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Lucas Torres

Felicia Mata-Greve

Claire Maria Bird

Erick Herrera Hernandez

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# Intersectionality Research Within Latinx Mental Health: Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

Lucas Torres

Department of Psychology, Marquette University;

Felicia Mata-Greve

Department of Psychology, Marquette University

Claire Bird

Department of Psychology, Marquette University

Erick Herrera Hernandez

Department of Psychology, Marquette University

Abstract

*Intersectionality* considers the meaning and consequences associated with multiple identities along interlocking systems of disadvantage and inequality (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). In recent years, there has been increasing attention on examining the mental health outcomes associated with membership in multiple marginalized

groups. Unfortunately, intersectionality research examining the unique experiences of Latinx groups remains scarce. The current article reviews theoretical and methodological considerations regarding intersectionality research within Latinx mental health. From a theoretical perspective, intersectionality brings a series of questions regarding the epistemological approaches to studying psychological phenomena. This, in turn, influences the methodological strategies used to examine these processes. The discussion advances the ongoing discourse regarding the benefits and limitations of integrating intersectionality within research that provides further insight into our Latinx communities.

## Keywords

intersectionality, Latina/o mental health, methodology

Despite the significant theoretical and methodological strides observed in Latinx mental health research, major disparities and discrepancies continue to hamper the advancement of knowledge and the development of intervention and prevention efforts. Increased empirical attention in recent years has sought to integrate intersectionality to help explain how various aspects of identity contribute to health outcomes ([Seng, Lopez, Sperlich, Hamama, & Reed Meldrum, 2012](#)). *Intersectionality* considers the meaning and consequences associated with multiple identities, differences, and levels of disadvantage ([Cole, 2009](#); [Crenshaw, 1991](#)). The intersection of identities involves overlapping systems of inequality or oppression that are interdependent across levels of functioning, from individual interactions and social spheres to structural or institutional arenas ([Warner & Shields, 2013](#)). Intersectionality attends to social identities as elements of the individual and the context, both of which are fluid and dynamic ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016b](#)). In short, intersectionality posits that social identities cannot be studied separately from one another nor without consideration of the underlying social processes of inequality and power dynamics ([Moradi & Grzanka, 2017](#); [Warner & Shields, 2013](#)).

Although intersectionality is rooted in the work of Black feminist scholars and social activists (e.g., [Combahee River Collective, 1977/2007](#)), the term was introduced by [Crenshaw \(1989, 1991\)](#) to describe the unique experiences of Black women with racism and sexism, which legal scholars considered separate processes at the time. The draw of intersectionality for many scholars is that, on a theoretical level, the unique and intersecting experiences of individuals from traditionally marginalized groups can be addressed and accurately examined. Intersectionality research in psychology has grown recently, as evidenced by several special issues on the topic (see *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* [2008, vol 59; 2013, vol 68], *Psychology of Women Quarterly* [2016, vol 40], *Journal of Counseling Psychology* [2017, vol 64], and *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* [2018, vol 161]). A cursory search of the term *intersectionality* on PsycINFO found that from 1935 to 2006, there were 113 citations, seven of which mentioned *Latina/o/x* or *Hispanic* (the first mention was in 2002). From 2007 to present, 1,890 publications were identified, with 131 including *Latina/o/x* or *Hispanic*. A recent content analysis of intersectionality research within counseling psychology found that examining complexity and identifying the potential risk of multiple marginalized identities were some of the main reasons for engaging in this work ([Shin et al., 2017](#)). This content analysis also revealed that the majority of research reviewed focused on the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender. In fact, the bulk of intersectionality research has focused on the experiences of Black women living in the United States ([Rosenthal, 2016](#)). Intersectionality research focusing on the unique experiences of Latinx groups remains scarce.

As the Latinx population living in the United States continues to grow, the need to reduce evident mental health disparities becomes paramount. As one example, Latinx women, particularly adolescents, engage in more suicide behaviors than other groups ([Romero, Edwards, Bauman, & Ritter, 2014](#)). Specifically, Latinx high

school students, when compared with non-Hispanic White and Latinx male high school students, had higher rates of suicidal thoughts (21% vs. 18.4% and 2.6%, respectively) and suicide attempts (13.5% vs. 7.9% and 6.9%, respectively; [Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013](#)). A similar pattern emerged for adults, given that the prevalence rate of suicide attempts for Latinx women was 6.1% compared with 2.7% for Latinx men ([Fortuna, Perez, Canino, Sribney, & Alegria, 2007](#)). As a second example, U.S.-born Latinxs have increased rates of depression and substance abuse compared with their foreign-born counterparts, a phenomenon termed *the immigrant paradox* ([Alegría et al., 2007](#)).

