

It should also be noted that appearances and pre-assumptions notwithstanding, all Latinos are not alike. A shared heritage does not mean that differences do not exist, and within-group differences have been noted in Latinos within the literature (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2022). It makes sense that even Latino psychotherapists will differ within their culture and, therefore, can empathize with their clients from various ethnic communities and thus provide needed services with empathy and understanding.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore Christian Latino therapists' lived experiences integrating psychology and theology in their practice in New York City while respecting client autonomy. Although mental health services, or lack thereof, seem to be ubiquitous in daily news stories, those that provide psychotherapy often deal with homeless populations, domestic violence, and drug-induced individuals. Some populations, however, continue to be underserved; minority populations often do not avail themselves of needed services due to shame, the stigma attached to a mental health problem, and distrust of professionals (Nogueira & Schmidt, 2022; Robertson et al., 2015). According to them, Latino populations generally fall into this dynamic. Since this is the case, Latino therapists' expertise, resilience, and similar cultural experiences were mined as resources to help these populations.

Significance of the Study

This research study is significant because it purports to highlight and analyze a gap in the current literature, namely, the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists integrating

psychology and theology while protecting client autonomy. The specific experiences of this population within this context merits further examination and contributed new information. All of these elements, taken together, will add to the literature significantly as the interrelationships between them are studied and extrapolated into future and more extensive studies.

Empirical Considerations

It should be noted that cultural sensitivity is needed at all levels to bridge gaps of inconsistency and misunderstanding that need to be discussed safely (Pope et al., 2022; Sevilla et al., 2020). This study is critical because it added empirically to the current literature by exploring in-depth the methods, experiences, and cultural interpretations of Latino therapists within the nuances of psychotherapy where they exist daily. The literature demonstrates that the therapeutic relationship significantly promotes healthy psychological dynamics and increases clients' ability to develop positive coping strategies (Frunza et al., 2019; Ganzer, 2018; Scott, 2018).

Theoretical Considerations

Theoretically, the self-reflection of the Latino therapists allowed for a critical albeit subjective examination of ethics, mental health practice, and respect for client self-determination by these clinicians (Loosemore, 2021; Reis et al., 2019). Also, Latino psychotherapists often present with knowledge of multicultural individuals through their studies and experiences and by living in a dualistic environment of speaking at least two languages (Vaquero & Williams, 2019; Sevilla et al., 2020). In further examining this phenomenon of similar language and culture the literature will be broadened by including the experiences of the therapists in this study.

Practical Considerations

Bridging this gap between cultural compatibility, language differences, and similar experiences is the unique ability of the Latino therapist. The experiences of Christian Latino

therapists can be influential in helping other therapists and clients feel that they are being heard and that what they say is valuable. In addition, their advanced mental health degrees, coupled with working in the mental health organizations of New York City, provide them with a unique perspective that requires further examination. The exploration of the experiences of these Latino therapists opens the door to a greater understanding of the populations they serve and highlights their perspectives in providing therapy to them.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to examine the lived experiences of the therapists involved in the research study. Each question sought to engage the participant's thoughts and feelings regarding their interventions with clients in therapy.

RQ1: How do you understand your role as a psychotherapist?

This question clarifies the participant's role in therapy as they understand it given their activities and functions as a psychotherapist (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022).

RQ2: What are your experiences of being a psychotherapist?

This question explores the therapist's primary experiences in providing therapy and highlights the participants' perspectives (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022).

RQ3: What does it mean to be a Christian Latino therapist?

This question adds another factor to the previous question regarding being a therapist and narrows the scope to Latino therapists' experiences adding further context to the therapist's answers (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022).

RQ4: What methods do you intentionally use to integrate psychology and theology?

This question clarifies and explains the therapists' use of self in integrating psychology and theology (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022).

RQ5: How do you protect client autonomy in therapy provision?

This question explores the therapist's actions as they relate to the outcomes that affect clients (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022).

Definition of Terms

1. *Christian* – A person who subscribes to Judeo-Christian beliefs as memorialized in the canon of the Bible (Denova, 2022).

2. *Latino* – According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a Latino(a) is a person whose family ancestry derives from the twenty Spanish-dominant groups from Latin America and Spain (Baumann, 2019).

3. *Psychotherapy* – Using psychological principles to help a person reach or maintain healthy mental functioning (Parekh & Givon, 2019).

4. *Integration* – The collaboration between psychology and theology, often used in the context of the provision of psychotherapy (Strawn et al., 2018).

5. *Phenomenology* – Examining a phenomenon, such as experiences or the being of something, to discover the forces that shape it (Bynum & Varpio, 2018).

6. *Experience* – What happens to someone or affects them (Petitmengin et al., 2019).

Summary

This research study examined Christian Latino psychotherapists' experiences integrating psychology and theology in New York City while maintaining client autonomy. Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the theoretical framework and background to explore the experiences of these Latino psychotherapists. This researcher's interest in the study stemmed from his experiences seeking to integrate psychology and theology within his professional practice as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in New York City, working with

children, adolescents, and adults. The fact that the researcher is a third-generation Puerto Rican, aka Latino practicing in New York City also informed his interest in the research study.

Moreover, being raised in a Christian context and adopting those behaviors as an adult also play a part in this researcher's interest.

While Latino therapists continue to progress in making their presence felt in counseling, more research was still necessary on their feelings and thoughts regarding how the mental health counseling system operates. Their lived experiences are an essential part of the literature for those that will come after them and may need information from someone of their background to provide insight into their own experiences. The problem researched focused on how Christian Latino therapists view their experiences in the field of psychotherapy, given their ethnic status. This is closely related to the study's purpose, which was to examine the experiences of Latino therapists and develop themes surrounding these experiences to garner an understanding of their thoughts and feelings while in the field.

This researcher expected that the research study would fill a gap in the current literature by examining and analyzing the experiences in providing counseling by these Christian Latino psychotherapists and provide insight and a basis for further research into their thinking in the therapeutic environment. The research questions in the study were purposely open-ended and focused on "How" and "What" to provide an opportunity for the therapists to respond fully and try to provide an understanding of their mindset and worldview as they engage in psychotherapy. Various terms used are defined within the parameters of this research study to help clarify them for readers. These terms include "Christian," "Latino," "Therapist," "Integration," "Phenomenology," and "Experience."

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The provision of psychotherapy, while focusing on the client and their issues, needs, and recovery of good mental health, can also influence and affect the psychotherapist. As is commonly understood, people affect each other, and this is no less true in a therapeutic relationship. While therapists are frequently thought to be able to deal with the client's issues while maintaining a stoic demeanor, the reality is that everyone in the therapy process is changed, for better or worse, by their engagement in the process. When two (or more) individuals come together to discuss thoughts, feelings, and wanted or unwanted developments, the developed ideas can help or hinder further progress. Keeping this in mind, this researcher sought to engage with Christian Latino therapists to examine their lived experiences, whether negative or positive, in providing psychotherapy with an integrational perspective.

There is still much work to be done in providing therapy to multicultural populations (Gallegos, 2020; Huang, 2018; Nogueira & Schmidt, 2022). In Huang's case, she asserts that there appears to be tension between the need for mental health workers in her Asian Christian community and culturally compatible therapists. Although her agency is an overtly Christian one, clients can choose whether or not to discuss faith in therapy, but it is purely at their discretion. Huang feels that her ability to be culturally compatible, her counseling experience, her desire to integrate psychology and theology, and God's working within her and her client led to a healthy outcome (Huang, 2018). Although this case appeared to be beneficial for Huang and her client, there continues to be a great need for therapists that can successfully bridge the gap between psychology and theology in therapy competently.

Gallegos (2020), in the same vein, agrees with and echoes Huang's findings but ascertains that mental health professionals are not only tasked with providing therapy, but spiritual caregivers are often necessary to lessen tensions and support communities. He finds many challenges facing local communities, and mental health support is only one of their many needs. In his experience, racist mental health professionals, racial microaggressions, and dealing with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are three of the most challenging situations to deal with daily for racial minorities. He feels these all contribute to some potential clients, particularly those in multicultural contexts, who are suspicious of mental health providers. There is still some work to be done to lessen this negative perspective and garner greater respect in these communities.

Moreover, Nogueira and Schmidt (2022) and Robertson et al. (2015) reiterate that although mental health services are offered to more people, some populations still appear underserved. According to them, minority populations in general, and Latinos in particular, are still not availing themselves of all the mental health help available. They point out two reasons for this phenomenon. They feel that a general lack of trust in professionals and the shame and stigma attached to suffering from a mental health problem still plagues the Latino population. This makes sense given the suffering accrued in Latino populations from immigration to institutional discrimination and political turmoil in some of their countries. In essence, although inroads have been made in providing mental health care to needy populations, trust and understanding still need to be developed.

Given cultural compatibility, the need for spiritual as well as psychological counsel, and the misunderstandings imposed upon mental health counseling by some minority populations, there appears to be a gap between the need for mental health counselors and individuals with the

cultural, psychological, and spiritual skills needed to provide it (Gallegos, 2020; Hook, 2020; Huang, 2018). Additionally, with the rapid influx of several different Latino and Spanish-dominant populations into the United States, the need for culturally aware psychotherapists continues to grow in demand with no end in view. Furthermore, the lived experiences of such individuals require in-depth research and examination to understand their mindsets in the provision and reception of therapy and how they can work with clients while still maintaining client autonomy.

That being the case, it is hoped that this research study contributes to the existing body of work regarding Latino therapists' thoughts and feelings regarding providing therapy to their clients while respecting client rights and determination. These Latino therapists' work was explored to gain insight into their resources and abilities and add to the literature regarding the mechanisms by which they function therapeutically. The following section will provide the theoretical framework that guided the present research study. This framework will provide a basis for the current study and help articulate the relevant gap in the literature that this research study hopes to bridge. In addition, it will build on the lived experiences of the Latino therapists interviewed according to how they articulate these experiences. This will provide a greater understanding and relevance to the current literature.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this research study was from Martin Heidegger's phenomenology. Martin Heidegger's theory was essential to this research study because it describes how a person's beliefs, attitudes, and daily perceptions develop and transform experiences (Pham, 2022). These experiences were explored and analyzed to recover themes that add to the current literature regarding the phenomenon that Christian Latino therapists deal with

in their practices. The aforementioned theoretical framework embodied this study's ontological and epistemological character and anchored the methodological phase of the study's inquiry.

The background of phenomenology is rooted in Edmund Husserl's transcendental or descriptive phenomenology (Farrell, 2020; Pham, 2022; Shabazian, 2015). Husserl sought to find the essence of human knowledge through a dualistic view of reality comprised of the inner world of the soul and the outer world or physical world. Edmund Husserl proposed several procedures to capture the essence of a phenomenon. The first was the epoché which entailed bracketing understanding, knowledge, or assumptions regarding the observed phenomenon. The second procedure was transcendental phenomenological reduction which deals with preparing a detailed description of a phenomenon's meaning. The third procedure, free imaginative variation, asks one to isolate the essential features of a phenomenon and then imagine removing them to determine if the phenomenon remains the same (Farrell, 2020; Shabazian, 2015).

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, deviated from Husserl's transcendental and descriptive phenomenology by incorporating a hermeneutic phenomenology that used language to announce and make known what is experienced by an individual. Martin Heidegger focused more on what it means to be in the world rather than what one can know about the world (Farrell, 2020). Heidegger also posited that meaning is inherent within the lived experience, and all understanding is informed by three interrelated fore-structures of understanding: fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. These fore-structures, according to Heidegger, represent what one already knows about a phenomenon which will help understand and categorize new information for the recipient (Farrell, 2020).

This so-called being in the world of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology can also be explicated by three factors: "in the world," "the being," and "being in as such" (Pham, 2022, p.

263). The first factor, “in the world,” drives one to question the structure of the world and define what it is. The second factor, “the being,” is the current existence in the world. The third factor, “being in as such,” examines “in-ness” in the world (Pham, 2022, p. 263). These factors provided a means to explore universal response patterns while simultaneously generalizing that those involved are a part of that universal pattern. When contextualizing Christian Latino therapists’ experiences while integrating with their clients, their narrative voices fit nicely into Heidegger’s phenomenology.

Shahbazian (2015) describes hermeneutic phenomenology with human experience as it is lived. Focusing on bringing to light details of lived experience is essential and can lead to greater self-understanding and, thus, greater understanding of others. This can be helpful in the integration of psychology and theology as the Christian Latino therapist experiences life alongside the client and can be reflective and critical of their practice. As Whitehead (2021) described, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology can also be helpful when applied to health, well-being, happiness, and the most basic human experiences. In his practice, Whitehead has successfully applied Heidegger’s theory to athletes and feels that it can lead to greater intimacy in interviews when properly used. He cautions, however, that the methodology remains a problem because some researchers are afraid of misusing it.

The fact that Heidegger’s phenomenology focuses on individuals and their actions in the world, including the realities by which they are influenced (Neubauer et al., 2019; Shabazian, 2015), bodes well for the research study. The research into the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists helped to extend knowledge of their thoughts in place and provide greater insight into their therapeutic decisions and actions with their clients. Nebauer (2019), in further explaining hermeneutic phenomenology, posits that a person's past experiences do not need to be

disavowed. Instead, those experiences inform and guide where the person is in the present. Those experiences can give greater meaning and understanding to their functioning in the therapeutic environment. Therefore, these experiences should be examined to develop insight into the thinking process that led to their development.

In keeping with Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, therapists should be proactive in self-reflection regarding the provision of their service (Loosemore, 2021; Reis et al., 2019). This self-reflection should include questions about their performance, how they have or have not reached their client, and how they have been changed and challenged in fulfilling their professional duties. Also, regarding the present study, this pro-active self-reflection, without becoming self-deprecating, can benefit Christian Latino therapists as they look at their role in therapy and how they use themselves to provide help and comfort to others. This may also be advantageous in effectively providing a structured framework for further exploration to benefit the therapist and client as they work collaboratively to find a safe space to integrate their views and experiences.

Related Literature

The Meaning of Experience

One may commonly explain an experience as what a person lives through daily, how something affects an individual and the life activities that enhance or detract from an individual's standard of living. Benzel (2021) humorously quotes Randolph Frederick Pausch as referring to experience as "what you get when you didn't get what you wanted" (p.13). This may seem contradictory, but the reality is that experiences are, by necessity, personal and will often lead someone in a particular direction, even if not their intended outcome. In seeking to examine the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists, I recognized that their experiences were

different but no less valuable to each individual. Knowing that each experience is valid and vital helped me understand that I do not need to understand or agree with all information gathered from interviewing them. However, I was respectful and encouraging and held them in high regard as I explored them.

Although experiences are personal and accordingly reflect some bias on the part of the person living through them, this does not mean that personal experiences should be discounted as relevant in research studies. Experiences can be valid and informative, and “expertise by experience” (Oates et al., 2017, p. 471) reflects this sentiment. These authors studied the experiences of psychiatric nurses diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. They reported that bullying and feelings of vulnerability accompanied their diagnosis, and the nurses also experienced that other clinicians were concerned with their professional competence due to the diagnosis. The study's results cannot be overgeneralized, but it helps describe the fact that personal experiences, when carefully examined, can add significantly to the current literature. In the same way, the study on Latino therapists informs the research literature regarding the importance of their experiences.

