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### The Mestiza/o Perspective

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### The Mestiza/o Perspective

We are very happy to publish the premier issue of the *Journal of Mestizo and Indigenous voices*. Our intent and mission are reflected in the diversity of articles presented, which represent a mix of invited and referred manuscripts. However, to expand upon our use of the term *Mestiza/o*, consistent with mission, we start with the present article reprinted from our first newsletter available on our Website.

As Stavans (2013) puts forth, a *Mestiza/o* is a person or culture born from different races, but it is something far bigger yet tangible: a state of mind. Among Latinas/os, ancestral histories are embedded in the *Mestiza/o* experience, the forging of several different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Caucasian, African, and Indigenous bloodlines that have contributed to their unique identity and worldview. The *Mestiza/o* experience and the Indigenous backdrop are interrelated, and consequently form an essential basis toward a critical identity for many Latino groups. Ramirez (1998, 2004) refers to the *Mestiza/o* perspective as a dynamic, synergistic process developed from the amalgamation of peoples, philosophies, and cultures bridging the European continent and the Americas; the intermingling of physical, psychological, cultural, and spiritual ties between the Caucasian and the Indian.

For centuries racial crossbreeding was rejected in our society, and seen as a refutation of purity, as purity was synonymous with wholesomeness. As we reconsider this view, to be racially mixed is to represent unity, to synthesize, and to integrate (Stavans, 2013). Ramirez (1998, 2004) traces this perspective to the Mesoamerican peoples who came to represent a mix of European and Native Cultures and ideologies. These peoples often spoke two languages and served as cultural ambassadors or brokers. In this process of cultural and genetic “*Mestizoization*” the individual was viewed as an open system i.e., openness to diversity and experience made indigenous peoples receptive to other ways of life and philosophies. In their

search for self-knowledge, every culture, person, worldview was believed to reflect the knowledge necessary to understand the mysteries of life and self. Consequently, diversity was accepted and incorporated into the self through both genetic and cultural amalgamation. Ramirez (1998) further illustrates this perspective in delineating the major differences between European and *Mestiza/o* Approaches to the social sciences and helping professions. The *Mestiza/o* approach includes a focus on the interdisciplinary, with frameworks that are devoid of notions of cultural, genetic, gender, or sexual orientation superiority. Communication and cooperation are valued with primary responsibility to the groups and communities one is working with, along with a deep personal commitment to solving social problems. What Burke (2002) describes as the attributes of a Mestizo Democracy include: The permeability of borders in contrast to the inelasticity of frontiers, a relational as opposed to a possessive rendering of morality and community, the transformation of relations of domination into relations of empowerment, and the engendering of hope in the struggle for justice for all peoples.

Indigenous is a reference to those populations, who, by historical origin, were the original inhabitants of a designated land or nation who include Native American/American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian populations. Being indigenous incorporates the embodiment of an earth-based spirituality-namely, the recognition that all life is interconnected, and that this awareness influences and guides responsible action toward appropriate moral and ethical behavior, and a commitment to the well-being of others (Cervantes, 2008; McNeill & Cervantes, 2008). The psychology of the indigenous peoples of North America over centuries has also viewed the person as an open system as what is learned in interactions with others, the environment, and the universe helps a person achieve harmony with surroundings and to understand the meaning of life. The notion of interpenetration is also an integral part of the view

of the person as information and knowledge from others is modified and incorporated, and influences the psychodynamics of the person. Additionally, the spiritual world holds the key to destiny, personal identity, and life mission, and is a source of power and knowledge. Finally, community identity and responsibility to the group are of central importance (Ramirez, 1998).

Similar concepts are demonstrated in the indigenous psychology of the multiethnic and multiracial Native Hawaiians, which emphasizes the examination of psychological phenomena in ecological, historical, and cultural contexts, involving multiple perspectives and methods to create a comprehensive and integrated picture of the people. These concepts are grounded in the emphasis upon social relationships, and tied to the view that the individual, society, and nature are inseparable and key to psychological health. Unity or accord is paramount as mental health is viewed holistically encompassing body, mind, and spirit. Ties to earth and nature are more than simple place or geography, but embody multiple dimensions including the physical, psychological, and spiritual. What is referred to as *Mana* is the spiritual energy of life found in all things, as well as divine or spiritual power, and connects person, family, land, and the spirit world (McCubbin & Marsella, 2009).

The influences and effects of these Mestiza/o perspectives have only started to be articulated, integrated, and understood by mainstream organized psychology (McNeill & Cervantes, 2008; Gallardo & McNeill, 2009, Comas-Díaz, 2006). Cervantes (2004, 2010), for example, describes the *Mestiza/o* perspective within the context of indigenous Latina/o spiritual principles with guidelines for therapeutic relationships, procedures, and goals including the integration of indigenous healing ceremonies. Emphasis is placed on the central role of spirituality, cultural or ethnic identity, and the power of ritual and ceremony in the counseling process. Similar work has been articulated for Native American populations (e.g., Duran &

Duran, 1995), as well as the holistic framework for psychological health delineated by McCubbin and Marsalla (2010) for Native Hawaiians.

Perhaps it is the increasingly changing demographics in our culture or simply the reality of our multicultural and increasingly multiracial society that is influencing these movements. The *Curanderos* or Traditional Mexican Healers say that we are now coming full circle in recapturing traditional cultural practices post colonization that reflect the worldviews of our peoples. After all, our ancestors provided us with 2000 years of Evidence-Based Psychology Practice (EBPP), while we as contemporary practitioners have only 200! Nonetheless, it is somewhat reaffirming that the American Psychological Association (APA) now recognizes the crucial role of culture and common factors across all healing procedures in defining EBPP (APA, 2006). For many of us, these developments represent the reality and influence of our increasingly *Mestiza/o* nation.

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