The overall objective of the current article is to discuss some theoretical, methodological, and statistical considerations regarding intersectionality research within Latinx mental health. Two research questions informed our overview of the empirical literature: first, what are the theoretical tenets underlying intersectionality and how do they help to address Latinx mental health?; and second, what are some quantitative approaches to studying intersectionality? From a theoretical perspective, intersectionality in psychology brings a series of questions regarding the epistemological approaches to studying psychological phenomena. This, in turn, influences the methodological procedures and statistical strategies used to examine these processes. Although qualitative procedures are a critical part of the scientific discovery process (in the current issue, see [Delgado-Romero, Singh, & De Los Santos, 2018](#), p. 318) and intersectionality research to date ([Bowleg, 2008](#)), the present discussion focuses on quantitative strategies to examining intersectionality, namely, regression models, person-centered analyses, and multilevel modeling. Although many techniques are available, these commonly used analyses are discussed because of their previous use in intersectionality research and/or for their potential in the field. Further, these statistical strategies could be applicable to our population of interest given the minimal number of quantitative intersectionality studies focusing on Latinx populations. The goal is not to determine the most effective quantitative analysis, as this is driven by the project aims and research questions, but to describe the statistical procedures that can be used to advance intersectionality and Latinx mental health, along with potential limitations. When possible, we highlight studies that have focused on Latinx populations. The intention of the present discussion is to advance the ongoing discourse regarding integrating intersectionality within research that provides further insight into Latinx mental health.

## Theoretical Considerations

In discussing theoretical issues associated with intersectionality, [Else-Quest and Hyde \(2016a\)](#) proposed that being aware of specific epistemologies—namely, positive epistemology, social constructionism, and standpoint epistemology—can inform the methods used in this line of research. A positivist epistemology, which can also be referred to as an *etic approach* ([Berry, 1999](#)), posits that an objective reality or a universal “truth” exists, that natural laws govern this truth, and that researchers can access this knowledge directly ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016a](#)). A positive epistemology is the most common underlying set of assumptions in psychological research and focuses on quantitative efforts to verify a priori hypotheses and prediction of phenomena ([Ponterotto, 2005](#)). The notion of *cultural universalism* assumed under positivist epistemology becomes the starting point for comparative studies and research across a single axis or single social category ([Berry, 1999](#)). Under this epistemology, empirical research has sought to compare differences across ethnic groups assuming that the lived experiences of individuals across groups is equivalent. This is evident in epidemiologic studies examining prevalence rates across ethnic groups ([Breslau et al., 2005](#)) and within Latinx subgroups ([Alegría et al., 2007](#)).

On the other hand, *social constructionism* emphasizes the culturally based meanings of phenomena. As an emic approach, social constructionism suggests that understanding the world and attaining knowledge is a socially negotiated process rooted in the experiences of language, traditions, and

culture ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016a](#)). As an epistemology, social constructionism is the foundation for qualitative research ([Ponterotto, 2005](#)). Standpoint epistemologies view knowledge as socially constructed but not relative and emphasize “truth” as rooted in a particular context and time ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016a](#)). Similarly, [Berry \(1999\)](#) addressed employing a derived etic by which knowledge is discerned following extensive use of social constructionist or emic strategies with the goal of identifying similarities across phenomena, possibly leading to “universals.”

Intersectionality has been described as both a theoretical argument and methodological approach, yet there remains some inconsistency as to whether it is best conceptualized as either or both ([Hancock, 2007](#)). [Else-Quest and Hyde \(2016b\)](#) conceptualized intersectionality as a critical theory and an analytic approach with the potential to be applied to more traditional theories in psychology. Still, the epistemologies employed by researchers shape the methods used to investigate intersectionality. One of the challenges in integrating intersectionality within psychological science and Latinx mental health research involves negotiating the principles of positive epistemology and social constructionism. The focal unit of analysis within psychological science is on the individual, which is not always congruent with intersectionality’s emphasis on systems of inequality and privilege ([Syed & Ajayi, 2018](#)).