In addition, the literature demonstrates that experiences, although subjective, can be beneficial and instructive to other people involved in similar situations and can inform future studies (Vandewalle et al., 2016; Vandewalle et al., 2019). A research study that examined peer workers' experiences with mental health professionals led to the identification of a lack of credibility, negative attitudes, tensions, and several other barriers to service implementation (Vandewalle et al., 2016). These were all evident through surveying the experiences of peer workers and providing a forum to bring necessary changes to light. These lived experiences all help to bring more respect and understanding to these different individuals by documenting

them. These experiences can be used to promote safe spaces and allow voices to be heard that may not have felt comfortable expressing themselves in the past.

Latino Psychotherapists

Although some may feel that a research study on Latino psychotherapists is not necessary or even essential, yet, given the mass exodus from several Latin American countries into the United States, it seems practical and beneficial to the mental health system to understand what feelings, experiences, and attitudes help Latino psychotherapists to function in current society. Being a Latino psychotherapist licensed in New York City for over two decades has given me a unique perspective and the ability to bridge multiple worlds simultaneously. In the context of psychotherapy, I have been able to work with different ethnicities and cultural groups. In addition, I have been able to do this in both English and Spanish, allowing me to see mental health needs from various viewpoints. This has also provided a valuable learning experience as I see populations grow and change in New York City.

Latino psychotherapists, although still underrepresented, continue to make inroads in the psychological professions (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021). Nevertheless, Latino psychotherapists still need to become an integral part of the culture, especially since, in the United States, Latinos are one of the most rapidly growing ethnic groups. (Jalisi et al., 2018; Pew Research Center, 2016; Sevilla et al., 2020). Given the increasing number of Latinos migrating to the United States, the fact that most of these immigrants are Spanish-dominant, and the traumatic experiences they suffer in transitioning from one country to another, the need for Latino psychotherapists continues to expand exponentially. Even from a practical viewpoint of being able to provide therapy in at least two languages, it makes sense to expand the availability of Latino psychotherapists.

Notwithstanding the continued growth of the Latino and Spanish-speaking populations in the United States, Latino psychotherapists are not only needed for linguistic purposes, but the cultural component of similar backgrounds with these emerging populations is helpful to a community that already feels marginalized (Gonzalez et al., 2015; Sevilla et al., 2020). Even so, there are even more pressing reasons for the continued need for Latino psychotherapists. High rates of psychological distress have been noted in Latinos seeking refuge in the United States. They often report violence, poverty, persecution, and war as just a few reasons to take the perilous journey to another country and culture (Jalisi et al., 2018). Not to mention that the migration journey is rife with peril, with little assurance of success, and can often lead to negative consequences.

Although Latino psychotherapists must perform the tasks that all psychotherapists do according to their titles, some character sub-themes in Latino populations can accentuate or denigrate their overall functioning. These pertain to idiosyncrasies and modes of being that affect their responses and interactions. This was especially notable in a study of Mexican women who are psychotherapists in training. Given considerations for generalizability and transferability, there are some limitations to the research study, but the experiences of these study participants merit further review. Nevertheless, four factors stood out in the research study regarding Mexican American psychotherapists in training. These factors include focusing on the family (*familismo*), a preference for warm interactions (*personalismo*), traditional gender roles for females, and acculturation (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021).

Regardless of its limitations, the study highlights that Latino psychotherapists come in many shapes and forms regarding their ethnicity. If Mexican American women generally operate according to a particular paradigm, other Latino ethnicities may function similarly, albeit within

their cultural milieu. This means that if this study were replicated, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Columbian, and Venezuelan psychotherapists (to name a few Latino ethnicities) would probably have similar patterns of focus internalized by culture and country of origin. Within-group differences among Latinos have been noted in the literature (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2022). This information highlights the necessity of Latino therapists operating in different locations with a skill set geared towards humanizing and giving voice to the different cultures engaged within Latino communities.

Although some may consider that it is given that Latino psychotherapists are fluent in both English and Spanish, the nuances of language when engaged in bilingual counseling dynamics do not consist in merely speaking both languages. Bilingual therapists must perform language-switching, broadly defined as the ability to alternate between two languages, follow a back-and-forth conversation, and combine words from English and Spanish within a phrase (Vaquero & Williams, 2019; Sevilla et al., 2020). Latino psychotherapists' language-switching is paramount in counseling, and it can be extrapolated from the literature that at least three counseling benefits are derived from its practice; they feel that emotional expression and self-disclosure are facilitated, further strengthening the therapeutic relationship (Vaquero & Williams, 2019).

Even though Latino psychotherapists are more readily available and continue to legitimize their place in the mental health industry, their success is only possible with the input and support of their valued clients. Nowhere is this more evident in the respect and care demonstrated to clients by therapists demonstrating a high regard for client autonomy. The client, in essence, is truly the expert in their own lives, and the psychotherapist merely pulls out from the client the myriad experiences that shape them. When doing this, however, there is the

danger of either inputting injurious values and information or devaluing the client's opinion and thoughts, thus minimizing client input. The concept of client autonomy is helpful here and helps the psychotherapist to pause and consider the importance of client collaboration, which will be considered in the following section.

Client Autonomy

Respecting the rights and privileges of clients is an essential element of the psychotherapeutic relationship. One of the critical components of providing psychotherapy is understanding that the client may or may not decide to follow through with the guidance provided. It is up to the therapist to develop a healthy therapeutic relationship with the client, not to coerce but to convince them that the sometimes-tedious work of counseling is worth the effort. A client enters into counseling relationships expecting that the therapist has their best interests in mind, and the therapist must demonstrate the veracity of this view. This usually begins by developing trust and fostering an environment accepting of client views. This dynamic relationship in counseling should be one of mutual respect, including the crucial aspect of client autonomy.

In many counseling scenarios, asking questions is essential in information gathering, expressing feelings, and requesting feedback (Cantwell et al., 2022; Juhila et al., 2021). Although it is a given that questions must be asked in this relationship, they can sometimes be intrusive and disquieting. For this reason, therapists' questions do not necessarily have to be directive but can and should be framed in a supportive way to enhance client autonomy (Cantwell et al., 2022). They also propose that shared decision-making enhances the client-therapist relationship and further empowers the client. (Juhila et al., 2021) Agree with this assessment and further propose that client competencies are enhanced through the avoidance of

manipulative language and the endeavor to increase client self-confidence. Nevertheless, there is an implicit and explicit agreement to respect client desires.

Even though client autonomy is upheld vigorously when debated, the reality is that there remains what may be considered “soft coercion” when complex cases are considered (Perry et al., 2018, p. 108). Their research found that mental health services providers sometimes highly recommend that a client do something to improve their condition even though the client is opposed to the recommendation. Drug use and mental illness are two factors that may lead to ethical challenges where the therapist and client disagree. On the other hand, in their research, Perry et al., (2018) found that education and conciliation were less coercive factors and helped the clients understand what the therapist was attempting to do. In these difficult cases, although client autonomy is the desire, there remains what the authors call an “ambiguous autonomy” (p. 108), which must be considered.

Client autonomy, although focused on the client, is informed by the therapist's behavior, attitudes, and input. When fostering a healthy therapeutic relationship, one must understand that even though the therapist may have different knowledge than the client because of their studies, they must still help the client understand their part of the relationship (Cantwell et al., 2022; Kinsella, 2018). The psychotherapist must gently lead the client to a place of safety where their opinions, observations, and values are held in high regard. This entails a collaborative alliance where the client's and the therapist's input are equally valid and can be a motivating factor in reaching therapeutic goals (Kinsella, 2018). Client autonomy is more of a collaboration and teamwork effort than a top-down narrative imposed upon the client by the therapist's knowledge and expertise.

Not only is client autonomy an essential dynamic in therapy, but it is also a vital consideration during the therapeutic process. One research study found that therapists felt they had to be more directive in the beginning stages of therapy when the client felt more anxious, although the client did not feel the same. Later, the clients felt they had less autonomy in treatment, while the therapists thought this was not an issue (Egozi et al., 2021). This difference in opinion between the client and the therapist demonstrates the significance of engaging the client in all aspects of therapy to preclude adverse client and therapist interactions and understandings. This counseling dynamic also fosters mutual respect garnered through client engagement and helps promote a healthy therapeutic environment, which proves advantageous for both parties.

Notwithstanding the importance of client autonomy in therapy, it is just one more mechanism in the therapist's toolbox to reach the common goal of improved client health outcomes. The relationships developed in the therapeutic process allow all involved to mature and gain greater insight into the delicate workings of the human mind. In this research study, a collaborative balance between psychology and theology is another mechanism to reach clients pursuing mental health. This balance is not easily achieved, and the skilled therapist must tread carefully in the arena between the therapist's religious beliefs and the client's beliefs. While doing this, an adequate knowledge base of psychological principles must still be needed to enhance the client's functioning. The integration process may successfully utilize client and therapist beliefs to achieve therapeutic goals.

Nuances of Integrating Psychology and Theology

Psychology and theology are two vast domains with multiple spheres of information available for both. It would be intellectually dishonest to say that either can be removed from modern society without severe repercussions. However, one can see that both of these areas can be used for good or evil as it refers to mental health and the overall healthy functioning of the human mind. In both the Old and New Testaments, the Bible has been used to guide, inform, and comfort countless millions for thousands of years. On the other hand, psychology has been used for the last couple of hundred years to inform and describe the human condition. Both domains can be efficacious when used with care and respect. It is essential in integration to maintain both close to oneself when working with clients. This will ensure that psychology and theology are kept in a healthy balance within therapy.

Integrating psychology and theology can be difficult but can also be seen as a collaboration rather than simply an academic exercise between the two domains (Haynes, 2020; Ripley, 2022). Haynes further posits that these two domains should not be seen as opponents but can be reconciled in practice and serve to enhance client needs. To accomplish this, however, continuums of respect, formative progress, and emotional development must be seen as critical factors when seeking to be active in the integration process (Haynes, 2020). More research is needed regarding integration, and Haynes advocates that instead of propping psychology and theology against each other, as some are wont to do, they should be considered in the light of what each offers the client. The result of increased mental health, better functioning in society, and security in relationships can demonstrate integration's efficacy.

Moreover, progress is made in integrative psychotherapy when the client develops insight into their functioning and coping mechanisms, and the therapist can work proactively with them

(Dehoff & Massey, 2022; Fort, 2018). These authors assert that during the integration process, after several sessions, the client may acknowledge how their faith has helped them manage anxiety in a healthy manner. More personal information from the client can be forthcoming, aided by the therapist's faith and psychological perspectives. When involved in integration, the therapist must be aware of their input psychologically and theologically concerning the client's needs and understandings. The therapist's worldview, as expressed in the therapeutic relationship, helps the client to develop better coping skills by sharing resources. This is essential for both client and therapist as they work together and synthesize the information they bring to the process.

Healthy therapist and client interactions bolster their relationship and can lead to better outcomes experienced throughout the therapeutic relationship (Frunza et al., 2019; Ganzer, 2018; Scott, 2018). However, they stress the importance of the counseling process by including religion and spirituality, one of the essential tenets of integration. They also assert that religion and spirituality support therapy by instilling values and principles in both therapist and client that reinforce their relationship. This, in turn, provides an anchor of support for the mechanisms used by the therapist in integration. The integration process does not necessarily favor one domain over the other. However, it borrows from each as necessary to aid the client in developing healthy coping mechanisms while at the same time helping the client develop a greater understanding of both psychology and theology.

When seeking this integration, practical considerations must still be considered (King & Baer, 2022; Ripley, 2022). They stress that caution must be used in the integration process. Ripley (2022) further points out that contrary to popular thought, worldwide economic, social, and health crises often lead to improved outcomes in society and individuals. Ripley adds that

these areas of human concern and interest have spiritual implications that can promote good mental health through personal acts of service. They can also be change agents by providing and extending mental health resources for local churches to use in their communities. All of these authors feel that a healthy collaboration between psychology and theology aids in understanding conditions that affect large parts of society while maintaining and sustaining psychologically safe boundaries.

The nuances of integration are not cut and dry, and much research is still necessary on how the mechanism of integration of psychology and theology is done in session. Moreover, even with this information, therapists' experiences in integration seem wide and varied. Latino therapists are only now beginning to move forward into the mainstream of therapy and are, therefore, still on the margins of integration. Since there is yet to be a systematic way of integrating, therapists must work closely with clients to ensure proper protocols are understood and followed and barriers to integration are avoided. This takes work by the therapist and the client and can be a learning journey they take together. Some of these common barriers to integration are discussed in the following section with the hope that healthy solutions can be found and instituted.

Barriers to the Integration of Psychology and Theology

Integrating psychology and theology is not a given; therapists wanting to do so must be aware of the client's needs and wants before adopting an integrational perspective. Only some clients may be interested in integration, and it is their right to refrain from participating in an integrational environment. This should be especially stressed in counseling agencies with a theological or religious foundation to protect clients and allow them to refuse integration and focus on only a theological or psychological therapeutic environment. In either case, the therapist

must protect the client's rights and values to ensure that the client receives the most efficacious treatment possible. The following are just some of the myriad situations that may hinder the integration of psychology and theology and represent just a small sample of these possible barriers.

Barriers to effectively integrating psychology and theology are still present in the counseling process, although therapists are generally adept at respecting client values or at least should be so (Adams & McMinn, 2014; Loosemore, 2021). Therapists must be conscientious in client interactions to acknowledge their biases, assumptions, and worldviews as they provide interventions (Adams & McMinn, 2014). The danger here is that therapists, when seen as an expert, can overwhelm the client with their expertise, thus diminishing the client's voice, and must avoid doing so. The authors warn that when assessing and evaluating clients, therapists may be drawn into the power of diagnosing and should, at all costs, avoid its corrupting influence. However, they also stress that Christian virtues are essential when interpreting and generalizing findings and how the religious beliefs of both examiners and students may influence scores.

They caution, however, that when exercising these Christian virtues, there is a potential danger of minimizing the psychological aspects of counseling. There should be a creative balance between the psychological and the theological to address spiritual and mental health issues healthily. McConnell et al. (2021) caution against either extreme as both psychology and theology are necessary and essential to integration (Cenker et al., 2021; Hoover-Kinsinger, 2018; King & Baer, 2018). Therefore, they propose that therapists should seek to include more than just social justice, multiculturalism, and peace in their practice. There must also be an active seeking after being salt and light in a decaying world. In other words, integration must actively include resources from both disciplines for greater viability. The need for balance is called for,

especially since therapists and clients seeking integration often have intersecting beliefs within psychology and theology.

While balance is essential, it is also vital for a therapist to try to understand the client's needs and how often their maladaptive adopted beliefs have brought them into their current situation. Client beliefs can hinder or help as they participate in therapy, and the therapist needs to understand these beliefs as they work with a client (Gordon, 2018; Torres-Blasco et al., 2020; White, 2020). Gordon (2018) also points out that sometimes, a client and therapist will have little in common, especially in an area such as spirituality or theological beliefs. She, therefore, suggests that the therapist avoid ignoring the client's beliefs and instead seek to explore them as therapeutically relevant. This entails some fine self-tuning by the therapist as they empathize with the client without minimizing their struggles or overwhelming them with concepts they may not understand. Understanding client beliefs fosters a better relationship and may prove fruitful in future therapy sessions.

