Abstract

To understand the realities and complexities of Latinas' multidimensionality of identities, this chapter addresses the different sociocontextual considerations and cultural dimensions and roles with which they contend. Implementing a gender-cultural strength lens, the ways by which Latinas infuse their multiplicity of identities as a strength-based and powerful process are examined. Through the bridging of Latinas' cultural and familial costumbres, valores, y practicas culturales (customs, values, and cultural practices), the chapter emphasizes the energetically spiritual transmissions of Latinas' internal strength patron (blueprint) while (re)defining una buena mujer and the process of tranformation to una Latina poderosa (a powerful Latina).

Key Words: Latinas, identities, cultural values, with-group heterogeneity, gender roles, spirituality, mestizaje

Long-standing questions for Latinas are those addressing ¿Quién somos? (Who are we?), ¿Cómo somos? (How are we?), and ¿Qué somos? (What are we?). From whose voice, from what perception or assumption, or from what role and context are Latinas defined? All too frequently, Latinas are aggregated as a single group, with similar values, beliefs, and behaviors, without consideration of the dimensionalized identities and multiplicity of roles, influencing contexts and circumstances, and complex nuances that create the lived experiences of different Latinas in the United States. In elucidating the intertwining of Latinas' identities and processes, it is necessary to address considerations of context, differences, moderating processes, and cultural considerations in the theory and research of exploring and understanding ¿Quién son Latinas? (Who are Latinas?).

Estableciendo el Contexto
Setting the Context

To create a context in describing and lending definition to Latinas' experiences, a brief overview of general descriptors of who Latinas are within the United States is necessary. As this chapter cannot provide the scope, depth, and detail of each characteristic dimension of Latinas, select and consistently identified dimensions from which to understand Latinas are provided. Doing so will call further attention to the range and complexities inherent to Latina identities.

¿Qué es lo que me llaman—Qué es lo que me llamo? (What Am I Called—What Do I Call Myself?)

The term "Latina" in and of itself encompasses multiple identities and the aggregation of identity
dimensions. First, the label “Latina” is a gendered term that intertwines gender and race/ethnicity. That is, the term “Latina” is gendered as it refers to both males and females (i.e., Latinos) or males only (i.e., Latinos). The term Latinos places males as the “standard” or norm from which females must call attention to differentiate their gender (e.g., Latino/a). The subjugation of identity through language (and terminology) is a well-known and scholarly debated conversation (Comas-Díaz, 2001; Dermeresian, 1993; Obolet, 1995) in finding voice and identity for Latinas. For example, how does a Latina identify when in a group of Latino males? If she identifies as a Latina, she is inherently placing her gender before her ethnicity and is open to criticism from her male counterparts for not having solidarity to ethnicity. Yet, she is de-emphasizing her womanhood should she identify with her ethnicity first (i.e., Latino). It is an on-going consideration to identify how both gender and ethnicity are identified simultaneously (Latina/o) in order to honor the full range of Latinas’ identities. Choosing gender before ethnicity (i.e., a/o) as opposed to ethnicity prior to gender (i.e., o/a) is a seemingly small choice (i.e., spelling), yet the selection of a self-referent and self-identification is an important part of the meaning-making process for Latina identity (Comas-Díaz, 2001). The emphasis of gender before race/ethnicity (i.e., a/o versus o/a) is a political and even ideological struggle, as Latinas have been omitted or marginalized from sociocultural and sociopolitical systems and processes that are male-privileged (Dermeresian, 1993). Nonetheless, choosing a self-referent is one of the first of many layers inherent to the identity of Latinas as a means of resistance (Sandoval, 2008) and a “straddling of borders” that are often imposed by others (Viramontes, 2008, p. x).

Whether a Latina chooses a self-referent that is reflective of ethnicity (e.g., Peruanas, ethnicity and geographic region (e.g., Nuyorican), sociopolitical identity (e.g., Xicana), indigenous origins (e.g., Taino), spiritual connection and indigenous roots (e.g., Mestiza), or generational status and ethnicity (e.g., Boricua), it is the self-ascribed meaning and psychological implications that are ultimately of most relevance (Padilla, 1995; Quintana & Seull, 2009). “Hispanic” was a governmentally imposed term with colonial implications (García & Marotta, 1997), in which ethnicities were not identified as a race (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Saenz, 2010), yet a racially-mixed population (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). The ability to name and emphasize salient dimensions of identity through self-referents has become a source of strength and resistance for many Latinas (Comas-Díaz, 2001; Gloria, 2001).

Also inherent to the term “Latina” is the combining and subsuming of vastly different ethnicities and heritages. Specifically, the within-group heterogeneity included within the pan-ethnic term of Latina/o (Comas-Díaz, 2001; Obolet, 1995) includes individuals of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and South and Central American heritage. Similarly, the term comings and even de-emphasizes the historical and social oppressions, languages, religions, generational and immigration statuses, and processes of being Latina (Gonzalez, 2000; Obolet, 1995). Although no definitive answer has emerged from the long-standing debate as to whether the term “Hispanic” (as per U.S. Census) or “Latino” (i.e., Latina/o, Latino/a, or even Latinx) is the most culturally appropriate or accurate, this chapter will use the term “Latina” to reference a group of women who have culturally similar yet vastly different characteristics and sociocultural realities.