In an attempt to make use of both epistemologies, mixed methods approaches take advantage of the strengths associated with social constructionism (qualitative strategies) and positive epistemology (quantitative analyses). Mixed methods rigorously integrate statistical techniques with in-depth narratives to provide greater insight than either approach alone ([Creswell, 2015](#)). It has been suggested that researchers investigating a process across groups should first implement qualitative strategies to understand similarities and differences in meaning making and then use this data to inform quantitative procedures ([Bowleg & Bauer, 2016](#)). As an example, [Díaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, and Marin \(2001\)](#) used a mixed methods approach to examine discrimination and psychological distress among self-identified gay and bisexual Latinx men. The qualitative portion included focus groups of 300 participants. These focus group discussions were used to create items of “social discrimination” that reflected homophobia, racism, and poverty. Using quantitative analyses (i.e., multiple linear regressions) with over 900 participants, the authors reported that social discrimination predicted psychological distress and that this relationship was mediated by social isolation and self-esteem. Although measured separately, homophobia, racism, and poverty were conceptualized under the broader construct of social discrimination, thus addressing various forms of discrimination experienced by this group. This study implemented qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand the unique experiences of individuals who represented membership into multiple disadvantaged groups. Given the theoretical considerations discussed, it is important to understand the methodological issues salient within intersectionality research and the statistical strategies available to assess these complex phenomena.

## Methodological and Statistical Considerations

As a way of integrating intersectionality across the research process, [Cole \(2009\)](#) suggested that scholars can begin by asking three important questions: first, the question “Who is included within this category?” to address within-group differences and interdependence of identities or social categories; second, the question “What role does inequality play?” to emphasize the individual- and structural-level systems of privilege, power, and inequality that occur within a specific context and time; and third, the question “Where are the similarities?” to allow researchers to identify commonalities, as well as differences, that may exist across social categories. Cole pointed out that these questions allow researchers to expand their understanding of social identities beyond demographics and provide “layers of intersectional inquiry” (p. 176).

In a recent review of extant research within counseling psychology, [Shin and colleagues \(2017\)](#) categorized intersectionality studies as either weak, strong, or transformative. As the most common category, weak intersectionality research included investigations of multiple identities, usually

as demographic variables, without discussion of systems of inequality. For instance, a study examining depression symptoms among U.S.- and foreign-born Latinx women may be considered weak intersectionality research because of the focus on social identities, in this case nativity, ethnicity, and gender, without consideration of the underlying systems, namely, immigration stress, ethnic discrimination, and gender discrimination. Strong intersectionality research involved analysis of identities and interlocking systems of power and privilege, and transformative intersectionality added a call for social justice action. Community-engaged research, in which there is an equal partnership between scholars and community constituents throughout the research process, is critical to identify areas of need and inequality and to advocate for social change ([Rosenthal, 2016](#)).

Although several methodological considerations exist, scholars must, first and foremost, address the intersectionality constructs being assessed (i.e., social identities, social processes) and how they are measured. In terms of statistical considerations, there are several challenges and opportunities for quantitative intersectionality research ([Mays & Ghavami, 2018](#)). The next section provides a brief overview of some statistical analyses that have been used or have the potential to examine intersectionality and Latinx mental health.

### Measuring Intersectionality

Despite the conceptualization of identities as dynamic and fluid, a bulk of intersectionality research has used predetermined demographic categories (i.e., gender, ethnic labels), even though these may limit, and perhaps serve to exclude or ignore, key differences ([Moradi & Grzanka, 2017](#); [Warner & Shields, 2013](#)). As an example, this phenomenon is evident in the use of Latina/o/x pan-ethnic labels, which may subtly infer cohesive shared experiences, thus potentially ignoring distinct cultural characteristics. Some scholars have argued that social identities should be distinguished from social processes that amplify inequalities ([Bauer, 2014](#)). For instance, in examining the increased use of alcohol observed among U.S.-born Latinxs ([Alegría et al., 2007](#)), researchers can consider the intersection of social identities, including nativity, gender, documentation status, or socioeconomic class, along with corresponding social processes, namely, immigration/aculturative stress, ethnic discrimination, gender discrimination, and/or social class bias. In this way, research can disentangle the contribution of identity from social process, as these are not always directly associated—that is, membership into an ethnic group may elicit different forms of ethnic discrimination based on phenotype or social class.