The therapist's role in healing is vital and should not be taken for granted but seen as a mechanism to prevent barriers in counseling (Dehoff & Massey, 2022; Ganzer, 2018; McWhorter, 2019). The ability and skills necessary to attract the client into becoming relationally intimate in disclosing their pain and life circumstances can be difficult. If not careful, the therapist can begin to engage the client without first prioritizing what the client feels is their most urgent need, thus limiting client participation. Ganzer (2018), however, cautions on the importance of transference and countertransference as a means of further involvement of the therapist in working through client issues. Rather than seeing the important concepts of transference and countertransference as problems, they can be a growth dynamic in the therapeutic relationship.

Although a clear and consistent integrational perspective can often overcome some of these barriers to integration, moving incrementally and at the client's pace is important and necessary. As already noted, much of the work in integration relies on the therapist's value of the client and their full participation in the process. However, there should be a measure of responsibility throughout the therapeutic process put on the client to assist in their healing. Neither the therapist nor the client works alone, and this synergistic dynamic relationship can lead to maturity and improved mental health outcomes. This may be possible through a mutual understanding of the possibility of mitigating negative coping behaviors and developing healthy coping mechanisms through integration. These positive coping skills and strategies can alleviate the client's stress.

Developing Positive Coping Skills through the Integration of Psychology and Theology

Coping strategies and skills are many and varied. What helps one individual cope with life's stressors may not work well for another person. Hence, the importance of assisting the client in finding a sense of value, self-determination, and ability to cope is an essential aspect of integration. It behooves the therapist to engage the client in healthy dialogue that will enhance their self-understanding while enabling them to be partners in their healing. Developing positive coping skills is a critical conversation in the client and therapist partnership because it provides strength beyond the therapy that the client can repeatedly use on their own. The inherent value of the client and therapist relationship is concretely observed when a client can assimilate these new and productive coping strategies into their lifestyle and lessen the need for the therapist and begin to function independently.

Many challenges in this ever-changing world beset people living today. There is a notable increase in the identification of psychological issues, violence continues to increase, and myriad

economic difficulties affect communities (Dipierro et al., 2018; Gallegos, 2020;). To counter this negative reality, the essential spiritual and existential health dynamic must address adverse life situations (Torres-Blasco et al., 2020). The researchers propose that meaning-of-life issues should be treated in the therapeutic environment as a means of helping the client accept their functioning and needs in an efficacious manner. They present the real-life situation of a Latino male needing palliative care but having difficulty understanding the concepts used in therapy. However, he understood the spiritual concepts and was receptive to them. This case demonstrates the viability of Christian Latino therapists enhancing clients' care because they possess the cultural knowledge necessary to do so.

Integrating psychology and theology is also helpful in treating clients who need healthy coping skills and are receptive to spiritual disciplines as prescribed in different religious practices (Hoover-Kinsinger, 2018; Rosmarin et al., 2021; White, 2020). White (2020) also asserts that the spiritual disciplines of meditation, fasting, prayer, and reading have been used throughout church history for centuries and have proven helpful. While clients receive psychological help by participating in therapy, they may also gain different spiritual coping strategies complementing the already used psychological strategies when spiritual disciplines are included. Spiritual themes and disciplines discussed in treatment for those willing to do so will aid in integrating psychology and theology because they will provide excellent collaboration between client and therapist (White, 2020).

Integration offers enhanced mental health to clients and helps limit the adverse effects of mental health disorders, yet it also aids in developing positive coping mechanisms (Dipierro et al., 2018; King & Baer, 2022; Torres-Blasco et al., 2020). One essential fact to be noted is that one of the most ubiquitous mental health disorders, anxiety, affecting youth and adults, is

diagnosed at even higher levels for Latino adolescents (Dipierro et al., 2018). They also assert, however, that religion, spirituality, and the appropriate and necessary mental health resources used for this population can alleviate the stresses encountered and lead to a greater capacity for coping with life's stressors. Positive coping strategies can then be adapted by using and respecting the client's religious views while still operating within the norms and boundaries of appropriate psychological parameters.

Therapists can also benefit from integrating into their own lives and can thus be of greater help to their clients. The literature shows that clients often show an increase in healthy functioning through integration, leading to effective functioning (Barto, 2018; Scott, 2018). In fact, a professional identity that is separate from a person's Christian one is dangerous and will lead to a fractured and incomplete practice (Scott, 2018). Scott also feels that the therapist's effective self-identification as a Christian will often inform the client's therapy. The counselor, according to Scott, should be proactive in mentioning their faith as an essential part of their life with the hope that it will be helpful to the client. Scott (2018) asserts that this limited and careful self-disclosure can put clients at ease regarding their beliefs, and perspectives can be shared with respect and care.

The importance of helping the client develop positive and healthy coping skills to replace those maladaptive coping strategies that have hindered their wholeness cannot be overstated. Integration is helpful in this area by providing a safe place where clients can further develop their theological beliefs and foment psychological well-being with the therapist's guidance. It is also beneficial to the therapist as they gain further knowledge and understanding of what integration looks like through improved client behavior and functioning. This synergistic relationship between client and therapist helps them expand their knowledge base as they interact and

integrate within the session. Another healthy manner in which this relationship is advanced comes by examining Scripture and what it says about life and mental well-being, which is the focus of the following section.

The Importance of Scripture in the Integration of Psychology and Theology

The Bible has been used for millennia to encourage, correct, strengthen, and provide a foundation for belief. From the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation, the Bible offers a schema for life and a sure guide when making difficult choices. Through the lives of the personalities mentioned in scripture, the reader can glean principles that will bring direction and focus to troubled lives. The Bible speaks authoritatively about the world, human functioning, and spiritual conditions that concern people. In it, the reader can find solace from anxiety and hope in difficult circumstances, and hundreds of promises are contained between its pages. Even the beginning and progression of human history are detailed from beginning to end. It makes sense then that scripture's principles, guides, and words would be of utmost importance and utility when seeking integration.

Regarding integration, the Bible must inform the discussion (Cenker et al., 2021; Rennebohm & Thoburn, 2021; Santrac, 2016). One should go back to the book of beginnings, Genesis, to demonstrate that the creation account shows crucial working relationships among God, the Father, God, the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Whitney, 2020). This relationship, according to Whitney, points to integration in at least four ways. First, the goodness of creation is espoused, bringing meaning to the study of humanity within this context. Second, the order present in creation helps explore the dynamics of the human psyche. Third, the creative abilities of humans demonstrate the tenets of discovery and culture. Finally, the trinitarian relationship allows for a view of human relationships that calls for further theological and psychological

understandings. Whitney illustrates that even in the beginning, God placed inherent value and importance on humanity.

Even with the importance of psychology, psychology supplements scripture and cannot claim equality with it (Hathaway, 2021). Nevertheless, integrating psychology and theology remains essential as it helps meet human needs and explore dynamic relationships. Also, as supported through a Biblical lens, clinical psychology is helpful to Christian mental health providers who seek to accommodate integration (Polischuk & Kang, 2022; Rueger et al., 2020). They assert that the use of both psychology and theology should be fully encouraged in the integration process so that the best of both worlds can be encountered and enrich the counseling experience. However, it should be noted that the need for balance in integration is paramount; it takes skill and knowledge of both areas to fully integrate them without minimizing the importance of either.

Healthy family relationships are sustained by God, including love, forgiveness, empowerment, and intimacy (Rueger et al., 2020; Santrac, 2016). Therefore, the Bible, God's written and revealed word, is integral to the integration process as it interacts with psychological principles. Every area of human existence falls under psychology and theology; therefore, integration is crucial, necessary, and essential (Santrac, 2016). Santrac also feels that the intellectual and spiritual mind are joined in welcoming the Lordship of Jesus Christ, further validating, and authenticating the Christian faith as revealed in Scripture. The importance of this collaboration between the person of Christ and applying the life principles he espoused in his teachings can be life-altering and provide a sense of purpose to the client. Jesus spoke about worry, life choices, and other situations germane to good mental health.

Although scripture helps inform the integration process, as mentioned above, other factors within the integration of psychology and theology can be helpful in the therapy process. The advent of Christian psychotherapy is within this purview, and one study found that elements of hope, personality, and spirituality were comingled when it was further researched (Sutton et al., 2018). The researchers found that the element of hope in finding comfort in Christian psychotherapy was pronounced, but the client's personality mediated it. One exciting outcome which may merit further research was that patient spirituality was a predictor for clients remaining in Christian psychotherapy and finding satisfaction in its efficacy. Overall, the clients who participated in the study had psychotherapy outcomes equal to those who participated in secular counseling.

The integration of psychology and theology necessitates a careful understanding and study of both domains and must be done with the client's mental health in mind. Clients who find comfort in scripture and can develop new modes of healthy living through the collaboration of psychology and theology may gain insight and better mental health functioning. However, this integration does not happen by chance, and the skilled therapist integrating appropriately can significantly alleviate the client's distress. The reality is that the combination of a qualified therapist, a willing client, healthy psychological principles, and sound theology can all work together in a unified manner to provide relief, wholeness, a sense of purpose, and fruitful living to all engaged in this dynamic process. Utilizing all of the skills necessary for integration will allow the therapist to aid the client without overwhelming them in therapy.

The Importance of the Current Study

The current study examined the lived experiences of Christian Latino psychotherapists integrating psychology and theology in New York City while maintaining client autonomy.

Although there is some information in the literature on every aspect of this research study, there appear to be limited, if any, research studies that combine all of these elements. There is much research regarding the integration of psychology and theology (Dehoff & Massey, 2022; Fort, 2018; Haynes, 2020; Ripley, 2022). Aspects of client autonomy have also been examined (Cantwell et al., 2022; Egozi et al., 2021; Kinsella, 2018; Perry et al., 2018). The inclusion of Latino therapists in the current literature has also been considered (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021; Williams & Vaquero, 2019). Notwithstanding, the collaboration between these elements is worthy of further review and inclusion in the literature.

Nevertheless, as stated in this research study, Latino therapists continue to increase in number and extend their skills into many areas of need, but greater representation is still needed. A research study conducted with marriage and family therapists of color, including Latino therapists, found that although the number of therapists of color had markedly increased, there continues to be some disparity. The researchers concluded that the sociopolitical environment in the United States, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic concerns, and perceived or actual racial bias have negatively affected therapists of color (Erolin & Wieling, 2021). Given this information, examining Latino therapists' experiences can provide a greater understanding of how they function in this environment by exploring their thoughts and feelings.

Moreover, therapists that speak a language other than English in the United States can be viewed as incompetent and lacking credibility (Peng et al., 2020). Rather than seeing the ability to communicate in two or several languages as a marketable skill, therapists can be marginalized and discriminated against when they are not fluent in the home language where they practice. However, the researchers in this study conclude that the therapists were resilient by using healthy coping mechanisms such as discussing their feelings in supervision and defining their culture and

language as strengths rather than deficits. This is further evidence of the need for a more in-depth discussion with Latino therapists that still need to prove that they fit into the mainstream and have the desire and skills to thrive in the current therapeutic system. Their experiences merit further exploration.

In exploring these experiences, however, there needs to be an understanding that emotional suffering can also be attached and exacerbated when Latino therapists identify with their clients' pain (Lombana, 2021). The author reflects on her experiences providing therapy to survivors of violence while still living with the memories of the violence suffered in her own life. The empathy and care she offers come from not only personal experience with violence but also from witnessing food insecurity, increased trauma reactions, and the inability to traditionally bury a loved one during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. To further exacerbate this traumatic environment, she felt that barriers of discrimination, cultural dehumanization, and fear of poverty affected participation in therapy. All of these contributed to the vicarious traumatization experienced by Lombana (2021) as she sought to help her community.

Notwithstanding the deleterious effects of trauma and victimization, there are also cultural and linguistic factors present in some Latino communities that may influence the decisions of Latinos in whether or not to seek help. Millions of individuals live in the United States for whom English is not their first language, with the most common first language being Spanish (Jalisi et al., 2018; Lebensohn-Chialvo et al., 2022; Pew Research Center, 2016). This fact alone demonstrates the need for Latino and multiculturally sensitive therapists across disciplines. One of the most significant factors noted in not seeking mental healthcare is not finding culturally and linguistically appropriate clinicians (Lebensohn-Chialvo et al., 2022). This fact helps demonstrate the need for therapists to intentionally enhance client lives through

guidance and cultural sensitivity while also reflecting client views and identity through shared experiences and language.

As has been mentioned several times throughout this research study, there continues to be a need for therapists sensitive to the needs of a multicultural and multilingual population in the United States (Gonzalez et al., 2015; Pope et al., 2022; Sevilla et al., 2020). The linguistic skills, multi-cultural sensitivity and flexibility, and mental health acumen acquired through education demonstrate that Christian Latino psychotherapists can be instrumental in this endeavor. The lived experiences of these Latino therapists will provide insight, understanding, and greater depth to the literature regarding integration while respecting client autonomy. The current research will demonstrate the professionalism, ethical considerations, and strides Latino therapists have made and continue to make in the mental health field.

Summary

The psychotherapist does not counsel in a vacuum. Counseling entails giving personal information to another individual, which must be handled with care and respect. In this giving, however, the therapist is also changed and molded by interactions with the client. This literature review highlighted the importance of these interactions between Christian Latino therapists and their clients. An overview was provided, which determined that although much work has been done in counseling multicultural populations, more work is still needed in this area (Gallegos, 2020; Huang, 2018; Nogueira & Schmidt, 2022). Many challenges still face local communities, especially those of color, including Latinos (Nogueira & Schmidt, 2022; Robertson et al., 2015). Rapid migration from Spanish-speaking countries continues unabated, and therefore, it is essential that those that counsel these in-coming populations be heard regarding their experiences.

In exploring and examining these experiences, critical points derived from the literature on Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology were brought to light. Heidegger's theory was tied to this study by using it to analyze the experiences of these Christian Latino therapists. Although Heidegger did not establish phenomenology, he adroitly amended Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological theory and added a hermeneutic perspective (Pham, 2022). Heidegger was more concerned about evaluating the meaning of being in the world through language (Farrell, 2020). This hermeneutic phenomenology, as posited by Heidegger, can be applied to health, well-being, and most experiences (Whitehead, 2012). Since it can be used in those areas, it can also help examine Latino therapists' thoughts and feelings regarding their counseling practice.

The meaning of experience was explored, and how examining these experiences can add to the current literature on Latino therapists integrating psychology and theology. Learning through experience, as a valid means of instruction, also helped inform the discussion. Moreover, although experiences may be discounted due to their subjective nature, they can provide a framework from which the world is viewed and should be respected.

The work of Latino therapists was discussed with the understanding that the numbers of Spanish language-dominant individuals entering the United States continue to increase, and Latino psychotherapists are needed to an even greater extent (Jalisi et al., 2018; Pew Research Center, 2016). This influx of individuals is often a marginalized group that seeks refuge from poor living conditions and violence in their countries, leading to psychological distress (Jalisi et al., 2018). Latino therapists that are also bilingual have the advantage and ability to engage in language-switching, which can further strengthen the therapeutic relationship (Williams & Vaquero, 2019). These skills with language and understanding of the cultural context due to their

backgrounds can add authenticity to Latino therapists' counseling paradigm and endear them to their clients.

The importance of respecting client autonomy in the therapeutic relationship was also considered, as to how this aspect benefits both therapist and client. Little work can be accomplished when the therapist and client do not work well together, so a healthy relationship should be nurtured. Using supportive questions rather than directive ones, requesting feedback, and allowing the client to express feelings without fear of condemnation are all helpful here (Cantwell et al., 2022). Helping the client to increase self-confidence and have a voice in decision-making regarding their treatment enhance the relationship and help the client to feel responsible (Juhila et al., 2021). Providing education rather than pushing a client to do something also greatly respects client autonomy (Perry et al., 2018). Taken together, all these ideas can enhance the therapeutic dynamic.