**Dimensiones de la identidad (Dimensions of Identity)**

Although a discussion of each descriptive dimension influencing Latinas is beyond the scope of this chapter, several of the most salient considerations that engender the multiple differences subsumed within the term are addressed. Despite the assumed homogeneity of Latinas, contradicting realities and processes exist. The way by which Latinas navigate and traverse the contradictions of identities and physical and psychological borders is perhaps best brought to life by the poignant poem of self and identity by Gloria Anzaldúa (1993, p. 97), “To Live in the Borderlands Means You.”

To survive the Borderlands you must live *sin fronteras*; be a crossroads.

**A Large and Growing Population**

Counted as individuals of any race, Latina/o are the largest U.S. minority group (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011), with a projected population of 132.8 million by 2050 (i.e., 30% of the nation's population; Ennis et al., 2011). As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the Latina/o population was estimated at 50.5 million, or 16.3% of the total U.S. population, having increased 15.2 million over the last decade and accounting for more than half of the total U.S. population increase (i.e., 27.3 million; Ennis et al., 2011). Although exceeding four times the national population growth rate since 2000, the
overall growth rate for Latina/os was lower than in previous decades (Passel et al., 2011).

Much like the previous 2000 report, Latina/os of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban origin remain the largest groups as per the 2010 census (Lopez & Dockerman, 2011). Based on country of origin, those of Mexican descent comprise 63% of the U.S. Latina/o population, followed by those of Puerto Rican (9.2%) and Cuban (3.5%) origin (Ennis et al., 2011). Yet, the diversity of Latina/os is changing considerably as the growth rate of the Guatemalan (18%), Salvadorian (15%), Colombian (9%) and Dominican (8%) country-of-origin populations rose substantially over the last decade. By comparison, the Puerto Rican (36%) and Cuban (44%) populations had a lower growth rate (Ennis et al., 2011).

As the diversity of ethnicities has changed, so have the areas in which Latina/os live. Nine states have consistently had the largest established Latina/o communities (i.e., Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, and Texas); however, nine other states had a 100% or more increase in populations in the last ten years. Primarily in the Southeastern portion of the U.S., the Latina/o populations are steadily growing in South Carolina (148%), Alabama (145%), Tennessee (134%), Kentucky (122%), Arkansas (114%), North Carolina (111%), Mississippi (116%), Maryland (106%), and South Dakota (103%) (Passel et al., 2011). Although the numbers of Latina/os who live in the high Latina/o population states have decreased over the decades (i.e., 76% in 2010, 81% in 2000, 86% in 1990), the largest number of Latina/os continue to live in California in Los Angeles county (4.7 million) (Passel et al., 2011). Clearly, the ethnic diversity and subsequent sociopolitical processes of immigration are increasing the diaspora of Latina/os in the United States.

Immigration and Generational Status

As a function of the reason for and the process of immigration to the United States, many Latinas are challenged to define first-time and lifelong identities as “minorities” (Arrondo, 1991; Gloria, 2001; Ginorio, Gutierrez, Cauce, & Acosta, 1995). The timing (e.g., Puerto Ricans after World War II) and context (e.g., Cubans as political refugees) for different Latina/o racial and ethnic groups coming to the United States create a sociopolitical blueprint that informs the larger conceptualization of what it means to be Latina in the United States (Gloria, 2001; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004). The blueprint is further impacted by Latinas’ legal status or citizenship as they adapt and integrate within their communities and access resources and services (Gonzales, 2007; Ortega, Fang, Perez, Rizzo, Carter-Pokras, Wallace, & Gelberg, 2007).

As the time from original immigration increases (i.e., familial generations born in the U.S.), there is the amplified propensity for intergenerational conflict or disagreement regarding the relevance, application, and engagement of cultural values between the generations (e.g., grandparents, parents, children) (Dennis, Basáez, & Farahmand, 2010). Increasingly, differences in adherence to cultural values and approaches (i.e., acculturative gaps) become part of the lived experiences in claiming and living our different identities (Hurtado & Cervantez, 2009). Given that U.S.-born Latina/os are outpacing immigration as the key source of growth, Suro and Passel (2003) estimated that in the next 20 years, second-generation Latinos (i.e., the U.S.-born children of immigrants) will be the largest subpopulation of Latina/os, which will have immediate consequences for school systems (Suro & Passel, 2003). As a fast-growing and young population, Latina/o children are entering the U.S. educational school system, which is inadequately prepared to provide language resources (e.g., bilingual teachers, translators for parents and families), an integrated curriculum (e.g., Latina/o history and contributions to U.S. history), and professional training considerations (e.g., cultural competence, assessment of student persistence, cultural audits) (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006). Critical to immigration and generation status, however, is the emotional and psychological proximity to those experiences that prompted immigration (e.g., economic need, political unrest, physical violence). It is “the emotional and physical legacy of war and trauma exposure” (Kaltman, Green, Mere, Shara, & Miranda, 2010, p. 32) for Latina/o first-generation immigrants that becomes part of the survival and transmission of different values and practices that shape Latinidad (the meaning of being Latina/o) and la condición de la mujer (womanhood).

El lenguaje de la identidad (The Language of Identity)

Almost two-thirds (62%) of the 55.4 million who speak a language other than English speak Spanish (34.5 million). From 1980 to 2007, the percentage of individuals who spoke Spanish at home increased 210.8% (23.4 million more individuals) (Shin &
Kominski, 2010). Understandably, Latina/os who were non-U.S.-born (73%) were more likely to speak English less than “very well,” compared to U.S.-born Spanish speakers (21%). Although language ability differs based on native status for Latina/os of different ethnicities as well as socioeconomic standing, nearly half of Latina/os are bilingual (speaking Spanish at home and speaking English well to very well) (Saenz, 2010).

