Premarital counseling and culture: A narrative inquiry of couples' insights

Sonja Stutzman
Iowa State University

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Premarital counseling and culture: A narrative inquiry of couples’ insights

by

Sonja E. Stutzman

A dissertation proposal submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Program of Study Committee:
Megan Murphy, Co-Major Professor
Susan P. Maude, Co-Major Professor
Mary Jane Brotherson
Christine Cook
Anthony Santiago

Iowa State University

Ames, IA

2011
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank the participants that agreed to be a part of this study. Your insights, sharing, and commitment to the study are so valuable to me and are much appreciated. You have all helped me along in my own personal journey to understanding Latino/a culture better and I hope I have portrayed your stories and thoughts in a way that is truthful.

Next I would like to thank my co-major professors and the committee. Dr. Murphy, you have been a mentor and an inspiration to me for the past four years. Your commitment to teaching, mentoring, and advising amazes me. I am grateful to your time commitments to both this study and to my professional development. Your integrity to the field of marriage and family therapy is moving. I would also like to thank my other co-major professor Dr. Maude, as you agreed to step in to a leader role on the committee in a time of transition. Your insights regarding culture have assisted me greatly. I would also like to thank Dr. Brotherson, Dr. Santiago, and Dr. Cook, as the other members of the committee, for their input and support. Also, a special thank you to Dr. Brotherson, for introducing me to the field of Human Development and to the Marriage and Family Therapy program. Without your initiative in my future I would not be in the field I am in today.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family and friends. Mom, your positive spirit and wisdom have carried me through so many difficult times. Dad, your logical thinking and work ethic provided the example to aspire to. To my grandparents, who have supported me and loved me. To my brother, step-brothers, and step-parents, you have all been there for me and I appreciate your support. Finally, to Nathan, I cannot express how
many times your support and love carried me through in the last couple of years, thank you for always listening and pushing me to be the best I can be.
ABSTRACT

Premarital counseling programs have emerged as a way to lower the chances of divorce and also to increase couple satisfaction after marriage. Premarital programs provide couples with necessary skills to enhance communication, problem solving, and decrease conflict by addressing expectations within marriage. Although these programs have been shown to be helpful to couples, they often present a “one size fits all” approach to assisting couples. This is particularly true in relation to culture and premarital counseling programs. To date, there has been a lack of attention in the literature to cultural differences within premarital programs; therefore, this study aimed to explore couples’ and therapists’ perceptions of ways Latino/a culture can be addressed within premarital counseling.

In this study, six married couples in which at least one person considered himself/herself Latino/a and three therapists that had extensive experience working with the Latino/a population were interviewed. Through a narrative approach, couples’ stories around Latino/a culture and Latino marriage were analyzed. Three major themes emerged, which were; unique aspects of Latino/a culture, Latino marriage, and premarital counseling with Latino couples. Subthemes for Latino/a culture included: dress, language, religion, tradition, and extended family. Subthemes for Latino marriage included: extended family, birth order, parenting skills, roles, communication, respect and trust, sex, and immigration. Subthemes for the premarital counseling with Latino couples included: delivery of religious influence, delivery, cost, and therapist training. The discussion addresses how themes and past literature related directly to the research questions of the current study and provides suggestions for therapists working with premarital Latino couples. Suggestions for future research include
additional research with particular ethnic groups, particular immigration groups, intercultural couples, and the structure of premarital counseling.
INTRODUCTION

Premarital counseling (PMC) has become an accepted way to assist couples in creating a healthy marriage. The emphasis on PMC began following the rise of divorce rates, as a means of decreasing marital discord and the harmful effects that divorce can have on individuals, couples, and families. Some states have gone so far as to require some form of premarital counseling prior to a wedding (Brotherson & Duncan, 2004; Murray, 2006). Despite the support for PMC within the clinical and political community, the research falls short of explaining the impact of culture for couples, such that culture has been shown to affect communication styles, customs, expectations, and roles within marriages (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Holman & Linford, 2001).

The definition and understanding of culture has changed dramatically over the past decades. Historically, culture was minimized in American society (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). In recent years, culture has been viewed as a way of accepting a person and his/her worldview. One important consideration is that culture and cultural beliefs are fluid and can change over time (Laird, 1998). Additionally, it is important to consider the uniqueness of each culture. For this reason, it is important to investigate individual cultures and the impact of each culture on individuals and couples throughout life. This study will investigate ways that Latino/a culture can be addressed within PMC. Literature has shown that unique aspects of Latino/a culture include “family unity, welfare, and honor” (Garcia-Preto, 2005, p. 162). Additionally, machismo, marianismo, and familism are overarching concepts that are linked to Latino/a culture within the literature (Garcia-Preto, 2005).

Prior to marriage, each partner has certain expectations of marital roles, customs, communication styles, and problem solving strategies. One’s family of origin provides a
blueprint for each individual’s expectations of marriage. When expectations go unmet, communication styles conflict, or role confusion occurs, leading to marital dissatisfaction. In order to alleviate marital dissatisfaction, PMC programs have attempted to address many of the factors leading to dissatisfaction, yet these programs fall short of directly addressing ways that culture may impact expectations, roles, and communication within marriage. Therefore, in this study, I attempted to understand ways that PMC can better address Latino/a culture within PMC by interviewing several couples about their insights into Latino/a culture and its link to PMC.

Problem Statement

Individuals and couples are influenced by culture (Halford et al., 2003). Consequently, culture shapes the couple’s ways of communicating, problem-solving, and performing rituals (Halford et al., 2003; Holman & Linford, 2001). Those in the field of human services have called for an increase in understanding the impact of culture on marriage for nearly two decades (Asai & Olson, 2004; Busby, Ivey, Harris, & Ates, 2007; Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Chadiha, 1992; Cherlin, 2004; Crohan & Veroff, 1989; Goddard & Olsen, 2004; Larson, 2002; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006; Ooms & Wilson, 2004; South, 1993), yet research continues to fall short of exploring the impact of culture in a therapeutic setting. Although research has shown that individuals and couples are influenced by culture (Halford et al., 2003; Holman & Linford, 2001), marriage and family therapists often scratch the surface of understanding the impact of culture for individuals, couples, and families within their initial training and continuing education (McGoldrick, Gioradano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005; Nelson et al., 2001). Therefore, research explicitly exploring culturally-centered
approaches is needed in order to assist therapists in understanding the impact of Latino/a culture and cultural topics to discuss within PMC.

Purpose

The first purpose of this study was to explore and better understand how Latino couples’ insights of PMC vary and how PMC can be more responsive to Latino/a culture. For the purpose of this study, cultural background is defined as being “profoundly influenced by social class, religion, migration, geography, gender oppression and racism, as well as by family dynamics” (McGoldrick, 2007, p. 240), whereas culture is defined as:

“An individual and social construction, a constantly evolving and changing set of meanings that can be understood only in the context of a narrativized past, a co-interpreted present, and a wished-for future. It is always contextual, emergent, improvisational, transformational, and political” (Laird, 1998, pp. 28-29).

Additionally, culture encompasses customs, race, geographic area, traditions, food, rituals, language, shared values, family of origin, and ethnicity. Culture is a contributor to the current study as it aspects of culture listed above impact one’s worldview, consequently impacting one’s expectations of their marital partner and the marriage. The second purpose was to provide information to therapists about the importance of considering culture within PMC based on Latino couples’ wants and needs from a narrative perspective. Furthermore, therapists that had expertise working with Latino couples were interviewed in order to provide an additional professional perspective.
Research Questions

1. What are Latino couples’ (and the therapists who work with these couples) insights into what is important to attend to in PMC?

2. What aspects of Latino/a culture do participants feel are important to attend to in PMC?

3. How do participants believe clinicians can craft PMC programs to be more sensitive to Latino/a culture?
LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and family therapists (MFTs) strive to help clients create and maintain healthy relationships. It is important for clinicians to understand the breadth of factors that contribute to functional and stable relationships and marriages—factors such as individual strengths and vulnerabilities, and the interactional processes between partners should be taken into consideration in conjunction with the influences of the clients’ cultural background (Bradbury & Karney, 2004; McGoldrick et al., 2005). The following sections will consider two main themes: premarital counseling and culture. These two themes are supported by several sub-themes that are described in greater detail below.

Premarital Counseling

PMC is defined as a specific type of systemic therapy aimed at assisting couples that are considering marriage. Interventions include “understanding and improving the premarital individual and couple interactional factors that can influence both quality and the stability of the marital relationship” (Holman & Linford, 2001, p. 1). This section provides insight into the structural elements of PMC. More specifically, I discuss the influences of individual and dyadic characteristics of clients, PMC programs, and the delivery of a PMC services. It is essential for PMC providers to understand these factors, as they provide guidelines, knowledge, and awareness of the clients’ needs.

Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics are defined by historical and personal experiences (Halford et al., 2003), and encompass each partner’s relationship history, family of origin structure, physical and mental health, ability to manage stress, emotional readiness, sociability,
flexibility, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, conventionality, and context (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004; Halford et al., 2003; Holman & Linford, 2001; Larson, 2002). Relationship history refers to the parental relationship that the couple observed in childhood, adolescence, and the present day (Halford et al., 2003). Relationship history affects the couple’s current relationship, such that couples who had parents that were not divorced and displayed low levels of conflict reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Halford et al., 2003).

Family of origin provides the blueprint for an individual’s understanding of conflict management, relationship interaction, and communication styles (Halford et al., 2003; Holman & Linford, 2001); this blueprint influences the worldview held by individuals. When each partner’s values regarding aspects of the blueprint do not coincide, or are not understood by the partner, greater levels of conflict and lower relationship satisfaction occur (Halford et al., 2003). For example, if the woman in the relationship is raised to believe that the man apologizes after a fight first but the man is raised to believe that the woman should always apologize; escalating conflict is likely to occur.