The integration of psychology and theology in this research study was discussed, and its usefulness was considered. The Bible is viewed as a guide to life for millions of people, and psychological principles have also provided comfort and healthy mental functioning. The combination and collaboration of these two domains can inform a person's well-being (Haynes, 2020; Ripley, 2022). Through integration, clients may develop greater insight into their behavior, which can lead to healthy outcomes (Fort, 2018; Dehoff & Massey, 2022). The importance of religion and psychology, adequately integrated, supports the therapeutic relationship by promoting healthy principles in therapist and client (Frunza et al., 2019; Ganzer, 2018; Scott, 2018). Latino therapists' experiences engaged in integration benefit other clinicians seeking to do the same.

Even with the nuances of integrating psychology and theology, there can be barriers to this integration. The client's desires, the therapist's skills, and agency regulations must all be considered when counseling collaboratively within both domains (Adams & McMinn, 2014; Loosemore, 2021). The delicate balance between psychology and theology must be considered to prevent a negative dichotomous relationship between the two (McConnell et al., 2021). The therapist must analyze negative coping strategies developed throughout a lifetime to enhance client health outcomes (Gordon, 2018; Torres-Blasco et al., 2020; White, 2020). The barrier of belief dissimilarities between client and therapist is essential, and the therapist must seek to counter this by exploring them as therapeutically relevant (Gordon, 2018). This display of empathy can help the client join with the therapist rather than see them as opponents.

The literature review also discussed the vital importance of scripture because it has been used for centuries to provide hope, strengthen faith, and comfort the mourning. One of the critical components of integration is the appropriate and theologically grounded use of the Bible as it relates to the human condition (Cenker et al., 2021; Rennebohm & Thoburn, 2021; Santrac, 2016). Nevertheless, from the integrationist perspective, a marriage between psychology and theology may benefit the therapeutic relationship (Polischuk & Kang, 2022; Rueger et al., 2020). However, some integrationists strongly feel that psychology is an adjunct to scripture and not equal to it (Hathaway, 2021). Even so, healthy functioning in society includes aspects of love, forgiveness, empowerment, and intimacy, all encompassed in the Bible (Rueger et al., 2020; Santrac, 2016).

The study combined the abovementioned elements to examine how they work synergistically in the Christin Latino therapist's practice through an integrationist perspective. Though progress continues, people of color still face some stumbling blocks as they venture into

the therapeutic field. The sociopolitical environment in the United States and racial bias and discrimination are still factors to consider as the therapeutic family grows to include those formerly marginalized (Erolin & Wieling, 2021). The resiliency of adapting to a culture other than their native one, providing therapy in multiple languages, and processing their own experiences are all essential factors in engaging Latino therapists to explore their views. In addition, the sensitivity and closeness of Latino therapists to many of their clients may aid in fostering a climate for communication (Gonzalez et al., 2015; Pope et al., 2022; Sevilla et al., 2020).

Although the integration of psychology and theology has been empirically studied over many years, a lack of in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists was found to be lacking in the literature and demonstrates and merits further research. This is important because as Latino therapists continue to become a part of mainstream society in providing therapy, their experiences are valid and important to discuss. This study also opens the door to hearing the narrative voices of an ethnic minority community as they branch into academic and therapeutic fields in which they were not validated in the past and can now speak authoritatively about their essential experiences. The unique narrative their voices can bring to integrating psychology and theology will add to the current literature and provide a foundation for other therapists to add their experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological research study aimed to examine and explore the experiences of Christian Latino therapists providing therapy in New York City while maintaining client autonomy. With respect to cultural compatibility, the increased need for spiritual as well as psychological counsel, and some distrust of mental health practitioners by several minority populations, there seems to be a gap between the need for psychological counseling and therapists with the cultural, spiritual, and psychological skills needed to provide it (Gallegos, 2020; Huang, 2018). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used in this study, based on the phenomenological analysis of Martin Heidegger as it relates to the Latino therapist's lived experiences.

This methods chapter describes the research design chosen and the reasons for its viability. It will also describe the participants used and the sampling techniques that were chosen to select them for the research study. The relevant research questions that are pertinent to this study are listed. The author's role and purpose in the study, data analysis, trustworthiness, credibility, and ethical treatment of participants are also discussed. The methods section is then summarized to ensure that all areas are thoroughly discussed.

Design

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study utilized Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology as its framework. The study used a qualitative design to focus on exploring and describing the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists providing therapy in New York City. When reviewing the phenomena of these experiences and opinions, qualitative research helped provide a further understanding of them to help develop efficacious interventions when

necessary (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). Qualitative research examines behaviors and thought processes, providing further insight into a person's overall functioning, which is appropriate to this study.

The mechanisms by which the integration of psychology and theology is achieved are not easily defined. Its application in therapy through a qualitative analysis was attempted with mixed results (Tipton et al., 2022). They researched the experiences of Christian clinicians and found that there appears to be an effective mentoring process in the counselor's provision of therapy. I have endeavored to take this study further and examined how Christian Latino therapists integrate psychology and theology within the scope of their practice.

Edmund Husserl provided the foundation of phenomenology in transcendental thought Farrell (2020). Husserl posited that humans live in an inner world, the soul, and an outer physical world, thus asserting a dualistic view of human understanding. In this assertion, he sought to capture the essence of human knowledge. However, at least three measures are necessary to achieve this. The first consists of the epochê or assumptions about what was being observed. The second measure seeks a detailed description of a phenomenon's meaning. The third measure purports to isolate features of a phenomenon and then imagine removing these features to determine if the phenomenon remains the same or is altered.

Martin Heidegger was a student of Husserl and developed a hermeneutic phenomenology different from the transcendental one posited by Husserl by using language to announce and make known what one experiences (Farrell, 2020). Farrell points out that Martin Heidegger was more interested in what it means to be in the world rather than what one can know about the world. Heidegger further posited that meaning is inherent within the lived experience. This led him to explain that all understanding is informed by three interrelated fore-structures of

understanding: fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. When taken together, these fore-structures represent what one already knows about a phenomenon which aids in understanding new information (Farrell, 2020).

The research study I conducted focused on the experiences of Christian Latino therapists working in New York City and provides an extension of the understanding they have gained in their practice. Martin Heidegger's phenomenology shed light on individuals and their actions in the world, which includes the realities by which they are influenced (Neubauer, 2019). This theoretical framework fit well with the study. Exploration of these lived experiences provided a greater understanding of what psychotherapists experience in therapy.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do you understand your role as a psychotherapist?

RQ2: What are your experiences of being a psychotherapist?

RQ3: What does it mean to be a Christian Latino therapist?

RQ4: What methods do you intentionally use to integrate psychology and theology?

RQ5: How do you protect client autonomy in therapy provision?

Once the participant's responses are collectively analyzed, the developing themes were examined and categorized for further analysis and discussion.

Setting

This research study was conducted via a virtual platform such as Teams, Zoom, or Webex through interviews with the subjects, allowing the participants and the researcher to collaborate with minimal travel. All of the interviews were conducted directly from the researcher's home via this virtual platform, with appropriate parameters in place for privacy and confidentiality. The setting was chosen to provide a safe space for interviewing the participants.

Participants

Subjects invited to the study were Christian Latino psychotherapists currently in the field providing therapy or retired psychotherapists. This sample included social workers, psychologists, and licensed mental health providers. Ten psychotherapists were recruited to allow for attrition and to reach a sample size of 7 participants, which permitted each participant's narrative to be explored adequately. When the sample size is too large, the voice of participants can be suppressed (Bartholemew et al., 2021). They also affirm that larger sample sizes were associated with lower-quality research studies. The subjects chosen had, at minimum, a master's degree in their counseling field and had been providing services for at least three consecutive years. The ages of the participants varied, as well as their gender, but all were over eighteen. In addition, each participant chosen was a Christian with a church affiliation that subscribes to the truth of the Bible in faith and practice. They also attested to integrating psychology and theology in counseling to benefit their clients while allowing both domains to inform their practice.

The importance of confidentiality in research studies cannot be overstated (Oye et al., 2019). Confidentiality was maintained in this research study by providing each subject with a pseudonym, and a number system was used to code each interview. A Facebook invitation was initiated to find eligible participants and was used as an invitation to participate. The Facebook invitation provided the details of the study and its voluntary nature and explained the right of each participant to exit the research study at any time for any reason at their discretion. Every participant responding to the Facebook invitation was asked for their email address and was contacted to gauge their desire, availability, and appropriateness to be included in this research study.

Procedures

The first thing I did as the researcher was to identify a gap in the literature that served as the catalyst for the rest of the study. My next step as the primary researcher was obtaining the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) permission to begin the research. Volunteers were recruited for the study once IRB was approved. As a researcher and therapist, I was non-judgmental when interviewing the participants. I disclosed the fact that I am a Christian Latino therapist, gained consent from the participants, collected the data, analyzed the data once collected, and categorized the information received into a written form of the phenomenon: the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists providing therapy through the integration of psychology and theology in New York City while maintaining client autonomy.

Most phenomenological research studies collect data through conversations and semi-structured interviews to explore the phenomenon and the subject's experiences (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). This study used such a structure. In this research study, the phenomenon of the lived experiences of the therapist was used as the qualitative approach (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The ethnic background of the therapist was one of the qualifiers to participate in the study as well as their admission to being Christians. In addition, as previously stated throughout this document, therapy provision in an integrative environment was examined.

The Researcher's Role

Therapists must not impose their personal views on clients during the therapeutic process, and value bracketing is essential in preventing this (McWhorter, 2019). Although moral and ethical values may be difficult to separate in treatment as they are integral to the therapist's life, respect for client autonomy must be an area of concern. With this in mind, subjects were recruited from a pool of psychotherapists I am acquainted with through social media groups we

have in common, or referred to me by other therapists. Data was gathered through individual interviews with each participant in person or through an appropriate virtual platform.

My interest in the phenomenon stemmed from my experience as a Christian Latino therapist in New York City, which was made clear to participants in the study. This experience allowed me to enhance my skills as a therapist while ethically engaging with clients.

Data Collection

The experiences of the Latino psychotherapists participating in this research study were the primary form of data being examined. In keeping with qualitative research studies, interviews consisting of twelve open-ended questions were used to guide the study (see Appendix D). These interview questions were preceded by four simple demographic questions for categorical purposes, which were gathered in the interview process. The researcher's notes assisted in developing themes promoted by the interviews.

Interviews

The data collection procedures in this study consisted of interviews and researcher notes. The interviews were conducted via a virtual platform such as Teams, Zoom or Webex, etc., to give participants a choice as to which they preferred. Conducting interviews in a virtual platform minimized or eliminated travel between the researcher and participants. Although in-person interviews allow for an easy way to establish relationships and verbal and non-verbal communication is evident, virtual interviews were also cost-effective and provided easier participant access (Siedlecki, 2022). The interviews were transcribed verbatim through the Microsoft Teams software used for the interviews and were conducted with the participants using open-ended questions that were broad and general. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes each. Time was given for each participant to thoroughly

answer each question to the satisfaction of the participant and this researcher and any follow-up questions as appropriate.

Erasti-Ibarrono et al. (2018) promote a methodological outline based on van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological method for doing phenomenological research and writing; the first two steps are helpful here. The first step calls for the identification of the phenomenon to be researched. In the present study, the phenomenon being examined was lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists in New York City, providing therapy while protecting client autonomy. The second step calls for gathering material relevant to the topic. The interview process provided the material necessary to engage in the study. The data analysis section covers various steps in this method. According to Heinonen (2015), van Manen's method of gaining a deeper understanding and describing a phenomenon, also known as reduction, is essential and valuable here. The concept of reduction proposed by van Manen focuses on the uniqueness of the phenomena being researched (Heinonen, 2015). This "reduction" helped examine the lived experiences of Christian Latino therapists as they provide therapy while maintaining client autonomy.

The following demographic questions were asked at the beginning of the interview session.

Demographic Questions

1. What ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture do you most identify with?
2. Please tell me the highest level of education you have achieved.
3. Is your age between 18 - 30, 31 - 40, 41 - 50, 51 - 60, 61 - 70.
4. What is your gender?

Interview Questions**Introductory Question**

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we had just met (pseudonyms will be used, and identities will be kept confidential).

Questions Related to Cultural Identity

2. How does your being Latino inform your practice?
3. What has been your greatest struggle as a Latino in providing psychotherapy?
4. What barriers have you faced in being a Latino man or woman practicing psychotherapy in New York City?

Questions Related to Therapists' Experiences with Clients

5. How does your Christian faith inform your provision of therapy?
6. Please share your view on integrating psychology and theology.
7. What have been the positive and negative effects of integrating psychology and theology on you and your clients?
8. How do you work with clients who profess no faith or prefer not to speak about religious themes related to their therapy?
9. What elements of psychology and theology work best for your clients?
10. What do you understand client autonomy to be?

Summary Questions

11. What have you learned about yourself as a Latino Christian therapist that has helped you better understand your clients?
12. What further insights can you share about your experiences providing therapy in New York City?

The interview questions used were grouped into four separate categories. The first category consisted of one introductory question to open the interview and allow participants to introduce themselves as they want to be identified. The second category focused on cultural identity and consisted of three questions to enable the participant to describe themselves and their cultural status through their experiences. The third category consisted of six questions exploring therapists' experiences with clients while integrating psychology and theology. The fourth category contained two questions allowing the therapist to synthesize and summarize their experiences.

Question one is a simple introductory question to begin the interview and set the stage for further questions. It was asked to put the participant at ease and allow them to self-identify rather than imposing an identity upon them. This question allowed the participant to authentically identify themselves and attempt to minimize power differentials (Paradis & Varpio, 2018).

Questions two through four explored the therapists' experiences providing psychotherapy while being Latino. Words are important in therapy, and by answering these questions, the therapists have their semantic space respected by sharing their cultural views and perspectives freely (Wagner et al., 2014).

Questions five through ten examine the therapists' integration and religious views by asking for in-depth responses on how they balance these two domains. These questions help examine the therapists' experiences by asking them to fine-tune their responses, providing greater insight (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Questions eleven and twelve allow participants to add more information to their previous answers and consider what they would like to share that was not asked. This allows the

participant to go beyond the interview questions and provide more background for their answers (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022).

Data Analysis

This researcher conducted the data analysis used in this study using four consecutive steps (Erasti-Ibarrono et al., 2018). The first step was choosing a relevant research topic and gathering the data, and then the essential meaning of the data was explored. In this study, the lived experiences of the participants were examined. The second step consisted of writing a phenomenological text describing what had been received in the interview process. The phenomenon is then further explored in the third step through the professional lens of the researcher. Finally, the fourth step took the information received and reduced it, per van Manen, to critical themes while still engaging the totality of the information presented to create a balanced narrative (Erasti-Ibarrono et al., 2018).

Data analysis included listening to the recorded interviews, reviewing the transcribed interview data, and taking notes. Open-ended questions focused on “What” and “How” were used to understand the therapists' experiences (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022, p. 6). The answers collected from the questions were grouped into themes of interest through the similarities and differences of the responses collected. The themes were conceptualized by repeated words or statements in the participant's responses (de Farias et al., 2020). Confidentiality and privacy were maintained to safeguard the information received to preclude ethical dilemmas (Paradis & Varpio, 2018). Peer review of the collected information added a safeguard to the process.

