

Spirituality Among Latinas/os

Implications of Culture in Conceptualization and Measurement

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Despite growing transnational migration between the United States and Latin American countries, culturally relevant conceptualizations of spirituality among Latinas/os remain lacking in healthcare research. Grounded in Latina feminist theology, this article elucidates cultural values that influence spirituality and describes findings from a study using a new questionnaire to explore spirituality among Latinas in Puerto Rico and the US mainland. Results support the saliency of cultural values such as personalismo and familismo as the context for spiritual perspectives, which may function independently of the Catholic Church structure. **Key words:** instrumentation, Latinos, postcolonial, prayer, religion, spirituality

SPIRITUALITY is a concept that has been receiving increased attention in nursing, psychological, sociological, and healthcare research during the past several decades. Spirituality and religious coping are salient factors in maintaining health and longevity, in well-being during chronic and terminal illnesses, in recovery from traumatic stress, and in positive coping during bereavement.¹⁻⁹ Numerous questionnaires have been developed for investigating relationships between spiritual perspective and health or illness.¹⁰⁻¹⁵ The majority of available instruments measuring

spiritual perspectives, however, lack psychometric evaluation among people from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds. Few studies examine the role of spirituality in human health and well-being from the perspectives of Latino people.

Latinos are now the largest minority group in the United States, comprising more than 35 million people or 12.5% of the total US population.¹⁶ The increase in the Latino population is due in part to the overall increase in the number of foreign-born residents since 1990. More than half of the 28 million foreign-born in the United States are from Latin American countries, mostly from Mexico and Central America.¹⁷ As transnational migration and immigration between the United States and Latin American countries continue to increase, an understanding of Latino cultural values and spirituality has important implications for nursing research, theory, and practice that are relevant for global healthcare needs of Latino people.

Latino theological literature describes spirituality as integral with Latino culture.¹⁸⁻²⁴ Although Latinos are not a monolithic or homogenous group, there are fundamental cultural influences that must be considered in an exploration of spirituality among Latinas/os. One of these influences is the collectivist nature of Latino culture, emphasizing mutuality in relationships. Another influence is a

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shared history of colonization. The continuing societal oppression many Latino people experience, particularly those from the lower class, shape spiritual perspectives.^{25,26} This will be discussed further in later sections.

Most of the empirical research in spirituality and religiosity among Latinos has targeted primarily Mexican Americans. These investigations indicate that spirituality and religiosity are interwoven with their daily lives and serve as foundations of strength in coping with life's struggles. For example, religious attendance was associated with psychological well-being across 3 generations of Mexican American families²⁷ and with physical health status among Mexican American women.²⁸ Latinos describe their faith as intimate and reciprocal relationships with God, family, and community, with these relationships playing an important role in health and well-being.^{29,30}

Given the premise that spirituality among Latinas/os is intertwined with cultural values, it becomes imperative that empirical measurements of spirituality are grounded in Latino perspectives. Simply translating items in questionnaires from English to Spanish is not sufficient if the underlying concepts of the questionnaire are reflective of dominant Anglo European, individualist perspectives. As no instrument was found that specifically addressed conceptualization of spirituality from Latino perspectives, the first author developed the Latino Spiritual Perspective Scale (LSPS) to begin exploration of religious practices and spiritual perspective among Latinos both within and outside the United States. The purpose of this article is to (1) explore Latino cultural values that influence spirituality and (2) describe findings from the first validation study of the LSPS, along with implications for future refinement of the questionnaire.

CONCEPTUALIZING SPIRITUALITY

An important methodological issue in the empirical study of spirituality is clarity in the operationalization of religiosity versus spiri-

tuality. Religiosity focuses on various behavioral measures such as frequency of church attendance, of reading religious scripture, of purification through religious actions, and of seeking support from priests or clergy.^{5,8,31} Spiritual perspective involves a broader conceptualization that explores meanings ascribed to events, self-transcendence, and the intimate relationship of an individual's particular conception of a universal being or consciousness.^{12,14,32,33} (See Reed³⁴ for an excellent discussion of spirituality in health-care.) Religiosity relates to the expression of one's spirituality through behaviors and practices grounded in a particular religious denomination. On the other hand, spirituality may, but does not necessarily, involve connection with any religious belief, doctrine, or denomination. While both constructs may be salient in people's practice of their faith, it is important for researchers to be clear about which construct is being measured.

