Latinas Poderosas:

Shaping Mujerismo to Manifest Sacred Spaces for Healing and Transformation

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First and All Alone

The first in her family to graduate from high school and attend college in the U.S., Alma finds herself in an environment in which she feels alone and often experiences uncertainty and feelings of overwhelm, panic, and guilt for having left her mother and younger siblings. With her mother unemployed for the past year, Alma struggles as to how she will send monies home from her financial aid package as it was not as large as she had hoped. Alma faces being unable to purchase her books for class or to buy a full-week meal plan despite working a full 12 hours of work-study each week in additional to 15 hours per week as a cashier at the local grocery store. She is worried as to whether she can keep up academically despite a semester of earning grades of B or better in all her classes. She also worries as to whether she should return home to help her mother with finances by working a full time job and taking care of her younger siblings. Torn about asking her mother for advice, who is supportive of Alma’s educational pursuits, Alma feels proud of how well her mother has managed to support the family given her father’s absence. Her father has been unable to contribute physically, financially, or emotionally to the family. More than two years ago, Alma’s father was pulled over during a routine traffic stop for a broken car tail-light only for him to be arrested and eventually deported. Alma’s family started each day in prayer asking that they would all return home at the end of the day, yet she hid her constant fear that her mother or father might not return home someday given their status in the U.S. Alma’s parents left their home country with the desire for opportunities for their family. Her mother’s stories of sacrifice and going without motivated Alma to cross the educational borders that would lead to something different for herself and her family. Feeling scared and uncertain had become an all too common experience for Alma at both home and school. At this point, Alma sought assistance at a Latina/o community mental health clinic that offered sliding scale services and had a good reputation for working with university students.

A frequent starting point for and about Latina/os more generally and to Latinas specifically, is the question of quien somos (Who are we)? Yet, all too frequently the questions of who are Latinas or what are the cultural roles available Latinas becomes the center of focus and subjugates self-discovery and self-affirmation (Miguela, 2001). The restrictive roles of sinner, saint, whore, mother, wife, and caretaker become the measure against which Latinas are dichotomously judged or admired (Castillo, 1994; Gloria & Castellanos, 2013; Miguela, 2001).
Given the heterogeneity of experiences based on age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, generational level, acculturation, language ability, education, socioeconomic status, and a multitude of other identities, there is no “typical” Latina (Gloria, 2001). Although the statistical descriptives may seemingly provide a typical or average narrative of Latinas in the U.S., the data only assists in creating a context - - the information does give meaning or deep-structure value in and of itself. Instead, literature which examines more fully Latinas’ processes is of greatest gain. Further, it is incumbent upon Latinas to engage in self-exploration in finding her voice and defining her realities in answering the questions of who, what, and how she is (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castellanos & Gloria, in press; Comas-Díaz, 2013; Miguela, 2001; Rodriguez, 2004).

Throughout the chapter, information and perspectives are shared to address the questions of who, what, and how for Latinas. The chapter was not conceptualized to be formulaic or prescriptive in addressing the process of healing or transformation, but rather as a starting point for knowledge and self-awareness. To do so, the chapter first provides a brief overview about the presence of Latinas in the U.S., followed by salient informants of Latina identities and realities. Next, the chapter addresses the challenges and processes of reclaiming patrónes culturales and espiritualidades (cultural and spiritual blueprints) and models by which Latinas can work toward transformation and self-awareness in the weaving of their multiple realities and identities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ancestral wisdoms to bridge to Latina’s realities being una Latina poderosa (a powerful Latina).

Latinas’ Presence in the U.S.

With more than 53 million Latina/os in the U.S., of whom 36.2% are foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), the Latina/o population is rapidly growing and increasingly diverse (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2013). As a group, Latinas are projected to constitute just over one-
fourth (25.7%) of the U.S. female population by the year 2050 (Jackson, 2013) and 30% by 2060 (Nielsen Project, 2013). Clearly, Latinas have a growing numerical presence in the U.S; however, her role within educational, economic, political, and health spheres warrants attention.

Despite recent educational gains for Latinas in higher education, their science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) undergraduate enrollment rates and degrees earned are substantially less than those of their male counterparts (Yoder, 2011). More generally, Latinas’ educational experiences are fraught with social and cultural expectations which hinder their persistence in college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). As education translates to employment and economics, the difference for Latinas in comparison to their male Latino counterpart is notable. For Latinas who are 20 years of age and older, the employment-population ratio is just over half (54.3%), whereas for males the corresponding ratio is 75.7% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Further, Latinas were at the highest rate of being below the poverty level in comparison to other women of color and White women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

As full-time working women in the U.S. are paid at 77% of what men earn, the pay gap is more than a women’s issue, it is a family issue (American Association of University Women, 2014). For Latinas, who have proportionally larger families than other women groups (US Census, 2011), they make 89% of their male counterparts’ median annual full-time year-round earnings; however, their earnings are the lowest in comparison to other women of color and White women (American Association of University Women, 2014). Further, when compared to the same salary information for White males, Latinas have the largest of pay gaps among the women, being paid at only 53% of the earnings. Examining the weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary earners for women 25 years of age and older, Latinas at every level of education (from less than a high school diploma to advanced educational degree) earn less than their
females counterparts of different races (American Association of University Women, 2014). Yet, Latinas are increasingly the primary buyer for their households and in turn largely control the annual 1.2 trillion dollars in Latina/o buying power in the U.S. (Nielsen Company, 2013).

