

Curanderismo and the DSM-IV: Diagnostic and Treatment Implications for the Mexican American Client

Martin L. Harris

Occasional Paper No. 45

September 1998

ABSTRACT

When the Mexican American family's attempt to heal a troubled member fails, either by seeking out western medicine, psychotherapy, or the saints, curanderismo may be considered as a viable alternative form of intervention. However, opportunity for efficacious care may be thwarted by a psychologist/psychiatrist trying to "sell" their system of treatment and disease classification. Some challenges with traditional psychiatry and psychology are rooted in the nosological system used for assessment, diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Although the symptom profile for a culture-bound syndrome may mimic the clinical profile of a "standard" DSM disorder, the sequale of the disorder as well as the diagnostic, assessment and treatment protocol may differ significantly. The DSM-IV has made strides in terms of mentioning some cultural syndromes, however differential diagnosis, etiological considerations, and appropriate treatment protocols continue to be a challenging theme for mental health care providers. This paper seeks to overview some of the cultural stepping stones in the current classification system. Issues of family support, curanderismo, and differential diagnoses will also be discussed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Harris, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Southern California College. He received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Washington State University. He is the recipient of a fellowship from the American Psychological Association Minority Fellowship Program.