In essence, intersectionality research includes the assessment of individual- and structural- or group-level factors to examine identities and social processes. [Bowleg and Bauer \(2016\)](#) suggested that population (i.e., income inequality, community violence), environmental (i.e., housing, air quality), and policy variables are important to consider as structural-level factors. Specific to Latinxs, policy variables should include attention to immigration regulations at the national and local community levels. Researchers may consider social identities associated with immigration, such as documentation status or acculturation, as well as the social process, in this case, procedures or regulations for attaining citizenship or permanent resident status. For instance, in 2016, the United States deported approximately 344,000 immigrants, an increase from 2015 ([Lopez & Bialik, 2017](#)). Accounting for immigration or deportation statistics for the specific states or contexts in which Latinx participants are recruited can provide information regarding the policies in place regarding foreign-born Latinxs. Integrating these social process factors within Latinx mental health research is vital given the current sociopolitical climate which is rampant with anti-immigration rhetoric.

Scholars seeking to investigate the social process of discrimination have often employed scales that assess the frequency of these events. The underlying assumption is that discrimination is distinct and identifiable for each identity ([Bauer, 2014](#)). In examining the measurement equivalence of the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS) across women of color (African American, non-Hispanic White, Chinese, Latinx, and Japanese), [T. T. Lewis, Yang, Jacobs, and Fitchett \(2012\)](#) concluded that responses to this scale differed slightly across ethnic



groups, with “public” items having more salience for African American and Chinese women, whereas the “courtesy” item was more highly endorsed among Latinx women than among African American women. The authors concluded that researchers need to consider these findings when using the EDS across ethnic groups and may consider conducting sensitivity analyses or examining ethnic groups separately. Although this study did not state the use of intersectionality as a framework, it used between-groups comparisons to elucidate differences for women across ethnic groups in their endorsement of racial/ethnic discrimination items on a commonly used measure. When using established scales, scholars should consider the equivalence of the measure for the groups and processes of interest particularly when adapting items to assess intersectionality. Given the relative neglect of this topic, [Helms \(2015\)](#) provided examples of how to integrate racially and culturally responsive strategies when assessing measurement equivalence. For instance, even if evidence is found for metric equivalence, thus suggesting that scores are comparable across groups, within-group differences and variations in response styles may continue to exist ([Helms, 2015](#)).

The empirical research investigating the health consequences associated with discrimination acknowledge multiple forms of discrimination but tend to focus on a single form ([Moradi & Grzanka, 2017](#)). Although ethnic and sex discrimination have been the most commonly studied, Latinx individuals also experience differential treatment based on nativity/generation level, documentation status, phenotype, and social class, to name a few, all of which can contribute to mental health problems. For instance, a darker phenotype (e.g., Latinx individuals who identify their race as Black) has been associated with greater mental health problems ([Araújo & Borrell, 2006](#)), particularly among Latinx women ([Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, & Organista, 2016](#); [Telzer & Vazquez-Garcia, 2009](#)). Recent work has illustrated how, within clinical practice, integrating a strong intersectional approach that reflects on how systems of inequality contribute to psychological symptoms can help to reduce the internalized blame experienced by many Latinx individuals ([Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, Sharma, & La Roche, 2018](#)). It is not practical to assess for an exhaustive list of intersecting identities and processes ([Bowleg, 2008](#)). Instead, the intersections of interest should be driven by the study research questions, and researchers should be conscious of attending to inequality, privilege, or both as they interpret their findings ([Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2018](#)).

Generally speaking, there is a lack of quantitative scales that explicitly assess intersectionality, with a few exceptions noted examining the unique microaggressions experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people of color ([Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011](#)) and Black women ([J. A. Lewis & Neville, 2015](#)). To our knowledge, scales assessing the intersection of identities for Latinx groups have yet to be developed. Intersectionality encourages scholars to investigate phenomena for which no formal measure exists in order to combat intersectional invisibility ([Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008](#)). [Bowleg \(2008\)](#) recommended that questions about intersectionality, whether quantitative scale items or qualitative interview questions, focus on meaningful constructs, such as stress or discrimination, and tap into the interdependence and mutuality of identities.