Directly linked to education and economics is social and political influence. Although Latinas provide leadership in their homes, communities, and workforce (López-Mulnix, Wolverton, & Zaki, 2011; Vasquez & Comas-Díaz, 2007), they are underrepresented in all levels of government (Jackson, 2013). Data reported by the Center for American Women and Politics (2014) indicated that of the 99 women currently in Congress, nine are Latinas and all serve in the House of Representatives. Five of these nine Latinas are Representatives for the state of California. Across the nation’s 100 largest cities today, only one Latina serves as Mayor (Corpus Christi, Texas). Further, of the six Latinas who have previously served as statewide elective officials (e.g., Secretary of State), five have represented the state of New Mexico (Center for American Women and Politics, 2014). Although Latinas remain direly underrepresented in high-status and powerful leadership roles (López-Mulnix et al., 2011; Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007), Latinas have historically provided models of strength, bringing health and wellness to others (e.g., promotoras / Latina community-identified members who serve as advocates), as well as engendering legacies for their communities (Arredondo, 2011).

Finally, in addressing the overall wellness and mental health for Latinas, it is disquieting that Latinas have been reported to experience depression at almost twice the rate of their male counterparts (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2006; 2008). Although there is no single cause of depression, Latinas face multiple risk factors including immigration status, adjustment and acculturative stress, discrimination, underemployment and low-paying positions, single parenthood, familial separation and/or change of familial roles, interpersonal loss, or caring for
aged parents (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2008; Valdez, Abegglen, & Hauser, 2013). Although a review of risk factors for Latina depression is beyond the scope of the chapter (for more information see Valdez et al., 2013), it is clear that understanding the values and beliefs which inform Latinas’ realities and construct the meanings of being Latina is an imperative in finding healing, transformation, and well-being for themselves, families, and communities.

**Informants of Latina Realities and Identities: Valores Culturales (Latina/o Cultural Values)**

Although Latinas uniquely navigate dynamically diverse communities and experiences (Aguirre & Turner, 2011), they are unified by cultural practices and beliefs (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo, 2002). Latinas share a collective identity (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, & Smelser, 2004) and dimensions of common realities. Specifically, Latinas hold the belief that individuals are interconnected more broadly to the environment and to others physically, mentally, and energetically or spiritually (Ramírez, 1991). Grounded in community, Latinas come from a culture that emphasizes interconnection, loyalty to others (Castellanos & Gloria, in press), and a sense of collective responsibility to the group and family (Ramirez, 1991). These beliefs and traditional practices root from a diverse set of ethnocultural and indigenous Latina/o communities (McNeill & Cervantes, 2008) and varying emic psychologies (Ramírez, 1991; 1998). Moreover, these culturally shared ethnic specific beliefs, practices and values offer Latinas a common ground for their experiences, interpretations of life, and responses to their every day challenges. In their processes, Latinas learn to navigate through the belief/cultural practices and engage these ethnic specific values differently with age, time in the US, changing perspectives about *mujerismo*. Yet, these values serve as a common denominator (*hilo* - thread) for their realities. As *familismo, comunidad*, extended family, *personalismo*, and *spiritualidad* are core values within the culture, these beliefs and practices are highlighted.
For Latinas, the values of *familismo* (familism) and *comunidad* (community) are arguably the most salient values (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009; Santiago-Rivera et al, 2011). *Familia* (family) is “the primary natural support system that provides physical, emotional, and social support for many Latina/os” (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009, p. 14). A review of the literature consistently describes *familismo* as that of solidarity, loyalty, reciprocity, and interdependence (Falicov, 1998; Marín & Triandis, 1985; Santiago-Rivera et al, 2011), which is regularly identified as the chief cultural structure, mutual support system, and source of resource for Latinas (Castellanos & Gloria, in press; Lopez, 2010). Although the degree to which *familismo* is adhered or manifested differs among Latinas, the role of *familia* (family) is nonetheless a critical value (Gamble & Modry-Mandel, 2008). The value of *todo para la familia* (everything for the family), holds a poignant cultural power and resulting expected processes as Latinas are socialized to place family first and to take responsibility for others within the family (Gloria & Castellanos, 2013; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

Having care and obligation for family ultimately creates and expands the responsibility of interconnection to *comunidad* (community) (Castellanos & Gloria, in press). In that family includes extended kinship systems who are fictive and non-fictive family members, Latinas often hold a collective family identity that is broad and serves to integrate and connect (Lopez, 2010; Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Castaneda Alvarez, & Turner, 2013). In particular, the process of *compadrazgo* (co-parentage) occurs by tasking *padrinos* (godfathers) or *madrinas* (godmothers) to care for the financial, spiritual, or physical well-being of others children (Gill-Hopple & Brage-Hudson, 2012; Gloria & Castellanos, 2009) at specific milestones across the lifetime (e.g., baptisms, weddings). *Compadrazgo* ties together individuals and families in lifelong relationships (Mintz & Wolf, 1950) whereby families hold a collective responsibility for the
group’s welfare (Gloria & Castellanos, 2013). With values of interconnection and responsibility, Latinas have the flexibility to reconfigure as they faced change or need (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009). Whether taking in elders, visitors, close friends, or caring for hija/os de crianza (children taken into the family), the value of interconnection to the environment and to those beyond self allows Latinas to have “emotional proximity, affective resonance, interpersonal involvement, and cohesiveness” (Comas-Díaz, 2006, p. 437).

Directly connected to the processes and values manifesting family are the elements of connection and modes of interaction. Personalismo is a distinct interpersonal style that emphasizes the importance of personal connections (Ortiz, 2009). Commonly-referred within the literature as a “cultural script,” personalismo is an orientation in which personal connections are centralized and marked by respect and dignity regardless of personal or social statuses (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009). Similarly, simpatía is the process of maintaining cordial relationships (Arbona, 2006). By doing so, a sense of trust, intimacy, and familiarity within relationships engenders confianza (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009). As relationships “son de confianza” (can be trusted), engaging with cariño (affection and care) via verbal and nonverbal endearments (e.g., hug or kiss when greeted) is common. Importantly, Latinas who engage such cultural connections are often considered una persona bien educada (a well-educated person) - - “someone who has been taught by his or her parents the importance of respect and to be well-mannered within personal relationships” (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009, p. 15).