Although able to speak English, many Latina/os have a strong preference to hablar Español en casa (speak Spanish at home) (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). The use of Spanish has been linked to comfort and willingness to discuss personal or intimate matters (Gloria, Ruiz, & Castillo, 2004), in particular for conversations that are emotion-oriented (Echeverry, 1997; Santiago-Rivera, Altarriba, Poll, Gonzalez-Miller, & Cragun, 2009). As communication in one’s native language (Spanish) is more natural and facilitates free expression, Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba (2002) argued that Spanish–English bilingual Latina/os “represent emotional words differently in their two languages and typically associate these words with a broader range of emotions in their first language…” (p. 53). Despite differences in dialect (based on region and ethnic group) and language ability, the Spanish language is frequently considered a primary process for maintaining cultural tradition and identity (Santiago-Rivera & Altarriba, 2002; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009).

Yet, being Latina/o and being a heritage-language Spanish speaker are erroneously assumed to be synonymous (Ardila, 2005) and result in the frequent essentialization of Latina/os (e.g., “Real Latina/os speak Spanish,” Gloria, 2001). Yet, there exists great variability of Spanish language mastery among Latina/os, from native Spanish speakers who speak no to very little English to those who understand or speak no Spanish at all (Ardila, 2005). This language variability is frequently an artifact of generational status, historical educational and cultural oppression, or processes of survival (Gonzalez, 2000). The blending of English and Spanish (i.e., Spanglish) creates a permanent mixture of both languages and “represents the most important contemporary linguistic phenomenon the United States has faced that has unfortunately been significantly understudied” (Ardila, 2005, p. 65). Although the use of Spanglish is frequently negatively perceived, with an undertone of stigma for Latina/os due to a loss of intergenerational language continuity by other Latina/os, the use of Spanglish can in fact bridge acculturation gaps and solidify evolving identities for Latinas. Indeed, usando Spanglish puede crear espacios de seguridad y facilita (using Spanglish, creates spaces of security and facilitates) rapport among diverse Latinas. As there are Spanish words that do not translate easily or have the same feeling or meaning when spoken in English, the ability to share the feelings, images, and sensations of certain words in conversation can allow for connection: For example, referring to one’s familia (family) and telling about the comida (food) made en la cocina (in the kitchen) of our abuelitas (grandmothers) engenders a different conversation than telling about the food made in the kitchen of our grandmothers. Again, it is not the level or sophistication of Spanish spoken; rather, feelings and stories may be rendered incomplete without a combination of Spanish and English.

**Education and Socioeconomic Status**

As Latinas seek to integrate and acculturate, two key factors influencing their gender and ethnic identities are education and socioeconomic status. Briefly examining but not fully encompassing Latinas’ representation in education and the workforce, it is clear that there is a strong relationship between education, occupational attainment, and upward mobility (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Kochhar, 2005; Thomas-Breitfeld, 2003). As a whole, Latina/os are more likely to be of low socioeconomic means and to have lower economic indices (e.g., education, employment, health insurance, and income) (Kochhar, 2005; Saenz, 2010), which influence their adjustment, adaptation, and integration. Underlining the role of dimensionality, birthplace affects socioeconomic status and education, as foreign-born Latina/os evidence less educational attainment (e.g., lower high school graduation) and lower occupational statuses (Gonzales, 2007; Saenz, 2010). Latinas, however, face high rates of impoverishment (Cawthorne, 2008), regardless of place of birth or generation (Saenz, 2010), reflective of Vasquez’s (1994) notion of Latinas being “affected by the triplicate oppressive experiences associated with being female, ethnic, and… poor” (p. 121).

Although underpaid and underemployed within the workforce (Gonzales, 2007), Latinas continue to be viewed as wives and mothers first and foremost, which may create domestic and gender role strains (Niemann, 2004). Linked to economic empowerment and social mobility, Latinas’ educational preparation and achievement is abysmal, as only 59% graduated in four years with a high
school diploma (National Women's Law Center and Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009). Although Latinas outpace their male counterparts through the educational pipeline (American Council on Education, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009), they encounter unique challenges (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000) and make familial and cultural "sacrifices" to pursue higher education (González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004, p. 19). The quality of educational experiences is influenced by stereotyped expectations, cultural incongruity, and unwelcoming academic environments (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007), coupled with familial pressures (González et al., 2004) and guilt for moving beyond the family to pursue an education (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

Mediating Processes of Latina Identity: Acculturation, Enculturation, and Ethnic Identity

An accurate understanding of identity for Latinas must include the concepts of acculturation, enculturation, and traditionality to circumvent the process of essentialism and misattributions of behaviors and interactions. The notion of a universal Latina, much less the concept of a universal woman, is perilous, as it renders the understanding, meaning, and application of values and approaches of vastly different realities and lived experiences to oversimplified stereotypes and misassumptions (Gloria, 2001).