## Regression Analyses

As a field, psychological science has yet to determine statistical procedures that can capture the rich articulation found in qualitative work, which cannot be accurately captured when using demographic or cumulative risk index variables ([Seng et al., 2012](#)). Quantitative studies examining multiple identities have, for the most part, employed a “double jeopardy” model that analyzes additive main effects and/or multiplicative effects to understand how identities add or interact to predict an outcome of interest ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016b](#)). [Else-Quest and Hyde \(2016b\)](#) argued that intersectionality can be aptly assessed via additive main effects so that the unique variance of predictor variables can be demonstrated in regression analyses. Often, this has involved examining ethnicity and gender as independent, categorical variables ([Hayes, Chun-Kennedy, Edens, & Locke, 2011](#); [Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor, 2002](#)). Alternatively, scholars have employed

formal measures, such as ethnic discrimination and sexism scales, concurrently to assess their ability to predict psychological outcomes ([Moradi & Subich, 2003](#); [Stevens-Watkins, Perry, Pullen, Jewell, & Oser, 2014](#); [Szymanski & Stewart, 2010](#)). As an example with Latinx women, [Matthews and colleagues \(2014\)](#) reported that substance use was associated with discrimination as indicated by the summed experiences of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex. Overall, research examining main effects have yielded support for the unique contribution of multiple forms of discrimination in predicting psychological outcomes.

In contrast, [Bowleg and Bauer \(2016\)](#) postulated that utilizing a statistical approach of main effects does not accurately assess intersectionality because such a model separates the effects of race and gender, for example, and considers these as mutually exclusive groups. Thus, misleading interpretations as well as attempting to identify the most disadvantaged group can be the unintended consequences ([Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008](#)). Multiplicative effects (i.e., moderators), on the other hand, may be more appropriate, as these analyses represent the notion that the effect of a predictor variable on an outcome is influenced by a third variable ([Bowleg & Bauer, 2016](#); [Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016b](#)). Empirical research has examined the interaction of gender and ethnicity, either in factorial analyses of variance or regression analyses, as well as the interaction of multiple forms of discrimination, primarily ethnic discrimination and sexism. Mixed findings have been observed regarding the ability of ethnicity to moderate the relationship between sexism and psychological distress ([Bergman & Drasgow, 2003](#); [Rederstorff, Buchanan, & Settles, 2007](#)). However, numerous studies have indicated that the Ethnic Discrimination  $\times$  Sexism interaction does not predict psychological distress above and beyond their separate main effects ([Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008](#); [DeBlaere et al., 2014](#); [Moradi & Subich, 2003](#); [Stevens-Watkins et al., 2014](#); [Szymanski & Stewart, 2010](#)). The research examining multiplicative effects has yielded inconsistent findings, with some work suggesting that ethnicity may moderate the relationship between sexism and psychological distress among women of color, and other studies noting a lack of significant results when assessing the interaction of ethnic discrimination and sexism. Such discrepancies have led scholars to postulate that examining moderating effects are not sufficient to be considered intersectionality without understanding the underlying meaning of the interaction ([Cole, 2009](#)).

The use of regression analyses has provided important information regarding the role of ethnicity and gender in contributing to mental health, although the bulk of this work has focused on African American women, with minimal studies focusing on Latinx samples. The reliance on social identities without consideration of social processes and interlocking systems greatly hampers the utility of regression analyses in evaluating how intersectionality is associated with mental health. The demand to examine intersectionality beyond ethnicity and gender has highlighted some of the methodological limitations associated with conventional statistical techniques, including model parsimony and small sample sizes to represent certain identities ([Evans, Williams, Onnela, & Subramanian, 2018](#)). For instance, although Latinx adolescent girls show increased rates of suicide behaviors, ethnic and sex discrimination have not been examined together as predictors.

### Person-Centered Analyses

An important consideration regarding intersectionality research is that social identities are often predetermined, as is the case with demographic variables. Person-centered approaches assess the relationships between individuals and identify a set of mutually exhaustive and exclusive groups or classes based on key characteristics ([Lanza & Cooper, 2016](#); [Muthén & Muthén, 2000](#)). More traditional variable-centered techniques, such as regression or factor analyses, focus on the relationship between variables. Examples of person-centered approaches include latent class analysis, latent transition analysis, latent growth modeling, or growth mixture modeling, to name a few. Generally speaking, these approaches can identify heterogeneity within a population based on similarities and differences among individuals who share social identities and areas of disadvantage, while shifting the focus away from predetermined social categories ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016b](#)). In this way,



person-centered analyses match the tenets of intersectionality by allowing the social identities to emerge rather than organizing them a priori.