Another major methodological issue in the study of spirituality is grounding research concepts within the culture of the people being studied. Rogler^{35(p425)} points out that the "uncritical transferring of concepts across cultures" is an unfortunate procedural norm that persists within social science research. When investigating spiritual perspectives among racial or ethnic minority populations, it is imperative that the values and assumptive worldview of the participant's culture be recognized and incorporated into the theoretical framework and methodology of the research study. Simply translating instruments into another language may not be appropriate if this step has been omitted. Similarly, local practices of the group being studied should be considered in order for relevant theorizing to occur. Reed^{34(p51)} articulates this recognition by observing that in the conceptualization of spirituality, "paradigms must relate to the embodied and contextual sources of truth—the personal experiences and wisdom of the local context."

In this article, the term *spirituality among Latinos*, rather than *Latino spirituality*, is used to denote the multiplicity of

perspectives that may exist across various Latino populations. The authors reject the notion of a singular "Latino spirituality," just as they view the notion of a single "Latino culture" as an essentialist conception of culture that may promote stereotypes. Multiple, socially constructed phenomena such as racialized and gendered identities, class, immigration status, language, and adherence to Catholic Church doctrine or another religious denomination all may contribute to diversity among Latinos' expression of cultural values in general and spiritual perspectives and religious practices in particular.

Thus, in this work, Latino culture is conceptualized as fluid and evolving rather than fixed and bounded.³⁶ Such a conceptualization embraces contradictions that are inherent in a dynamic view of culture that recognizes the enactment of multiple, socially constructed phenomena. This means that while there may be some core cultural values shared among Latinos, these values may be subject to variation and diversity that are grounded in class, language, immigration, gender, and other socially constructed differences. We maintain that the task of the critically conscious researcher is to not accept "cultural values" at face value but to interrogate how the historical, political, and social contexts in which the participants live inform their cultural values.

The terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* are used interchangeably in this article, though many US Latina/o people prefer to be identified by their country of origin (eg, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban).³⁷ All such categorical labels in and of themselves (Latino, Hispanic, or national origin), however, fail to provide any information or understanding about the actual lives of people who occupy these categories. Researchers conscious of the colonizing legacy of inscribed racial and ethnic categorical labels are challenged when seeking to elucidate and understand perspectives of postcolonial subjectivities.³⁸ It is therefore our intent to disrupt rather than reinforce conceptions of Latinos as a monolithic group and to emphasize that this discourse on spir-

ituality is grounded within particular social, historic, and cultural contexts. While avoiding essentialist categorization, we seek to identify and explore aspects of spirituality that reflect shared cultural and historical experiences of Latina/o people.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Latina feminist theology informed the theoretical perspective for this study.^{18,39-42} This perspective recognizes that spirituality among Latinas/os is intricately woven within the historical events of Spanish/Christian colonization of the indigenous people of Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Latinos of the Americas embody this shared history of colonization, which has an impact on cultural and spiritual perspectives and values.¹⁸ Religious symbols, rituals, and meanings that exist within the structure of organized Hispanic Catholicism are mixed with the influences of indigenous cultural roots. Thus, the cultural and spiritual lives of Latinos are reflective of the survival and struggle of a marginalized people that began with European Christian subjugation, and continues today. Hiniyosa^{19(p155)} emphasizes that "a core issue facing every Hispanic, whether he or she be of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or of other Latin American extraction, is how to relate to the dominant culture and to one's culture of origin. Many issues in the spirituality of Hispanic Americans, as such, relate to this core issue."

Spirituality among Latinas/os: Historical influences

The historical events of colonization have continuing effects on Latino people today. Oppression based on racial category, ethnicity, class, language, and immigration status is a lived reality for many Latinos and is linked to ongoing socioeconomic, educational, and health disparities for Latino groups.^{25,39,43} Liberation theology emerged from the perspectives and needs of marginalized Latinos. As a religious and political movement,

liberation theology gained credence in Latin America and then the United States primarily from the work of the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez.²⁶ Christian love and compassion for the suffering experienced by the poor motivated this specific theological discourse and strategy for liberation from oppressive structures within dominant societies. Discourse within liberation theology reflects an integral understanding that love, justice, and equality are inseparable.

