

Research on Strong Marriages in the Latino Culture

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My research goal was to understand, from a cultural perspective, what made marriages strong in the Latino culture. I wanted to interview 25 Latino couples who had strong marriages and use the information to develop culturally appropriate marriage education.



I knew that developing a sense of trust with couples in the Latino culture to the extent that couples would participate in the interviews would be difficult to do. The process I used to accomplish this was to first volunteer in a Latino computer literacy class at Logan High School. Volunteering accomplished two things: 1) I became knowledgeable about the Latino population in Logan where I planned to get my sample of couples, and 2) It provided a way for me to become known in the Latino community and give something before I asked for something. I also interviewed eight Latino community leaders or people who worked with the Latino community to ask them about the Latino population in Logan and about marriage in the Latino community. I also gained knowledge about who might help me in recruiting Latino couples for the study.

In the end, I worked with two Catholic priests and two Latino community leaders to help recruit couples. It was absolutely necessary for someone who is trusted by the Latino community to make the referral and connection to the couples. In each case the priest or community leader contacted the couple who they felt had a strong marriage and I made the follow up phone call to set up the interview. I also hired a graduate student who spoke Spanish to do most of the interviews.

Setting up the interviews and interviewing the couples took several months. Couples were usually interviewed in their homes at their request and they were given a meal delivered to their home for their family as a thank you for their time and knowledge. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Interviews conducted in Spanish were translated at the same time they were transcribed by the transcriber who also spoke Spanish. The data has been analyzed and themes have emerged about what makes marriages strong in the Latino culture. The findings are different from what you would expect in the dominant culture.

The process worked well and would be considered a success. We have great data from which to develop marriage education that will fit the Latino culture. There were definitely frustrating times:

- 1) When couples needed to cancel the interview and we had to reschedule,
- 2) When we seemed to run out of people who could refer us to couples, and
- 3) When the tape recorder did not work and we lost an entire interview.

However, the positive things that happened were definitely in greater abundance. Some of those wonderful things included:

- 1) Being asked to stay and share the meal that we were providing,
- 2) Being overwhelmed with emotion as I listened to a Latino man tell me how important his marriage was to him as the tears rolled down his cheek,
- 3) Learning about strong families as I spent almost three hours in a very small house with nine family members and feeling the warmth and love this family had for each other. I could only concur when the husband said, “We have something to teach others.”

Probably one of the most satisfying aspects of doing this project was that I learned things about strong Latino marriages that has not currently in the literature and I think I can make a difference when I develop curriculum that truly draws on strengths of couples and families in the culture. This information has been presented to audiences where Latinos are present and they confirm that the findings are accurate. They appreciate the fact that someone has documented what they already knew.

The things that were essential in making this work was working with Latino leaders or others who work with the Latino population to recruit the couples. In fact, more than once we called the couple and if we did not use the name of the person who had contacted them on our behalf in the first sentence, the person would hang up the phone. The lack of trust on the part of people in the Latino culture is great, probably having to do with documentation issues. It is essential to work with someone who is trusted or you will get nowhere.

It is also important to have an attitude of humility and have the utmost appreciation for the experts from the culture who will teach you what you need to know. Enter the community with respect and listen, watch and learn. There is so much they will teach you.

It is also important to realize that sometimes things do not always happen on a university timetable when working with diverse populations. Patience is necessary. It will happen when it is supposed to happen. Looking back on how the study was done, I do not believe I would change anything.

A major cost in doing interviews is the cost of transcription and possibly translation. Make sure you have the funds to accomplish this.

If someone else wanted to do something similar to what I have done and they are not Latino, I would suggest they start making contacts and learning about leaders in the culture and the issues in the culture at least six months before they plan to start the study.