The concepts of acculturation and enculturation are two closely related yet different processes in understanding Latina experiences and identities. Considered multidimensional constructs (Alamilla, Kim, & Lam, 2010; Kohatsu, 2005), acculturation and enculturation both address psychological and cultural elements (Berry, 2007; Hurrado & Cervantes, 2009). More specifically, "psychological acculturation describes individual changes resulting from socialization to dominant cultural norms, psychological enculturation describes individual processes or changes resulting from (re)socialization to indigenous cultural norms" (Alamilla et al., 2010, p. 58). That is, acculturation encompasses a cultural exchange between the native and host culture, requiring a psychological adjustment by the recipient. In contrast, enculturation is the learning of one's own culture through socialization into and maintenance of specific practices embedded in native values and beliefs. The individual adaptations of these processes have been described as "assimilation, integration, or biculturality, separation or maintenance of traditionality, and marginalization or peripheral status in both cultures" (Gamst, Dana, Der-Karabetian, Aragón, Arellano, & Kramer, 2002, p. 480), a series of processes that can moderate Latinas' general health and well-being. For example, Latinas who experience minority stress reported higher perceived discrimination, leading to general anxiety symptoms (including tension and nervousness), somatization, and hostility (e.g., resentment, aggression) (Lechuga, 2008).

A simultaneous social-cultural process of identity-making and a person's response to their lived experiences creates ethnic identity—an individual's attitudes, values, knowledge, behaviors, preferences, and affiliation of membership to their own ethnic group (Gonzalez, Fabret, & Knight, 2009; Ocampo, Bernal, & Knight, 1993; Quintana & Scull, 2009). Concurrent with the process of cultural socialization and maintenance, ethnic identity influences the perception of the experiences and the interpretation of the contrasting expectations for personal encounters. For instance, if a Latina self-identifies as Mexican (versus Mexican American or Hispanic), her affiliation to her heritage group or host culture will influence her experiences and perceptions (Lechuga, 2008). Consequently, the straddling of two cultures and the various difficult encounters that accompany the transitional phases and ongoing adjustments of Latinas result in complex psychological functioning (Kim & Omoto, 2006).

As a plethora of research has emphasized the challenges and difficulties of balancing multiple identities, resilience models and frameworks (Hurtado & Cervantes, 2009; Zimmerman, Bingerheimer, & Notaro, 2002) emphasized the protective factors that reduce negative outcomes. Two key factors that influence the process are centrality (i.e., the extent to which an individual places importance on their racial self-concept) and public regard (i.e., one's belief and evaluation of others of one's racial and ethnic group) (French & Chavez, 2010; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowlley, & Chavous, 1998). As Latinas negotiate their identities and work toward being culturally-grounded, they are protected by keeping culture at the center of their processes but are simultaneously conflicted as they begin to make other identities more salient during various stages of their lives. Hence, as culture serves as a protective factor, Latinas often use la familia (family) as their central resource (Keefe, 1980; Marin, 1993; Padilla, 1980). Simultaneously, the cultural values when shifted by acculturation or traditionality can create...
cultural incongruence or familial stress (Alamilla et al., 2010; Vasquez, 1994). Moreover, the role of public regard in relation to their family is heightened if Latinas do not maintain and preserve the traditionality of cultural values passed down generationally (Gloria et al., 2004; Ramirez, 1991). Yet, it is the mujer’s ability to navigate these conflicts and assist in the immersion and continuum of collision of differences (Anzaldúa, 1987; Arredondo, 2002) that allows her to create a seamless integration of successfully living out the multidimensions of her various evolving identities. More simply stated, it is the mezcla de las diferencias (intermingling of differences) that manifests a transformed reality of intersecting contrasts in which Latinas are situated.

Complexity of Roles

As Latinas seek to manage the complexity of their roles, the notion of a “wild zone” or the “…contextualization or space that applies to the mental, physical, and spiritual chaos that has enveloped many Latinas” (Arredondo, 2002, p. 308) has emerged. The challenge of identity politics, which are tied to gender, economics, sexual orientation, and spirituality, makes the wild zone and the concept of living within the borders of different identities relevant spaces of discussion for Latinas (Arredondo, 2002). As part of the complexity of merging and re-actualizing the intersections of identities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Vasquez, 1994), Arredondo (2002) persuasively argued that Latinas must also find grounding or reestablish connection to our raíces (roots) of past and present: mestizas to create opportunities for knowledge and identity. More specifically, para conocer el presente o el futuro hay que conocer el pasado (to know the present or future, one must know the past). Knowing the past can assist in the process of claiming and living out different identities, as they often do not come without challenge or question of authenticity. As Latinas broaden the notion of la condición de mujeres Latinas (Latina womanhood), or what it means to be mujeres Latinas at the individual, group, community, and societal levels, their diversities become evident.

The following section is a discussion of the different roles and identities that are frequently negotiated by Latina women; yet, the conversation must consider moderating constructs of acculturation, enculturation, and traditionality. Considering these processes guards against the essentializing of core values and roles for Latinas and provides a working framework from which to delineate the salience of one’s identity and an interpersonal approach.