Latina theologians critique liberation theology for ignoring the oppression of women by emphasizing transformation of global structures of injustice while neglecting the daily injustice of women in the home as well in the larger society.^{39,42} Foundational to a Latino theological perspective is the importance of spiritual experiences of Latina women because in Latino culture women have a fundamental, albeit formally unrecognized, role in shaping the spiritual perspective of the family. For many Latinos, the women in the family are the ones who inculcate values and keep religious rituals alive.²⁰⁻²² While the structure of Latino families may have a patriarchal exterior, the foundational base is often formed by the influence of the mother, grandmother, or other female figures.⁴⁴ Spirituality is conceptualized as a personal self-actualizing struggle that is not individualistic but rather entails a lifelong collective responsibility for the well-being of self, family, and community. Finally, this theological perspective emphasizes liberation from oppression for all people (not only women) and that spirituality is integral to surviving and maintaining integrity in the daily struggles of life.

Spirituality among Latinas/os: Cultural influences

Despite forces of transnational migration that may blur geopolitical boundaries, there are some enduring cultural values among Latinos in which their faith experiences are embedded. *Personalismo* is an important Latino cultural value that is characterized by warmth, closeness, and empathy in one's re-

lationship with others. In faith experiences, this translates to a direct and intimate relationship with one's conception of a universal being, which may include Christian concepts of God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and/or various saints.

Another Latino core cultural value that influences spirituality is *familismo*, which is characterized by an enduring commitment and loyalty to immediate and extended family members.⁴⁴ Faith experiences are often embedded in one's relationship with the family and members of the community, which may or may not include involvement with the church. The role of women in the family and local community is a key component.

Popular religiosity

Given that Catholicism was forced upon indigenous people of the Americas during European conquests, it is not surprising that most Latinos identify as Roman Catholic; in the United States about 75% to 90% of Latinos are Catholic.⁴⁵ There has been an increasing trend toward evangelical Pentecostalism in the United States and particularly in Latin American countries.^{23,46} Not all Latinos, however, relate to Christianity; some may be atheist or agnostic, or they may identify with non-Christian faith traditions. Nevertheless, within the context of religious denominational diversity, Latinos tend to have an active, intimate relationship with their conception of God, and popular religiosity is a prevalent value.

Popular religiosity, or the blending of indigenous beliefs and practices with Christianity, is practiced by a majority of Latinos and is reflective of the historical contexts of their countries of origin.¹⁸ Latino theological scholars describe the origins of popular religiosity as beginning with apparitions of the Virgin Mary to an Aztec Indian in the pueblo of Tepeyac, near present-day Mexico City in 1531.⁴⁷ She is referred to as *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Our Lady of Guadalupe), and for many Mexicans and Mexican Americans, she represents the Virgin Mary. Some Latino

historians and postcolonial scholars point out that Our Lady of Guadalupe represents the Aztec Goddess *Tonantzin Coatllalopeuh*, who had been worshiped by indigenous people at a temple in Tepeyac prior to European subjugation.³⁸

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe may serve as both a religious and a cultural symbol. As a religious symbol, Our Lady of Guadalupe is seen not as subservient to God but rather as a metaphor for God, representing God's qualities of a loving, comforting, and maternal presence. She gives dignity, strength, and empowerment to people, but it is a "power with," not a "power over," people.^{18(p156)} As a cultural symbol, she represents the survival of a people and resistance to oppression by the dominant society: "Guadalupe represents the very icon of the *raza* (race) for Mexicans and other Latin Americans: the fact that God did not abandon the pueblo in the face of Spanish oppression and slavery."^{48(p165)}

In Catholic Church doctrine, the Virgin Mary has traditionally been venerated as a divine being, free of "original sin," whose role is to serve as an intermediary between humans and God.^{49(p355)} Latina theologians have reinterpreted traditional, patriarchal Christian images of the Virgin Mary from a symbol of sacrificial subservience (*Marianismo*) to a conceptualization of ideal womanhood more reflective of the actual roles many Latinas embody in their families and communities; that is, as a symbol of strength, dignity, and autonomy.^{18,24} For both Latino men and women, a personal and intimate relationship with the Virgin Mary or Our Lady of Guadalupe, developed through prayer, facilitates empowerment in the face of daily life struggles.