Stress is a natural part of the life course. One’s ability to effectively manage stressors consequently impacts problem-solving, coping, and communication with others in intimate relationships. Ineffective stress management is related to lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004; Larson, 2002). Several factors are related to enhanced stress management in couples, including emotional readiness, sociability, flexibility, self-esteem, reciprocity, interpersonal skills, and conventionality; these factors have all been linked to increased relationship satisfaction, and thus reduced levels of stress.

Emotional readiness defines the individual’s willingness to commit to a marriage. Sociability, flexibility, and self-esteem contribute to how individuals relate to one another
(Holman & Linford, 2001; Larson, 2002). Higher levels of these traits create reciprocity among couples, which is correlated with greater levels of relationship satisfaction (Holman & Linford, 2001; Larson, 2002). Interpersonal skills such as assertiveness have been shown to contribute to the healthy formation of close long-term relationships (Holman & Linford, 2001; Larson, 2002). In addition, individuals who are conventional are more likely to participate in traditional rituals (e.g., wedding ceremonies, honeymoons, couple rituals), which are positively correlated with marital satisfaction (Larson, 2002).

Halford et al. (2003) emphasized the significance of the cultural context for the individual and the couple. The context in which an individual was reared has implications for the expectations, assumptions, and beliefs about the marital relationship (Halford et al., 2003). Incongruent expectations of roles, rituals, socialization, and communication may lead to higher levels of discontent within intimate relationships (Halford et al., 2003).

**Dyadic Characteristics**

Dyadic traits are defined by interactional processes that two people engage in (Holman & Linford, 2001). The interactional processes are operationally delineated through cognitive and behavioral aspects of the couple’s relationship (Halford et al., 2003). Within PMC these processes include couple interaction, support, communication styles, and homogamy which provide the premarital counselor with a better understanding of the couple’s patterns (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004; Halford et al., 2003; Holman & Linford, 2001). Bodenmann and Shantinath (2004) highlighted the importance of support among couples in their literature review of longitudinal quantitative research. For example, couples that provide supportive dyadic coping to one another through helping one another, expressing belief in one another, and using empathic listening report higher levels of relationship
satisfaction. Although a quantitative understanding of conflict and support is established, qualitative research is limited, especially when consideration is given to the ways that conflict and support may be impacted by one’s cultural background.

The quantitative literature has shown that healthy communication among intimate partners is a strong predictor of relationship and marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1994; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Healthy communication is defined by one’s openness with his/her partner, the ability to discuss particular issues and behaviors that bother him/her, and request changes without criticizing (Nichols, 2007). Homogamy refers to similarity of couple traits and couple expectations of the marital relationship. Higher levels of homogamy are correlated with higher levels of marital satisfaction (Larson, 2002). Couple traits may include similarity in age, race, background, education level, and socioeconomic status (Larson, 2002). The gender roles, parenting roles, and household responsibilities that were carried out in the family of origin influence expectations of roles within the current marital relationship (Holman & Linford, 2001; Larson, 2002). Culture shapes the levels of homogamy among couples, such that one’s cultural background influences how much one is “like” his/her partner (Quinn & Gacigalupe, 2009). Consequently, levels of homogamy impact how couples communicate. For example, Hispanic men are often seen as the dominant figure within the relationship and may be expected to financially provide for the family. This expectation may never be communicated verbally, as it has been engrained into the individual from observing family and community members (Quinn & Gacigalupe, 2009).

Individual and dyadic traits are an important consideration in PMC as they affect the ways that the couple understands themselves and others around them. The importance of individual and dyadic expectations of the marital relationship should not be underestimated
by researchers or clinicians as they provide insight into the inner workings of the individual and couple. The majority of research conducted on individual and dyadic characteristics within couples therapy has been quantitative, therefore losing the thick descriptions of individuals’ and couples’ experiences within counseling. Furthermore, the cultural background of participants is often not reported in quantitative studies, which contributes to a lack of understanding of how culture plays a role in the couple’s relationship. This may occur as culture is difficult to report within quantitative studies due to the multitude of factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, values, SES, education, customs) contributing to one’s culture.

*Premarital Counseling Programs*

The following section outlines overarching PMC principles, characteristics, and topics. The focus of PMC is to prepare a couple for a lifelong relationship. In general, PMC programs are based on two principles: preventing future problems for couples and providing couples with skills-based training (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Dyer 2004; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008; Stahmann, 2000). Halford et al. (2003) report that there are four main components of relationship education, “awareness, feedback, cognitive change, and skills training” (p. 390). Awareness focuses on expectations of the future roles (e.g., household roles, financial roles, parenting roles) within the relationship (Halford et al., 2003). Feedback between the couple and other social supports, such as family members, church members, and community members, provides the couple with an understanding of how communication occurs. Cognitive change addresses how individuals think certain events, beliefs, situations, or patterns will unfold within their marriage. Skills training entails teaching clients about “positive communication, conflict
management, and positive expressions of affection…partner empathy…self-regulation…commitment, respect, love and friendship” (Halford et al., 2003, pp. 390-391).

In an addition to his previous work, Halford et al. (2004) suggest that relationship topics such as realistic standards of marriage, awareness that there may be difficult times when the couple will need to identify and work through problems, willingness to make sacrifices for one’s partner, impact of the social environment (i.e., children, community, contribution of the couple to the community and society, family of origin), definitions of commitment and the motivations behind commitment, and virtues such as generosity, justice, and loyalty to the marital relationship should be emphasized within all PMC programs. Halford et al. (2004) do not mention ways that culture may affect couples’ perceptions of marriage.

There are numerous PMC programs that exist (Stahmann, 2000). The following paragraphs describe five of the most widely used programs. The Relationship Enhancement Program (REP) is the most broad and one of the first PMC programs to be established. The REP emphasizes “increasing caring, giving, understanding, honesty, openness, trust, sharing, compassion and harmony” (Stahmann, 2000, p. 108). The strengths-based REP is delivered to groups of couples with the aim of helping couples deal with distress that occurs in marriage by teaching them about the above topics (Stahmann, 2000). Couples are also encouraged to take an REP inventory, which shows the couples’ strengths and weaknesses of their relationship (Premarriage counseling: Skills for a lifetime of love, n.d.). The REP is provided to large groups of couples in a lecture format for the duration of one weekend or one day. In addition to the larger group lectures, couples receive one individual session with
a counselor (Premarriage counseling: Skills for a lifetime of love, n.d.). Information regarding reliability and validity for the RE program were not able to be found.

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), a problem-focused model, teaches couples how to avoid entrenchment of problems and that behaviors can change with work (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992). These two main ideas are accentuated through an emphasis on conflict management, the use of active listening, gender roles, problem solving, core issues of expectations, commitment, forgiveness, intimacy, and enhancement of friendships, fun, sex and belief systems (Stahmann, 2000). PREP is delivered in two different formats: first, a six week program that provides information to small groups of six to eight couples in an interactive lecture format; and second, a weekend program which provides information to larger groups of twenty to forty couples (Renick et al., 1992). Studies regarding the reliability of the PREP program have shown an alpha composite score of .81 for internal reliability of the four subscales of the assessment (i.e., marital expectations, personal readiness, partner readiness, and couple readiness), suggesting high internal consistency (McGeorge & Carlson, 2006). This study did not report on the demographics of the population sampled.

The PREmarital Personal And Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE) focuses on “marriage expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parents, family and friends, role relationship, and spiritual beliefs” (Stahmann, 2000, p. 109). The PREPARE program begins by having couples fill out a 195-item questionnaire that guides the remaining sessions of PMC (Stahmann, 2000). Computerized scores then lead the therapist through the Building a Strong Marriage Workbook that targets the couple’s strengths and problem areas (Olson &
Olson, 2000; Stahmann, 2000). The PREPARE program is estimated to last three sessions, but can be longer depending on the needs of the couple. The therapist meets with the couple in a more traditional couples counseling setting (i.e., one counselor and one couple). PREPARE has shown to have an alpha composite score of .79 for internal reliability for their premarital inventories used, suggesting high internal consistency (Olson & Olson, 2000). Studies regarding PREPARE were able to show predictions the accuracy of couples satisfaction and likelihood of experiencing difficulty with 80 % to 85% accuracy (Olson & Olson, 2000). The sample size for this national study was 250,000. It was reported that couples in the study were from various ethnic groups, but specific ethnicities were not provided (Olson & Olson, 2000).

The Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) concentrates on “attitudes and beliefs about love between partners, helping couples understand individual and partner knowledge of self, emotional efficacy, and teaching couples the skills to change ineffective behaviors that drain emotional intimacy” (Gordon, Temple, & Adams, 2005, p. 8). This program begins with an assessment in which couples meet with a therapist or trained professional in a traditional couples counseling setting. Couples are interviewed together (approximately four hours total) and separately (1 hour each). Couples explore their own beliefs and attitudes towards marriage as well as their partner’s (Gordon et al., 2005). Following the initial assessment and teaching of initial skills the counselor recommends that the couple either participate in a four month course, a one day retreat, or a two day retreat. The retreats are set up in a larger group lecture format where couples learn about skills and then apply them on their own. The four month course is a traditional couples counseling setting (Gordon et al., 2005). The PAIRS program has shown to have an alpha composite
score of .94 for reliability, suggesting high internal consistency (Eisenberg, Peluso, & Schindler, 2001). The PAIRS program utilized the pre and post-test scores from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to show reliabilities of the approach used. Post test scores were collected six months and one year following the completion of the PAIRS program. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale has four subscales to show relationship satisfaction (i.e., cohesion, consensus, satisfaction, and affectional expression. The demographics for this study are reported as follows: 68% Hispanic, 16% White, and 33% Black (Eisenberg, Peluso, & Schindler, 2001).