Inherent to Latinas’ cultural and collective values and identity is the role of spirituality and the creation of energies that directly emanates from the group (family, community) and culture. Cervantes and Ramirez (1992) described Mestizo spirituality as a life philosophy of Latina/os which engages, protects, and connects. The perspective holds that all individuals have
a valuable life story from which all can learn, harmony is critical to wellness, openness to
difference fosters respect, willingness to learn from others maintains connections, and there is a
protective divine who has influence and affirmation over all. In particular, the life approach
emphasizes a relational orientation and stresses balance of connections among self, family, and
community, engagement of subsequent responsibilities of the relationships, and insight and
clarity of one’s meaning which is affirmed by a higher creative force or spirit (Cervantes, 2010).

Indeed for many Latinas spirituality is a worldview or approach toward life which is
innately intertwined with the person and culture (Nicolas, Gonzalez-Eastep, & DeSilva, 2010)
and rooted within interpersonal interactions (Gloria & Castellanos, 2013). Permeating all
elements of life (Comas-Díaz, 2006), Latinas are socialized within a belief system rooted in
religiosity (e.g., Si Dios quiere / If God wills it) and spirituality (Soy conectada con el universo/I
am interconnected with universe) and educated to attend el espíritu (the spirit or energy) through
the practice of rituals, “cultural osmosis,” and language (Comas-Díaz, 2006). In doing so,
Latinas are drawn to their mothers and grandmothers generational wisdoms, life lessons, and
perspectives on relational and communal interactions and mind-body interconnections

Mislabeled and Misunderstood: Evolution of Understanding la Mujer’s Cultural and
Gender scripts

The cultural scripts ascribed to Latinas span from self-deprecated and deficient-oriented
to culture power-filled and strength-based (e.g., chingonas / badass warrioresses, Gloria &
Castellanos, 2013). With a history of oppression, marginalization, and misrepresentation of
processes (Anzaldúa, 1987; Arredondo, 2002; Isasi-Díaz, 2004, 2008) and subsequent
disempowerment (Arrízón, 2009; Candelaria, 1980), Latinas are challenged to sift through
Social, cultural, and religious messages about themselves. One script Latinas encounter was originally described as a religious, the marianista perspective (Stevens, 1973). Latinas were consigned to being passive, in need of protection, divine-like, selfless, and compliant and submissive, as well as a-sexual beings for the purpose of procreation. Latinas’ were viewed preferentially when they fulfilled the mandate of motherhood and their value was linked to reproduction (Vasquez, 1994). In this way, Latinas have been metaphorically “decapitated” or silenced having no choice but to follow patriarchal orders (Arrizón, 2009). The systemic silencing, along with misunderstanding and misnaming their processes (Anzaldúa, 1987; Arrizón, 2009; Isasi-Díaz, 2004) disengages and distances Latinas from their power, giving them a false and limited sense of self-worth and value — enabling a fragmented process of existence.

Sensuality and sexuality is one dimension of Latinas about which perceptions, directives, and oppressions are salient (Arrizón, 2009; Lara, 2008). Quite frequently, Latinas’ sexuality is dichotomized into a “whore-virgin” binary (Arrizón, 2009: Castillo, 1994; Gaspar de Alba, 2005), while her sexual exchanges are relegated to physical necessities and cultural scripts (Lara, 2008). As a result, the divine energetic exchange and transformed consciousness of reclaiming one’s emotional and physical self is dismissed (Acosta, 2008; Gloria & Castellanos, 2013; Lara, 2008) and split from the physical and spiritual (Arrizón, 2009). In particular, the spiritual exchanges that stem from a sacred human process of sensuality or the “flexible structures of feelings” (p. 192) are overlooked, unaware, unarticulated and not lived out (Arrizón, 2009).

With modern times and the liberation of women through education and work representation (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Nielsen Company, 2013), there is a reclaiming of the dimensionality of women, the complexity of their identities, and the strength and value within their practices (Comas-Díaz, 2008; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). More than a decade ago
Comas-Díaz, Lykes, and Alarcon (1998) addressed the need for Latina women’s psychological liberation which affirms their identities. More specifically, Comas-Díaz (2008) described the concept of *Spirita* or “spirit of liberation among women of color” (p. 13) which “mobilizes women to take control of their lives, overcome their oppressed mentality, and achieve a critical knowledge of themselves” (p.13). Similarly, Arredondo (2002) proposed the *santas* and *marquesas* (saints and royalty) thesis – an analysis centered in a cultural understanding that Latinas must navigate cultural scripts and balance the gender expectations. Specifically, Arredondo (2002) argued that to manage the complexity of identities, Latinas first need to (re)establish to one’s cultural roots as a means of creating new knowledge and identities. Indeed, the process of identifying, reclaiming, defining, and making meaning of these identities for oneself individually and broadly-defined as a member of an open system, Latinas live *entre fronteras* between borders or *nepantla*, a Nahuatl (an indigenous language to Mexico) word meaning *tierra entre medio* (land or space in the middle) (Anzaldúa, 1987).