Latent class analysis extracts largely independent groups based on indicators entered into the model ([Lanza & Cooper, 2016](#); [Schwartz et al., 2014](#)). Recently, [Goodwin and colleagues \(2017\)](#) sought to examine patterns of inequalities when using multiple indicators simultaneously, as opposed to individual variables independently, when related to mental health. Latent class analysis was used to examine the intersectionality of socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and migration status in relation to mental health among 1,052 participants of the South East London Community Health Study. The findings revealed that the combination of these social indicators differentiated groups based on privileged, mixed, and disadvantaged positions. The groups with multiple levels of disadvantage (e.g., economically inactive, renters, migrant, mixed ethnicity) were at greater odds of experiencing psychological problems. The authors concluded that latent class analysis highlighted nuanced differences that would have been otherwise overlooked with other methods.

In a sample of Mexican-origin girls, [Gonzales-Backen, Bamaca-Colbert, Noah, and Rivera \(2017\)](#) sought to understand cultural profiles across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and familial domains, and examined their relation to mental health and ethnic discrimination. Latent class analysis differentiated cultural profiles, based on ethnic identity, generational status, language use, and familial ethnic socialization. The findings revealed four separate groups, including strong-positive (high ethnic identity, high family socialization, bilingual, second generation), Spanish-dominant low (low ethnic identity, low family socialization, Spanish dominant, first or second generation), English-dominant low (low ethnic identity, low family socialization, English dominant, second or third generation), and strong-negative (high ethnic identity but negative feelings toward the ethnic group, high family socialization, bilingual, first generation). Mexican-origin girls in the strong-positive group showed the highest levels of self-esteem, whereas no differences were found for depression or ethnic discrimination. As an example of intersectionality research, Gonzales-Backen and colleagues implemented person-centered approaches to identify subgroups of Mexican-origin girls based on several cultural factors to reveal important differences connected to psychological health.

Latent transition analysis is an extension of latent class analysis, with the addition of longitudinal data. Latent transition analysis is particularly informative when group or class membership is thought to not be stable over time ([Lanza & Cooper, 2016](#)). This technique estimates the probability of group membership at the first time point and the incident of transitions to subsequent time points ([Lanza & Cooper, 2016](#)). Latent transition analysis can provide insights as to movement within intersectional identities and could potentially identify the circumstances in which certain social categories are more salient than others.

As another way of integrating longitudinal data, latent growth modeling identifies differential groups based on similar starting points and change trajectories ([Muthén & Muthén, 2000](#); [Schwartz et al., 2014](#)). Information from a single outcome measured repeatedly over time is used to identify latent classes or groups that correspond to different growth curves ([Muthén & Muthén, 2000](#)). Unlike latent transitional analysis, which provides information about potential movement between or within groups, latent growth modeling identifies increases or decreases along a particular trajectory and determines groups or classes that may not follow the most common path ([Schwartz et al., 2014](#)).

This brief review suggests that person-centered analyses may be an effective way of examining the complexity of intersectionality in relation to mental health by allowing the combination of social identities and processes to emerge from the population of interest. These analyses can advance the field by identifying points of intersection as experienced by the participants. The benefit of integrating longitudinal strategies (latent transition analysis, latent growth modeling) is that researchers can take into account change over time of group membership. For instance, given that family conflict has been implicated as a contributing factor to Latinx

suicidal behaviors ([Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, & Fortuna, 2005](#)), person-centered analyses can track how these negative interactions influence group membership (i.e., ethnic identity, adherence to traditional cultural values) and risk of self-harm. Although these person-centered methods are thought to introduce flexibility beyond traditional methods, major limitations include that clustering procedures are specific to the sample and require large sample sizes ([Schwartz et al., 2014](#)). [Muthén and Muthén \(2000\)](#) have provided a more in-depth overview of these person-centered approaches.

## Multilevel Modeling

An important aspect of intersectionality is to address and account for structural or institutional inequities that inform an individual's intersection of identities. Examining structural-level factors within intersectionality research can be accomplished through multilevel modeling. Multilevel models or analyses, sometimes referred to as *nested models*, are appropriate when observations at one level are related or dependent on another level of data. Individuals within a certain group share common features (i.e., Puerto Rican) but differ at the interpersonal level, whereas group-level characteristics vary across groups (i.e., Puerto Ricans vs. Mexican Americans; [Nezlek, 2012](#)). [Ayalon \(2014\)](#) examined ageism, sexism, and racism across 28 countries in Europe and used multilevel analyses to account for individual- and structural-level factors (i.e., gender salary gap). Age, followed by gender and ethnicity, were the most common reasons for discrimination in the countries studied. The findings revealed that individual-level factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income, accounted for the majority of variance in predicting age-, gender-, and race-based discrimination. Group-level variables were significantly associated with race-based discrimination. Although measured as separate outcomes, the examination of discrimination based on age, gender, and race provides important information regarding the intersectionality of these identities at the individual and structural level.