Trustworthiness

As per Martin Heidegger, this qualitative research study was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Credibility was achieved by giving access to all the

participants completing the research study to the information gathered throughout the study. This approach also allowed participants to clarify or make corrections to their statements, allowing them to rethink and add to their statements at their discretion (Cope, 2014). In keeping with proper and standard protocols, all participants were given full disclosure regarding research purposes and procedures before the study began. Participants were also informed through the informed consent form and verbally that they can end their participation at any time and for any reason during the course of the study. Rather than identifiable names, pseudonyms were used to identify all participants as a measure to protect their identities and ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Further strategies for trustworthiness included prolonged engagement and persistent observation, rich and thick description, and reflexivity (Houghton et al., 2013). Prolonged engagement refers to the researcher spending time with the participant and data to gain a greater understanding of it and be immersed in the experience and voice of the participant. Persistent observation speaks to being attentive to the individual in the interview context and observing body language, such as facial expressions. Rich and thick descriptions refer to detailed descriptions that may aid in the transferability and generalizability of the findings and give the observer a thorough account of the results. Finally, reflexivity required the researcher to maintain a personal closeness to the data gathered while engaging in the process of collecting it. A reflective diary or journal of thoughts and feelings during research helped accomplish this (Houghton et al., 2013).

Credibility

The researcher was aware of his biases and assumptions to promote unbiased interpretations when developing themes and exploring the findings gathered from the interviews.

Participants were also given access to their transcribed interviews to provide direct confirmation of their views (Houghton et al., 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

Descriptions of the formats used to obtain research material and memorialize the research subject's data will be kept. The purpose of this is to keep a record and explanation for each step in the process and provide detailed documentation for the final findings of the research study.

Transferability

Transcribed interviews reflect the recorded live interviews to report precisely what each research subject provided as reviewed from the data collected. The themes developed from this data exploration may be compared with similar studies in the future.

Ethical Considerations

Therapists should acknowledge that they directly influence clients and should be aware of their biases and possible issues resulting from their interventions. In interviewing participants, my influence was duly noted to prevent undue harm, and issues of transference and countertransference were considered carefully (Huang, 2018). However, Huang also noted in her research that she felt a greater connection was established with her client as they discussed similarities regarding emotions and fears.

IRB approval was necessary as the first step in the process of beginning the research with participants. Upon receiving approval from the IRB, the dissemination of the informed consent form was done, acknowledging the voluntary nature of the study. Participants were informed that their information will be kept confidential in a password-protected computer for three years, and written notes will be secured in a locked file cabinet to prevent a breach of confidentiality. It was also explained to participants that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities. The

relevant information regarding IRB access and contact information was provided as part of the informed consent document.

Summary

As I interviewed participants for this research study, I hoped that similarities and differences in faith and practice would lead to rich conversations and deepen connections between researcher and participant. In addition, there was also the development of collegial participation and knowledge-sharing with the other professionals engaged in the study.

Chapter Three outlined and justified the methodology of this qualitative phenomenological research study. The experiences of the Christian Latino therapists were explored in-depth using strategic interview questions that guided the development of themes through the research questions. Four demographic questions were included for identification purposes. The twelve open-ended questions allowed the therapists to express themselves broadly and provided a forum for their experiences.

A general description of the participants was given, as well as general parameters for the amount of time necessary for each interview per participant. Recruiting the participants was discussed, and the data collection, design, and analysis were presented. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also addressed. The importance of client confidentiality and providing them access to the data was also discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to develop a greater understanding of the rich experiences of seven Christian Latino psychotherapists who intentionally integrate psychology and theology within the purview of their counseling paradigm. While integrating is a part of their counseling practice they have been careful to protect and respect client autonomy as the research study will demonstrate. In the examination of these individuals' responses, I was able to better understand and develop a holistic view of the thought processes, intentions, and counseling characteristics that pertain to them and that can be extended to a limited degree to other psychotherapists in the counseling field.

In this chapter, the data compiled from the interviews conducted with the participants was summarized and analyzed. The research study on the lived experiences of Christian Latino psychotherapists utilized four demographic questions for categorical purposes and twelve interview questions that helped to define each participant's perceptions of their cultural identity as well as their integration experiences with clients. The phenomenon of the experiences of these participants was examined on an individual basis and the development of larger themes was explored and discussed.

Participants

The data collected in this phenomenological study is reflective of the collective input from the seven counselors who participated in it. When the social media recruitment information was posted on Facebook, six people initially responded through Facebook and Messenger. Four more participants were identified through "snowball sampling" where one participant being interviewed refers another appropriate participant for possible inclusion in a research study

(Babbie, 2014). In total, ten participants were identified who fit the criteria for the research study in its entirety.

The participants included in this research study were all over eighteen years old and had been providing psychotherapy for at least three years or more. The ten possible participants who were initially identified were contacted and asked to supply an email to have the informed consent form sent to them. Nine of the possible participants supplied their email and the consent form was forwarded to them. One of the initial participants did not respond and was, therefore, unable to complete the study. The first seven who responded with the signed consent form were contacted to be included in the study.

The remaining two participants not included in the study were informed that the number of participants chosen for the study had been reached and they may be able to participate in a future research study if appropriate. Once the seven participants were identified they were scheduled to be interviewed through the virtual platform of Microsoft Teams and each participant acknowledged that they had access to this medium. Each participant agreed that they had the time, the ability, and the desire to participate in the interviews. The participants were then scheduled to be interviewed at a mutually agreed upon time when they would be available to speak with no interruptions.

When each interview commenced each participant was informed again that they were being recorded and transcription would also occur at the time of the recording. Each participant confirmed understanding and agreed to continue the interview. They were reminded that only I have access to the recording and the transcription and it would be safeguarded according to the criteria agreed to in the informed consent forms. The interviews were then conducted as per the

scheduled time with respect to each participant and ample time was given for each participant to answer the questions.

Participant 1: Gerry

Gerry is a Clinical Social Worker with over 25 years of experience in assessment and counseling. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that he self-identifies with is Puerto Rican and to be more specific he feels that Nuyorican is more appropriate which is a combination of Puerto Rican and New Yorker. Gerry is between the ages of sixty-one through seventy and describes his gender as male. He was born and raised in the Bronx, New York, and reports that his first language growing up was Spanish and then transitioned to English in school.

Gerry feels that being Latino has helped him to gauge the perspectives and apprehensions of the Latino populations he works with. He relates that the commonality of language with many of his clients allows him to have steady communication with them and avoid misinterpretations. However, he is aware that even though he may share the Spanish language with clients, cultural nuances differ and he will sometimes need further explanation to understand some words that are Spanish but not familiar to him or used in another context outside of his background.

Gerry feels that there remains a great apprehension in some of his clients and they are not aware of the counseling process which causes a sense of anxiety or the possibility that their needs will not be met. This has also led to some families being guarded with their information because they do not trust or understand the counseling process. This has included male clients that feel that their authority is being challenged and also family members concerned with removal from homes by authority figures. Another situation related to Latino culture that he has noticed is that even if the client does not understand what is being said they often do not ask for

clarification and he gets around this by asking them to repeat what he has said to gauge their understanding, which has been helpful.

Gerry finds that integrating psychology and theology presents several challenges. He feels that different church backgrounds and religious beliefs can be an obstacle. He adds that some individuals have developed church jargon and may present a religious façade to appear to agree with him and may come from an entirely different religious context. He seeks to integrate by understanding the client's differences and similarities with his Christian faith but is careful to try and understand the “operational definitions” by which they understand faith in relation to counseling. He recognizes that he has his own core beliefs which can be informed by particular psychological dynamics and practices.

Some positive effects of integration on his clients have been a focus on self-development for the client and himself and in the process of counseling being aware of counseling limitations when he feels that he may need to refer a client to someone with more expertise. He has come across some negative situations where ministers have come in for counseling and have deemed themselves experts and begun sharing this “expertise” with their congregations by using psychological terms and becoming “faddish” in their presentation of psychology.

Gerry stated that when he has counseled non-believers or those that prefer not to participate in faith-based counseling he has been careful not to defraud them. He has been respectful and has experienced that sometimes they will initiate faith discussions. He is careful not to proselytize, avoids judging his clients, and seeks to empower them. He feels that the point of client autonomy is helping the client to move to a place of safety and making them feel respected. He wrapped up the interview by focusing on the importance of empathy in integration and counseling and giving the client space to process by helping them prioritize issues in their

lives. The fact that he had mentors in his own life and is grateful to them propels him to continue working with his clients with a positive and hopeful attitude.

Participant 2: Deborah

Deborah has a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling with 17 years of experience in this field. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that she self-identifies with is Puerto Rican and to be more specific she feels that she is a mix of black, white, and indigenous cultures native to Puerto Rico. Deborah is between the ages of forty-one through fifty and describes her gender as female. She was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Deborah reports that she has been an adjunct professor and has developed her own practice since 2017. She is versed in completing immigration evaluations and speaks Spanish fluently.

Although she predominantly works with the Latino/Hispanic population she also counsels clients from other cultures. She feels that this shared experience of living in New York City has helped in the counseling process through similarities despite cultural differences. Nevertheless, she states that being Latina greatly informs her practice and helps her relate to her clients on various levels. One of the greatest struggles she has faced as a Latina therapist is witnessing the lack of access to resources such as health insurance within the population. In her experience, there also seems to be a negative connotation in seeking counseling which prevents some of her clients from seeking counseling services. In addition to this, she feels that although New York City is quite diverse there continues to be some inequality in the acquisition of counseling licenses and employment because leaders of larger organizations and licensing boards are not necessarily people of color and may not understand their particular needs and issues.

Deborah feels that her faith was a deciding factor in her becoming a counselor and informs every aspect of her life. She is happy to help and serve others and she sees being a

therapist as being a healing job, a “healing position” with God, Jesus, and her being present in the process. With her openly Christian patients and with their permission she feels free to pray and explore questions of faith and with her clients who come from a non-religious background, she feels that she can respect and encourage them also. In cases where clients choose to not engage in integration, she respectfully asks them about their worldview to better understand where they are coming from and assess best practices with them.

Deborah’s system of integration is decided on a case-by-case basis and depends on the topics clients bring into sessions. She is careful to allow clients to slowly open up and as they speak she gauges whether integration is appropriate for the client or not. There have been positive interactions with clients through integration such as them speaking about how they feel God is speaking to them and being comfortable in bringing that into session. Negative interactions have also occurred where a client can be religiously obsessed and be in need of clinical intervention and not be aware of it. She feels that through client experiences she has also matured in her Christian faith. The psychodynamic approach, Deborah feels, is the most effective with her clients. The relationships fostered with God and others through religion and spirituality lend themselves to this approach and Deborah finds that connections are established and maintained through exploring the choices her clients have made.

Client autonomy is important to Deborah and she describes it as a guiding principle with her clients. Instead of leading them she takes a step back and helps the client explore decisions and choices they have made and where they want to go. It is important to ask the client questions so they can formulate their own agenda and walk towards the goals that are important to them. Deborah summed up her interview by stating that she still feels that there is much oppression and part of her work is acting against it. She feels that the system continues to be patriarchal and

white supremacist and she is actively combatting this through waking up and maturing to the fact that she can be supportive of other Latinos in the community.

Participant 3: Leila

Leila has a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling with 5 years of experience within this field. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that she self-identifies with is Central American. She is between the ages of forty-one through fifty and describes her gender as female. She currently works in a diverse practice in New York City and has also been the assistant director of a Head Start Center for the last thirteen years. Leila speaks Spanish fluently and provides psychotherapy in both English and Spanish.

Leila reports that being Latina means more to her than just speaking Spanish. She feels that there is a connection with her Latino clients that transcends language and leads to relationships especially since she also experienced immigrating to the United States. Leila describes struggles as a Latina psychotherapist stemming from the stigma attached to counseling, miscommunications about the importance of mental health counseling, and lack of resources for the Latino community including resources written in Spanish. In addition, she finds that she must work harder as a Latina to receive the salary she deserves considering the work she does. She would also like the implementation of peer counseling groups geared toward Spanish-speaking therapists who may have some trouble fully understanding English therapy terms.

Leila was adamant that her faith informs her work and she feels that she is doing more than simply working but that the purpose of her life is closely tied to providing Christian therapy. She is an instrument in God's hands and the Holy Spirit is guiding her as she works with her various clients. This is closely tied to how integration is done in her personal practice. She seeks to integrate the body, mind, and spirit to bring a holistic transformation. Rather than developing

positive individuals through counseling, she is developing a maturation of the whole person. Positive effects of integration that have caused a change in her life include feeling less worried, praying constantly for her clients, and helping the clients deal with trauma through effective prayer when they have consented to it. This also entails listening closely to the client and allowing the Holy Spirit to inform the session and draw out her skills and the client's needs. Leila could not describe any negative effects of integration on herself or the client.

When faced with clients that do not want faith-based counsel or deny having any faith Leila said that she explores the feelings and circumstances surrounding their decisions and may refer to spirituality rather than religion. She is respectful of the client's feelings and focuses more on the body, mind, and spirit of the individual. The elements of psychology and theology that she feels work best for clients include developing trust, being patient, and praying for the client before meeting them. She favors a person-centered approach in establishing relationships with the client to develop connections and foment understanding. Client autonomy is important to Leila and she understands that she cannot force her faith upon them. Even with Christian clients, she says some have come with a broken faith and she allows them to guide the session and develop the treatment plan.

Leila summed up the interview by stating that she loves working in New York City because of the diversity of cultures and that even within Latino/Hispanic cultures there is great diversity. She also feels that providing therapy should be fun and laughing is an essential part of enjoying the process and being involved with different individuals. Leila sees the counseling process as an opportunity for her to help others.

Participant 4: Edna

Edna has a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling with 8 years of experience within the counseling field. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that she self-identifies with is Puerto Rican and considers herself an advocate for education within the Puerto Rican community and Latinos in general. She is between the ages of forty-one through fifty and describes her gender as female. She currently works in a psychotherapy practice in New York City. Edna speaks Spanish fluently and is able to provide psychotherapy in both English and Spanish.

Her provision of psychotherapy is informed by her Latino culture including speaking Spanish and feeling a level of commonality with many of her clients. She feels that her Latino clients often seek someone that looks like them when developing trust and this has been an advantage to her in the counseling process. However, it has been difficult working with recent immigrants because in her experience they have had trouble with acculturation and understanding therapy. In addition, parenting skills and psychoeducation are a great necessity for them to help them learn the cultural norms and laws in the United States. Some of the barriers that Edna has faced is working with families that lack insurance even though the children may receive it. This means adults often have to pay out-of-pocket for counseling and do not see the benefit in doing so.

Edna reports that her Christian faith is very important to her and when doing an intake with a client she explores their faith to ensure that she respects their beliefs and integrates them into therapy. Integration in her practice begins with asking clients about barriers and struggles in their lives and how faith can help strengthen and encourage them. She feels that her clients that come from a faith background feel free to discuss religious situations and how they see God

working in their situation. They also find acceptance when discussing prophecy, or speaking in tongues which may be considered psychosis by traditional counselors. However, there can be a real concern when a client claims to hear voices and she explores this in session. When clients profess no religious belief Edna gives them space but has encountered clients who deny God and then mention him in session and they then process these feelings.

