

Chapter 5

Reclamando Lo Que Nos Arrebataron:

Spiritual Reclaiming and Reconnection

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ABSTRACT

The terms religion and spirituality are used interchangeably and often shown as symbols of strength, resiliency, and resistance among Latinxs with intersecting identities who are impacted by various forms of oppression in their daily lives. The authors will explore the shifts that have taken place in the Latinx population, moving away from predominantly Catholic practices and returning to practices pre-colonization and more Spiritual practices. The authors will weave intersectionality throughout this chapter, highlighting the diversity that exists within the Latinx community, focusing on cultural strengths, resiliency, and decolonization. The chapter will focus on central aspects of spirituality that include the return to indigenous healing practices, coping, and recommendations and implications focused on training through a multicultural lens and highlighting the strengths and growth areas of available interventions and research.

INTRODUCTION

As three Latinas descendants of Nicaragua and Mexico, we use our narratives and understanding of spirituality's significant role in the Latinx community in this chapter. Specifically, we use our lived experiences and those we have witnessed through praxis as healers, mental health therapists, school

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counselors, professors, and *hijas y nietas de inmigrantes*. Through our bicultural experiences, we highlight the resiliency within the Latinx community. More specifically, we focus on the strengths of these communities, which have served them to survive through slavery, racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, genocide, xenophobia, and other experiences of oppression *en lo cotidiano* (Isasi-Díaz, 2002). Latinx communities are returning to indigenous forms of healing, exploring spirituality outside of Catholicism and Christianity, all while newly connecting and strengthening traditional forms of healing that have been in the shadows or completely erased due to colonization and patriarchy (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2022; Medina & Gonzales, 2019). Mental health professionals must reimagine what incorporating spirituality will look like in practice.

Ana Carina is a first-generation Mexican-American, daughter of immigrants, Georgian and Catholic raised. These salient intersecting identities, along with *Mujerista* Theologies and spiritual *mestizaje*, have informed her spiritual journey. Growing up in a Mexican mixed-status household with “*el Espíritu inmigrante*” (the immigrant spirit), it was a norm to always “*encomendarnos a Dios*” (entrust ourselves to God) to protect us from a roadblock that could lead to deportation and separation of a family system. It was the push to navigate systems fearlessly as a way of resistance and survival. In her family, spirituality and religion allowed them to believe in the ancestral spirits, *Los Santos* (saints) and *el rezo* (prayer), which functioned as a veil to protect the individual, family, and, more importantly, the collective community. Ana Carina’s journey through education also made her voice louder, making room for expression that moved away from traditional thinking. Her spiritual journey has unfolded, allowing her to express herself more freely while welcoming this kind of liberating experience in therapeutic spaces.

Jocelyn identifies as a Latina, Nicaraguan-American, and first-generation daughter of immigrant parents. Her spiritual journey was shaped by navigating many systems at home, school, and the Catholic church. Growing up, she frequently heard phrases like “*si Dios lo permite*” or “*Gracias a Dios*” from her mother, grandma, and all *las tías*. Spirituality and “*la relación con Dios*” served as a strong coping and support tool for her and her family when facing adversity, individually or as a whole. Catholic school, youth group, church retreats, and *misa* every Sunday became a staple of her childhood, which allowed her to find her path and create her unique relationship with spirituality.

Vanessa’s identity as a Mexican-American is strongly influenced by the polarity in her experiences living in the suburbs of California in a predominately White neighborhood while simultaneously staying connected to her culture through her grandparents lived experiences immigrating from Guadalajara, Mexico and rooting themselves in the United States. Having been raised Catholic but never truly identifying with the practice, most connections to a higher power were through her grandma’s spiritual practices like providing the “*bendición*” before leaving the house to protect the family and provide a safe return to the community. Growing up participating in *Posada*’s, building *ofrendas* in celebration and remembrance of loved ones, and the habitual practice of the *bendición* created connection to her community and fed her spiritual soul in ways she could not explain while occupying predominately white spaces at home and school. Vanessa’s connection to her community and spiritual practices influenced her desire to move away from a Eurocentric way of counseling and changed her conceptualization of healing.

THE CULTURAL SHIFT: HONORING INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

There has been an evident cultural shift among Latinxs, as new generations honor Indigenous spiritual knowledge centering in on practices that have been utilized for years. Spirituality is a practice not situated

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