Madres, comadres, hijas, y pecadoras (Mothers, Co-mothers, Daughters, and Sinners)

Any scholarly investigation or clinical intervention about Latinas inherently involves la familia (family), cultural scripts and gendered expectations, and an operationalization in some form of what it means to be una buena mujer (a good Latina woman). Central to the discussion is the widely-known and written value of familismo, around which many cultural values emanate and are interrelated (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009). Familismo is the “preference for maintaining a close connection to family” (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002, p. 42), which is demonstrated by solidarity, interdependence, and reciprocity (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009). Including both fictive (e.g., abuelas de crianza [“adopted” grandmothers]) and nonfictive (e.g., primas [cousins]) relationships (Gloria et al., 2004), an allocentric or collectivist approach often drives the process of emphasizing the well-being of the family first and foremost, despite detriment to individual needs (Marín & Triandis, 1985; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

It is from this context of familismo that Latinas negotiate their interactions. Regardless of whether they themselves have children or are married, they are frequently defined by being part of la familia, as a woman, daughter, or (co)mother simultaneously. The cultural and gender scripts for Latinas have been described through psychological, sociological, and women’s studies literatures, ranging from docile and subservient women who are venerated as saints (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghoshel, 2010) to guerreras chingonas (bad-ass warrioress) who have fought against male subjugation and traditional conceptualizations of Latina scripta (Gaspar de Alba, 2005). One of the first scholarly discussions of marianismo, a Latina gender script, was by Stevens (1973), who described it as a religious manifestation in which Latinas were regarded as semi-divine, morally superior, sexually chaste, and spiritually stronger than their male counterparts. Upholding the roles of mother and caregiver, familial backbone, and cultural transmitter of values was required, or else their womanhood was questioned (Stevens, 1973). Adherence to the role was considered a “maintenance of honor” (p. 94) and responsibility to uphold the cohesion and status of the family (Frevert & Miranda, 1998). In particular, the daughter’s chastity and purity were tied to familial dignity (Espin, 1997), such that females who did not conform to the traditional gender script of marianismo were considered una mala mujer (a bad
woman) or even a malinche or malinchanas (traitors). The original malinche was Malinziin Tenepal, an indigenous Mayan woman, who interpreted and assisted Hernán Cortés in the conquest of Mexico and bore his children (Gaspar de Alba, 2005). Inherent to marianism is the assumed heterosexuality of Latinas, as lesbianas (Latina lesbians) are charged with the act of favoring the foreign (Gaspar de Alba, 2005). In turn, they seek out alternative spaces away from their families of origin in order to express their sexuality, thereby creating new spaces and families of choice—an act that is considered culturally defiant (Acosta, 2008). By doing so, Latina lesbians are believed to repudiate the concept of family, the most serious of betrayals.

A more recent conceptualization known as the "Maria Paradox" described marianism as an "invisib yoke which binds capable, intelligent, ambitious Latinas...to a no-win lifestyle" (Gil & Vasquez, 1996, p. 7). Their "ten commandments of marianism" (p. 8) identify the strictest of traditional gender scripts and subsequent self-beliefs, interactions, and approaches to self. Each of the beliefs or commandments places the needs of the woman's husband and family first, whereby Latinas are yoked to a role of subservience and without self-expression or power. Drawing out the cultural strengths, there is a reclaiming of positive qualities such as dependability, trustworthiness (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004), loyalty, compassion (Gil & Vasquez, 1996), perseverance, and ability to survive (Comas-Diaz, 1989). Yet, the attempt to fulfill multiple role expectations has been identified as working the doble jornada (double duty both at home and work, Comas-Diaz, 1989), giving rise to the super macha or la hembra (superwoman), who is continuously charged to hacer algo de nada (to make something from nothing), based on her espíritu creativo (creative and innovative spirit of survival) (Nogales & Bellotti, 2003).

Mestizaje y espiritualidad (Practices/Beliefs of Mixed Ancestral Indigenous Heritage and Spirituality): The Sacredness of Open Spaces

Oppression and social injustice have opened the path for Latinas to implement mestizo (e.g., a mixture of indigenous and Spanish blood and cultura [culture] (Falicov, 1998)) skills, tools, and practices to navigate their current circumstances and spaces. Considering the historical colonization of Latina/o cultures and the ongoing discrimination and marginalization of Latinas' experience (Campesino & Schwartz, 2006), sociopolitical, religious, and gender movements have assisted in the liberation of oppression. At the same time, Latinas' dual minority status has been negated (Aquino, 2002; Campesino & Schwartz, 2006) as they contend with continued and consistent struggles of imposed patriarchy (Arrízón, 2009). It is the synergistic ability to convert difficult realities into manageable experiences that promotes the healing and well-being of women as they forge their pathways. Within the multiple and varied dimensions of spirituality (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999), mestizaje ultimately encompasses the experiential encounter of the divine through subjective lenses (Cervantes, 2010). Mestizo spirituality recognizes the connection of the psychological adjustment of a person, nurtures the practice of history in context, unifies harmony with all, maintains openness to diversity, and promotes a willingness to learn from differences (Cervantes, 2010).

As a result, Latinas have passed indigenous knowledge (consciously and subconsciously—orally and behaviorally) intergenerationally, having learned the connection of nature, soul, and spirit (Lara, 2008). Latinas understand the holistic role of interpersonal interactions and the centrality of energy, intention, mind-set, and beliefs. Embodied in a culture that offers a range of spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g., folk beliefs, Espiritismo, Santeria; Baez & Hernandez, 2001; McNeill & Cervantes, 2008), Latinas are often socialized with a fundamental belief system with dual beliefs rooted in religiosity (e.g., Dios me ayudara [God will help me]) and spirituality (Soy una con el universo—Yo puedo crear mis realidades [I am one with the universe—I can create my realities]). Given the emphasis of el espíritu (spirit), Latinas often gravitate to the teachings of their mothers and grandmothers, who often provide insight into family interactions, how to navigate differences, and shift energies to facilitate tranquilidad (tranquility) of differences (Arredondo, 2002; Cervantes, 2008). Cognizant of the psychological impressions that can occur in conflict, Latinas digest old traditions and subsequently create new ones to persist (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). For example, Latinas have converted the energy of la malinche (Espín, 1997; Gaspar de Alba, 2005) to la mujer radical (a radical woman)—transformed into a survivor through personal stories and intuitive abilities to understand the invisible and parallel spiritual processes (Lara, 2008).

