Chican@'s and Mestizo Spirituality

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Learning Objectives

- Gain an understanding of the spiritual framework used by Chican@'s
- Overview of health beliefs, folk beliefs and illnesses, and supernatural disorders
- Discussion of traditional healing
- The role of *La Virgencita*
- The role of *las calaveras*
- Chican@'s students and spirituality
- Application
Mestizo refers to a dynamic, synergistic process developed from the amalgamation of people, philosophies, and cultures bridging the European content and the Americas.

It is the intermingling of physical, psychological, cultural and spiritual ties between the Spaniard and the Indian.

5 Main Characteristics
✓ Every person has a valuable story to tell and lesson to learn
✓ Harmony with the physical and social environment ~ crucial to psychological adjustment.
✓ An openness to diversity and respect for all people
✓ Willingness to learn from diversity
✓ Belief in the theistic cosmology that protects, influences and engages all of life.
The Toltecs were the originators of all civilization. Most of their work is known through the work of the Aztec.

In 975 a.c. the Toltec warriors from Tula, near Mexico City, move to Veracruz, beat the Mayas and established themselves in Yucatan, at Chichen-Iza, which had earlier been a Maya ceremonial center; they also settle at Mayapan (987), and Uxmal (1007). They lasted until 1200 a.c.
The Mastery of:

- Awareness
  - Expand awareness of self reflecting on thoughts, feelings, and actions
  - Note habitual thinking, personality modes, attitudes, beliefs
    - Uncovering deepest secrets
- Transformation
  - Heals, cleans and clears his/herself to be a clear channel
- Intent
  - Spiritual evolution begins
    - Sense energy
    - Connects with higher aspect of self
    - Receives direct guidance from dreamer
Indigenous Mestizo Epistemology

- Earth is a living ecosystem in which responsibility for care taking, protection and interrelationship are essential elements
- Development of unifying relational self where one’s connection with the other is understood as interdependent and holistic
- Systemic causality implies the presence of a web of life where all events rely on one another and are interconnected
- Life is a great mystery that imbues its meaning in sacred stories, ancestral teaching and visionary experience
- Every aspect of nature contains knowingness that can be revealed, and where ones truths can be understood and embraced
- Indigenous knowledge and wisdom can be discovered through the Toltec and Mayan ways of *Flor y Canto* including songs, prayer meditation, dance, and ceremony

Cervantes, 2011
Indigenous Mestizo Epistemology

- Portals for meaningful dialogue, knowledge and healing can be opened through dreams, synchronistic events, intuition, communication with the physical world, and related non-human entities.

- Recognition that a Creative Life Force, spirits, cosmic energies are central and significantly impact life span development.

“This we know, that all things are connected like the blood that unites us. We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it—whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.”

- Chief Seattle (1850)

Cervantes, 2011
Mexican folk healing evolved from early Aztec and pre-Columbian civilizations.

Folk healing is comprised of a set of health beliefs and practices derived from ethnic and historical traditions.

- Its goal is to cure psychological, spiritual and physical problems
- It involves beliefs in the natural and supernatural illnesses, a metaphysical connection of the physical world and a view of God’s divine as a central component of life
- Chican@s hold a dual constellation of beliefs about health and illness and religion and spirituality.

- Illness is perceived as a social-interpersonal matrix rather than just a change-biological event.
  - Medical problems, psychological concerns and emotional instability are a direct reflection of the kinds of interpersonal relations that exits within family and community networks.
The health belief of Chican@s can be grouped into belief in:

- traditional folk illnesses
- hot/cold theories of illness
- supernatural magic and bewitched (or witchcraft)

Beliefs in natural folk illnesses exist throughout the US.

- Unrelated to religious beliefs and social class standing.
During developmental transitions, immigrant families turn more intensely to the comfort and continuity of past traditions such as prayer and folk medicines.