Edna stated that the elements of psychology and theology that worked best for her clients include Rogerian therapy and not necessarily using Christian words but applying biblical principles to life situations. The importance, in her experience, is providing counseling from a healthy place, and even God and Deborah in scripture were considered counselors. The unconditional positive regard provided in her practice is helpful to her clients and they feel welcome and accepted. She is mindful, however, of the fact that clients make decisions for themselves and should have the freedom to do so. For her, client autonomy includes acceptance of the client as they are and not contradicting what the client says in session but providing choices instead. Her focus in session is highly psychoeducational as clients may sometimes want to pray symptoms away and she must help them to become more aware of the reality of disease or mental health needs. The client can be helped to understand that needing help is not due to a lack of faith.

Edna's trajectory in the counseling process has led her to understand that she cannot lean on her own understanding but seeks guidance, help, mentorship, and supervision. She actively immerses herself in receiving these services so they can be available to her clients through her own acquisition of them. She also stresses the importance of continued education to prevent harm to clients through misunderstanding and the therapist missing important cues from an underdeveloped understanding of the client.

Participant 5: Karmen

Karmen has a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling with 8 years of experience within the counseling field. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that she self-identifies with is Central American and Dominican. She is between the ages of thirty-one through forty and describes her gender as female. Being a Christian, a wife, and a mother are important to her. She currently works in a psychotherapy practice in New York City. Karmen speaks Spanish fluently and is able to provide psychotherapy in both English and Spanish.

Karmen stated that being a Latina greatly informs her practice because it has made her greatly aware of the customs and cultures of the Latino/Hispanic population with whom she works. The family dynamics and their cultural experiences vary widely and this has helped her to be present when working with them. One of her greatest concerns is that she has noticed that there are some dynamics in the Latino culture being normalized that are actually detrimental such as machismo and toxic patriarchy. Both extremes lead to unhealthy outcomes and need to be properly processed in therapy. Another issue is that counseling can be seen as taboo in Latino culture because it amounts to telling personal things to an outsider. There is also much skepticism attached to being in therapy because speaking about the family is not appreciated and being “loco” (crazy) is associated with seeing a counselor so it is avoided.

Karmen feels that her Christian faith is essential to her practice and although she does not overtly present her faith in session she acknowledges Biblical and fundamental truths guide her as she meets with clients. When the client is Christian and asks questions regarding faith she is much more open and will share Bible verses to challenge negative thinking with the truth of God's word. When integrating psychology and theology she finds that these elements work well together and can lead to stability and happiness in a person's life. In using Cognitive Behavioral

Therapy (CBT), for example, she is able to integrate with clients that are not Christian because some of the principles are universal.

When speaking of the positive and negative effects of integration Karmen mentioned seeing a maturing process and development of goals which have been helpful to her and her clients. A negative situation also occurs, however, when the client over-spiritualizes in their sessions and begins to deny science and chemistry. This has caused some to refuse medication seeing a lack of faith if they use it. For clients who do not acknowledge any faith, Karmen is respectful and finds that sometimes they ask religious-oriented questions and then she is mindful in respecting their views. She feels that this is the essence of client autonomy: not seeking to control client choices or decisions but to protect and help them to reach their own conclusions in a healthy manner.

Karmen summed up the interview by sharing some of the things she has learned as a Latina Christian therapist that helped her understand herself and her clients better. She has learned to serve others without being a people-pleaser so she does not lose herself in the process of helping others. Placing boundaries and being more assertive has also been helpful as she matures as a counselor. Teaching her clients to do the same has been helpful in counseling.

Participant 6: Alicia

Alicia has a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling with 6 years of experience within the counseling field. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that she self-identifies with is Puerto Rican having been born in Puerto Rico and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She is between the ages of thirty-one through forty and describes her gender as female. She is married, has two children, and currently works in a psychotherapy practice in New York

City. Alicia speaks Spanish fluently and is able to provide psychotherapy in both English and Spanish.

Being a Latina has helped Alicia in her work environment in being able to be at ease with her clients because they identify with her in both language and culture and open up more because of these similarities. The clients have told her they feel understood by her and reported no real obstacles in her practice for being Latina. However, she did express that there is a perception of higher intelligence being necessary as a Latina and an expectation that women in general, and Latinos, in particular, must excel to be accepted. One thing that stood out to her is being asked when completing intakes to place families with cultures or ethnicities that most closely resemble them which she feels is not always appropriate. Clients have also requested an older therapist due to them having more experience in the field of counseling. Being that she works in a secular counseling agency Alicia has had to make sure that she is careful with her Christian beliefs and sometimes struggles with how to combine them with her psychological training.

Integration, Alicia feels, is essential due to the collaboration between science and theology leading to ultimate healing. The Latino and African-American clients she works with have been more drawn to integration than those from other cultures. Clients have felt understood, trusting of the process, and less marginalized because of their Christian beliefs instead of being viewed as psychotic or mentally ill. Some dangers are inherent in integration though and Alicia points to clients that only want to use the Bible in session and have problems facing the fact that psychiatry might be necessary in their case. With clients that prefer not to discuss faith, Alicia states that she focuses on the precipitating factor that brought them to counseling whether it is a trauma, depression, or the symptoms thereof.

In her practice, Alicia uses many of the concepts of CBT such as psychoeducation because she wants her clients to be well-informed. Being client-centered is also important to her and helping guide them through the counseling process has been helpful. In terms of client autonomy, Alicia is concerned with boundaries and respecting the client. Although she may feel that a client may benefit from some biblical truths she is careful to honor the client if they do not profess any faith and not overwhelm them with her beliefs. In working with clients Alicia has learned that she is passionate about client justice and client rights. When it comes to clients that have limitations with English she is concerned that they are properly understood so she will advocate even more for them. For Alicia, the client is more than a number on a chart, they have a story to tell and it is important to hear them.

In summary, Alicia has learned to empower her clients and let them know that she and they operate from the same level, she does not feel any superiority or act like an expert towards them. She is concerned with the lack of information and resources that many clients have experienced and even when they are diagnosed, they do not always know what the diagnosis means and seem afraid to ask. She has also noticed that there appears to be a lack of assertiveness and sometimes a lower educational level and she tries to help her clients by giving information in easy-to-understand language to put them at ease.

Participant 7: Glenda

Glenda has a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling with 5 years of experience within the counseling field. The ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture that she self-identifies with is Puerto Rican and is married for thirty years and has two children. She is between the ages of forty-one through fifty and describes her gender as female. She currently works as a bereavement counselor and also in a private therapy practice in New York City.

Glenda speaks Spanish fluently and is able to provide psychotherapy in both English and Spanish.

Glenda feels that being a Latina is a huge influence on her provision of therapy and she is impelled by the great needs she sees within the Latino community. She sees herself as a success story and avoided becoming a statistic through education and focus. A lack of mentors was detrimental in her experience and so she now is intentional about encouraging and educating. Poverty and having little privilege spurred her to come out of negative circumstances and she feels she must give back to the community. Glenda finds that cultural norms and negative stereotypes regarding counseling have to be broken in Latino communities. Breaking mentalities, breaking traditions, and bringing information are key in helping clients not to hold on to old and negative ways of living. Planting seeds in their minds is essential as well as guiding them through careful redirection when necessary.

In the process of educating clients, she has found that there is pushback and they refuse to “air their dirty laundry” so to speak. Some of these clients will not embrace therapy and Glenda feels that the church can also hinder the expression of grief by using faith as a spiritual band-aid on an open wound. In her experience, there have been factors that prevented Latinos from excelling and she is not sure if these factors are intentional or not but they do force Latinos to work harder to meet the same standards as other groups. Her current work environments are secular and so she remains a “silent witness” to the gospel in all she does. She does this by being compassionate and presenting the heart of Christ, being patient with her clients, and allowing the peace of God to inform the environments where she provides psychotherapy. Imparting hope to her clients, she feels, is itself a sacred task and she considers it a call from God. Although she is

not working in a church setting she says that she is a minister and is constantly ministering through her work.

Integrating psychology and theology is done subtly, Glenda feels, she may, however, engage a client in conversation about getting enough sleep or eating correctly and thus helps them care for their body and mind in practical ways which does not always call for a Bible verse. For clients with a faith orientation, she is able to speak of the body as a temple and the need for intentional self-care. Some issues she has come across with integration include hyper-spiritualization and a lot of emotionalism rather than clear and logical thinking which she practices. She feels that she understands this well as she needed to move away from church legalism and indoctrination which were not always biblically correct. She points to people seeing demons behind every bush or tree rather than dealing with core negative issues in their life as a method of avoidance.

Hearing client narratives has been essential and helpful to her in developing an eclectic practice where the client can share past relationships, their history, and their childhood. This has helped her to be an active listener so she can provide effective interventions. Unconditional positive regard and the general tenets of CBT have been helpful in her practice as well. Working with forgiveness as an evidence-based therapy has helped her clients to heal past scars of the heart and embrace letting go of what has occurred in a healthy manner. Client autonomy, Glenda feels, is appropriate but clients come to therapy because they want guidance and help. A good way to provide this autonomy is to allow the client to do their own work based on their needs and wants.

In summary, Glenda has learned that her clients can sometimes act like mirrors for situations in her life and she gains valuable insight through working with them. Their stories

inform her own because she is well aware that she is not exempt from issues and problems. This understanding has given her a heart of compassion because she feels that her client's struggles are meaningful to her as she has also experienced some of them in her life. Glenda says that it is important that Latino therapists stay current, relevant, and aware of the societal movements so that they can effect meaningful change in their sphere of influence as changes are constantly occurring.

Results

In this phenomenological study interviews conducted through the Microsoft Teams virtual platform were utilized to record and transcribe the experiences of Christian Latino psychotherapists who integrate psychology and theology and protect client autonomy while working in New York City. Seven participants were involved in the research study which was composed of four demographic questions for categorical purposes and twelve additional interview questions. The twelve interview questions explored the participant's culture, their experiences in integrating psychology and theology, and their experiences in providing psychotherapy in New York City.

Each interview was recorded and lasted from thirty minutes to an hour to provide ample time for each participant to respond completely. The videos were automatically transcribed through the Teams virtual platform and were then analyzed to capture and discuss themes that emerged from these interviews. This entailed using the information gathered in the interviews and reducing it to prevalent themes that informed and responded to the provided research questions (Erasti-Ibarrono et al., 2018). Once the participant's responses were collected and analyzed, the themes that developed were examined and categorized for further analysis, discussion, and inclusion in the research data.

Theme Development

A number of themes emerged through the interview information gathered from the therapists. These broad themes emerged from an analysis of the responses to the research question through the interviews conducted. Several subthemes were also identified and included.

Theme One: When asked to explain their role as a psychotherapist the themes that emerged focused on making connections with clients, teaching the client that grief and the need for counseling are normal, and encouraging the client to trust in the counseling process. Karmen sees herself as a servant which helps her to support clients while Edna feels she is an educator and a source of connection for her clients. Gerry was concerned about misinterpretations by clients and was careful to ask clarifying questions to keep clients safe.

Theme Two: The second cluster of themes emerged as therapists discussed their experiences with clients. The therapists identified areas where skepticism in the counseling process abounded and was even considered taboo by a number of their Latino clients especially when speaking of family issues. They also explored the stigma attached to counseling as related to them by Latinos they have worked with. Gerry experienced how some clients express concern about their authority being undermined while Glenda was concerned that some Latino cultural norms are unhealthy and can be detrimental to their mental health. Deborah reflected on how services for newer incoming Latino populations are lacking. Edna felt that she gained a broader perspective with clients through understanding some of their shared religious experiences.

Theme Three: In describing the meaning of being a Christian Latino therapist all of the therapists felt that their Christian faith and belief are essential to their practice and are a large part of it. They also felt that their understanding of the counseling process together with their understanding of scripture helped them to counsel clients who did not know the differences

between psychosis and gifts of the spirit. For Leila being an instrument in God's hands is important and Glenda felt that her experiences as a child empower her to help break stereotypes and encourage Latinos to move forward with new information.

Theme Four: The intentionality of integrating psychology and theology was important to this study and each therapist expressed their own method of integration. The most commonly mentioned were using CBT, teaching about over-spiritualizing, and accepting client beliefs without undermining psychological principles. Alicia fosters a collaboration between psychology and theology and Deborah uses a psychodynamic approach with clients. Gerry uses the clients' knowledge and practices as a starting point in integration while Karmen uses CBT to explore principles of living with clients.

Theme Five: Protecting client autonomy was important to each therapist and they generally agreed that setting boundaries and explaining appropriate limits with respect allowed both therapist and client to express themselves freely in counseling sessions. Leila expressed great respect for the client's worldviews and carefully assesses the client's needs to protect autonomy. However, Glenda felt that clients come to therapy seeking counseling so there must be some guidance provided. Edna focused on the clients making their own choices and showing them that they were free to make them.

Subthemes: Some themes expressed were not shared by the majority of the therapists interviewed but are worthy of being mentioned. Themes of historical oppression, patriarchy in various levels of society, and white supremacy were of concern for one therapist. The feeling that there are higher expectations for Latino therapists and the need to have to prove themselves over and above other counselors was expressed by another therapist.

Research Question Responses

The following research questions were designed to examine the experiences of Christian Latino therapists providing therapy in New York City.

RQ1: How do you understand your role as a psychotherapist?

This question focused on the self-perception of the role of the counselor and generally speaking, the counselors agreed that they must be intentional in drawing in the clients to have them accept counseling and remain in therapy. There was an overall commitment to establishing trust, seeing counseling as serving the community, and advocating according to client needs. The psychotherapists generally saw themselves as filling in spaces where the clients needed further information and clarification and the counselors were in a position to provide it. The following quotes from several of the interviews express how therapists view their roles in therapy.

Leila felt that trust is essential to developing connections while Karmen saw therapy as service. Gerry felt protective of clients and used clarifying questions to gauge their needs.

Leila: "I seek to establish trust with a patient as soon as I meet them. I try to establish early connections and be person-centered so they know that I care about them."

Karmen: "As a Christian, I was taught to serve others and this is what I seek to do with my client, serve them through counseling. I am available to support clients in whatever crisis they are going through."

Gerry: "I can protect my clients by asking clarifying questions to avoid misunderstandings. I feel I can better gauge perspectives and be aware of misinterpretations because I am Latino. It helps me with asking questions because I am aware of some of the things that may affect a Latino."

Glenda stated that her role included remembering her personal background and experience as an aid to the client. Edna says that being an advocate is essential although Deborah struggled with advocacy due to time constraints.

Glenda: "I try to never forget where I came from so I can help others climb higher."

Edna: "I am an advocate for education in the Puerto Rican community. I also advocate for mental health in Latino communities in general. I feel that other Latinos feel comfortable knowing that there's someone they feel connected to. Not only in language but historical concepts also."

Deborah: "I struggle with having the time to advocate for meaningful change in having more accessibility for my clients in evidence-based services."

Alicia: "I am client-centered, enjoy providing psychoeducation, and help the client to take control of their life. It's important to me to advocate for clients and make sure they are heard because they have a story to tell."

RQ2: What are your experiences of being a psychotherapist?

The counselors expressed that although most of their clients come to therapy voluntarily they would sometimes feel that the clients were not quite sure if the process was worthwhile or even effective. Some of the beliefs in Latino communities especially newer immigrants require information and education to destigmatize the process and intention of counseling. Given the nature of "experience" the responses by the participants were many and varied. Clients came with pressing needs seeking immediate relief which is not always possible given the nature of the counseling process. However, as can be noted from the counselor responses below client characteristics informed counselor experiences and stretched their academic and experiential knowledge to a large degree.