The application and transfer of spiritual knowledge and practice for Latinas to meet their daily demands of la familia, work, home, and school (Comas-Diaz, 1989) keeps them conscious of their
needs and personal power in the process. One challenge that augments Latinas’ dual belief systems includes the separation of sensuality and sexuality as a sacred component of human processes, of which “both are integral aspects of the self” (Lara, 2008, p. 28). As sexuality has been used to promote the subjectification of Latinas with the role of spirituality fragmented from the body, the attraction and energetic pulls that come through personal energy exchanges are minimized and negated (Arrizón, 2009). In the context of larger society, Arrizón (2009) contends that “...Latina sexuality and its representative ‘brown’ body becomes the product of objectifying stereotypical processes and complex subject formations” (p. 191) from a colonizing perspective. Simultaneously, the practice of identifying Latinas’ sexual exchanges as solely corporal necessities and pleasures ignores Latinas’ active powers in mutual spiritual exchanges. As Latinas work through the polarizing messages regarding sexuality and sensuality (Arrizón, 2009) by acknowledging, understanding, and working with their personal and spiritual power within multiple dimensions (including sexual identity and sensual being), they create spaces that nurture collective consciousness by awakening a “transformed consciousness” and an empowered mujer (Lara, 2008). For example, a sexual encounter becomes more than family honor or cultural script; it can instead be a divine energetic exchange, equally engaging and balancing the sexual powers of reclaiming the self (Acosta, 2008).

**Poderosas (The Powerful Ones): A Different Latina Power**

Latinas have created a mujer-grounded culturally centered skill set in which they translate and transform everyday processes while preserving and nurturing healthy elements of tradition to reinforce their evolving identities and values. For example, Latinas poderosas must daily live through negative experiences about who they are and what they represent in today’s society. Staying strong to the strengths of their valores culturales (cultural values) allows them to maintain a sense of groundedness and meaning of who and what they are as Latinas. With the internal ability to navigate incongruence, Latinas morph and transcend within their multiple identities that harvest changing contexts and cultures, while facilitating the practice of cultural shape-shifting. Understanding the essence of survival and connectivity with their surroundings, Latinas function as transformers, connectors, and key or wisdom keepers to different realities (Cervantes, 2008). They learn to be present in one world, consistently working toward an internal seamless continuity in the midst of change. Their practice of moving and transferring within the changing tapestry of their daily realities, however, is not implemented to meet the needs of others or to lose their person to another, but to grow and persist despite challenges. Given that Latinas’ value-centered coping strategies are founded in spirituality and familia, la condición de la mujer (the condition of the Latina woman) and their feminismo (feminism) are evolving. Consequently, with the goal of remaining culturally grounded, Latinas face the continuous challenge of infusing a combination of their core values of familismo and espiritismo into their engagement of everyday activities.

Imprinted in their ancestral blueprint and spiritual makeup, Latinas have survival skills that are generationally passed down, both consciously and unconsciously. Through daily encounters, the basic task of sharing time and coexisting (e.g., eating a meal, sitting, and sharing space) transmits ancistros costumbres, valores, y prácticas culturales (customs, values, and cultural practices). *Nuestras madres y abuelas* (Our mothers and grandmothers) may take the initiative to share the details of how to sobrevivir (survive), but this knowledge is already energetically transmitted via the management of challenges and subsequent strength patron (blueprint)—a collective consciousness awaiting to be awakened. A lack of awareness, or self-doubt, or limited confidence to tap into the subconscious will often lead Latinas to borrow from external, oppressive, and non-native systems. Doing so creates a foreign cultural blueprint for la mujer that is often inadequate and manifests as incongruence, depression, and other mental health concerns (Ginorio et al., 1995). When Latinas mask their identities with others’ words, labels, and practices, they simultaneously dismantle and contaminate their most natural inner support system of self-definition to live out or complete processes in sacred spaces.

Reclaiming ourselves is a strength and powerful process of spirit and energy transformation and creation. As Latinas embrace their range of identities, they move from victims to survivors, fearful fighters to warriors, and ultimately poderosas, transforming realities as they engage daily processes and struggles. More specifically, Latinas’ active identification, acknowledgment, ownership of their skills, and conscious permission to embrace inner ancestral and spiritual abilities (e.g., intuition, creative practices) reinforce an identity of active healer (Lara, 2008).
As healers of different capacities, Latinas merge and connect dimensionalized realities, which can lead to seamless navigation of identities.

The evolving poderosa identity promotes a culturally referenced skill set that instills a preparedness, personal resourcefulness, and intuition regarding the fluidity of life experiences. In owning these qualities, Latinas slowly and progressively engage the fluidity of their identities (e.g., gender, educational, generational, sexual, spiritual). Although identity fluidity can create discomfort, ambivalence, and ambiguity for la familia, los hombres, and other social conexiones (connections), it becomes the space of power for the poderosas (warriors) as Latinas engage and express their full scope of being una buena mujer.