✓ Tendency for people to find meaning in life changes by revisiting cultural belief and rituals – (ideological ethnicity)

This draw toward one’s primary ethnicity can be used as a therapeutic resource to help families discover practices that enhance continuity and belonging, and propel the life cycle forward while reaffirming past ties.
Traditional Folk Illness

✓ Folk illness refers to the layperson’s conception of a physical or emotional problem. These problems are identified with non-medical labels that summarize observed clusters of symptoms, and are derived from knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation.
Folk Illnesses

- Older people are the repositories of this knowledge and life experience. It more prevalent in rural settings but still exists in urban settings.

- Folk syndromes are sufficiently different from the conventional diagnostic classifications that the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-R)
  - Includes an appendix of a glossary of culture-bound syndromes several which are relevant to specifically to Latinos.
Folk Illnesses

- The majority are collected under males naturales (natural illnesses), while a small number fall under mal puesto (witchcraft).
- Most common natural illnesses are mal de ojo (evil eye), susto or espanto (freight), and empacho (indigestion).
- Two other natural syndromes are very important - nervios and ataques de nervios
Mal de ojo
Concept widely found in the Mediterranean cultures.
Embody the belief that social relations contain inherent dangers to the equilibrium of the individual.

- *Vista fuerte* - (strong vision) can exert inordinate attention on another person. His/her covert glances produce a stronger power over a weaker person.
- Victim of *mal de ojo* - severe headache, uncontrollable weeping, fretfulness, insomnia, and fever. Thought to more commonly attach women and children.
- *Susto/espanto* (fright) syndrome that can affect people of either sex and all ages.
  - e.g., parent may bring a child to clinic after a fall - loss appetite, frightened to nerves after death threatening incident
  - thought of as an acute reaction to trauma
  - if not treated = soul lost
Empacho - type of indigestion or gastrointestinal infection that afflicts children and adults and is thought to be caused by a complex interaction between physiological and social factors

- Stomach pains are thought to be a symptom of intestinal blockage and fever that causes thirst and abdominal swelling.
- Person has been forced to eat against his will
- **Nervios** - general state of distress connected to life’s trials and tribulations. It includes brain aches, headaches, sleep difficulties, trembling, tingling, and *mareos* (dizziness) or simple anxiety.

- **Ataques de Nervios** - PR syndrome
  - Happens to other national groups. It is a sense of being out of control. Dissociative, seizure-like or fainting episode, hyperventilation, crying spells, and shouting.
Other disorders

- Llamada de espiritu ~ calling of spirit
- Levantar mollera ~ lifting of the head
- Caida de matriz ~ fallen uterus
- Dolor de cintura ~ waist pain
- Mareos ~ dizziness
- Espanto ~ fear
- Mal aire ~ bad air
- Latido ~ palpitation
Magic and Bewitchment

✓ *Mal Puesto* or *brujeria* - provide explanations for prolonged disorders that cannot be accounted for and for which treatments for natural illnesses have not worked.

- Unrequited love, quarrels, and breakups among lovers, and conflicts among close family members
- Used to explain various forms of mental illnesses including schizophrenia.
Elements of cultural syncretism

- Pre-Hispanic Mexico, natural elements were invested with god-like, supernatural, qualities and magical powers (gods- sun, rain, etc.)
- Involved ritual sacrifices

Magic benefited human beings but also dark

- harm enemies thorough poisoning, fatal illnesses = black magic
- Black and White Witches
  - white = to ward off dangers, alleviate illnesses, locate work, bring success, provide luck in romance
  - black = harm an enemy, defeat a rival, revenge another evil hex
Curanderismo is a set of folk/medical beliefs, rituals and practices that address the psychological, social and special need of Mexican American populations through a system of medicine with its own theoretical, diagnostic, and therapeutic roots.

- It is the indigenous method of cure for many natural folk illnesses.

Curanderera/os- heterogeneous group distinguished by specialties in particular disorders or by particular healing powers.