Protestant Latinos may relate to the Virgin of Guadalupe only as a cultural symbol, not a religious one.⁵⁰ Catholic Latinos may refer to the Virgin as more "mother and godlike" than Protestants and may have an intimate, personal bond with the Virgin of Guadalupe, Jesus, and a variety of saints, which is integral to their experience of spirituality.^{51(p631)} There are also differences in conceptualiza-

tion of the Virgin Mary according to level of assimilation. Latinos who were more culturally embedded in Mexican society referred to the Virgin Mary as "Our Mother," whereas more assimilated Mexican Americans viewed her as "the Mother of Jesus" or simply "Mary."^{18(p125)}

LSPS ITEM DEVELOPMENT

Items for the LSPS were developed from Latino theological perspectives and cultural values as described above. The Latino value of *personalismo* was represented by items about one's everyday relationship with God and with cultural and religious symbols, such as Jesus, Our Lady of Guadalupe, or personal saints (see Table 1 for list of items). The value of *familismo* was represented by items about the role of family and community, as well as feeling connected with deceased family members. Items were also developed that reflected a sense of empowerment gained from one's relationship with God. Additional items were developed related to negative conceptualizations of God because empirical studies in the psychology of religious coping have indicated that a negative or punishing conceptualization of God may be associated with poorer mental health outcomes.⁵ These items were reversed coded ("I believe God punishes me when I do something wrong" and "When something terrible happens, I feel angry with God"). An important point to consider is that because Latinos are not a monolithic group, there are some for whom this questionnaire may not be relevant, particularly those Latinos who identify as non-Christian or atheist.

Testing of the LSPS

The LSPS is a 23-item, 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *disagree strongly* to 6 = *agree strongly*) that focuses on one's relationship with the divine and how spiritual perspective manifests in one's daily life. Initial testing of the LSPS was done only with bilingual and English-speaking participants. Validation of the LSPS in Spanish is underway.

Table 1. Factor analysis of LSPS (Item loadings 3.0 or greater, using PrC with Varimax rotation) (N = 95)

| Item content | F 1 | F 2 | F 3 | F 4 | F 5 | F 6 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Helping family part of spirituality | 0.783 | | | | | |
| My spirituality gets me through bad times | 0.775 | | | | | |
| I feel close to God | 0.765 | | | | | |
| God is loving/kind | 0.747 | | | | | |
| My spirituality guides to do right thing | 0.702 | | | | | |
| I depend on God | 0.637 | | | | | |
| Talk daily with God | 0.608 | | | | | |
| I feel grateful | 0.578 | | | | | |
| It's pointless to figure out purpose in life | 0.502 | | | | | 0.445 |
| My spirituality helps me to understand suffering | 0.486 | | 0.401 | 0.394 | | |
| Talk daily to Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe | | 0.839 | | | | |
| Feel close to Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe | | 0.819 | | | | |
| I depend on Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe | | 0.797 | | | | |
| I help church/community at least once a month | | | 0.769 | | | |
| I think about meaning of my life | | | 0.735 | | | |
| Doing something about injustice is part of my spr | | | 0.562 | | | |
| Bad things mean God teaching a lesson | | | | 0.647 | | |
| My well-being is in God's hands | | | | 0.604 | | |
| I solve my own problems | | | | 0.551 | | |
| Relationships continue with deceased | | | | | 0.921 | |
| I feel close to deceased | | | | | 0.887 | |
| God punishes for wrong doings | | | | | | 0.814 |
| Angry with God when bad things happen | | | | | | 0.792 |

High scores indicate a strong spiritual perspective. A 6-point Likert-type scale was chosen to increase variability of responses and to decrease equivocation or neutrality in the response categories.⁵² The LSPS reading level is between 6th and 7th grade (per Flesch-Kincaid readability statistics in Microsoft Word 2005).