The RELATIONship Evaluation (RELATE) program focuses on personality characteristics, values, attitudes, beliefs, family background, and relationship experiences (Holman, Larson, Stahmann, & Carroll, 2001). These topics are addressed by having couples take a 271-item questionnaire and discuss the results in PMC and outside of PMC (i.e., in daily conversation). RELATE is provided via a large group lecture format, as a self-assessment, and in a traditional couples counseling setting (Holman et al., 2001). When using the traditional format for relate, seven sessions is typical (Holman et al., 2001). The couple meets with the therapist weekly in a traditional counseling setting (i.e., couple and therapist only, no group or lecture format). The RELATE program has shown to have an alpha composite score of .80 for internal reliability regarding the assessment measures of the program, suggesting high internal consistency (Busby, Holman, Taniguchi, 2001). Correlations were conducted between constructs within the RELATE questionnaire using a factor analysis in order to establish construct validity (Carroll et al., 2001). Additionally, RELATE studies compared construct validity between a general population sample and a Hispanic sample, which showed high levels of construct validity for both populations (Busby
et al., 2001). Concurrent validity was established when comparing the RELATE questionnaire to the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Busby et al., 2001). No information was provided on what constituted the “general population” sample.

**Delivery of Premarital Counseling Services**

The leader, length, format, timing, and topics of sessions of PMC differ based on the program. PMC is delivered by many different professionals, including clergy, clinicians, teachers, and paraprofessionals (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). Clergy were found to provide the majority of PMC (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). This is somewhat unfortunate as studies have shown that clergy members have little training in PMC, and also provide services for the least amount of time (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). PMC services provided by a clergy last about four hours, whereas PMC services provided by therapists last approximately two to thirty hours (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). Research has been inconsistent in showing differences in outcomes for couples based on methods of delivery (i.e., length of PMC and who provides PMC; Silliman & Schumm, 1999). PMC has been delivered via group and individual counseling settings. Silliman and Schumm (1999) reported that couples prefer individual counseling over group settings. The literature shows that couples entering PMC four to twelve months prior to their wedding receive the most benefit (Silliman & Schumm, 1999).

PMC sessions vary on the outline and format of each topic. Generally, topics of premarital counseling flow in the same order but the timing of each topic differs based on the couple’s needs (see Appendix A). The **REP, RELATE, and PREPARE** programs emphasize the use of written or computerized assessments that couples fill out prior to or at the initial
therapy session. Assessment for the PAIRS program is conducted in an interview format in the first PMC session. The PREP does not report the use of assessments for couples.

Appendix A describes the flow of PMC topics for the REP, PREP, PREPARE, PAIRS, and RELATE programs. None of these programs directly attend to culture and the impact of culture on the couple, although the PREP, PREPARE, and PAIRS programs address the impact of culture more indirectly. The PREP program subtly discusses culture through the expectation of roles and spirituality, in that couples are encouraged to look at how their family of origin has influenced their spiritual beliefs and beliefs about expectations of roles each partner has in the relationship (Renick et al., 1992). The PREPARE program addresses family of origin issues by using the Circumplex Model which shows each individual’s level of closeness and flexibility to his/her mother and father. Discussing family of origin issues in PMC opens the door to dialogue about culture, as family of origin issues are considered to be influenced by culture. The PREPARE program falls short of attending to the broader impact of culture on the couple. The PAIRS program also addresses one part of culture by discussing the impact of generational beliefs through the use of a genogram (Gordon et al., 2005). Again, this program fails to address the bulk of what culture is and how it affects the couple. The RELATE program also uses a genogram to attend to parental communication and conflict-resolution styles, and encourages couples to go to their parents for advice about marriage (Holman et al., 2001). Despite the implicit inferences and discussions about pieces of culture, attention to culture is not explicit nor is it comprehensive.

A post-wedding session has been recommended as a way for the couple to review aspects of counseling that were helpful, for the counselor to provide support, and to evaluate adjustments and expectations of the marital relationship (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). A post-
wedding session should only occur after the couple has passed the “honeymoon” phase of their marriage; this is so the couple can adequately assess their current situation, effectively foresee future problems, and review problem-solving techniques (Silliman & Schumm, 1999).

In summary, PMC programs involve consideration of individual and dyadic influences such as personality characteristics, family of origin influences, communication and conflict resolution styles, and support. Themes within PMC include addressing strengths and problem areas, providing couples with skills needed to overcome problem areas, and building on strengths, which helps couples to create a more realistic and healthy portrait of their marriage. Despite the consensus in attending to strengths and problem areas, literature on PMC programs falls short of attending to and integrating the impact of culture on the couple.

**Culture**

Culture has been shown to be complex and intricate subject matter within research and therapy. The multifaceted awareness of culture has proven to be difficult to incorporate within many areas of research. Despite the complexity surrounding culture within the broader research realm, culture has been highlighted within the human sciences as there is a sense of importance placed upon understanding people with different contextual experiences and influences. There has been little research to guide educators and clinicians on how to address and process cultural issues within systemic therapy. For the purpose of this study, culture encompasses customs, traditions, food, rituals, language, shared values, family of origin, and ethnicity.
The definition of culture that is used for the current study was written by Joan Laird (1998) is as follows:

“Culture is an individual and social construction, a constantly evolving and changing set of meanings that can be understood only in the context of a narrativized past, a co-interpreted present, and a wished-for future. It is always contextual, emergent, improvisational, transformational, and political” (pp. 28-29).

This definition was chosen because it represents the ever-changing flow of the constructs of culture that are created through a narrative. I especially liked the attention to meaning that was provided in this definition, as I believe the meaning of culture is then manifested through customs, beliefs, values, traditions, and roles. In addition, Laird (1998) describes culture as a kaleidoscope in that the intersections of the different pieces are like the varying aspects of culture that change based on the movement of the object, the light, or person. This metaphor is helpful to the current study, as it provides insight into the changing perspectives of participants that may occur due to changes in the environment, relationships, or the overall culture.

Literature on culture has provided a better understanding of how culture affects a person’s way of thinking and understanding the social world. Historically, culture was used as a device to categorize individuals and groups (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). The segregation of persons promoted a sense of “otherness” among groups, consequently emphasizing power of certain groups (i.e., dominant groups; Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). More recently, research has shifted to embrace cultural differences and similarities. In addition, literature on how to improve services to individuals of different cultures by understanding and discussing culture has increased dramatically. This study follows the path of the recent literature, in that participants are asked to define culture and how their cultural
background may have influenced their insights into marriage and aspects that they believe are important to PMC. The following section will look at how culture has evolved within marriage and family therapy and within PMC.

*Therapy and Culture*

Culture is a value-laden construct that influences the way people view the world (Sussman, 2004). Within therapy, culture impacts the therapeutic relationship, the process of therapy, and goals within therapy (Padilla, 2001; Ponterotto, Gretchen, & Chauhan, 2001; Sussman, 2004). For example, assessment tools that evaluate mental health diagnoses do not attend to culture. Inattention to culture leads to inconsistency or bias in diagnosing and confusion for the client and therapist (Sodowsky, Jackson, & Loya, 1997). In order to address the impact that cultural issues can have on varying aspects of mental health and the services provided in a therapeutic setting this study explored ways culture can be addressed within PMC.

Systems theory supports the process of understanding one’s worldview based on his/her surroundings (Jones, 1993). By supporting the understanding the influence of one’s surroundings, the therapist can better provide interventions towards meeting the client’s goals. According to systems theory, culture is a significant factor when considering how one understands the world, as our comprehension of the world is manifested through our interactions (e.g., support, feedback, communication, relationships) with others (Jones, 1993). In other words, from a systemic perspective, clients in therapy cannot be understood without considering the context of their background and current interactions with others. As a result of integrating knowledge of culture and the impact of the system on the client(s) within therapy, the therapist can provide interventions that are better suited to premarital couples.
Premarital Counseling and Culture

Currently, there is a dearth in the premarital literature regarding how to directly address culture. The deficit in the literature inhibits premarital counselors from assessing for, addressing, and providing effective interventions to assist couples in understanding and working through issues regarding culture. More specifically, clinicians are potentially unaware of how to attend to premarital issues related to specific aspects of culture. For example, a premarital couple disagrees on what gender roles each person in the relationship should play. The man believes the woman should do all the cooking and cleaning, as the wives did this when he was growing up. The woman believes that the household chores should be equally divided between the man and the woman. This issue directly relates to the culture in which the two individuals were brought up. The man may feel that his role is the monetary provider for the family, whereas the wife is the organizational provider for the family. In order to address this issue the therapist would need to be knowledgeable of the cultural patterns, values, emphases, and meaning of the roles for each partner.

Within recent literature, there has been some attention given to providing PMC to those of different cultural backgrounds (Asai & Olson, 2004; Synder, Larson, Duncan, & Stahmann, 2007), but these studies fall short of addressing the clients’ wants and needs of clients and also understanding how different cultural backgrounds impact the couple’s beliefs and expectations about marriage. Translation of PMC materials has been one aspect of addressing culture within PMC (Asai & Olson, 2004; Carroll, Holman, Segura-Bartholomew, Bird, & Busby, 2001). Translation has increased premarital couples’ accessibility to PMC materials. Although the translation of PMC assessment forms, workbooks, and interventions to different languages has increased couples’ accessibility to PMC, research is needed on
increasing the understanding of different cultures and how to assist couples from varying backgrounds. For example, Asai and Olson (2004) found that PMC assessments were lacking in being applicable to different cultures, such as Japanese cultures. They translated the *PREPARE* program from English and Japanese, but also found that there were “cultural mismatches” between the version produced for the Euro-American middle-class and the Japanese population (Asai & Olson, 2004). Nine items of the *PREPARE* assessment were removed as they did not show to be applicable to Japanese couples, and the element of time spent with in-laws was added in order to address to the importance and collectivism of the Japanese culture (Asai & Olson, 2004). Although this study has been helpful in determining cultural aspects of the *PREPARE* program that may need to be adapted, there are a multitude of other cultures and aspects of PMC that need to be researched (i.e., other cultural influences that may apply to those of different cultural backgrounds, therapist education, and aspects to address within varying cultures).

In addition, Snyder et al. (2007) conducted gender specific and professional focus groups that included Latino couples that were dating, cohabiting, newly married, and transitioning to parenting in Utah. This research explored the need for attending to culture within PMC and also compared several topics that Latino couples found to be of interest. Concerns regarding finances, infidelity, and changes after marriage were uncovered (Snyder et al., 2007). Women reported concerns with domestic violence, whereas men reported concerns regarding parenting (Snyder et al., 2007). Therapists reported finances, poor communication, and materialism as common themes they came across when working with Latino couples (Snyder et al., 2007). Commonly perceived contributors to healthy marriages
included respectful interactions, improved communication, and equality in the partnership (Snyder et al., 2007).