As a within-group example, [Roy, Hughes, and Yoshikawa \(2013\)](#) used multilevel modeling to examine neighborhood-level factors, namely, ethnic density and SES, in relation to health among mainland- and island-born Puerto Ricans. The major findings revealed that island-born individuals living in ethnically dense, low-SES neighborhoods endorsed worse health than island-born Puerto Ricans living in other types of neighborhoods. This pattern of results was not observed among mainland-born Puerto Ricans and could have been overlooked had this sample been examined in aggregate. Additionally, the multilevel analyses yielded insight into the interaction between ethnic density and SES, variables that are typically examined separately. In terms of intersectionality research, the Roy et al. study illustrated the benefit of multilevel modeling to assess individual-level factors, namely, ethnicity and nativity, within the context of broader neighborhood factors.

Multilevel modeling has numerous advantages and gives scholars a way to examine structural- and individual-level factors. Recently, [Evans and colleagues \(2018\)](#) compared multilevel modeling with a more conventional fixed-effects approach to examine intersectionality within health research. They found that multilevel modeling was more parsimonious when adding intersectional identities, adjusted estimates based on the actual sample size, allowed for the examination of mixed privilege and marginalized identities, and provided an alternative to understanding unexplained variance beyond additive main effects. Still, there are limitations to the use of multilevel modeling, the most important of which may be the need for large sample sizes or data sets. Additionally, multilevel modeling may not be preferred when examining a relatively small number of identity interactions ([Evans et al., 2018](#)).

## Discussion

Intersectionality research has the potential to make continued contributions to advancing the empirical research with Latinx groups, especially in reducing mental health disparities. The focus on areas of disadvantage and privilege, within a particular setting and time, allow scholars to identify risk factors and protective mechanisms influencing mental health. Critical aspects of intersectionality emphasize the systems of inequality that

perpetuate disadvantage as well as the dynamic nature of social identities. As has been argued previously, attention to group without attention to power or context is not enough ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016b](#)). The appeal of intersectionality research is, in part, the ability to capture “real-world” situations and daily lived experiences that involve nuance and complexity. Thus, it is important to conceptualize the structural- and individual-level factors that contribute to mental health among traditionally disadvantaged groups while acknowledging the heterogeneity that exists within groups of predetermined social identities. Still, the application of intersectionality within psychology, both clinical and counseling, has been minimal ([Shin et al., 2017](#)) and there remains much debate regarding how to do so resulting in the need to consider theoretical, methodological, and statistical issues when conducting research in this line of work. Strong intersectional frameworks can help researchers and clinicians better understand how psychological outcomes are influenced by different experiences of inequality and discrimination that correspond to an individual’s positionality within multiple identities ([Adames et al., 2018](#)).

In terms of theoretical considerations, intersectionality research elicits the tension between positivist and social constructionist epistemologies within psychological science. These epistemologies shape the way scholars think about research as well as the questions they seek to investigate. A strong intersectionality framework posits that various sources of inequality and discrimination contribute to an individual’s mental health and that these factors may shift depending on context and identities ([Adames et al., 2018](#)). Thus, scholars must be mindful about the research questions employed so as not to rely on models that inadvertently rank or separate experiences of inequality ([J. A. Lewis & Grzanka, 2016](#)). Long-standing debates regarding quantitative versus qualitative work may continue to hamper efforts to integrate intersectionality within psychological science. Mixed methods approaches combine quantitative and qualitative strategies and provide an opportunity to utilize the strengths of both when conducting intersectionality research ([Mays & Ghavami, 2018](#)). Unfortunately, between 2013 and 2015, mixed methods studies accounted for only 5% of publications in the major counseling psychology journals ([Ponterotto, Park-Taylor, & Chen, 2017](#)). As such, the limitations of mixed methods research, including that it can be time consuming, costly, and labor intensive, must be considered. There does not seem to be a simple resolution to some of these broader theoretical issues. [Cole \(2009\)](#) and [J. A. Lewis and Grzanka \(2016\)](#) have provided some suggestions on how to apply intersectionality throughout the research process, from conceptualization to interpretation, by attending to the individuals included within a social identity group, the role of inequality, and areas of commonality across differences.