Method

On the basis of literature from Latino theology and the psychology of religious coping, 4 subscales were identified a priori: Subscale 1, *personal relationship with the divine*, measures the respondents' quality of relationship with one or more "divine beings," including God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, or saints. Subscale 2, *assumptive view of God*, focuses on conceptualization

of God as either loving or punishing. Subscale 3, *empowerment*, refers to how one's spiritual perspective enhances everyday life, including relationships with the family and community. Subscale 4, *existentialism*, focuses on the meaning of life, suffering, and relationships with the deceased. Content validity of the scale was achieved through review of the instrument by 5 bilingual/bicultural Latina nurses for clarity and appropriateness of questions. The questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample of 156 Hispanic nurses at a 2-day nursing conference in Puerto Rico; 95 nurses completed the LSPS, resulting in a response rate of 61%.

RESULTS

All 95 participants who completed the questionnaire were female, predominantly

bilingual in English/Spanish (77%), and Catholic (74%). The next most frequent denominational category was "None or Other" (10%). This sample was highly educated (59% master's degree or higher), with middle-to upper-income levels (64% had a family income of \$50,000 or greater). The mean age was 46 years old (range of 21-87 years). Approximately 33% were Mexican or Mexican American; 26% were Puerto Rican, living predominantly on the US mainland; 21% were Puerto Rican, living predominantly on the island of Puerto Rico; 11% were Central or South American; 4% were Cuban; and 2% identified as "other." Thirty-nine percent of the women attended church services once a week or more, while 64% engaged in daily prayer outside church. The most frequent reason for church attendance was to obtain physical, emotional, or spiritual healing (58%), and the next most frequent reason was to feel close to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or other divine being (55%). The LSPS mean item score was 4.6 (6 = highest maximum item score).

Reliability estimates for the LSPS

Psychometric evaluation of the LSPS was done using the Statistical Manual for Social Sciences 12.0 program. Cronbach α for the total scale was acceptable at .88. The alpha for split-half reliability was also acceptable at .90. The K-S Lillifor's test ($P = .200$) revealed variability of scores for the total scale; scores were, however, clustered toward the high end of the scale. This ceiling effect is not surprising, given the importance of spirituality among Latino populations. Subscale 1 (personal relationship with the divine) and Subscale 3 (empowerment), which have the strongest links to the Latino theological perspective, had the highest item-total correlations (ranging from 0.41-0.77). Cronbach α for these 2 subscales was also moderately high ($\alpha = .88$ and $.75$). The lowest item-total correlations (ranging from 0.09-0.23) were in Subscales 2 and 4 (assumptive view of God and existentialism respectively).

There were significant relationships between responses to demographic questions about religious practices and the LSPS total scores. Frequency of church attendance had a moderately strong Pearson correlation with the total scores ($r = 0.53$, $P = .000$), as did frequency of discussion of religious or spiritual beliefs ($r = 0.55$, $P = .000$). Frequency of prayer outside church had a stronger association with the total LSPS scores ($r = 0.62$, $P = .000$). There were no significant associations between the total LSPS scores and respondents' age, education, income, religious denomination, generation level, or country/place of origin (eg, Mexico, Puerto Rico).

The majority of women in this sample identified as bilingual (77%). Nearly half (49%) of the women spoke Spanish always or most of the time in the home. The frequency of speaking Spanish in the home was significantly correlated with total LSPS scale scores ($r = 0.32$, $P < .01$). While language alone is not a sufficient measure of cultural embeddedness, this finding suggests that the LSPS may be relevant for less acculturated Latinas. A more thorough assessment of acculturation, however, is needed in future validation testing.

Validity estimates for the LSPS

Estimates for construct validity were obtained through exploratory factor analysis using the principal components method. Exploratory factor analysis is appropriate at beginning stages of instrument development, although confirmatory factor analysis is often utilized when evaluating the fit of hypothesized subscales.⁵³ Confirmatory factor analysis and latent variable modeling could be utilized in the next stage of evaluation to specify a substantive and statistical alternative model.

The 4 subscales theorized a priori were not supported by the factor analysis, as items from the subscales did not load together. Implications of this will be discussed further in the next section. Principal components extraction with Varimax rotation produced 6 factors with eigenvalues of 5.0 or greater, explaining 70% of the total variance. All the

factors met the recommended standard of at least 2 items per factor,⁵⁴ with cross-loadings of less than 2.0 for only 2 items. The 2 variables that had cross-loadings were "It's pointless to figure out the purpose in life" and "My spirituality helps me to understand why there is suffering in life."