In bridging and balancing Latinas’ opposing worlds which are often unpredictable and ever-changing, Rodriguez (2004) presented a Latina consciousness, identified as Mestiza spirituality, in which women experience “oppositional consciousness” as they are consistently in a transformative stage of becoming. It is the recognition of the one spirituality and energetic engagements is embedded and core to identity and culture for Latinas. Similarly, the notion of *Mujerismo* (Comas-Díaz, 2008; Isasi-Díaz, 1996) underscores Latinas’ resilience in navigating oppression, the role of culture and gender, and the value of liberation approaches. The resilience and power movement to correct cognitive distortions and recognize the role of colonization and oppression is proposed by the *Spirita* consciousness (Comas-Díaz, 2008) that calls for a collective identity, liberation, and emancipation of oppression. A value on the past and present,
inner strength and resilience, and a repositioning of La mujer has manifested a type of soul retrieval in women of reclaiming and capturing their full essence shaping a collective identity comprised of multi-dimensionality, embedded in personal empowerment, and reinforcing the role of strength and power (poder) through La Poderosa paradigm (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

In a society where women are identified as libretarians/libertisadas, feminist/feministas, (sometimes even traumadas/traumatized, amargadas/embittered, fieras/fierce, mujeres sin razon/ women without reason) when expressing their full identities, embracing their power, and asserting their position, and brujas/witches when taping into their subconscious and creating divine space for vision and insight, there is a great need to create a different platform of interpretation for these practices and processes (Comas-Díaz, 2013; Espín, 1997; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). There is need for increased and specific work addressing Latinas’ identities as interpretations of their identities has shifted to empowerment, inner strength and healing (Arredondo, 2002; Comas-Díaz, 2006; 2008; Falicov, 1998, 2013). Moreover, the call to understand Latinas and their processes as healers and visionaries who are valued for insight, intuition, energetic connections, and spiritual interplay, rather than defined as brujas (witches) or cultural and spiritual libertines is warranted. It is this call for a mind-shift to interpret properly and understand their processes, practices, beliefs, powers, and identities that the following conceptualization and models of being Poderosa are offered.

Latinas Realidades: Patrónes Culturales y Espiritualidades (Latinas’ Realities: Cultural and Spiritual Blueprints)

Although there may be shared elements for Latinas, each has a unique patrón cultural y espiritual or blueprint seeded in one’s ancestral contributions and experiences formed through historical, spiritual, religious, moral, cultural, and sociopolitical outlook. It is through self-
reflection and clarity of their blueprint, that Latinas become aware and consciousness of their identities as *Poderosas* (Gloria & Castellanos, 2013).

Gloria and Castellanos (2013) described *patrónes* as blueprints of the spiritual makeup that has been consciously and unconsciously transmitted generationally individuals. From cultural learnings that direct daily encounters to basic tasks of sharing time (e.g., eating a meal, sitting and sharing space), it is the transmissions of one’s ancestors *costumbres, valores, y practicas culturales* (customs, values, and cultural practices) which serve to form one’s *patrón*. Consistent to Comas-Díaz (2013) discussion of the healing process of *comadres*, it is often Latinas *madres y abuelas* (mothers and grandmothers) who impart the wisdoms of *supervivencia* (survival) and *prosperidad* (prosperity).

Comas-Díaz (2006) described the process of “calling back the spirit” to means to reformulate one’s identity. It is the process of engaging one’s strength and resilience to reconnect spiritually to one’s native roots and practices. It is the process of achieving *sabiduría*, a spiritual and existential type of wisdom or collective consciousness that interconnect Latinas to themselves and their identities as well as to others for integration and self-improvement (Comas-Díaz, 2006). It is when Latinas doubt or do not trust themselves that leads to their borrowing from “external, oppressive, and non-native systems” (p. 176) and the engagement of *patrónes* that are extraneous to one’s true self (Gloria & Castellanos, 2013).

**Sacred Spaces and Healing: Reclaiming patrónes.** Whether using the approach of *spirita, sabiduría, mestizo spirituality, conocimiento,* or collective consciousness for empowerment, a common element to the transformation is that of reclaiming self. In doing so, sacred spaces are fundamental as they are spaces in which energies are shared in support of envisioned transformations and reclaimed scripts that serve to empower. It is the spaces that the
divine breaks through to the mortal world (Ivakhiv, 2003). Spaces can be physical, metaphysical, conscious, or unconscious. For example, sacred space is that place which emerges “as a result of dialogic and collaborative tensions, intentions, and complexities” (Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, & Campos, 2009, p. 756). It is a place where Latinas engage their inner consciousness and connect to the collective consciousness. Latinas engage in self-discovery, rediscovery, and conocimiento (knowing, Facio & Lara, 2014; Soto et al., 2009). Specifically, Latinas create sacred spaces on a daily basis through personal reflections, intimate conversations, positive exchanges, shared intentions, prayer, connecting with others, bonding with others via conversations, positive exchanges, shared intentions, sometimes prayer, and collective efforts.

Ultimately, it is from and through scared spaces that healing occurs. The process of healing is that of restoration and renewal - - a process that Latinas must engage in creating transformations that are rooted within her indigenous patrón. A multidimensional process, healing occurs consciously and unconsciously at the physical, metaphysical, emotional, and spiritual levels. For example, Nuñez (2008) described the process of spiritual healing as the liberation of one’s soul from barriers and obstructions that could lead to physical or emotional suffering. Comas-Díaz (2006) holds that spirituality is foundational to healing in which the mind, body, and spirit of the collective must be balanced in promoting transcendence, change, and wellness. By engaging sacred spaces for healing, Latinas can tap into their patrónes with clarity and intent, pushing past the societal oppressions and scripts that disempower.