One specific theme that Snyder et al. (2007) found is that Latino couples desired marriage counseling. This finding suggests that couples across the lifespan desire marital counseling and support. Furthermore, Snyder et al. (2007) found that couples would like to receive services from professionals and religious leaders. Although Snyder et al.’s (2007) research is helpful in understanding the desires of Latino couples when seeking marriage assistance, it falls short of understanding the unique aspects of Latino/a culture that should be addressed within PMC. In other words, Snyder’s research on topics and interest areas that are culturally sensitive are helpful but additional research is needed to address the unique aspects of Latino/a culture that need to be addressed within PMC. The following section will address identifying aspects of Latino/a culture, with detail given to cultural aspects of Latino marriage.

**Latino/a Culture**

It has been established that the Hispanic population is the largest and fastest growing minority group within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the United States Census Bureau (USCB), Hispanics made up 12.5% of the population in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The USCB predicted that Hispanics would make up 15.5% of the U.S. population by 2010 and 24.4% of the population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The average age of marriage for Latino men is 27 and 28 for Latina women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Additionally, in 2009, 14% of the overall population in the U.S. fell below the poverty line, while 25% of the Hispanic population fell below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
Latinos/as are considered to be from varying countries including, but not limited to, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico. Each has their own distinct culture, but there are some commonalities within these cultures; for example, Spanish is spoken in all the above-listed countries (except for Brazil, where Portuguese is spoken), and most countries are predominantly Roman Catholic (García-Preto, 2005). Within Latino/a culture, religious practices are considered to be a part of everyday life (García-Preto, 2005).

An important consideration when working with Latino families is level of acculturation and immigration status. According to Falicov (2003), immigration status can have an impact on families, “Families derive their shared and individual meaning from their particular ecological niches and unique personal histories” (p. 281). Factors associated with immigration include religious beliefs, political beliefs, community support, education, age, gender, country of origin, and proximity to homeland (Falicov, 2003). Immigration status presents unique challenges and rewards for couples, as they must overcome acculturation to a new country, community support, and family lifestyle, but can also present rewards of bringing the couple closer together, understanding broader culture, and developing a lifestyle that they feel comfortable with (Falicov, 2003).

Latino/a culture emphasizes “family unity, welfare, and honor,” (García-Preto, 2005, p. 162). In addition, gender roles are constructed based on the level of machismo or marianismo within the family of origin (García-Preto, 2005). Machismo is defined as the male’s responsibility to both his family of origin and family of procreation. It involves providing for his family financially and protecting them (Snyder et al., 2007). Marianismo refers to the Latina woman’s role of being more submissive and self-sacrificing to her
husband (Snyder et al., 2007). *Familism* is another more recent term that has been used to describe the unique role of the extended family within Latino/a culture. The significant impact of the extended family in Latino families is well documented and can present unique challenges for a newly married couple (i.e., boundary setting), but also provide higher levels of support as well (Garcia-Preto, 2005).

Sibling roles present another unique dynamic within Latino/a culture, such that older siblings are given more responsibility within the family (McHale, Updegraff, Shanahan, Crouter, & Killoren, 2008). Within Mexican families, older siblings have been shown to be given more household responsibilities and financial responsibilities, as compared to White families that presented more equalitarian roles within siblings (McHale et al., 2008). As projected by McHale et al. (2008), differential treatment of siblings, based on birth order, may be necessary for understanding roles within the marriage.

Gender role construction, collectivism, respect for authority, and religion are four factors that may need to be considered in greater detail when working with Latino families. For couples, conflict can arise regarding differences among or between Latinos/as or other cultures (Garcia-Preto, 2005). When working with couples in conflict over cultural issues it is important for the therapist to model listening and validation techniques to couples in order to show couples how they can validate one another and accept differences more readily (Garcia-Preto, 2005).

Intercultural couples present their own unique dynamics that affect the marital relationship. Intercultural couples are defined as, “the bringing together or the meeting of two different cultural backgrounds into one relationship” (Crippen & Brew, 2007, p. 107). Crippen and Brew (2007) noted that intercultural couples are on the rise and suggest that intercultural
couples may struggle more in decision making, problem solving, and child rearing. Furthermore, Crippen and Brew (2007) suggest that intercultural couples must acknowledge the impact of their own cultural background on themselves and on their partner in order to decrease conflict.

Consideration of Latino/a culture within premarital counseling is significantly under researched. To date, there has been few studies that have attempted to address Latino/a culture within premarital counseling. Carroll et al. (2001) undertook the extensive process of translating the RELATE program into Spanish. Their analysis included a modified serial approach to translating the RELATE program (Carroll et al., 2001). The test-retest reliability was shown to be adequate for Spanish speakers (Carroll et al., 2001). As stated previously Snyder et al. (2007) conducted qualitative focus groups with Latino couples. This research investigated topics of interest and appropriate delivery methods of marital counseling to Latino couples in Utah. Although this research has been useful to assisting therapists with the translation of the language and delivery methods of services there were no modifications made to address specific cultural aspects of Latino/a culture.

Study Rationale

The study aimed to explore Latinos’/as’ insights into ways PMC can address culture. As shown in the literature, there is a deficit in understanding and implementing culturally sensitive and useful approaches within PMC. Additionally, literature has shown that there are culture specific aspects that relate to marriage within the Latino/a culture (i.e., gender role construction, respect for authority, religion; Garcia-Preto, 2005). For example, Latino/a constructs such as *machismo* or *marianismo* have an impact on roles and communication strategies for couples (Garcia-Preto, 2005). This dissertation addressed the problem of
deficits in the literature regarding culture in PMC by interviewing couples from Latino/a backgrounds and therapists about their insights into ways the impact of Latino/a culture on marriage can be addressed in PMC. Interviews and the researcher’s interpretations of interviews provide participants with a voice, and provide clinicians and researchers with a better understanding of clients’ needs surrounding the topic of culture within PMC.

Research Questions

1. What are Latino couples’ (and the therapists who work with these couples) insights into what is important to attend to in PMC?

2. What aspects of Latino/a culture do participants feel are important to attend to in PMC?

3. How do participants believe clinicians can craft PMC programs to be more sensitive to Latino/a culture?
METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how couples feel PMC programs attend to Latino/a culture. To explore the research questions above a qualitative approach was used. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), qualitative research provides a deep comprehension of people’s perspectives of a particular event. The interpretivist paradigm provided the framework for the researcher’s methods. Narrative inquiry granted the opportunity to gain knowledge of an experience that constructs a person’s worldview through the use of a story (Keats, 2009). Six couples and three therapists were interviewed in a total of nine interviews (six dyadic interviews with couples and three individual interviews with therapists). Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. Artifacts were collected from each individual in the couples’ interviews. Artifacts were used as mute evidence within this study in order to provide a representation of what each individual believes represents his/her culture. This study posits that culture is a topic that needs further research in order to help therapists provide PMC clients with relevant interventions and assistance regarding the impact of culture. In the sections below, I discuss narrative inquiry, participants, data collection, subjectivity of the researcher, data analysis, rigor, and ethical considerations.

Narrative Inquiry

On the whole, narratives provide an understanding of people’s lives and how people construct and understand the world (Keats, 2009). Narrative inquiry supports a more comprehensive understanding of a person’s experiences through the meaning making of narrative accounts (Bloom, 2002). Creswell (2007) suggests that narrative inquiry is like uncovering the layers of a person’s experience. Furthermore, narratives inform the way
people understand and explain the meaning behind a particular event or experience (Bloom, 2002). For the purpose of this study, participants’ narratives were used to understand and explain experiences of culture. A couple’s experience is unique for each individual and couple, therefore narrative methodology was compatible for the current study.

A second purpose in using narrative inquiry was to provide a greater understanding or way of knowing through the construction of a person’s narrative (Hendry, 2007). This rationale was congruent with the researcher’s goal of providing voice and a more comprehensive conception of how culture plays a role in PMC. Moreover, narrative inquiry emphasizes the impact of a person’s cultural background on meaning-making (Bloom, 2002). For this reason, narrative methodology informed the researcher and the analyses for this study. In addition, the influence of culture and the narratives that were presented about the individual and the couple’s background were crucial to understanding the story.

Artifacts are also endorsed by a narrative inquiry in allowing participants to educate the researcher about their culture and their cultural background. Artifacts promoted a collaborative and comfortable environment of learning, working together, and understanding was established. Artifacts have been defined as “mute evidence” which provide information and knowledge about the past that shapes a person’s current worldview (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Artifacts were important to the current study as they provide information to the researcher that may be lacking in verbal conversation within the interview format. Furthermore, artifacts assisted the researcher in interpretation of the participants’ culture by providing more detail into the impact of the participants’ cultural background (Riessman, 2008). Artifacts were documented by taking a picture of the artifact. If a photograph or visual
description was provided, a copy was made of the artifact for the researcher and the original artifact was returned to the participant.

Participants

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling involves seeking out participants that have been through specific experiences and can provide insight of the experience (i.e., the experience of PMC; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). A culturally diverse sample was sought in which at least one member of the couple considered him or herself to be Latino/a. Recruitment occurred in the state of Texas. IRB approval to move forward with the study, including recruitment of participants, was given in June 2010 (Appendix B). Recruitment methods involved contacting therapists in the Dallas area and informing them of the purpose of the study and requesting they post flyers in their office and inform current clients about the study. Other recruitment methods were to advertise in the local paper and to contact community groups and churches that were aimed at cultural diversity or specific cultural groups (Appendix C). All of participants were identified using purposeful sampling, followed by a snowball sampling technique to recruit other potential research participants into the study. Snowball sampling involves asking participants to recommend other participants for the study (Litchman, 2006). Additionally, one therapist was recruited via an advertisement through a mental health association (e.g., North Tarrant County Mental Health Professionals).