A 6-factor solution indicates the possibility that more than one construct is being measured, which will require further validation testing. Theoretically interesting patterns, however, emerged from item loadings in the first 2 factors. For example, the proposed subscale *personal relationship with the divine* contained 6 items. They included 3 items about feeling close to God, talking daily with God, and depending on God and 3 items about feeling close to, talking daily with, and depending on Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe, or saints. Each of these items hypothetically represents varying aspects of people's connection with transcendent or religiously symbolic beings, and all were hypothesized to belong to a single subscale. Nevertheless, the 3 items pertaining to respondents' relationship with God loaded on factor 1, and the 3 items about relationship with Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, or saints loaded on factor 2 (Table 1). Therefore, although each of the 3 items about relationship with God correlated with the 3 items about relationship with other "divine beings," they still generated separate factors. Items pertaining to respondents' assumptive view of God as punishing or angry loaded separately on factor 6. These separate factors may represent different aspects of respondents' personal relationship with their conceptions of divine beings, though it is not clear how these relationships may differ in their everyday faith experiences. The loading of the items about relationship with God and other religiously symbolic beings on 2 separate factors does, however, seem to mirror Catholic beliefs about the specific roles for the Virgin Mary and saints as intermediaries to deliver prayers and petitions to God.

Items contained in factors 3-5 did not load according to the hypothesized subscales.

Further validation testing will be done to examine patterns in factor analysis among other Latina/o populations and to determine whether subscales are relevant or necessary in this questionnaire.

Exploring relationships with the Divine

Latino theological literature and empirical studies in healthcare among Latinos emphasize the importance of relationship with God in one's everyday faith experiences. Items in factors 1 and 2 in the current study warrant further exploration because they pertain to aspects of relationship with God and other divine beings. To further explore these items, we examined inter-item correlations in factors 1 and 2 (Table 2). The strongest inter-item correlations in factor 1 were between the item "My spirituality gets me through bad times" and the 3 items about relationship with God ("I feel close to God," $r = 0.75$; "I talk daily with God," $r = 0.76$; "I depend on God," $r = 0.73$). In factor 2, items about relationship with other divine beings ("Jesus, Virgin Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe, saints") were also significantly correlated with "My spirituality gets me through bad times," but the correlations were not as strong (range = 0.46-0.52).

Multiple regression was then performed using the 6 items pertaining to relationship with God and other divine beings, with the item "My spirituality gets me through bad times" as the dependent variable. Each of the items pertaining to women's relationship with God predicted the dependent variable, while none of the items about relationship with other divine beings were significant (Table 3).

Another item in factor 1 that significantly correlated with the items pertaining to relationships with God and other divine beings was "Helping my family is an important part of my spirituality." Multiple regression, however, revealed only the items pertaining to "feeling close to" God ($\beta = .40$, $P = .01$) and "feeling close to" other divine beings ($\beta = .30$, $P = .05$; Jesus, Virgin Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe, and saints) related to the dependent variable "Helping my family is an important part of my spirituality."

Table 2. Pearson correlation between item “getting through bad times” and relationship with god/other divine beings ($N = 92$)

| | My spirituality helps get me through bad times |
|--|--|
| My spirituality helps me get through bad times | 1 |
| I feel close to God/higher power | 0.75* |
| Talking daily to God/higher power is important to me | 0.76* |
| I feel close to Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, or saints | 0.46* |
| Talking daily to Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, saints is important to me | 0.52* |
| I depend on God/higher power to help me | 0.73* |
| I depend on Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, saints to help me | 0.52* |

* $P < .000$.