Implications for Practice, Training, and Research

There are several implications for practice and training, as well as research and advocacy, that emerge from the previous discussion of identities and complexity of roles of Latinas. The following recommendations provide salient considerations and set a baseline for minimal competence for working effectively with Latinas. In particular, we pose questions to generate ideas about and around areas of practice, training, and research in providing best practices.

En terapia (In therapy)

What is the meaning and importance to Latinas' self-referents to their individual and family patron? Ask how the client identifies herself racially and ethnically and what it means to her. The self-referents that she uses may mean nothing, or they may mean everything to her (e.g., a source of pride and strength). Either way, a conversation about self-referents can provide a sense of ethnic identity and a way to access the psychological meaning and importance of being of a particular self-referent. Further, ask how others in her family self-identify. Identifying differences may reflect generational and acculturative changes and stresses that can serve to story the client's patron.

How is cultura integrated into interpersonal and social interactions with Latinas? Engage in the cultural values being emulated in the interaction (e.g., personalismo, respeto, simpatia). Knowing cultural values and interacting within the context of cultural values are different processes. That is, knowing the definition of personalismo is quite different from interacting in a manner that is steeped in personalismo. For example, a client may ask after the therapist's familia and expect a response that is genuine in order to engage in harmonious and caring interactions (i.e., personalismo). The counselor may recognize that the Latina's question is based in the value of personalismo; however, how the counselor responds will influence subsequent counseling interactions. Responding in kind will likely lead to confianza (trust) and respeto (respect) needed for a strong counselor-client relationship. In addition to implementing culturally-familiar interactions in therapy, counselors can access the resources and systems that represent Latinas' beliefs. For instance, counselors can collaborate with spiritual consultants or include other spiritual healers (e.g., santero, priest) as part of the therapeutic process based on the Latinas' beliefs.

What dimensions and contexts need to be considered in the assessment of Latinas' challenges? Include the assessment of psychological (the individual and their struggles), social (environmental oppressive systems), and cultural (family, gender and cultural scripts) factors in the context of understanding the client (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Ultimately, helping Latinas to traverse and bridge their different realities are of concern within treatment approaches (Flores-Ortiz, 1995) and as a means of empowerment.

What must be considered to create a culturally-seeded treatment plan that integrates the different roles and realities that Latinas may encounter? Develop a treatment plan that incorporates and is parallel to the cultural values (e.g., familia, espiritualidad), cultural gender scripts (e.g., marianismo, madre), and realities (e.g., educational status, immigration history) of the Latina to understand and address competently her multiple realities and roles. Doing so will require an assessment of the different roles in which Latinas engage to address potential areas of conflict and spaces in which they can be integrated. For example, is the client experiencing a doble jornada as she attempts to balance her varied and contrasting roles? How are her cultural and gender scripts influencing her choices and challenges? Importantly, the therapist will need to refrain from defining which behaviors, beliefs, and decisions are grounded in a poderosa framework and allow the Latina to define these for herself and within her context.

What are Latinas poderosas' strength-based processes? Be aware, sensitive, and reinforcing of those inner strengths that Latinas bring to their challenges and concerns. Empower them to find their own voice and cultural processes that are congruent to their worldview and sociocultural patron as they
find wellness and balance. Doing so will require that the therapist examine, challenge, and re-work his or her own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes about and for Latinas.

Training Considerations

How do training programs assess their students' readiness, progress, and processes to work with Latinas? Training programs can implement a comprehensive and ongoing cultural audit of students' beliefs, biases, and assumptions as part of their supervision, such that they can understand how their own worldviews and cultural values may interact (e.g., be similar or different) with those of Latina clients.

What venues can be accessed to gain historical, spiritual, and cultural information about Latinas? In that "to know the past is to know the present and future," practice-based training programs should require students to take a course on Chicana@/Latina@ histories and psychological processes to understand the diaspora of issues and identities within the different Latina/o communities. In particular, counselors will benefit from learning and understanding the roles that different Latina/o spiritual systems play for Latinas. For example, espiritualidad is often used as a coping response, serving as a moderating factor for everyday decision-making processes (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008). Moreover, understanding how espiritualidad influences the counseling interactions and the Latina client's progress warrants conceptualization and assessment.

What specific training components need to be incorporated to most effectively understand Latinas poderosas? Expose therapists to the complexity of Latina/o cultures through specific one-on-one interactions that will assist the understanding, implementation, and inclusion of cultural practices familiar to clients. For example, programs can require some portion (if not all) of the practicum and externships to work specifically within Latina/o families and communities in outreach and community service. Supervision should intentionally address diversities within the community, its multiple social systems, various means of coping, and venues to work with clients within their worldview, beliefs, and value systems.

Who needs to be included in developing an effective cultural forum within a program curriculum to understand the Latina poderosas paradigm? Practicum curricula should consistently include Latina cultural experts as part of the training (including community service providers) to share insight and understanding of Latinas. Latina experts can provide practicum lectures and conceptual consultations using composite vignettes to engage real-life considerations and cultural interactional processes. Addressing cultural nuances, varying levels of diversities, and cultural strengths can provide a working model to facilitate a strong therapist-Latina client relationship for efficacious exchanges and services.