The researcher interviewed six couples and three therapists. Each couple and therapist was interviewed once. Saturation was achieved after interviewing these participants. Saturation is defined as “continuing to sample until the responses consistently provide no new or conflicting information” (Bradley, 1993, p. 400). Selection criteria for participants
included in the study were as follows: at least one member of the couple must consider him/herself Latino/a, both members must be able to speak English fluently, both members of the couple must be present for the interview, and each couple must have an awareness and a baseline understanding of how culture impacts each partner and the marriage. For therapists, the selection criteria required that therapists worked with the Latino/a population on a regular basis and had knowledge of how culture affects Latino couples and their marriages (i.e., taken continuing education credits regarding culture, spoke Spanish and saw Latino/a clients at least five times monthly). Compensation for therapists was the same as couples that participated in the study—a $20 gift certificate. Prior to the interview, an initial consultation with participants was conducted via phone, e-mail, or in person. In the initial consultation, participants were e-mailed a copy of the informed consent, demographic questionnaire, cultural diversity survey, and interview questions. Participants filled out the cultural diversity survey (couples only, not therapists), demographic questionnaire and informed consent. Couples, not therapists, were also informed about the artifact and asked to bring an artifact to the interview that represented their culture. In short, artifacts were presented by each partner in the couple’s interviews. Artifacts were presented a mute evidence to further describe each member’s culture and to further promote triangulation, which is described in greater detail later.

For the cultural diversity survey, the researcher then scored the answers based on the sum score of the numbers indicated by each individual. The partners' scores were summed together and those scoring higher than 50 point were admitted into the study. For example, if each partner had a score of 27, these were added together for a composite of 54. The score of 50 was selected as it indicated that the couple had baseline knowledge of how culture affects
their marriage. No one that filled out that cultural questionnaire was screened out of the study. A total of twelve cultural diversity questionnaires were obtained (two for each couple). Appendix D shows the results of the cultural diversity survey and demographic information for participants. There was no cultural diversity score for therapists as they did not complete the cultural diversity survey.

Interviews occurred from the Fall of 2010 through Summer of 2011. Participants were compensated a $20.00 gift card per interview (i.e., one for each couple interview and one for each therapist interview). Participants had the choice of choosing a gift certificate from Wal-Mart or Target. Compensation was provided via mail within two weeks of each interview.

**Difficulty in Finding Participants**

Originally, this study was aimed at interviewing married Latino couples that had participated in premarital counseling. It was hoped that these couples could be interviewed twice, with the second interview focusing on participant and researcher reflections from the first interview and probing further regarding emerging themes that had surfaced. Between April 2010 and June 2010 the researcher used the following recruitment methods that were approved by the IRB: contacting therapists that provided premarital counseling, putting ads in local newspapers and community reports, and contacting community groups aimed at the Latino/a population. Between April 2010 and June 2010 no participants were identified. With IRB approval, the researcher expanded recruitment techniques to include contacting any therapists providing services, placing ads with local agencies and mental health organizations, and placing ads on Craigslist. Between August 2010 (time of IRB approval)
and October 2010 no participants were identified despite the expanded recruitment methods and numerous attempts at recruiting participants via the above avenues.

In October 2010 the researcher, with the permission of the committee and IRB, made the following changes to the sample of the study. First, the description of participants was broadened to include all married couples in which at least one member considered themselves Latino/a, with no premarital counseling required. Second, one interview was conducted with couples with a follow-up member check that was done over the phone and by e-mail. Third, three culturally competent therapists were interviewed one time in order to further promote saturation and endorse triangulation.

By January 2011 only one couple and one therapist had been interviewed. The researcher again sought IRB approval to extend recruitment strategies outside of Texas, including national newspapers and magazines aimed at assisting the Latino/a population. Additionally, the researcher sought approval to potentially interview couples via Skype or by phone in order to recruit participants from other areas of the country. Although interviews never occurred via phone or Skype in the study, it was hoped that this may increase participation in order to further data collection.

Several memos were conducted on the frustration felt when not being able to find participants. Memos on the topic of participant recruitment included frustration with not being able to find study participants, brainstorming of ways to modify participant recruitment and selection criteria for the study, reactions regarding initial interviews and changes made to the study and ideas for ways to keep my morale up and continue to move forward. Below is a quote from one of the memos, recorded on November 16, 2010, regarding my reactions to the changes in the study:
“I will no longer be interviewing couples that have just participated in PMC but those couples that feel they can contribute to the PMC literature based on their knowledge and experience with culture and marriage. I am hoping to continue my vision of contributing to the literature regarding the aspects of PMC that can assist both couples and therapists when a Latino couple presents to premarital counseling. This vision has changed over the course of the research but the overall vision of helping both clients and therapists has not. The frustrations have been mounting but I am trying to not let them get me down. My hopes are high, as are my apprehensions.”

Participant Description

The first couple interviewed was Catty and Carlos (all participant names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants). Catty and Carlos are both Hispanic and have been married for 31 years. Catty and Carlos did not participate in premarital counseling prior to marriage. Catty is a 51 year-old housekeeper and Carlos is a 57 year-old bartender. Catty and Carlos immigrated to the United States from Mexico shortly after they were married. For their artifact Catty brought a mocaheite and Carlos presented a sombrero.

The second couple interviewed was Maria and Ivan. Maria and Ivan have been married for three years. Maria and Ivan did not participate in premarital counseling. Maria is a 28 year-old housewife and Ivan is a 52 year-old real estate investor. Maria is a fourth generation immigrant from Mexico and Ivan is a second generation immigrant from Germany. Ivan’s mother immigrated to the United States when he was nine years old. Ivan’s father’s ancestors were from England. Maria presented a painting of the Madonna and child for her artifact while Ivan shared a painting of his English family crest.

Lola and Jerry were the third couple interviewed. Lola and Jerry have been married for 14 years. Lola and Jerry did not participate in premarital counseling. Lola is a 45 year-old ceramic artist while Jerry is a 41 year-old investor. Lola is a first generation immigrant from
Mexico and Jerry identifies with being Caucasian. Lola brought a small figurine of the Madonna and child while Jerry presented a cowboy hat for the artifacts.

The fourth interview was with Amelia and Randy, who have been married for seven years. Amelia and Randy did not participate in premarital counseling. Amelia is a 45 year-old business woman (self-employed) while Randy is a 47 year-old chicken farmer. Amelia and Randy are both second generation immigrants from Mexico. Amelia showed a piñata for her artifact while Randy shared a picture of a fighting rooster.

The fifth couple interviewed was Ana and Guy. Ana and Guy have been married for 37 years. Ana and Guy participated in premarital counseling throughout their elementary and high school years. When it came time for them to be married the priest said that they only had to attend one premarital session because they had already learned what they needed to know about marriage. Ana is a 57 year-old program services coordinator while Guy is a 57 year-old records manager. Ana is a first generation immigrant from Mexico while Guy is a first generation immigrant from Bolivia. Ana’s artifact was a cross with Jesus on it, while Guy shared a hat made of alpaca fur.

The sixth interview was with Marge and José, who have been married for 38 years. Marge and José were involved with premarital counseling through their church prior to getting married. Marge and José said that it lasted for one week and neither of them remembered much of what was discussed. Marge is a 56 year-old teacher’s assistant while José is a 58 year-old detention officer. Marge and José are both second generation immigrants from Mexico. Marge presented a curtain with traditional stitching in the shape of a poinsettia for her artifact while José shared several Spanish vinyl musical records.
The first therapist interview was with T. T is a 33 year-old African American therapist. T has been working with the Latino/a population for ten years. T is fluent in Spanish and works with the Latino/a population on a regular basis. T mainly works with women and families that have suffered domestic violence, but has done some premarital counseling in the past. She also attends and presents on intercultural counseling regularly.

The second therapist interviewed was George. George is a 39 year-old Mexican American therapist. George has been working with the Latino/a population for about twelve years. George is a first generation Mexican immigrant and is fluent in Spanish. George sees Latino families, couples, and children on a daily basis.

The third therapist interviewed was Cata, who is a 56 year-old Mexican therapist. Cata has been working with the Latino/a population for thirty years. Cata is a first generation Mexican immigrant and is fluent in Spanish. Cata sees Latino families, couples, and children on a daily basis. Cata also attend presentations and continuing education units on culture, more specifically Latino/a culture.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred via interviews and collection of artifacts regarding individuals’ culture. Each couple and therapist was interviewed once. All interviews occurred in person. Interviews have shown to be a powerful way of collecting information (Fontana & Frey, 1998), and therefore serve as an influential gateway to information regarding participants’ insights.

According to Sohier (1995), dyadic interviews provide a uniquely co-constructed reality between two people who have experienced a similar event. A dyadic interview can provide a richer and more detailed account of certain events as participants can provide one
another and the researcher with a more in-depth account of particular events (i.e., PMC; Sohier, 1995). Sohier describes the dyadic interview as a means to “illuminate the subject matter” that may not be otherwise clarified in individual interviews (Sohier, 1995, p. 97). Furthermore, Sohier (1995) contends that from a systems perspective, all accounts of events are needed in order to provide the researcher with an adequate co-constructed understanding of the event. Hence couple interviews utilized a dyadic arrangement. Therapist interviews were conducted between the principal investigator and the therapist.

Approximately one week before the interview the researcher provided the participants with the interview questions, confidentiality statement, demographic questionnaire and the cultural questionnaire to encourage the participants to think over and prepare for the interview (Appendix E). Sending the participants the interview questions allowed them additional time to contemplate potential answers, as many of the questions require insight and reflection. Prior to beginning the interview the researcher shared biases (e.g., the importance of therapy and premarital counseling, the importance for therapists to understand culture, and my lack of experience with the Latino/a culture in everyday life and therapy) and a small summary of my cultural background and my desire to know more about others cultural background and share the information with the academic and clinical community. As a result of sharing my own background and desire of the study I hoped to establish rapport with participants, therefore increasing comfort levels of participants for the duration of the interviews.