DISCUSSION

This sample of Latina nurses scored high on the LSPS, suggesting the presence of a strong spiritual perspective in their lives. This finding is consistent with other studies that demonstrate the importance of spirituality among women in general⁵⁵ and Latinos in particular.^{27,29,30} The women in this study were similar to the US Latino population¹⁶ in that the majority identified as Catholic (74%) and were foreign-born (45%). They were dissimilar to other US Latinos in their high education and income levels. In con-

Table 3. Regression coefficients for “getting through bad times” and relationship with god and other divine beings (Dependent variable: My spirituality helps me get through bad times.) ($N = 92$)*

| Independent variable | Standardized beta (unstandardized beta) |
|--|---|
| Feel close to God | 0.307 [†] (0.365) |
| Talk daily to God | 0.312 [†] (0.290) |
| Depend on God | 0.344 [‡] (0.298) |
| Feel close to Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, saints | -0.018 (-0.013) |
| Talk daily to Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, saints | -0.099 (-0.066) |
| Depend on Jesus, Mary, Guadalupe, saints | 0.105 (0.073) |

*Adjusted $R^2 = 0.694$.[†] $P < .01$.[‡] $P < 0.001$.

trast to other studies of spirituality among Latinos,²⁷⁻³⁰ this sample had a much higher representation of Puerto Ricans (47%) than Mexican Americans/Mexicans (33%). This is most likely due to sampling during a conference in Puerto Rico. Certain demographic variables (Latino subgroup, religious denomination, age, education, income, and immigration level) had no association with the total LSPS scores, indicating that a strong spiritual perspective was consistent across demographic categories. Church attendance, a variable that is associated with health and longevity,⁸ was significantly related to total LSPS scores. Personal prayer outside church, however, was the demographic variable that had the strongest relationship with total scale scores.

There is initial evidence for the LSPS as a culturally relevant measure. In this sample of women, frequency of speaking Spanish in the home (as a measure of cultural

embeddedness) was significantly related to higher total scale scores. Findings from a current validation study of the LSPS showed significantly higher scores among both male and female Latino college students compared to non-Latinos, regardless of Catholic denomination. Higher LSPS scores were also significantly related to frequency of speaking Spanish in the home and to a stronger identification with Latino culture (M. Campesino et al, unpublished data, 2005).

Strengths of the LSPS

A strength of the LSPS is that it is grounded in theory. Two of the proposed subscales, *personal relationship with the divine* and *empowerment*, contain items that are reflective of Latino theological perspectives^{18,39-42} and cultural values of *personalismo* and *familismo*. These items focused on a close, personal relationship with God and other divine beings and the importance of spirituality as a resource for the self, family, and one's larger community. Even though these items did not group together as subscales in the factor analysis, they were important in the total scale, as respondents scored high on them. These are items that are not present in current spiritual perspective instruments and may reflect values that are relevant for Latino populations.

Consistent with Latino theological literature, the women in this sample indicated strong relational connections with religiously and culturally symbolic beings, such as the Virgin Mary or Our Lady of Guadalupe. The meaning of the women's relationship with God and their conception of these "other divine beings," however, warrants further investigation. Items exploring the respondents' relationship with God loaded on the first factor, along with items pertaining to an intrinsic use of faith, such as the importance of spirituality in helping one get through bad times and guiding one to do the right thing. Items about the respondents' relationship with Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe, or personal saints, which all loaded on the second factor, had no predictive role in these particular aspects of faith.

One interpretation of these findings is that women related to their conception of other divine beings in a way that is different from their relationship with God. But it is not clear what differences there are among these relationships, because "other divine beings" (Jesus, Virgin Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe, saints) were all grouped together in the same item. Murphy⁴⁹ points out that the main role for the Virgin Mary and the variety of saints in Catholicism and popular religiosity is to serve as advocates or intermediaries to carry one's prayers to God. Whatever role other divine beings had for the respondents, the results suggest that the women in this sample may conceive of God as the ultimate being to call upon when in trouble or when coping with difficulties in life.

When it comes to helping one's family, however, the respondents' affective relationship with God as well as other divine beings became salient. Multiple regression showed that the items "feeling close to" God and "feeling close to" other divine beings (Jesus, Virgin Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe, saints) all predicted scores on the item "My spirituality is an important part of helping my family." Religious symbols such as pictures and statues of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or Our Lady of Guadalupe are often displayed prominently in many Latino Catholic homes. Possibly an intimate, feeling connection with both God and these other divine beings is experienced as important in providing assistance, protection, and blessings in a familial environment. Thus, while a close relationship with God may be most salient when it comes to personal coping, a felt connection with Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or Our Lady of Guadalupe may be part of "*la familia*" or ones' intimate family group. In another validation study of the LSPS, these items on religiously symbolic beings have been separated to determine their unique role in contributing to spiritual perspectives among Latinos.