- Some Curandereros refer clients to health services and use it themselves.
Curanderas

Urban Curandera
Teaching You How to Heal Yourself
I'll guide you through the labyrinth
CONSEJERA Y CURANDERA
BOLIVIANA
SRA. AGUSTA

• Se Lee la Suerte en Hojas de Coca, Naipe y Plomo
• Se Detectan Enfermedades en Cuy
• Se Cura el Susto con Huevo
• Se Limpia las Malas Vibras con Quirquincho Vivo
• Se Hace Pago a la SANTA TIERRA, para Trabajo, Salud, Dinero y Amor

SE HACE BANOS DE FLORECIMIENTO POR AÑO NUEVO

Consultas: Celular: 9-8850-4254
Feria Artesanal Av. Salaverri Stand 146(frente Hospital Rebagliati)
E-mail: curanderaagusta@latin.com / curanderaagusta@hotmail.com
Curanderas - Woman healers/curanderas are sometimes called señoritas.

- Use a range of treatments: herbal remedies, inhalation, sweating, massage, incantations, and a variety of ritual cleansing (raw eggs and palm leaves)

Curanderos, brujos, and espiritistas frequently perform limpias.

- Cleansing rituals require branches of various plants, eggs, perfumed waters, religious images, dissected animals, and candles specific to each problem.
- *Chamaca* are community leaders who serve as advisers.

- *Yerberos* provide home remedies and the use of hundreds of wild and domestic plants to treat body and mind.
  - Widely used health resource in Mexican communities.
Key terms

- **Espiritismo** - Spiritualism - It refers to the invisible world of good and evil that can attach themselves to human beings and influence behavior

- **Sobadores** - massage therapists
Waters used:
✓ Natural
✓ Holy
✓ Ocean
✓ River

Forms of Water:
✓ Hot
✓ Cold
✓ Heated
✓ Steam

Minerals used:
✓ Alumbre -
✓ Piedra de rio - river rock
✓ Alcanfor - canfor
✓ Barro - adobe
✓ Oro – gold
✓ Iman - magnet

Other remedies:
✓ Teas
✓ Baths
✓ Candles
✓ Azabache - Trinket
Rituals take place next to their altars decorated with ritual objects, candles, incense, and images of saints, the devil occasionally, or supernatural beings.

Some *curanderos* specialize in Western medical problems

- menstrual crams, ear ache, *tos*
- Do not see selves in competition with medical doctors
Espiritismo

- Everyone has spirits of protection.
- Number of spirits can be increased by performing good deeds or decreased by evil deed.

Espiritistas

- communicate with the spirits and have the power of healing
Other traditional beliefs: La Virgencita, her mystic powers

- La Virgen de Guadalupe is considered a spiritual mother
  ✓ Providing help and spiritual guidance

- Not considered a direct healer but helper, protector and guide.

- Represents both Virgen Mary and the indigenous Mexican goddess Tonantzin.

- Others believe the Virgin was a simplified and sanitized version of Coatlicue, the Aztec mother goddess.
Among their first converts was a man baptized with the Christian name Juan Diego. On the chilly morning of December 9, 1531, Juan Diego crossed the barren hill called Tepeyac to attend Mass. He was brought to a sudden halt by a blinding light and the sound of unearthly music. Before him appeared an astounding vision - a beautiful dark-skinned woman who, calling the Indian "my son," declared herself to be the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. She told Juan Diego it was her desire to have a church built on Tepeyac hill, and asked him to relay that message to Bishop Juan de Zumarraga.

It was no easy task for the humble Indian to be granted an audience with the top prelate, but the persistent Juan Diego was finally admitted. The incredulous Bishop demanded that he be provided with some proof of the unlikely encounter. Confused and fearful, Juan Diego avoided Tepeyac for several days, but on December 12, while rushing to find a priest to attend a seriously ill uncle, he took a short cut across the hill. The Virgin once again appeared and Juan Diego told her of the Bishop's request. The Virgin instructed him to pick roses from the usually sere and desolate hill and deliver them to Zumarraga as the sign.

Juan Diego gathered up the miraculous blossoms in his mantle and hurried off to complete his mission. Once again before the Bishop, he let the roses spill out before him. To the wonder of all assembled, a perfect image of La Virgen Morena (the Dark Virgin) was revealed emblazoned on Juan Diego's cloak.

By order of the Bishop, a small church was soon constructed on the site designated by the Virgin. Skeptics are quick to point out the unlikely coincidence of the Virgin's appearance on Tepeyac, the very site of an Aztec temple dedicated to Tonatzin (earth goddess, mother of the gods and protectress of humanity) which had been devastated by order of Bishop Zumarraga.