Interview questions were asked in a semi-structured format (Blee & Taylor, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are defined by having a predetermined set of questions that guide the interview, but allow the researcher to deviate from the questions as additional questions
or topics emerge (Blee & Taylor, 2002). Interviews were recorded with a digital recording device. The recorder verified all verbal interactions after the interview begins. Initial interview questions and discussion lead to probing questions that may not be listed. These questions were recorded and considered for future interviews.

Interview procedures were as follows: first, the couple was asked to explain important aspects of culture in general followed by unique characteristics of Latino/a culture. Second, in the couple interview, participants were asked to explain the artifact they brought to the interview. Each individual was asked to bring an artifact that represented their culture. As stated above, artifacts are referred to as mute evidence and were used as a way to promote understanding and a collaborative interview process within couple interviews. Third, following each interview an interview summary sheet was filled out by the researcher (Appendix F). The interview summary sheet provided the researcher with information about the interviews and important abstractions that may be needed for data analysis. Fourth, following each interview coding and data analysis occurred. A three-column format was utilized for coding, where the left column shows the researcher’s initial codes, the middle column shows the transcription text, and the right hand column shows the researchers initial thoughts, reactions, or impressions. Fifth, following the completed of coding and solidifying of themes, a member check was done with participants where they were asked to look over and collaborate with the researcher on findings and interpretations of their interview as well as other themes that emerged in other interviews.

Subjectivity of the Researcher

The biases of the researcher impact the findings and interpretations of this study in that my own experiences, education, and cultural background provide a lens for which data
are interpreted. McGoldrick et al. (2005) encourage therapists and researchers to become more culturally competent by questioning and exploring values and the cultural identity they possess. In the following section, I will take a closer look at my own aspects of culture and how it relates to the current study.

There are several factors contributing to the cultural values that I hold today. For the purpose of this study I will narrow the explanation of my cultural background to those surrounding my beliefs and values regarding marriage and diversity. I grew up in a small town that emphasized community, helping your neighbor, and treating others the way you want to be treated. These beliefs compel my aspiration to help others within my career and personal life. Some of the values and customs that I carry from my family background include eating together at the dinner table, sharing holidays with extended family members, and holding the commitment of marriage to a high standard.

The community in which I grew up in consisted of middle-class Caucasian Mennonite farmers with high school or some college education. I always felt that I wanted to know more about others that were not like me, understand them, learn from them, and share the knowledge I gained with others. My father’s occupation led him to travel the world. I was always jealous that he was able to meet others and understand and be a part of their ways of life. Through his exploration of varying cultures I was exposed to what else was “out there” and felt that I wanted to experience that as well. I plan to share with participants that I grew up in a blended family where extended family support was emphasized and that community and helping your neighbor were important. The desire to help others carries over into my research such that I want promote cultural awareness within the therapeutic community by sharing participants’ narratives with others.
As stated previously, I was raised in a home with a blended family. My parents have been divorced and have both remarried. The foundation of marriage continues to be important to all of my parents. It is important for me to understand why people choose their partner and ways that clinicians can assist couples who want to get married. I have been blessed with an amazingly large and diverse family, but the journey getting to a place of acceptance of my parents’ divorce and remarriage was not easy. Initially, the complexity of joining several cultural backgrounds under two roves proved to be trying. My step-mother and step-brother are Russian, my step-father and two other step-brothers spent ample time in Egypt. Combining families that have experienced varying cultural upbringings has been a process of learning, understanding, and humility that I never thought I would experience. Even through difficult times my family has been supportive of me; be it education, career, or personal issues. I only hope that my future partnership can provide the essence of loving, caring, and support that my family has provided to me.

My journey to becoming a marriage and family therapist began in high school. I was always interested in intimate relationships, communication in relationships, and understanding what the contributors are to successful relationships. My path changed in college when I began to work for a professor in the human development and family studies department at ISU, as I was enrolled in the Biology program. She introduced me to the program formerly known as the Marriage and Family Therapy Program. After meeting with the professors I knew that I wanted to do therapy with couples, individuals, and families. About that time I was offered the opportunity to work with families who had a child removed from their home due to the child’s behavioral issues. The work experience I have had has
been, and continues to be, a learning process that has opened my eyes to extremely difficult and traumatic life events that have impacted individuals and families.

One emphasis within my masters training was on understanding the effects of culture and ethnicity both clinically and in everyday life. I felt compelled to understand this impact in greater detail. I decided to incorporate these ideas into my thesis, which assessed the impact of anxiety and warmth on marital satisfaction in African Americans. Although I am very proud of the work I did, I felt disconnected from the research I was doing. I decided then that a qualitative study would enhance the purpose and understanding of my dissertation. I am grateful to the training I have had at ISU and the emphasis placed on understanding diversity. It has truly opened my eyes to privileges, roles, biases, and discrimination that occur on individual, dyadic, and societal levels. My training in diversity has lead to my understanding of how important culture can be within intimate relationships. For this reason I believe that PMC should address the influences culture on a couple.

I believe that marriage is a significant commitment that two people make to one another, and this commitment needs to be fostered through education, love, and understanding. This was most likely the case for my parents, young and in love, not understanding the intricacy of marriage. This misunderstanding caused a great deal of hurt within my own family. Therefore, I believe that all couples should partake in PMC with a trained professional that understands the complexity couple’s issues. Understanding marriage from culturally diverse perspectives is crucial for therapists and premarital couples, as my bias is that marriage is a life-long vow between two people.

A final bias is that I believe diversity issues, such as those associated with culture, should be addressed within PMC. Many times clinicians fall short of understanding the
impact of culture on couples, and couples do not recognize the ways that culture has impacted their own lives. This can have detrimental effects for couples in the future. Therefore, this study will explore gaps in the literature by analyzing people’s perspectives on PMC who are from varying cultural backgrounds. Prior to the interviews I shared about my background (i.e., being from Iowa, education, work) and my current biases of the study (i.e., the importance of therapy and premarital counseling, my lack of being submerged in the Latino/a culture both in everyday life and in therapy).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an inductive process of taking a large amount of data and focusing the data to show a certain phenomena through identifying themes and making meaning of people’s stories. Narrative inquiry analysis provided the basis through which the researcher organized the data elements into a coherent developmental account of the participants’ narrative; for the purpose of this dissertation, it is both the individual and the couple’s story as well as looking at insights from the couple regarding unique aspects of Latino/a culture that need to be address within PMC. It was expected that participants would have differing accounts of their cultural background and experiences, thus individual narratives may emerge, but it is the overall couple’s experience that is emphasized.

Merriam (2002) urges qualitative researchers to conduct analysis of the data while collecting data in order to create a simultaneous process of collecting and analyzing data. Therefore, the steps listed below are presented in a linear format in order to provide clarity and a flow to the reader, but the actual process of analysis was a continuous spiral between data collection procedures (interviews, artifacts, and memoing) and data analysis procedures (data management, transcribing, memoing, chunking topics, determining themes, reading and
rereading transcripts, describing and visually representing the data, findings, and conclusions; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Data analysis occurred via “re-storying” the participants’ ideas, thoughts, and experiences. Re-storying is the process of making meaning from the interviews and experiences participants share (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003). The meaning within stories emerged through themes within and across interviews. Meaning was derived from the accounts told by participants, artifacts, and the researchers interpretations of the interviews.

The analysis chart in Appendix G illustrates the general path of analysis. First, transcriptions of the interview were done within one week of the interview by the researcher. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) suggest transcribing interviews verbatim in order to show exact flow and interactions that occur throughout the interview, thus transcriptions were done verbatim for this dissertation. The transcription format included three columns. The first column is for codes, the second column contains the actual transcription, and the third column holds the researchers thoughts, remarks, and possible additional questions. All words, phrases, ums, laughter, and pauses were indicated in the transcripts. An example of the format for transcriptions can be found in Appendix H. By doing the transcription myself I was better able to reflect on the interviews, what was said, how it was said and re-listen to the tone of voice it was used in. This provided me with a better understanding of the text when I coded and described emerging themes.

Next, transcripts and artifacts were read or looked over the first time to record major themes and ideas. Initial codes were formed through reading and identifying important aspects of the data (Litchman, 2006). The transcripts were again re-read and codes were assigned to recurring statements and topics within each interview. Codes guided the
researcher in making meaning of topics and subject matter that were recurring within each interview. In order to synthesize codes within the interviews posters, tables, and flow charts provided the representation of the codes found.

Subsequently, transcripts were read multiple times in order to establish reoccurring themes related to each research question. Codes were assigned to reoccurring themes using a number and letter coding system to describe a particular theme or phenomenon, where the information was collected from (e.g., interview, artifact, member check), and what line it can be found in. A potential theme could be reoccurring statements about how individuals were treated within therapy. For example, C1C2ROL may stand for couple 1, code 2, ROL = role. Codes were then typed up on a line by line coding scheme. For example, the code above would be typed as follows:

C1C2ROL: pg 1: Cata: Roles of woman more submissive due to living at home till marriage

This code shows the couple, code number (i.e., shows how many times this code was mentioned in the interview), the code name, page number it can be found, who said it, and a brief description of the code. All codes were typed up from the interviews into a word document.

Then, codes were then printed and cut into strips. Creswell’s (2007) chart on narrative analysis (Appendix I) provided the framework for arranging themes, important events in the narrative, and a plot. Codes were placed under the category to which they fit. Codes with similar subject matter were then grouped together to form a theme. The process of grouping codes together to make themes is called “chunking” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Chunking assisted the researcher in establishing themes, which then connected to the research
questions. Following chunking, the researcher again re-read the transcripts to identify quotes that may clarify or exemplify themes that were identified. Quotes were then given an asterisk and were entered into the codes that were typed up in order to be easily accessed and identify the quote that fit with a particular theme.