There are several limitations to this study. These data reveal the spiritual perspectives of one select subgroup of Latinas: well-educated, female professionals with relatively high-income levels. While their education and

income levels were higher than the average Latina/o in the United States, the sample was similar to the national profile of Latinos in their religious denomination and immigration status. Validation testing of the LSPS is currently being conducted among a wider variety of Latino samples, including males, monolingual and bilingual Spanish-speakers, community-based samples, and Latinos with health illnesses to assess its utility for other Latino populations.

Another limitation in this study was the lack of thorough assessment of acculturation levels and English-language comprehension. While the majority of the women reported they were bilingual (and they all had passed the NCLEX-RN examination in English), it is not clear how comfortable respondents were with an exclusively English-language questionnaire. The LSPS is currently being tested in Spanish. The role of culture was more thoroughly assessed in a current validation study of the LSPS. Preliminary results from this study revealed that the stronger the Latino cultural identification, the higher the LSPS total scale score (M. Campesino et al, unpublished data, 2005). This finding supports the premise that Latino cultural values influence spiritual perspectives.

Finally, the limitations of instrumentation in elucidating complex human phenomena and perspectives need to be considered. Methodological triangulation using both qualitative and quantitative approaches is likely to yield more holistic understandings of how culture relates to spirituality among Latinos. All research findings, whether using qualitative, quantitative, or triangulated methods, must be contextualized within the social, cultural, and historical conditions of the study population to be useful and meaningful.

Implications

Healthcare professionals are increasingly recognizing the importance of spirituality in health, illness, and well-being across a variety of populations. As immigration and transnational migration between the United States and Latin American countries continue to rise, culturally relevant conceptualizations

of spirituality among these populations becomes increasingly salient.

Latina Christian theologians^{18,39-42} have found that many Latinas, while identifying with the Catholic faith, have an active, engaged spirituality grounded in their daily lives that may not include involvement with the Catholic Church. These theologians emphasize that spirituality among Latinas/os is often expressed through Latino culture. The Latino cultural values of *personalismo* and *simpático* (close, affectionate relationships) provide the context for an active and personal connection with God. This connection helps one to overcome personal and family hardships and gives one the strength to work for the social betterment of the community. Results of this study support Latino theological perspectives regarding the integral role spirituality has in peoples' lives, a role that may function independently of the Catholic Church structure. Daily personal prayer outside church, endorsed by 64% of the sample, occurred more frequently than church attendance, a finding that may be indicative of an intrinsic spiritually based life. Other LSPS items related to an intrinsically based spirituality were also highly endorsed, such as items about the importance of spirituality in guiding behavior, as a source of personal strength, and as part of one's relationship with the family and community. Three aspects of women's connectedness with God and other divine beings were evident in high means for the items pertaining to *feeling close to*, *talking daily with*, and *depending on* God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe, or personal saints. Spiritual perspective manifests through relationality on many levels, including familial, communal, and with the transcendent.

It would be inaccurate to assume that all Latinos who identify with Christianity and the Catholic Church are merely laboring under an unexamined colonized legacy of Christian religious subjugation. There are many Latina and non-Latina feminist Christians who are vocal in their critique of the various forms of oppression within the Catholic Church and seek to transform it.^{40,41,56,57} Latinas/os living in

socially marginalized communities describe a deeply felt, intimate connection with their spirituality, which functions as a vital personal resource for survivorship and resistance to the onslaught of domination, inequities, and racism that characterizes modern-day colonialism.⁵⁸

Researchers studying religious or spiritual perspectives among Latinos may obtain a more relevant, accurate understanding of their faith experiences if Latino cultural values are incorporated in the study design and mea-

surement. For example, abstract and vague questions such as "Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?"^{59(p422)} may not have as much relevancy for Latinos as asking concrete questions about their relationship with God or engagement in personal or family prayer. Conceptualizations of spirituality that are contextualized within the cultural realities of the population being studied will facilitate a deeper understanding of the faith experiences of diverse groups and better inform global healthcare research and practice.

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