Karmen stated that negative normalizations were a problem she encountered and Glenda echoed this sentiment. Gerry felt that clients were guarded in what they shared.

Karmen: "There are some dynamics in Latino cultures that have been normalized and they are not necessarily the healthiest. Some clients come in with a type of machismo and there is even toxic matriarchy that affects the client. These extremes stop the client from working through the counseling process. There is also a lot of skepticism about therapy and Latino clients see receiving it as a taboo because family secrets cannot be spoken about to people outside of the family. There is a lack of trust in people outside the culture."

Gerry: "I have experienced Latino men being guarded with their feelings and being concerned that their authority is being undermined in counseling. When further exploring this it really amounted to cultural and language misunderstandings."

Glenda: "There are some cultural norms in Latino populations that I work with that are irrational. There is still some stigma attached to seeking help for mental health issues and I want to speak truth and education to that."

Edna was positive about being able to understand the client's religious underpinnings due to shared experiences. She also felt that she could educate clients on healthy thinking patterns.

Edna: "I find it positive that in session I can speak of certain things with clients, like speaking in tongues, that in traditional psychology would be considered psychosis or schizophrenia. I can gain a broader perspective of my clients by exploring this. I try to provide psychoeducation to promote growth and awareness. When it comes to anxiety and other health-related symptoms I help the client to understand that there can be natural reasons for their condition and medication should not be seen as a barrier or demonic."

Deborah and Alicia tried to balance the needs of undocumented clients with few resources and some that wanted only Biblical counseling and avoided psychiatric services.

Deborah: "Having access to services for undocumented people has been a struggle in my experience. Not being able to afford therapy is another issue. Also, in our culture going to therapy is not seen as a positive thing, instead, there is the negative idea that you are 'loco' versus something to strengthen the self."

Alicia: "I have come across clients that only want a Spanish-speaking therapist or someone that looks like them. Some clients want to keep it biblical but sometimes I have to encourage psychiatric services and it is challenging for them."

RQ3: What does it mean to be a Christian Latino therapist?

This question sought a measure of self-reflection and the perceptions of the therapists on their own work. Interestingly, the counselors, for the most part, viewed themselves as helpers and were strategic in explaining how they are able to use their Christian beliefs, their cultural heritage, and their education to be fully present with their clients. Their reflections demonstrate a commitment to excellence while still allowing themselves to actively help those they work with.

Gerry stated that understanding "church talk" was helpful in understanding the client's spiritual needs while Leila felt that she was an instrument of help for them.

Leila: "I am an instrument being used by God to help my clients. The Holy Spirit helps me to understand the people I am working with."

Gerry: "Being a Christian Latino therapist has been helpful to me in being able to decipher some of the Christian jargon that some clients bring to sessions. We can discuss them and see if they mean the same thing to each of us. I can also better understand if a client is being dogmatic or doctrinally sound and work with them through this context."

Glenda: "It means that because of my experiences as a Latina growing up, I saw poverty and I understand deficiencies and limitations so I want to encourage them (Latinos), spur them forward, to educate and inform them. Breaking the mentalities, traditions, and stereotypes by bringing new information."

Edna was careful to respect her agency's protocols while still seeking integration while Deborah and Alicia saw their faith as an important part of their practice. Alicia added that she felt some pressure as a female therapist and having to prove herself.

Edna: "I am not trying to speak about doctrine in session but I do try to combine mental health with Christian faith when appropriate."

Deborah: "My faith informs every aspect of my life. I see my role as a ministry and a healer. I take it very seriously that I do no harm to the client. When I am working with somebody I look at it as if I'm serving that person and that God and me, Jesus, and me, is reaching out to that person."

Alicia: "I consider myself a woman of God and working in a secular place that doesn't necessarily support Christian therapy is something I struggle with. I do feel that women and Latinas in particular experience a barrier of having to be seen as intelligent."

RQ4: What methods do you intentionally use to integrate psychology and theology?

The method of integration varied by counselor but they all agreed that integration should be an intentional process and it takes experience to do it well. The counselors expressed using CBT, discussing spiritual principles, seeking connections, and focusing on self-care. The snippets of their interviews encapsulated below reflect a conscious effort to integrate while maintaining a healthy balance between psychology and theology.

Karmen and Deborah used CBT and a Psychodynamic approach respectively in their integrational approaches. Gerry let the client lead through their spiritual understandings.

Karmen: "I integrate through CBT and use Bible verses to demonstrate principles of living. I will not often specify the verses but just talk about how the client can have a stable, functioning, happy life through the choices they make."

Gerry: "I have my own values as a believer and I integrate through an understanding of the particular psychological dynamics and practices the client brings. One size does not fit all so I am careful to let them understand that this is not magic."

Glenda was practical in her approach and stressed self-care and Alicia stated that the collaboration between psychology and theology was important to some of her clients.

Glenda: "When I have a Christian client we discuss spiritual principles found in the Bible. With others, we focus on self-care such as sleeping, exercising, and eating healthy food which are common practical principles."

Deborah: "I allow the client to bring up the topic in session. If they want to discuss how they feel that God is not listening then we integrate that into it. I wait for the patient to bring it and then we integrate into the topic to find connections between them and God and what's happening with them now. I use a psychodynamic approach focusing on influences and connections that lead to different behaviors."

Alicia: "I like the collaboration between science and theology and I wait for a client to bring it up in session. More African-American and Latino families talk about it because it is important to them. The client feels understood, opens up more, and doesn't feel they are being judged as psychotic because they feel they can trust me."

RQ5: How do you protect client autonomy in therapy provision?

There was a consensus that although a relative familiarity develops between client and patient there is still a respectful distance that must be maintained to establish a healthy therapeutic relationship and avoid the imposition of the therapist's beliefs on the client. Setting boundaries, respecting client opinions, empowering them, and understanding client freedom and choice were all noted to be essential in protecting client autonomy.

Clients making their own decisions was important to Karmen and honoring their decisions. Leila stated that some clients avoid talking about God and she does not pressure them. Gerry echoes that clients need to be respected to decide for themselves.

Leila: "I have Christian clients that have a broken faith and they don't want to discuss God. I respect them and focus on another aspect of counseling that affects them."

Karmen: "I constantly remind myself in the session that clients are allowed to think differently. They can make their own decisions. I can help them along in the process but ultimately, they must come to their own conclusions."

Gerry: "Empowering the client so they can move on their own and respecting them otherwise we are crippling them."

Edna agreed that clients need to make their own choices and Glenda felt that clients are asking for some guidance and she is comfortable in providing it. Deborah placed a high value on client choice and provides guidance with the understanding that the client's agenda is important.

Glenda: "I try to give the client unconditional positive regard but I also understand that clients come to counseling because they want some sort of guidance. I protect them by not doing the work for them. They must put into practice what we cover in sessions."

Edna: "I want the client to know that they have the freedom to make choices. I want them to understand that they are heard and that I am actually listening to them."

Deborah: "Client autonomy means that my agenda is not the top agenda that the agenda is set by the client. I help direct, I ask them do you want to go left, right, or forward. I may say let's stop here and look around. I'm not dragging them anywhere but helping them to change their thinking when they are ready."

Research Journal

Maintaining a journal was a part of the study to help me in remembering thoughts, feelings, and actions associated with the collection of information and the process through which data was obtained. The journal highlighted key dates in the research process beginning with the email received informing the researcher of approval to begin the recruiting and research process. Once approval was received a Facebook recruitment post was placed on Facebook which resulted in the identification of six possible participants. Those six participants then referred four more possible participants for a total of ten research subjects.

The researcher requested emails from each participant and nine of them responded with an email and informed consent forms were then emailed to them with instructions to return them if the participant felt they could be a part of the research study. The first seven participants that returned the consent forms were then contacted to be part of the study and interviews were scheduled and conducted.

Summary

In summary, seven participants were included in this phenomenological research study which explored the experiences of Christian Latino therapists who integrate psychology and theology within their provision of therapy. Although all the participants were over eighteen their

ages ranged from thirty-one to seventy. Each participant was able to fully engage in the interview process and acknowledged that they were satisfied that they answered the interview questions with the knowledge they had. In addition, all of the participants understood that their responses would be used in this research study with the safeguards of confidentiality and privacy in place in accordance with IRB protocols.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of Christian Latino psychotherapists who integrate psychology and theology while respecting client autonomy. The research study specifically focused on five research questions that sought the insight of seven psychotherapists who have provided counseling in New York City for three years or more. The Microsoft Teams virtual platform was used to conduct the interviews and immediate transcription was done through the same virtual platform. This chapter brings a conclusion to the research study by summarizing the relevant findings and discussing the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of those findings in relation to the current literature. The delimitations and limitations of the research study are also identified and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Summary of Findings

Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, How do you understand your role as a psychotherapist?

This research question sought focused responses from each psychotherapist on their perceptions of their roles as therapists. The interviews demonstrated that the therapists' activities and functions played a large part in the self-understanding of their roles. Various themes emerged as the therapists responded to this question. Making connections with clients, expressing to clients that grieving and participating in counseling are normal, and trying to engender clients' trust in the counseling process were important themes uncovered through responses to this question.

There was a general consensus that being intentional in the counseling process by the therapist was important so as to maintain a viable and healthy therapeutic relationship. Commitment to the process by the therapist was demonstrated by being community-minded and advocating for the client's needs. Functioning, to a certain degree, as a clearinghouse of information and resources was also considered important. The counselors felt that the establishment of trust early in the relationship provided a good foundation for the counseling process to develop and be consistently fruitful.

Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was, What are your experiences of being a psychotherapist?

This research question explored and highlighted some of the rich experiences of the therapists as they engaged with clients throughout their practice. Among some of their experiences, therapists agreed that generally speaking, there was some skepticism and stigma attached to receiving therapy. Discussing family issues was a guarded affair and there was a sense that it was taboo to talk about family situations. The clients initially came to discuss areas where they needed help but in some counseling experiences, the clients sought practical and concrete resources more than therapy.

The counselors reported that there seemed to be some suspicion of the counseling process and although clients voluntarily sought therapy there were mixed reactions regarding the value and meaningfulness of the therapy given because of other concerns the clients had. The possibility of immediate results was important for the clients and this left some therapists with the task of educating clients on how counseling works which was helpful in providing resources and information for them. Nevertheless, therapist experiences, on the whole, were positive but

mingled with the weight of the pressing needs of clients especially newer and less established immigrants to the country.

Findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, What does it mean to be a Christian Latino therapist?

This research question explored the dichotomy of being Christian and Latino in the context of providing psychotherapy. The therapists all felt that their Christian faith informed their practice and was a large part of why they became therapists in the first place. However, there was an interesting dynamic that developed through the responses to this question. Namely, the fact that in the process of therapy, some of them noticed that their understanding of Scripture and their understanding of some church practices in Latino culture was helpful in determining and differentiating psychosis from spiritual gifting in some Latino-oriented churches.

The counselors viewed themselves as helpers in both psychological and theological ways but also felt that their rich cultural heritage greatly informed their practice. The common language (Spanish), some similar cultural attributes, and sometimes even the color of their skin endeared them to their clients and seemed to make them feel hopeful about the outcomes of therapy. At least two therapists commented that the clients felt comfortable speaking with someone that looked like them and could share cultural experiences.

Findings for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was, What methods do you intentionally use to integrate psychology and theology?

This research question sought to clarify and explain how the therapists' actively engaged in the process of integrating psychology and theology into their practices. Even though each therapist had their own method of integrating some key themes became visible throughout the

interviews. The use of CBT was used more often than other methods and there was a consensus that over-spiritualizing by a number of Christian clients had to be addressed. The respect and acceptance of the client's beliefs were also considered central to integration with the addition of basic psychological principles that did not undermine the client's faith.

The counselors felt that experience was important in practicing integration and that it was an intentional process. They also expressed that knowledge of both theological and psychological principles is essential to keep a healthy balance between the two. There were practical considerations also, such as having clients practice appropriate self-care like eating healthy foods, exercising, and sleeping to ensure they were protecting the temple of their body. For clients that were Christian and desired to incorporate the Bible into their therapy scripture was added to their treatment as appropriate.

Findings for Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was, How do you protect client autonomy in therapy provision?

This research question explores the mechanisms by which a therapist engages with a client while respecting the client's beliefs and helping them to understand their rights and privileges in the counseling relationship. The therapists understood the importance of client autonomy and expressed different ways in which they engage with clients without undermining their beliefs. Setting boundaries, explaining appropriate limits, and letting the client know that they are not forced to follow therapist recommendations were some of the themes that emerged here. They felt that with these items in place both the therapist and the client could express themselves freely in sessions.

The counselors generally felt that even with good client and therapist rapport a healthy therapeutic relationship is greatly informed by respectful boundaries. This includes the therapist

avoiding the imposition of their beliefs on the client without lessening the benefits that a client can accrue through the therapist's experiences. Maintaining this balance was important to all the counselors. Empowering the client through education, understanding that the client has freedom, and respecting the client's choice were also all considered important aspects of what best exemplifies maintaining client autonomy.

Subthemes

Some subthemes emerged from the research data that were not generally mentioned by the majority of counselors. One therapist felt that systems of historical oppression have been derived that forestall Latino expression in various areas of society. In addition, institutional patriarchy, and white supremacy were concerning for this therapist. Another therapist felt that Latinos need to demonstrate higher levels of education and have to prove themselves more than other more established cultures in New York City to be respected and seen as achieving a successful counseling practice.

Discussion

The current study explored the experiences of Christian Latino psychotherapists who integrate psychology and theology while protecting client autonomy and working in New York City. Seven areas were identified in the literature review for further consideration and discussion regarding the Latino counselor's interactions with clients and their personal experiences while seeking to integrate psychology and theology within their practices. The meaning of experience, the person of the Latino psychotherapist, client autonomy, the nuances of integrating psychology and theology, barriers to integration, developing positive coping skills through integration, using scripture in integration, and the usefulness of this research study were all explored.

Limitations with Therapy Provision

The background research analyzed regarding the availability of Latino counselors showed that although more Latinos are coming into the mainstream of psychological professions more seem to be urgently needed in the field as the Latino population in the United States continues to grow (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2021). The participants interviewed felt that because they are Latino therapists they are able to bridge gaps between Latino culture and therapy provision the influx of Spanish-dominant populations has been extraordinary and stretches them to capacity. The interview data also confirmed this as the participants generally felt that Latino counselors are burdened with high caseloads but are also often tasked with translating documents into Spanish to meet the needs of the population they serve. While some counselors have the ability to do this translation, valuable counseling time is used in the process which can lead to clients feeling less amenable to continuing in the counseling relationship.

Respecting Client Autonomy

The concept of client autonomy is vitally important and research bears out that while therapists generally try to avoid “pushing” a client into doing anything there is a measure of guidance used by therapists to help the clients find safety (Perry et al., 2018). The counselors interviewed had mixed responses here as some felt that they did provide some guidance in session but others felt that they were careful not to tell the client to do anything but instead presented options and choices to the client from which they could decide what was the best course to take. However, in providing this guidance there was a sense of protection provided to the client to prevent the counselor's worldviews and opinions from confusing the client. There seemed to be a consensus, however, in the interviewed participants that psychoeducation played a large part in the counseling process.