Models of una Latina Poderosa

As Latinas find themselves in different situations and contexts that may be incongruent to their core cultural values, worldview and attitudes and beliefs, they must find creative and sacred ways of owning and navigating power and success within their contexts. Importantly, it is each
Latinas who ultimately owns and holds the power for healing despite seeking assistance from helpers or counselors. As noted throughout the chapter, there are numerous approaches and models (e.g., Acosta, 2008; Arredondo, 2002; Cervantes, 2010; Comas-Díaz, 2006, 2008; Rodriguez, 2004; Soto et al., 2009; Vasquez, 1994) that lend insight and understanding of *mujerismo* or *marianismo*. One noteworthy model draws on the interpersonal bonds of women who create sacred and healing spaces of transformation as *comadres* (co-mothers) (Comas-Díaz, 2013). Salient among the female bonds was that of her grandmother. Comas-Díaz (2013) shared the scared teachings conveyed through her grandmother’s *cuentos* (stories) which focused on self-awareness, consciousness, broader spiritual and cultural connection to past, present and future, all the while bolstering resilience and wellness as a means for *mujerismo*. In particular, the ten commandments of being *Mujerismo* included poignant *consejos* (advice) of honoring inner divinity, asking for help, being aware of who one is yet be open to change, remembering that identity transcends oneself, transforming low self-esteem into self-love, empowering others, encouraging connectedness and solidarity, fighting oppression, becoming resilient and learning to overcome adversity, and dancing with life (Comas-Díaz, 2013).

Drawing from the collective work of other models, helping approaches, and writings about the realities and processes of Latinas, the following models set a working framework for helpers or clinicians and/or suggestions for Latinas to find and draw strength and meaning through self-awareness and transformation toward *mujerismo* and being a Latina *Poderosa*. In particular, the recommendations of the ELLA and SOMOS are positioned to emphasize the meaning and application processes that Latinas can make the processes their own.

*ELLA (She)*
The *ELLA* model of engaging healing and wellness through the self, family, and community is a broad based approach to assist Latinas seeking to reclaim their power and processes. The four tenets are dynamic and flow in an unending circular process. Below, each tenet is briefly described and applied to Alma, the Latina introduced in the chapter’s start.

**Envision transformation.** One of the first processes of transformation is to envision it. By believing it to be true for oneself and that one has the right to take on a different role or to manifest change is central to the vision. Envisioning transformation is not about “wishing away” challenges or situations of one’s life, family, or community, but rather it is the recognition that a change is needed and/or wanted for advancement and the process of determining how the change can be achieved. It is also the belief that there are energies, past wisdoms, and strengths, that is a *patrón,* which can be tapped into to assist the transformation.

With the knowledge that both of her parents struggled to overcome great obstacles and sacrificed to create a better further for their family, Alma became increasingly certain that by earning a college education would assist her family. Although she was pulled by the daily needs of her family (e.g., childcare and supplemental income from her jobs while at home), she had a vision that by gaining an advanced degree she can assist her family with greater impact and over the long term. By tapping into the same familial strengths and *patrón* of her parents and grandparents to centralize family and do for the family, Alma found that she could draw upon her familial and cultural strength to envision and manifest her transformation.

**Live through.** Perhaps one of the most challenging negotiations of transformation and manifesting visions is living through subsequent responses, reactions, and interpersonal engagements as Latinas. As change to cultural expectations and proscribed roles for Latinas are challenged and (re)storied and (re)claimed to hold positive and strength-based narratives, Latinas
will frequently finding themselves living through “push-back,” challenge, or question from their families and communities. Familial loyalty may be questioned or positioned as defiance and cultural treason and betrayal (Acosta, 2008) as Latinas who create their own scripts and processes for engagement. By living through the resulting shifts and changes, Latinas are able to remain consistent to envisioning and emulating transformations for empowerment and success.

As Alma returned home to assist her mother with childcare and reprieve from being on her own, Alma was increasingly faced with family members and her madrina telling her that she needed to come home - - that a good daughter would return home and assist her mother and forgo her selfish educational endeavor that was directly adding to the family’s demise. Alma had to gain the clarity and knowledge that the messages she was receiving were that of survival and seeking strength of family. By making this connection, Alma knew that she would have to live through the challenge and draw upon these same strengths to stay persistent to the goal of education for the family.

**Live out patrón and cultural values.** As Latinas experience any challenge or support for their transformations, there may be a tendency to move away from one’s patrón or even to return to the other-ascribed notion of who she is to be. Throughout the process of transforming roles and expectations, returning to one’s raíces (roots) is fundamental to maintaining engaging a different script (Arredondo, 2003), in particular as they determine whether contexts are safe and healing spaces to her notion of self. Importantly, not all contexts or spaces allow Latinas to live out their cultural values in ways that are accepted or valued (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013), and thus they must gage the how safely and strategically they can live out particular values within the context. Ultimately, Latinas should stay close to their core selves and can do so by finding their power or scared spaces which support and validate transformation and healing.

While on campus, Alma frequently found her values and beliefs about family were challenged and subtly dismissed as counter to the educational climate. She knew that several of her new peers questioned whether she was “college material” as she seemed to always put her family first when making decisions about how to spend any free time on weekends. Surrounded by relationships which were not collective-oriented, she often herself at a loss and feeling generally disconnected.
As Alma engaged in self-reflection and clarification of her core values, she recognized that she was moving away from her *patrón* and that her power of collective identity and consciousness would be compromised. To stay close to her values, she sought out a Latina cultural-based group that allowed her *hermandad Latina* (Latina sisterhood). By finding others who shared similar struggles of being “first” (to attend college, to navigate the system, to balance home and school) while keeping family centralized allowed Alma to engage and stay rooted to her cultural values and live through the challenges of engaging core values.

*Activa con su Intención (Act with Intent).* Acting with intent is steeped within the strength of conscious resolve and will to manifest or engage change (Nelson, 2003). The action of intent returns Latinas to the consistent process of envisioning transformation as intent steers the energies toward a belief that no other process or reality can exist (Castellanos & Gloria, in press). Specifically, it is by aligning one’s intent with other Latinas (Comas-Díaz, 2006), families, communities, and the divine or creative universal energies from which power is envisioned and manifested (Castellanos & Gloria, 2013).