After themes were established and organized into codes and the diagram of findings were completed within each interview (Creswell, 2007), analysis across interviews took place. Themes and codes were identified, chunked, and organized across interviews. These themes were placed into a different table which shows across interview themes and codes. Themes were identified for couple interviews and for professional interviews. Once themes and codes were identified across the couple interviews the researcher then identified and compared themes and codes between couples and professionals. By comparing the themes and codes between couples and professionals highlighted discrepancies and similarities among the participant/professional gap.

Next, interpretations of participants’ narratives were established to provide participants with a voice. In order to understand the meaning of participant’s stories the context in which the experience took place is important (Krauss, 2005). Meaning is defined as, “the underlying motivation behind thoughts, actions and even the interpretation and application of knowledge,” (Krauss, 2005). I coded for specific thoughts, actions, communication styles, expectations, and cultural language that related to the research questions for the current study. I then sought out dominant stories within each interview followed by a cross analysis of dominant stories. Parts of these stories were included in the results section, and are also included in the diagram of findings. In order to understand the meaning of the participant’s insights the interviews and artifacts were studied, multiple times,
in terms of themes, underlying mechanisms (i.e., culture) that contributed to the participants’ view of PMC (Krauss, 2005).

After the diagram of findings was established, member checks were done via e-mail or phone with participants to confirm the emerging themes from their interview as well as overall emerging themes. Through member checks, participants had the opportunity to dialogue and give the researcher feedback on the findings regarding meaning, therefore giving the participants a voice in the research process and in overall findings of the study. Codes and themes were then re-visited and looked at through the lens of the feedback provided by the member check. This furthered the participants’ ability to express their voices in the final document.

Upon establishing conclusions within and across interviews a visual representation was established. This visual represented themes and sub-themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process. Final results are presented in this document through the use of metaphors identified by participants, a narrative of the themes and meaning within themes, quotations by participants and a visual representation of themes.

Analytic memos were produced throughout the transcription process. An analytic memo provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore and record aspects of the emerging process of analysis (Saldana, 2009). Memos are generally brief and allow the researcher to think critically about different aspects of the analysis process (Saldana, 2009). Topics addressed in memos included participants, interview procedures, possible interview questions, codes, patterns, categories, themes, concepts, emergent analysis techniques, future directions, limitation, strengths, and challenges (Saldana, 2009). Analytic memos were taken
approximately twice weekly throughout the data collection and analysis process. A total of 46 memos were composed throughout the study.

Rigor

Rigor is vital to the current study as it provides trustworthiness and validity of the findings. Rigor was achieved through several different avenues within qualitative research. For the current study, rigor was addressed through triangulation, member checks, researcher reflexivity, peer review and an audit trail. Triangulation and member checks represent forms of internal validity, while and audit trail represents a form of reliability (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) suggests that external validity of qualitative research be applied by the reader; such that he/she asks how the findings of this study can be related to his/her own work. I hope that therapists can read the accounts of clients’ perspectives and apply what they believe is pertinent within my study to their own work. Furthermore, I hope therapists understand the need to attend to cultural aspects that effect of the individual and the couple within PMC. In order for readers to understand the premises of the conclusions thick descriptions of data collection, data analysis, and the writing process are used.

Triangulation is defined as the use of multiple sources to validate the data collected (Merriam, 2002). For this study triangulation was addressed through two dyadic interviews with the couples, member checks, and collection of artifacts (i.e., photographs explaining ethnicity) used in the PMC process. Through the employment of three data collection procedures a more accurate interpretation can be told about the couples’ feelings, knowledge gained, and application of aspects of the PMC process. Triangulation is reported using a triangulation table showing categories or themes that emerge through data analysis then
present where the data was found (i.e., interview, artifact collection, or member check; Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Member checks involved having participants look at the researcher’s interpretations of the interviews and reflect on the accuracy and spur additional thoughts or insights about the participants’ experiences (Merriam, 2002). Member checks were done at the convenience of the participant (i.e., in person, phone, or e-mail) following the completion of codes and chunking of emerging themes. Member checks included asking participants to evaluate their perceptions of findings by asking directed questions about how they can relate or not relate to themes and findings. An example of a member check document can be found in Appendix K.

Analytic memo writing supplements journals in that memos provided a directed, brief summary of procedures, thought processes, coding processes, choices of the researcher, emergent patterns and categories, themes and concepts within the data, and flow of the research (Saldana, 2009). Topics of the analytic memos included reflections about similarities between researcher and the participant, shared experiences between the researchers and participant, the research questions, purpose of the research, emergent patterns, categories or themes, problems with the study, ethical dilemmas, observations, future directions of research or the study, implications for the field, or a general reflection (Saldana, 2009).

Creswell (2007) recommends peer reviews as a means of “keeping the researcher honest” and to add elements of validity to the analysis process and final outcome of the study. Peer reviews were conducted by therapists that had knowledge of the research process and Latino/a culture. Three therapists were selected to review transcripts and emerging themes. The first therapist peer reviewer was a recent graduate of a Marriage and Family
Therapy program and versed in Latino/a culture and also considers herself Latina. The second therapist has over twenty years experience working with a diverse population of couples and families. She also had experience in research and has published several papers and is asked to speak regularly to doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists. The third therapist also has experience in working with the Latino/a population and is well versed in the needs of the Latino/a culture and this population’s needs within therapy. Each therapist was provided with a summary of themes as well as three transcripts to read over. Therapists provided feedback via e-mail followed by discussion either in person or via phone. Discussions centered on themes found by the peer reviewer and myself, as well as future research considerations. Following the peer reviews I was able to go back and compare the notes and suggestions from the peer review to the themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes that were previously found. I was able to adjust, move, and change aspects of the study as I saw fit. For example, one peer reviewer suggested that the gender roles and changing of women’s gender roles were important, therefore, I was able to go back and review the transcripts highlighting other aspects of women’s gender roles that were important.

An audit trail consists of keeping a close record of my methods, procedures, emergent themes, emergent interview questions, and the data analysis process in order to show the reader how I (as the researcher) came to my conclusions (Merriam, 2002). The audit trail consisted of a detailed research journal throughout the process of formulating interview questions, creating a conceptual framework, data collection, and data analysis as a way to show the audit trail. A separate journal was kept to track my own personal journey through the dissertation process. This journal tracked emotions related to interviews, collecting and
writing data. Certain aspects of these journals are included in the final dissertation to illustrate the emergent designs of themes, interpretations, and discussion.

Rich and thick descriptions supplied the basis for external validity, as they provide the reader with ample information on a particular subject (Merriam, 2002). I hoped to explore aspects of PMC that highlight culture and how attendance to culture could potentially enhance the PMC experience. Through rich and thick descriptions I was able to apply the sense of a narrative such that I can provide voice to the participants of my study. By addressing and following through with techniques such as triangulation, member checks, an audit trail, and rich and thick descriptions, rigor was attained and a quality dissertation assured.

**Ethical Considerations**

As a MFT I am first bound by the ethical code of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), and secondly as a researcher I am bound by the ethical standards of qualitative research. According to the AAMFT ethical code therapists’ (AAMFT Code of Ethics, 2001) ethical obligation to research participants includes seeking the counsel of others (Principle 5.1), informing participants about the research (Principle 5.2), providing participants with the ability to decline or withdraw from the study (Principle 5.3), and keeping participants’ information confidential (Principle 5.4). The following paragraphs will describe how each of these AAMFT ethical codes is addressed within the current study (AAMFT Code of Ethics, 2001). Additionally, ethical guidelines within qualitative research are addressed.

The dissertation committee provided counsel to the researcher and for the development of research methods of this study (Principle 5.1). Participants signed and were
given a copy of the informed consent document which informed participants of their rights as research participants and about the purpose and topic of the study (Principle 5.2).

Confidentiality was addressed by giving each participant a pseudonym within in the initial contact (Principle 5.4). The transcription was completed by this researcher and codes (e.g., pseudonyms) were used in the transcription, on the screening questionnaire, and on the demographic questionnaire. Participants’ names and identities were kept confidential in the final dissertation through the use of pseudonyms. Identifying information was not included in the final dissertation. The actual participant names and codes were kept under double-lock in two separate locations. One location was in the researcher’s home, and the other in an office location. Transcribed interviews were also kept in two different locations under double lock. Participants’ transcripts and participant information are kept for approximately one year after the interviews before being destroyed. This timeline of holding transcripts is based on the timeline for the dissertation. Additionally, this timeline allowed for information to be kept and revisited if the dissertation is published.

Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time (Principle 5.3). If a couple decided to withdraw from the study after the first interview but prior to the second interview, they were compensated for the first interview only. Reimbursement procedures are outlined in the informed consent document. Participants were asked at the time of the member checks if there is information they wish to be withheld from the final dissertation. The request to withhold information was honored. Member checks provided the basis for asking to withhold certain information. The information that was asked to be withheld was not published within the dissertation or any additional publications.
In addition, I uphold the ethical considerations of qualitative research. Avoiding harm to participants is the primary ethical consideration of qualitative research (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest two dimensions of ethics for qualitative researchers: procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics involves gaining approval from others in the field (i.e., dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Procedural ethics were followed by having a dissertation proposal, ongoing collaboration with major professors and the committee, and approval from the IRB prior to collecting data. Ethics in practice refers to managing and dealing with ethical issues that arise throughout data collection and data analysis (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Ethical dilemmas were expected to arise throughout the study and were be managed by collaboration with the dissertation committee, journaling, and using the AAMFT ethical code as a guideline for ethical decision making. The AAMFT ethical code and general ethical guidelines for qualitative research provide an ethical basis for this study. By considering the AAMFT code of ethics and considerations of ethical qualitative research, primarily doing no harm to participants, ethical dilemmas were managed appropriately throughout the study.
RESULTS

Introduction

Despite the Hispanic population being the largest growing minority in the United States, little is known about ways to craft services to be culturally sensitive. Furthermore, current PMC programs offer somewhat of a “one size fits all” approach to working with premarital couples. This study takes a closer look at what married couples believe are the unique aspects of Latino/a culture that need to be addressed within PMC. This is a qualitative study, meaning the researcher is the main instrument in data analysis and interpretation of the results. The study is not necessarily transferable, but provides therapists with several points to consider, assess for, and discuss further when counseling Latino premarital couples.