The original church was replaced by a larger structure built in 1709. The Miracle of Guadalupe was officially recognized by the Vatican in 1745. The second sanctuary was declared a Basilica in 1904, but by then it had begun to slowly sink into the soft, sandy soil beneath it. A new Basilica, of modern design and enormous capacity, was dedicated in October of 1976.

http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/guadalupe.html
Marriage of Religion and Folklore

- Apparent during death and bereavement
  - Day of the Dead - religious litanies, sugar candy skulls and tissue paper skeletons
  - Caresses death, sleeps with it, celebrates it
  - Fear toward it but it is not hidden away
  - Ritual of grieving that takes place each year for 4 years after the death of a family member
**Dia de Los Muertos**

- Erects a portable altar at the home with a photo of the dead person, some favorite objects surrounded by flowers, and the deceased favorite foods.
- After a day’s vigil, the family transports the altar and its objects, food to the cemetery.
- Family and friends light candles.
- Close family members sleep next to the grave until the next day.
Chican@s students have identified spirituality as a means of coping with their educational challenges.

- A frequent practice of Chican@s is that of *encomendarme* or entrusting or turning over to God or *la Virgen de Guadalupe* (Virgin Mary) a particular issue, concern, of life difficulty.
  - Individual resigns or releases the difficulty, turning it over to a higher power and process, with the knowledge that the individual is centrally connected with others (Ramirez, 1999).
The students addressed how their families and individual family members engaged in the activities within their households.

- Students indicated that their families knew of the importance of touching a baby in order not to give him/her *mal de ojo* and others reported how their mothers perform *limpias* or *limpiesas* (spiritual cleanings or cleansings) to purge their living spaces of negative energies or “bad vibes.”

- Several of the students reported having witnessed family members having *empacho* and the subsequent remedy of an intense massage and pulling of the skin on the family member’s back performed by *curaderas* or *sobadoras* (traditional faith healers) within their households.
  - A few students revealed that their grandmothers had the gift of healing powers to attend appropriately to such concerns.
Students reported having first-hand experienced culturally-bound syndromes such as *empacho* or having had a *limpia* performed on them with eggs.

As part of this and other rituals, students revealed that they had engaged in activities such as having had cards read for personal guidance and direction, used teas and natural herbs for healing (in particularly for *ataques de nervios*), lit candles and made prayer offering for saints, wore an *asabache* or kept trinkets for protection from negative energies, been visited by past family members through different forms (e.g. dove or visions), and having prayed to particular saints for specific needs and concerns (e.g., St. Anthony for a relationship).
The first in her family to go to college, Esemeralda is a sophomore who is for the first time living away from her family to attend a large predominately White university. She is the eldest of five brothers and sisters, of whom still live at home with her parents. Struggling to find connections on campus and with faculty, Esemeralda feels particularly lonely when she has to stay at school to study on the weekends knowing that her family (along with her grandmother and aunts) gather to eat dinner and spend time together. Growing up in a fairly traditional Mexican household, she has always known her family to be religious with her mother attending church, praying regularly, and lighting candles to *la Virgen*. She remembers fondly attending mass with her mother and grandmother almost every Sunday and lit candles as offerings, particular when a family member was sick. It was also on the weekends that she would say prayers to help protect the family and family home. Now at college, Esemeralda finds it difficult to attend mass as she does not like the English service masses and even more so does not like attending services alone in addition to having less time given the increasing demands of her studies. She has attempted to create her own alter in her dorm room with *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, a prayer book, and a *veladora*. Because lit candles are against dorm regulations, Esemeralda feels unable to make proper prayer offerings to help her with school and to help provide support for her dad who was recently laid off at work. Esemeralda has struggled to keep present her spiritual practices, yet as she has been less able to engage in them, she feels off-balanced and somehow less connected with her family.
What role does spirituality play for Esmeralda?
What impact might ethnic identity and acculturation have for her?
What recommendations might you have to help support Esmeralda manage?