How can comunidad be bridged with Latinas' needs to enhance the existing cultural and social networks? Prepare and teach psychologists to access comfortably the resources and health-system networks that include ethnic cultural processes and beliefs that support effective services. In particular, there is the need to shift the paradigmatic focus of individual counseling to include those systems and networks of individuals who are the primary constituents working for Latina well-being. For example, counselors can learn to use a collaborative community approach to develop partnerships with local Latina/o communities and community centers, Latina leaders, and gatekeepers to access the wellness services needed to support culturally integrated and comprehensive mental health services.

Conducting Research

What types of research can be implemented to better understand Latinas poderosas? Research should be considered (and taught) as the connection between practice and social advocacy for Latinas. By focusing on the value of action research, scholars and students in training can gain the narratives and foundational information (e.g., exchanges with the community) needed to implement a culturally-grounded perspective for the development of strength-based research questions. With students, for example, a required field studies and ethnographic project including participant observation of the social issues within Latina communities will facilitate their identification of salient community concerns and, in turn, the transfer of this knowledge into counseling services.

What are the specific research components necessary to understand Latinas' dimensionalized realities? Research questions need to be dimensionalized so that they include psychological (e.g., self-beliefs), social (e.g., connections), and cultural (e.g., values and behaviors) dimensions within the context or setting of the individual (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Engaging in this practice can allow for a holistic and comprehensive approach to explore concerns and processes for Latinas.
Similarly, researchers would do well to formulate questions that are strength-based and to consider the moderating processes of acculturation, enculturation, ethnic identity, and traditionalism.

What is the role of including Latinas' voices and narratives in the context of research? Researchers should consider how addressing narratives or phenomenological processes for Latinas holds prominence equal to that of quantitative investigations. Despite challenges or criticisms of qualitative approaches, it is from individual stories and voices that insight into the deep-structure culture is gained and more nuanced questions can be asked for and about Latinas. Similarly, using mixed-method designs within studies can provide deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Latina issues, concerns, realities, and lives.

What is the added value of creating and implementing an emic versus etic research measure for Latinas poderosas? Given the limited culturally emphasized scales developed for Latinas, there exists the need to create, pilot, and validate measures and assessments that are specific to their concerns and cultural constructs. For example, scales that assess how Latinas are poderosas or are negotiating the process of interweaving different identities (e.g., sexual, ethnic, gender, education, career, family) could assist in developing new programmatic research agendas.

Direcciones Futuras (Future Directions)

As the process of meaning-making and the struggle to create a strength-based and culture-steeped self-ascribed definition of being Latina continues, there are many directions in which multicultural feminist psychology can address concerns and challenges. The following are offered as areas of continued exploration and reflection.

- As the field of psychology strives to provide socially-just and culturally relevant and competent services for individuals and communities of difference, the development of counseling guidelines and practices for Latinas is warranted. While guidelines exist for the psychological treatment of women and girls (APA, 2007), specific and culturally steeped guidelines are similarly needed to differentiate the community concerns, cultural moderators, and processes unique to Latinas.

- As the immigration processes and histories of different Latina ethnic subgroups are varied, attention to how the immigration process influences the conceptualization and reconfiguration of family is warranted. As a frequent core consideration for many Latinas, an exploration of how the family occurs transnationally and across geographic and psychological borders increasingly warrants examination.

- An examination of the continual balance of identities and competing processes of Latinas' roles that are perceived as strength-based is needed. Identifying how a reclaiming of voice and a redress of the junction and mixing of traditional and contemporary values can be accomplished is pivotal.

- There is a need to acknowledge and facilitate Latinas' efforts to fuse and live out the multidimensionality of their identities, while still encouraging them to perceive themselves as mujeres buenas who balance energies and nurture wellness and well-being. In particular, an expansion of what is currently believed to encompass una buena mujer to include Latinas with professional identities (e.g., advanced educational degrees), all sexualities, of different belief systems and practices (e.g., healers, santeras, curanderas, shamanas, espiritistas), and with different constellations of family systems (e.g., single madres, multigenerational households, mujeres sin hijalos (women without children)) is warranted.

- As the field has moved to understand the Latina/o cultural values, beliefs, and practices, multiple psychological models have offered culture-based directives for clinical practice. Still, relatively few Latina-specific psychological models integrate multiple dimensions and emphasize the fluidity of identities that are important for addressing the dimensionality of Latinas' varied experiences and processes that support mental health.

- Relative to Mental and Latina/o psychology, the identities of spirituality, sensuality, and sexuality are fragmented, limiting the understanding of the psychology of la mujer. By integrating the identities, Latinas can move beyond the societally-imposed unidimensional stereotypes to a multi-dimensionalized Latina poderosa who is connected spiritually and culturally to herself, her contexts, and social networks. In the process of integrating the identities, researchers and practitioners must explore and refine methods to address the dimensions fully and contextually.

- As the transforming identities of la mujer have been criticized, it is the acceptance and embracing of Latinas' multidimensional processes by their social and cultural systems that will allow mujeres to live out their experiences with increased tranquilidad (tranquility), congruence, and continuity of identity. As the cultural and gender-
scripts for Latinas have been formulated from a static rubric, allowing for a fluid, evolving open system invites the voice, needs, and complexity of identities, and the bridging of Latinas' realities.

Authors' Notes
This chapter, Realidades Culturales y Identidades Dimensionadas (Cultural Realities and Dimensioned Identities), is dedicated to our abuelas maternas (maternal grandmothers), Refugio Fuentes and Maria Pergidon—the women who transmitted to us the strengths and resources to traverse multiple boundaries and identities via their daughters.

References


The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Multicultural Counseling Psychology