With the support of her *co-madres* from her student group, coupled with her counselors’ encouragement to maintain focus on her intent, Alma stayed persistent to her belief that her most valuable contribution to *la familia* was a college education. With a sense of clarity, Alma identified an intent to engage a day-to-day transformation of college which manifested as her returning for a second year as well setting in motion dreams of college for her younger siblings. Ultimately, she identified that a college degree would allow her the earning power and social capital to assist her family over the course of her lifetime more fully than if she had not persisted to graduation. Moreover, the processes she engaged in navigating college was also identified as the working platform from which her evolution as *una mujer Poderosa* would occur.

*SOMOS (We are)*

The *SOMOS* model of transformation and collective consciousness, provides specific directives for Latinas, however, is not purposed as an imperative but rather positioned as a way to make meaning. The model draws from
different indigenous and shamanic practices and systems which serve as points of reference within the model. The processes build upon each other and are thus presented as steps that arise toward being a Latina *Poderosa*. As natural healers and helpers, Latinas should be encouraged to own their power within these steps of transformation and collective consciousness. Similarly, helpers (e.g., clinician, therapist, psychologist, or counselor) can assist as co-helpers to Latina’s transformations and self-owing processes.

Latina *Poderosas* are tool seekers for personal transformation transcending to higher processes in their quest to sustain their power, expand their personal strength, and create more pathways to transmit and attain cultural, spiritual, and ancestral wisdom. They engage in rituals and spiritual ceremonies to communicate and gain awareness. They explore the dimensionality of sacredness and sit in stillness for insight and centeredness. Una Latina *Poderosa* creates through messages, dreams, and self-awakening. It is through creating unbeaten paths, pathways (and portals) procreating spiritual forts hosting past memories, acceptance, reclaiming of the self, and self-love that she reaches transformation, sacredness, divinity, and awakening. It is these steps that can assist in traversing the road to power and healing for Latinas.

**Shape-shifting.** Seeded in indigenous practices and shamanistic beliefs, shape-shifting is the process of moving or shifting energy as well the way that we view it (Perkins, 1997). Occurring at multiple levels, shape-shifting can manifest physically (e.g., taking on a new physical form) or personally such that one’s beliefs or attitudes are shift to be more congruent with our true selves. The first step of shape-shifting is accepting the role of dreams (Perkins, 1997) and the connection between real time and dream time, the role of manifesting vision through intent, and merging of goals to reality.

To engage the process of shape-shifting, Alma worked to tune into her intuition and inner knowing as she sought to move, morph, and transcend within and
between her multiple identities (from a student to a daughter). By gaining clarity of her changing contexts and environment, she tapped into her ancestral conocimiento and noticed the commonalities, differences, and common spaces. For example, she recognized her different strengths and core values across contexts that lead to an unfolding of her unconsciousness, an increased connection to a greater presence, and a sense of healing.

**Owning abilities.** Latinas’ engage life from the level of the soul, a sense of feeling and experiential exchanges that provides access to ancestral imprints and lending to spiritual gifts. Latinas ability to be courageous and own their abilities facilitates their mastering of skills, engagement in creation, and creativity in curious states. Engaging similar energies to achieve and own one’s abilities, such as the hummingbird who is noted for not being able to fly given its shape (Villoldo, 2008), Latinas nonetheless rise to challenging occasions, reclaim their power, and track past steps, ancestral wisdom, and intuition guidance to enter a new space.

Specifically, Alma’s evolving relationship with power and ability to see herself as having abilities was seeded in understanding her role in everyday processes, the connection between past and the present, and bridging of past teachings with present learning. By embracing her practices of prayer, gratitude, celebration, and praise, Alma sought to sustain sacredness and spiritual connection.

**Managing realities.** The process of managing realities stems from the understanding that there is consistently the courageous choice to create relationship with realities that are strength-oriented or filled with disempowered suffering (Villoldo, 2008). It is through the crafting of new stories and morphing through every day processes with intent that Latinas function as transformers, connectors, and key or wisdom keepers to different realities. *Poderosas* work to re-story or re-create their realities through vigilant focused to their new goal. Well-versed in feeling external energies, Latinas often know the future/what is coming and have a skill to track current vibrations in day to day experiences (Comas-Díaz, 2008).

With a deep value for personal her relationships, Alma focused on her interpersonal connections as she sought to navigate through her environments as a comadre, hija, y estudiante (co-mother, daughter, and student). In her everyday
exchanges, Alma sought to build common spaces (through family and community) and saw herself as a knowledge keeper as she constructed different possibilities through within her multiple realities.

**Opening energies.** Latinas know how to move and transfer within the changing tapestry of their daily realities. In a quest to maintain wellness, they learn to be opened and fluid to change, and transformation. In their survival processes, *Poderosas* are available in the present, have a deep understanding of feeling and love, show compassion, and seek understanding (e.g., demonstrating *cariño*/affection, expressing *amor*/love, and emphasizing *conocimiento*).

In her quest for healing, Alma worked to engage her family through genuine exchanges, via heart-to-heart encounters, and with forgiveness and self-acceptance. By slowing down, finding quiet, paying attention, and ultimately going inward (Stewart, 2009), she began to access wisdoms, and connections with her *patrón*.

**Seaming incongruence.** In managing multiple realities and identities, it is the borders that Latinas seam and seek to draw connections (Anzaldúa, 1987). Latinas’ internal ability to navigate incongruence and live within and between “borders” of identities, context, or realities is directly connected to her ability to anchor herself in the process and learn from the experiences.

For Alma, her skill of journeying through the differences (home and school, social expectations and personal processes) and creating personal nourishment from exchanges served as a healing process. By connecting differences she created a passage to her cultural and spiritual blueprint, ancestors’ wisdom, and lessons of past lives. Moreover, as she wove together incongruities (*soy mujer liberada; soy una buena hija centrada en la familia/ I am a feminist; I am a good daughter with the value of familismo*) while staying connected to her feelings (e.g., frustration, worry, fear, confusion, elation, relief, liberation), she sought a strong position (I am worthy, I am healthy) to gain power while obtaining higher consciousness.