Intentional Integration

The integration of psychology and theology was a large part of this research study and research demonstrated that those that seek integration within their counseling paradigm see these two domains as actively collaborating with each other (Haynes, 2020; Ripley, 2022). The participants confirmed this through the interviews and felt that both psychology and theology were important in their practices. They felt that the balance between using psychological and theological concepts in therapy was a challenge but were comfortable in engaging clients with both areas. However, the interviews showed that because some of the participants were employed in completely secular agencies the therapists often had to focus more on the principles of scripture rather than using Bible verses in session. They generally agreed that they would use the Bible if the client requested it and its use was appropriate within the context of their session and the therapy being used.

Honoring Client Understanding of Spiritual Gifts

The research showed that therapist understandings of clients' values and beliefs are important in therapy (Adams & McMinn, 2014; Loosemore, 2021). Nonetheless, this research study was able to shed further light and add to this topic. Although all the therapists interviewed agreed that they seek to integrate into their practice when they are able to do so, the phenomenon of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and hearing from God through dreams were important to their clients although these experiences are not always considered mentally healthy in mainstream psychotherapy.

This finding seems to diverge from what may be considered “normal” in therapy but the therapists in the study because of their Christian and Latino heritage were able to consider and better understand their client’s worldviews and be accepting of them carefully and respectfully.

This was vitally important as some of the therapists pointed out that some of the spiritual giftings their clients purported to exercise might be considered psychosis to other mental health practitioners resulting in a different dynamic in the counseling relationship. Their ability to gauge between psychosis and a genuine religious experience was helpful in informing their practice and preventing undue harm to their clients.

Latino Therapists and Considerations of Race

Finally, although race relations can often be a contentious subject the research showed that professionals of color are still being affected by negative perceptions and even subjected to microaggressions by other professionals in the field (Erolin & Wieling, 2021). In addition, when speaking a language other than English, which many Latino therapists do, these counselors can be viewed as incompetent or lacking credibility although they may have the same expertise, education, and experience as their peers (Peng et al., 2020). So even though the Latino therapists interviewed for this study spoke at least two languages they sometimes felt that they were viewed as inadequate in their counseling practice. In fact, one of the therapists interviewed felt that racism and historical oppression, and systems of patriarchy were still visible in the areas in which she practiced and further education, as well as social justice reforms, are necessary to combat this reality. In the same vein, another therapist interviewed felt that expectations for Latino therapists were higher even when they had the same level of education and knowledge as their peers.

Implications

The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study must be considered within the purview of various individuals. These may include therapists, ministers, administrators, and others who can affect change through policy. The hope is that they may gain

knowledge from this study and extend the conversation. They may also be able to address issues they find unresolved through the current research and add their insights and wisdom. In doing so they will be providing an increasingly necessary service to the counseling community in general and Latino therapists and their clients as well.

The present findings suggest that Latino therapists are at the forefront of a rapidly changing dynamic in the provision of therapy. The increasing number of Latino immigrants to North-Eastern American cities, particularly New York City, is stretching both material and human resources like never before. The fact that Latino therapists are able to help mediate these populations' psychological needs is a testament to their resiliency. Moreover, through their fluency in a shared language and a higher level of academic knowledge the therapists prove to be examples to emulate for those that have benefitted from their help.

The findings of the current study can empower other Latino therapists to nurture relationships within their own culture and broaden their knowledge to influence newer therapists in the field. The importance of faith in the current study cannot be minimized and it demonstrated that it is vital to the Latino participants' experiences in their counseling dynamic. The fact they are able to provide a measure of hope, extend their client's knowledge base, and integrate with their client's faith can only enhance the experience of both the client and therapist. In addition, the professionalism shown through protecting client autonomy and using well-known psychological principles such as CBT and client-centered therapy bodes well for the graduate schools that prepared them for service.

Theoretical Implications:

This qualitative research study incorporated the work of Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological analysis through the development of themes found in the interviews

conducted with Christian Latino therapists. Heidegger's theory was essential in this research study because of its descriptive ability regarding lived experiences (Pham, 2022). The experiences of the Christian Latino therapists interviewed were explored and the main themes that emerged from this examination merit further analysis and discussion. A person's experience is vital in developing their worldview and these experiences were respectfully explored.

The main themes that were developed as a result of this research study include, making connections with clients, skepticism and stigma attached to receiving counseling, faith, and culture being important aspects of the therapists' identity, differing methods of integration, and setting boundaries provides freedom of expression in session. The experiences of the counselors, although different, contained areas of similarity such as seeking the welfare of the client, being aware of cultural differences even within different nationalities of Hispanic origin, and integrating psychology and theology intentionally through biblical and psychological principles.

The study's findings show that some of the Christian Latino therapists identified closely with their clients and used their own experiences to help alleviate some of the angst present in encounters with their clients. Gerry shared that as a young man, he was mentored by kind individuals which influenced him to help others. Glenda remembered that as a child and youth, she lived in poverty and desired strongly not to become a statistic. This thinking informs her counseling because she feels that she must educate, inform, and provide guidance to her clients as necessary to avoid situations that will keep them from flourishing.

Empirical Implications:

This research study sought to add to the existing literature by detailing the experiences of Latino therapists willing to share their experiences providing counseling in New York City. The study confirmed that integrating psychology and theology entails having a balanced perspective

and knowledge of both domains is necessary. Some of the therapists felt that they could often integrate the principles of scripture without necessarily sharing Bible verses openly given their employment venue. However, there was also a consensus that many biblical principles are already consistent with psychological principles. Therefore, integration became a matter of simply sorting out where psychology ended and theology began.

The findings of this study supported the idea in the literature that there is much skepticism and stigma attached to receiving counseling by some Latinos and this may often lead to clients ending therapy early because they feel little value attached to it. The current literature also demonstrates that some clinicians are not culturally or linguistically prepared to meet the needs of incoming migrants (Lebensohn-Chialvo et al., 2022). Leila, when interviewed, concurred with this finding, and expressed that in her counseling practice, she has noted miscommunications about the importance of mental health counseling from the Latino population. However, in the current research study, all of the counselors asserted that developing a close and amicable therapeutic relationship with their clients buffered much of the resistance and helped to alleviate doubt in the counseling process while at the same time promoting better communication (Gonzalez et al., 2015; Pope et al., 2022; Sevilla et al., 2020).

Empathy, developing a healthy therapeutic relationship, and respecting client beliefs and values are all common characteristics of a good counselor. This sentiment was echoed in the literature and the findings of the study and also verified that therapists often identify with their clients and suffer alongside them (Lombana, 2021). Alicia, for example, described herself as having a passion for social justice and found that she would intervene as appropriate when a client's limited English proficiency might stop them from receiving much-needed assistance.

This research study's findings were consistent with much of the current literature but served to extend it further along with greater application to Latinos involved in therapy.

Practical Implications:

The literature already aptly demonstrates that more help is necessary when it comes to mental health in general. The levels of poverty in the United States continue to rise even though much money, programs, and ideas to combat it are often suggested. Also, in New York City the homeless population often burdened with high levels of mental illness, coupled with waves of immigration from mostly Latin-American countries has stretched resources to their limits.

However, there are practical considerations that can immediately address some of these issues. It is vitally important that the voices of those in the trenches providing therapy to the neediest be heard. Those in positions of authority who have the resources to make a change need to hear the stories of those that work with populations whose voices have been silenced through neglect and consider developing open forums to address their issues.

There should be implemented systems of better communication between agencies to ensure that needed support is reaching the most vulnerable. The experiences of the Christian Latino therapists interviewed show that they are able, to some degree, to reach new migrants to this country, and therefore, their voices must be acknowledged to better serve these incoming populations. Local ministers and agencies should combine resources and partner with city and state policymakers to develop screening tools to identify the needs of local communities to prevent abuses of the most vulnerable.

Delimitations and Limitations

In an effort to be consistent in this research study and ensure that all participants were equally qualified to be involved in it, eligibility requirements were set and set from the very

beginning. The delimitations included in this research study were several. First, each participant had to be over 18 years of age to be included. Second, each participant must have practiced psychotherapy for at least three years in New York City. Third, each participant must have agreed that they actively seek to integrate psychology and theology within their counseling practice. Fourth, each participant agreed that they understood and held to the beliefs and doctrines of the Christian faith. These delimitations helped to narrow down the pool of participants and thus provide greater focus to the study.

Limitations of the study include the fact that the sample size, consisting of seven individuals, is small. Also, individuals outside of the Christian faith were ineligible to participate in the study. Anyone under the age of eighteen was excluded from the study. Inclusion in the study required having practiced psychotherapy in New York City for at least three years which necessarily excluded those who have not practiced psychotherapy there. In addition, being that I, the primary researcher, identify as a Christian Latino therapist practicing psychotherapy in New York City my biases, implicit or explicit, and assumptions must be considered in the light of the research conducted.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the voices of Latino therapists continue to be more pronounced in the literature the exploration of their experiences is vital to the inclusion process within the domain of psychotherapy and may lead to other less-represented cultures feeling proactive in joining the conversation. It is important that those in positions of authority such as administrators, agency heads, and policy-makers consider the cultural, religious, and social values of newer populations entering the United States to help foster and develop healthy systems of acculturation. This research study and the current literature show that there are populations of individuals that will

benefit from counseling but feel marginalized and excluded because they do not fully understand the counseling process. This needs to be ameliorated to help produce a viable, flourishing, and mentally healthy society.

Nevertheless, the generalizability of the current research study is constrained by the delimitations and limitations imposed upon it. These limitations necessarily weakened and narrowed the study as eligibility was not open to other participants whose voices will, therefore, not be heard. These necessary limitations helped to frame this study but future developments in this area of lived experiences when providing psychotherapy will be well served by further exploration. Some recommendations for further research will perhaps encourage other researchers to broaden the current study and develop practical methods of implementation. It is my hope that this research study garners further interest in exploring in-depth the varied experiences of Christian Latino psychotherapists and is extended well beyond this one culture into other important areas.

Looking ahead to research studies incorporating the experiences of therapists across cultures, countries, and even local communities may be a consideration for those interested. It behooves counseling practitioners to take a step back every once in a while and actively consider why they do what they do. Exploration of one's intentions and actions in developing therapeutic relationships may be helpful in developing a counseling mindset. This researcher, after having completed this study, is well aware that much time and effort are necessary when a study is proposed and implemented. Therefore, it is with great respect that the following recommendations are made.

First, I recommend the use of a greater sample size which will increase responses and provide the combined voices of more therapists, thus adding to the generalizability of future

studies. Second, I recommend that comparisons of this study with Latino therapists be completed with psychotherapists of other cultures such as European and African nations which might prove insightful in determining if there are similar outcomes or differences are noted. Third, I recommend exploring if some psychological and theological principles are in fact interchangeable and may already be incorporated into counseling paradigms under different names. Fourth, I recommend comparing the mental health outcomes of clients who are in therapy with counselors who integrate with clients of counselors who do not integrate psychology and theology to determine if there are any major differences.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological research study focused on the experiences of Christian Latino therapists who integrate psychology and theology in New York City while protecting client autonomy. The study sought to bring greater understanding and enrich the current literature by linking these Latino psychotherapists' experiences with past research, and will, hopefully, encourage future research on similar topics. The study concluded that Christian Latino therapists actively try to integrate psychology and theology in therapy with the consent of their clients and the approval of the agency within which they function. The therapists also demonstrated that they actively protect client autonomy by respectfully allowing the client to be leaders in their own healing and providing a guiding hand as necessary.

Psychoeducation, helping the client to understand the importance and value of therapy, and promoting client awareness within the domains of psychology and theology were shown to be important aspects of their therapy as the research demonstrated. The research study also identified the fact that Christian Latino counselors involved in it had the ability to differentiate and carefully assess if a client needed further psychiatric services or was simply over-

spiritualizing and did not need further intervention. The knowledge that the Christian therapist brought into the counseling relationship as a result of their involvement in church culture accompanied by their knowledge of Latino church affiliations proved helpful here and protected the client from unnecessary interventions.

Finally, this study demonstrated that the Latino psychotherapists who participated in it promoted connectedness, gave space for the client to make their own decisions, and developed an atmosphere of mutual respect which allowed clients to be forthcoming about their wants and needs. Exploring the lived experiences of these Latino therapists was useful in acknowledging the work and effort that they provide in daily interactions with clients from all cultures, especially in the incredibly diverse world of New York City. The fact that these therapists are able to bridge multiple cultures is a testament to their flexibility, understanding of client needs, and ability to be mindful of the tenets of psychology and theology.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Date: 6-10-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1427

Title: CHRISTIAN LATINO THERAPIST'S EXPERIENCES IN INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY WHILE MAINTAINING CLIENT AUTONOMY

Creation Date: 4-19-2023

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Luis Ramos

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Luis Ramos	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	lramos@liberty.edu
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Member	Luis Ramos	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	lramos@liberty.edu
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Member	Mollie Boyd	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	meboyd@liberty.edu
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APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT**Consent Form**

Title of the Project: Christian Latino Therapist's Experiences in Integrating Psychology and Theology while Maintaining Client Autonomy

Principal Investigator: Luis Ramos, LCSW-R; MDiv, Doctor of Education candidate, School of Behavioral Sciences, Liberty University.

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, You must be a licensed counselor or a retired psychotherapist, have been providing services for at least three consecutive years, have a master's degree in the counseling field, and be 18 years or older to participate. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of Christian Latino(a) psychotherapists who provide or have provided therapy in New York City.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
Participate in an in-person or video-recorded interview that will take 45 minutes to 1 hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include an increased understanding on the literature regarding psychotherapy and will benefit future and present Latino therapists.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Your collected data may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand. Data will be

stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years. The researcher and his doctoral committee members will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Luis Ramos. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Mollie Boyd, at meboyd@liberty.edu

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED]

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX C: SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT FORM

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my study is to examine the experiences of Christian Latino(a) psychotherapists who provide or have provided therapy in New York City. You must be a licensed counselor or a retired psychotherapist, have been providing services for at least three consecutive years, have a master's degree in the counseling field, and be 18 years or older to participate. Participants will be interviewed for (45-60 mins). If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please direct message me for more information. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview, and you will need to sign and return it at the time of the interview.

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC & INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**Demographic Questions**

1. What ethnicity within the Latino/Hispanic culture do you most identify with?
2. Please tell me the highest level of education you have achieved.
3. Is your age between 18 - 30, 31 - 40, 41 - 50, 51 - 60, 61 - 70.
4. What is your gender?

Interview Questions**Introductory Question**

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we had just met (pseudonyms will be used, and identities will be kept confidential).

Questions related to Cultural Identity

2. How does your being Latino inform your practice?
3. What has been your greatest struggle as a Latino in providing psychotherapy?
4. What barriers have you faced in being a Latino man or woman practicing psychotherapy in New York City?

Questions Related to Therapists' Experiences with Clients

5. How does your Christian faith inform your provision of therapy?
6. Please share your view on integrating psychology and theology.
7. What have been the positive and negative effects of integrating psychology and theology on you and your clients?
8. How do you work with clients who profess no faith or prefer not to speak about religious themes related to their therapy?
9. What elements of psychology and theology work best for your clients?

10. What do you understand client autonomy to be?

Summary Questions

11. What have you learned about yourself as a Latino Christian therapist that has helped you better understand your clients?
12. What further insights can you share about your experiences providing therapy in New York City?