The current overview of intersectionality sought to highlight some important methodological and statistical considerations but was not meant to be exhaustive. As an initial step, scholars must attend to the definition and measurement of intersectionality within their studies. Researchers are encouraged to differentiate between and include both social identity and social process variables. For instance, the research examining acculturation, often determined by language preference or fluency, and mental health among Latinxs has been equivocal ([Yoon et al., 2013](#)), yet studies have shown a more consistent link between acculturative stress and poor psychological outcomes ([Hovey & Magaña, 2002](#); [Torres, 2010](#)). Attention to and measurement of social process variables in addition to previously used demographic indicators, although complex, can continue to advance the empirical research. Questions of conceptual equivalence and measurement invariance are often minimized but represent a critical aspect of assessing the processes and variables of interest.

As higher order statistical techniques continue to develop and become more readily accessible, scholars can examine complex and dynamic topics. Still, researchers integrating quantitative analyses in questions and conceptualizations of intersectionality must be mindful of statistical assumptions and concerns of statistical power ([Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016b](#)). As is evident from our review, scholars disagree on the use of main effect, fixed effect, and/or multiplicative regression models when examining intersectionality. These levels of analyses

have been the most common in the empirical literature ([Shin et al., 2017](#)), which could be due to the fact that a large number of participants are typically needed to conduct higher order statistics. Scholars can consider conducting regression models, which, although limited, can provide important information. For instance, examining the role of social processes, namely immigration stress, ethnic discrimination, and gender discrimination, beyond social status variables would help to clarify the factors contributing to the increased suicide behaviors observed among Latinx adolescent girls. Such approaches may be an important first step in examining multiple types of inequality or forms of oppression ([DeBlaere, Watson, & Langrehr, 2018](#)). Nevertheless, it is important for scholars to explicitly acknowledge the inherent flaws in these types of analyses when conducting intersectionality research, and findings should be interpreted with caution.

Person-centered analyses provide a unique examination into intersectionality by clustering individuals based on similarities and differences. This quantitative approach parallels many of the basic tenets of intersectionality and allows scholars to explore the lived experiences of participants, without establishing predetermined categories, pertaining to both disadvantage and resilience. Multilevel modeling may also serve to advance intersectionality research by allowing researchers to examine broader structural-level factors along with individual-level variables. However, scholars have stipulated that measuring multiple dimensions of identity and the use of sophisticated analyses may not be equivalent to the ways “intersections produce unique subjectivities, privilege-oppression nexuses, and lived experiences” ([Grzanka, 2018](#), p. 594). That is, researchers should ground their findings, or lack of statistical significance, within the structural inequalities underlying the outcomes ([DeBlaere et al., 2018](#)). Given the general lack of training available, future work should seek to help researchers learn how to utilize these analyses within intersectionality research ([Shin et al., 2017](#)).

According to [Shin and colleagues \(2017\)](#), transformative intersectionality research, which employs social justice principles and calls for a dismantling of the interlocking systems of inequality, has been rather minimal in psychology. Within Latinx mental health research, transformative intersectionality research must involve strong community-research partnerships. To effectively address structural inequities, researchers, activists, government officials, and community constituents must work together to establish coalitions that facilitate research, provide training and educational opportunities, and engage policy holders. For instance, [Alegria, Álvarez, & DiMarzio \(2017\)](#) examined the differences in prevalence rates within Latinx groups and concluded that social capital, neighborhood ethnic density, and transnational ties are important contributors to mental health beyond nativity status. A community-research coalition that examines these neighborhood-level factors is better apt to develop intervention efforts that address Latinx mental health concerns at an individual level. Intersectionality’s call for interdisciplinary work extends beyond how research is conceptualized and conducted into how it is disseminated suggesting broad forms of information sharing beyond scholarly journals.

[Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall \(2013\)](#) stated that “conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is” (p. 795). Regardless of the terms used, the discipline, or the level of statistical sophistication, the roots of intersectionality research lie in making meaning of the unique experiences of individuals living within interlocking systems of inequality. To do so, intersectionality relies on interdisciplinary work and community-engaged research to move beyond traditional ways of seeking knowledge to the reframing of questions that integrate an alternative perspective ([Moradi & Grzanka, 2017](#)).

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