In essence, Latinas’ internal blueprints stems from the ability to connect to the cultural consciousness through intuition, reflection, and mindfulness (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Latinas transmit information that is available in the larger cloak of knowledge that often goes unnoticed and untapped. Gifted with identities that are comprised of multi-dimensionality and
Richness, Latinas have learned to be opened to taking different forms, blending with the environment, and creating new and different realities. Within the *patrón*, Latinas access the fluidity of our existence such that intentions can shift relationships and energies.

**Living Through *Dichos*: The Bridge Between Ancestral Teachings and Family Knowledge**

As indicated throughout this chapter, tapping into one’s *patrón cultural y espiritual* allows for Latinas to gain self-awareness, healing, and transformation. A tangible and easily accessible way for Latinas, as well as the helpers and clinicians who are assisting them, *dichos* can bridge the past and present and serve as an active means of reflection and self-transformation (Castellanos & Gloria, in press). *Dichos* are cultural wisdoms and lessons frequently tied to early formative familial teachings (Zuniga, 1991) and core cultural beliefs within a culture (Flores-Torres & Ramirez, 2010). *Dichos* transmit Latina/o life lessons through short narratives, ideas, and reflections on daily activities (Aviera, 1996; Flores-Torres & Ramirez, 2006; Zuniga, 1991).

The perspectives and wisdoms of *dichos* emanate from *patrónes* which have been passed across generations and a means of *conocimiento* translated into life lessons. Capturing the *sabiduría* of Latina/os (Comas-Díaz, 2006) and serving as concrete directives from *patrónes*, *dichos* illuminate pathways to move through difficult experiences as they accentuate ability, resilience, and endurance (Castellanos & Gloria, 2014; Zuniga, 1991). Comas-Díaz (2006) aptly argued that *dichos* can “offer subversive strategies as they express adaptive responses to oppression, colonization, and internalized oppression” (p. 444). By reframing and/or gaining new perspective, Latinas tap into long-standing wisdom and familial energies to promote cultural resilience and situation management (Castellanos & Gloria, in press; Comas-Díaz, 2006).

For *Poderosas*, *dichos* “can be used as elements of healing to reveal and imagine the possible, expose truths, and learn from the collective unconsciousness” (Castellanos & Gloria, in
press). Addressing “food; love and marriage; work and monetary issues; and friendship, family, and human relations” (Flores-Torres & Ramirez, 2000, p. 251), *dichos* are used in daily situations. There are numerous *dichos* that can be used within the clinical setting and counselors would do well as ask Latinas which *dichos* have the most meaning or relevance to them as they find their sources of strength. Nonetheless, below are a few several “simple yet poignant truths” (Castellanos & Gloria, in press), which are briefly discussed that can be used to assist Latinas to draw power and strength in being *una Poderosa*.

*Lo que bien se aprende, nunca se pierde* (What one learns well will never be lost). In a process filled with contact to the spirit and connection to ancestral knowledge and inner knowing, there is a deep acceptance that knowledge is gained through experience and time but wisdom comes from cyclical energy that is a representation of our past ancestors, our past life lessons, our lineage, and the connection to the tribe. *Poderosas* work from a power that allows them to travel through dreams and communication through the calling of their ancestors, *abuelas* (grandmothers) who have crossed over, and deceased family members (spirits) who continue to visit to assist in the creation of the communal purpose and family mission. The knowledge base is complemented with spiritual knowledge, intuitive messages, and spiritual direction. These lessons are imprinted in their blueprints, unforgettable to their experiences, and accessible in their sub and unconsciousness. The vision, foresight, and clarity *Poderosas* possess is a collective knowledge and knowing that transcend time and space. It is a guiding force that is sought from within and found through the immersion of power and spirit.

As a way to enact continued connection to her ancestral knowledge and inner knowing, Alma was encouraged to engage in rituals in the counseling session as well as in her daily life activities that reflected the *dichos* essence. In particular, she reframed mundane practices that she had learned from her mother, aunts, and grandmother into power practices as she connected to her core values. Alma
explored how the practice of her daily prayers or even the act of sharing a meal with familia physically and spiritually feed her sense of cultural power.

**El que la sigue la consigue** (The person who persists is the person who will achieve it).

The premise of persistence is steeped in hope and fortitude that if one stays the course toward an outcome or through a situation that one will achieve or succeed. It is the passion of commitment, belief, thought, and action that allows Latinas to draw on their inner fortitude and strengths as Poderosas to persist. Reflecting on familial hardships, the sacrifices of Latinas who engage their individual strengths and divinities can draw strength to persist during times of uncertainty and question. Although life’s hardships may create stress, it is these processes that inherently engender the motivation and persistence to keep going to move through.

As a first-generation college student, Alma identified the different reference points of her family’s hardships and sacrifices endured by their parents as the motivation to persist with her intent to finish school. By recalling and honoring how her parents worked tirelessly in underpaid and difficult positions and lost cultural and family connection to secure a better life for their families and children, she found a source of strength to persist through challenges as well as to meet her goal of graduation. Importantly, developing a plan for persistence and identifying those internal (prayer) and external (family relationships) sources of strength were critical to buffer against on-going and unexpected challenges.

**Querer es poder** (To want is to have). The notion of one’s want being equated to having is built upon an individual’s desire, drive, or ganas (motivation) to achieve the desired goal or outcome. The desire to explore and imagine possibilities of something different is a powerful process in and of itself. As envisioning transformation is often challenging and may move against or beyond the cultural assumptions, it requires Latinas to stay steadfast in transforming culturally-restrictive assumptions and traditions and creating new fluid and flexible notions of self (Gil & Vazquez, 1996; Gloria & Castellanos, 2013). For example, Lara (2008) described one of the ultimate transformations of la malinche (the traitor), who has been considered the ultimate Latina traitor by providing interpretation in the conquest of Mexico for Hernán Cortés (Espín,
Latinas Poderosas

1997; Gaspar de Alba, 2005). Malinztin is re-claimed as la mujer radicada (a radical woman). A woman who is as a survivor, has inner strength and fortitude (Lara, 2008), and is a self-sufficient as she finds power rather than treason within her words (Miguela, 2001).

For Alma, envisioning and naming her desired transformation is a process that allowed her a “shedding” of external notions of self to occur. Releasing the beliefs that she is a “bad” daughter, a traitor to her family, or that her family’s demise rests on her shoulders was an important starting point. She also released the notions that by going to school she is giving up her culture, which in turn allowed her to find her strength and vision for herself. Reclaiming the power and desire within her vision allowed her a renewed and power-based notion of herself.

Se hace camino al andar (The road is made by walking). In a collective web of existence, Latina poderosas are not walking alone but must walk with others (familia, community, and ancestors) to make progress and create a path. Although Latinas work from a wholistic framework connecting with the upper or mortal world, they create pathways to navigate current realities and dream time (the passage to manifest change and envision a different reality). Latinas Poderosas must have the courage to transcend gender scripts, gender roles, and gender expectations to maximize their power and evolve personally and spiritually. To be Latina poderosas sustaining their power, they must be willing to walk unchartered waters, be willing to engage the unknown, become fearless of unexpected outcomes, and creative in problem-solving in their quest to survive, calm their spirit while feeding their soul.

For Alma, envisioning and giving breath to her dream facilitated a process of transformation. The process required her to sit with her fears and feel the discomfort of forging a new path as a means of finding strength and meaning within herself. Similarly, by seeking out others who are walking similar uncharted and unscripted paths allowed her to access power beyond herself as part of her interconnectedness to and with others. In essence, by assisting Alma to recognize and own her inner power can buffer and re-position the interpretation of her challenges while tapping into her collective consciousness.

Healing and Transformations: Self-Reflections for a Poderosa
Being una Poderosa is a continuous process rather than a static outcome. Being powerful is a dynamic ever-changing process steeped in one’s belief system that requires energy, knowing and consciousness raising, and physical and meta-physical connections. It also requires sacred spaces in which to heal and engage self-awareness for transformation. A critical process for Latinas is to engage in self-reflections to allow for conocimiento and healing to emerge. Within the transformation process, it is important to underscore that Poderosas are their own healers. That is, Poderosas have within themselves the ability and power to engage their own healing processes. Working in tandem with counselors, clinicians must strive to implement culturally relevant and emic-centered services in provision of Poderosa-based services. To assist in the self-reflection and transformation process, for either the Poderosa or the helper, questions addressing three core areas were developed with the goal of working toward clarity and insight about one’s patrón. These questions are not intended to be an exhaustive list but rather a starting point from which Latinas and their helpers can build upon and deepen through continued question and reflection as they make meaning and find insight into their processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spaces of Healing and Transformation</th>
<th>Inner Strengths</th>
<th>Processes Toward Conocimiento</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Where do you feel most validated to envision transformation?</td>
<td>• What practices do you engage to access your inner strengths?</td>
<td>• When do you access collective consciousness, your ancestral wisdom, and your patrón?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How do you create sacred space for conocimiento?</td>
<td>• What connections assist your inner strength and healing?</td>
<td>• What beliefs and practices do you engage to stay connected to ancestral wisdom and their teachings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What connections and exchanges validate your transformation and healing?</td>
<td>• How do you draw your personal strength and power?</td>
<td>• What beliefs and practices do you engage to attain conocimiento?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How do you engage your divergent and convergent realities and identities for transformation?</td>
<td>• What practices do you engage to access your power?</td>
<td>• What are your patrón’s ancient teachings of healing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Author’s Process Reflection and Conclusion

As the chapter’s authors, we would be remiss if as Latinas of multiple identities and realities we did not address how throughout the physical and spiritual writing of this chapter that we balanced and met in nepanthl and tapped into our patrónes, respectively. In our process of being Poderosas our realities of being and moving between identities to keep to task meant shape-shifting and managing realities that were other other-ascribed and self-claimed. We found sacred space, congruence and validation by weaving together our roles as colegas (colleagues), familia, and compañeras espirituales y culturales (spiritual and cultural companions). As Latinas who are challenged daily yet find the ganas y querer (motivation and want/will) to engage our patrónes to live out our cultural values, we are changed and similarly transformed as we carry on and transmit the dreams of our ancestors, in particular our mothers and grandmothers.

El Cielo y La Luna: Mi Poder – Ese Que Llevo Por Dento*

I hold my power in my belly
I hold my power in my ears
I hold my power in my vision
I hold my power with intent and conviction

I feel the essence of nature within
I feel the emotions of a circumstance as they begin to rise
My belly quenches when a person, a dream, an opportunity meets demise

I could hear the whispers of people’s interactions
The message comes in a language that requires intention and concentration
It is a message that speaks about everyday exchanges -their meanings, their energy, their powers
It comes through the wind; you can hear it in the fire; and feel it in the water

I see beyond the vision
I see the dream and taste its seeds
I sleep with the passion to complete the journey that ensures I am who I am meant to be

I share my transformations with others and ground with mother earth and father sky.
They feed my power
They recharge my powers
My powers magnify through interconnections
I hold my power with intent and conviction.

*The Sky and the Moon: My Power – That Which I Have Within*
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