In the following section, I describe the main themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes that emerged through the data collection and data analysis process. Creswell’s (2007) interpretation of organizing data is fitting for the current study as he uses the metaphor of a family to describe the organizing process of data, “These themes, in turn, I view as a ‘family’ of themes with children, or subthemes, and even grandchildren, sub subthemes represented by segments of data” (p. 153). This study follows Creswell’s (2007) approach to funnelling the data from themes to subthemes to sub subthemes. Another way of understanding this is to say that sub subthemes are an important part of a subtheme, which provided additional support, but was unique in and of itself. This is also true for subthemes, as they support themes but carry unique and important aspects that were distinct. Each theme, subtheme, and sub subtheme is represented in the following section by the researcher’s interpretation, quotes from both therapists and couples, and a description of artifacts that supported themes and subthemes. Themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes are supported by couples and
therapists interchangeably, as both therapists and couples contributed to overarching understanding of the research questions. By involving the therapists’ perspectives with the couples’ insights, the data is richer and is presented in a consistent and vivid manner.

Through the data analysis process, a conceptual map of findings was created (Appendix L). I chose to represent the findings in the shape of a Venn diagram in order to show the overlapping layers of Latino/a culture that emerged throughout data analysis. Within the conceptual map, only themes and sub themes that relate directly to the participants’ stories are represented, as the participants’ stories are the emphasis of this study. As shown in the conceptual map, the top circle of Latino marriage cannot be understood without understanding Latino/a culture. Furthermore, Latino/a culture and Latino marriage inform PMC with Latino couples. At first, I used arrows and boxes to represent the chronological order of the narrative, but this did not seem to fit the data as many of the themes and subthemes were overlapping and did not necessarily represent a direction, but instead revealed ever-evolving layers of understanding which was based on each participant’s story (i.e., the individual’s story, the couple’s story, and the therapist’s story).

As stated above, Latino marriages are understood within the context of Latino/a culture. The ways in which the themes, subthemes and sub subthemes emerged were fluid and inductive, such that as I conducted each interview, analyzed, and chunked the data across interviews I was able to develop, overlap, categorize, separate, and define themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes based on the frequency and substance (i.e., content and meaning that supported the topic) of each topic from the interviews. Subthemes were discussed by at least three couples and one therapist in some manner to be considered a subtheme. Themes were discussed by at least five of the six couples and at least two of the
three therapists in order to be considered a main theme. Themes, subthemes, and sub
subthemes were developed through the interview process and focused on unique aspects of
Latino/a culture, Latino marriage, and PMC with Latino couples. Some themes were a direct
result of questions asked, as outlined in the interview questions, whereas others were a result
of probing questions that were asked of participants.

As shown in the conceptual map Venn diagram (Appendix L), overarching themes for
Latino/a culture are presented in the larger circle. The data showed that aspects of Latino
marriage were directly affected by Latino/a culture, therefore Latino marriage could not be
understood without understanding the overarching theme within the Latino/a cultural context.
Latino/a culture and Latino marriage were found to have a direct effect on PMC with Latino
couples, thus the arrow symbolizes the influence of these two themes (Latino/a culture and
Latino marriage) on the third theme (PMC with Latino couples).

Subthemes of language, dress, and religion were discussed by participants as being
directly related to culture. Subthemes of sex, respect and trust, communication, and roles
were discussed by participants as being directly related to Latino marriage. Subthemes of
religious influence, delivery, cost, and therapists training were discussed by participants as
being directly related to PMC with Latino couples. Subthemes of birth order, parenting,
immigration, extended family, and tradition were discussed by participants as being
overlapping with Latino/a culture and Latino marriage. Subthemes of respect and trust,
communication and roles were found to overlap as many of the participants discussed these
topics concurrently. For tradition, two sub subthemes also emerged: a) tradition as it related
to expectations regarding roles, and b) tradition as it related to celebration. These sub
subthemes are represented by two smaller circles in the subthemes of tradition in the
conceptual map. Below, I report on the above-mentioned themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes with support from the interviews, artifacts, memos, and member checks.

Unique Aspects of Latino/a Culture

It was important to address overarching themes within Latino/a culture as much of the couples’ stories were represented through their culture, which in turn related to how they understood marriage. The themes discussed in this section are dress, language, religion, tradition, and extended family. Tradition had two sub subthemes that are also discussed.

Dress

Dress was discussed within three of the six couple interviews. At times, dress was discussed within the context of certain traditions, but was evident as part of the overarching Latino/a culture. For example, Ana describes the importance of certain garb when celebrating Dia de Guadalupe:

“Our lady Guadalupe is big in our culture. So you’ll see the cathedral and the Guadalupians get together on the 14th of December. What happens is they’ll have lot of Indians that will dance to it...and our dress, well on special occasions you’ll see I have my lady de Guadalupe. And on special occasions we will dress in our skirts, blouses and even at times at special events...so even at special activities for that I will wear a Barossa which is like a scarf that they use in the Mexican tradition.”

Guy shared a traditional hat that was made from Alpaca fur for his artifact. Guy spoke of the hat being used to keep him warm when working with animals in the mountain of Bolivia. Carlos described a sombrero, as a traditional dress for Latino men. Carlos brought a sombrero as his artifact and explained that the hat was over 100 years old and came from his grandfather who wore it when working in the fields (Appendix M). To him, it represented hard work and tradition because the hat was used in the fields to keep the sun out of the man’s eyes when harvesting food for the family.
“My hat. This is a very traditional hat from my hometown. We are the ones to create this kind of hat...so when we are working in the fields, it's almost like an umbrella and it covers you all because the sun is really hot...our ancestors, they created this kind of hat. This has been made from something like a palm, from a palm tree. This particular palm is not like a coconut tree—it's different. It’s a process to do these things. It’s really hard. It’s not for everyone. It’s an art. It’s not like, you know, you do it in a machine. It’s by hand...all of this is by hand. And money...it’s expensive. For so many years, I was born in ‘53 the hat was already made. So this hat is already 100 years old maybe more. It’s been created for people working in the fields.”

Additionally Carlos discussed that the hat is a way to impress women. It shows status, pride, money, and power.

“People use the nice hats to get the attention of the girls. In fact when they used to go to parties everybody goes, so you need to show your best hat. You have to have the hat. The hat has to be the first thing that is going to kick it.”

Marge describes that, in general, Latino/a culture emphasizes that the woman covers up more. Marge discussed that, as she was growing up, this was a point of contention between her and her mother:

“The way my mom wanted me to be and the way I should behave. I was just not having it, and part of the culture is that you are supposed to dress real modest and you’re supposed to behave and be real quiet. I was totally different than that.”

Later Marge attributed her desire to be different and rebel against the traditional dress as part of her desire to be more independent and more “Americanized.”

Language

Within the current study participants often mentioned language as a distinct part of Latino/a culture, and was often used a measure for the level of assimilation. For instance, Marge discussed only speaking Spanish in her home and mentioned that she was happy to do the interview for this study in English, as she needed to practice her English for her job that began in the fall, as she had not spoken much English over the summer with friends and
family. Catty and Carlos also reported only speaking Spanish in their home. Although Marge and José were both raised in the United States, Marge explained that the language is something that they both “kept”:

“And of course the language, I have always spoken Spanish and to this day we just speak English at work and we speak Spanish at home. So we keep that going. Our daughter will speak to us in English and we speak to her in Spanish. That’s how we carry our conversations. So the language is something I kept and I’m better in Spanish than in English but because of the job, you know. I’m glad we are speaking English right now so I can practice for when I go back to school next week, cause I don’t speak English at all during the summer unless I go to the store. When I’m at home or with our friends it’s in Spanish, unless they don’t speak Spanish then I’ll speak English.”

When I was reading over the transcript this quote stuck out to me because it speaks to aspects of the native culture that Latino/a immigrants “keep.” The notion of “keeping” the culture was evident in several of the interviews and will be discussed in greater detail later, but the idea of “keeping” aspects of the Latino/a culture after immigrating or being raised in the United States was something that was important for therapists to understand, and also for the couple to understand.

Ana and Guy discussed the importance of their children learning the Spanish language because it was taught to them mainly by Ana and Guy’s parents and grandparents. Ana explained:

“That’s why our kids speak Spanish because my grandmother spoke Spanish so we had to speak Spanish and didn’t speak any English. She lived with us so we had to speak Spanish. And so then my mother, when we started having kids, she normally speaks to them in Spanish so they had no choice, they had to learn Spanish.”
Additionally, Ana reported that there were differences in the levels of fluency among their children based on how old they were and how much care was given to them by Ana’s mother, as she only spoke Spanish to the children:

“Our kids are bi-lingual, but because we’re one generation back and they’re two generations back, so they’re not as fluent. So our oldest is the most bi-lingual. The second is still very bi-lingual and the third is the youngest, so he’s a little less.”

As Ana shared, there is a multi-generational purpose to language, which included keeping the family close to one another through the process of language acquisition.

For intercultural couples, language was not a barrier, as might be expected, but at times a way of bringing them closer. Jerry, a native Texan, and Lola, a Mexican immigrant, also only spoke Spanish in their home. Jerry is fluent in Spanish given that he spent several years in Mexico. Throughout the interview Jerry discussed embracing Lola’s culture as his own. By speaking her native language in their home this was one way of showing Lola that he accepts her culture. For Ivan, a second generation immigrant from Germany, and Maria, a fourth generation immigrant from Mexico, it is easier for them to speak English as Maria speaks very little Spanish. Maria reported that Ivan is more fluent in Spanish than she is. Directly following the interview, Ivan and Maria’s four year-old son entered the room and Ivan shared that he was teaching him Spanish. The child then counted to ten in Spanish with Ivan. It was interesting to see that Ivan spoke more Spanish than Maria and both partners felt it was important to teach their children Spanish.

All three therapists reported that language is something to consider with couples in therapy. Therapists reported that language can be a barrier, at times, and recommended that therapists that work with the Latino/a population on a regular basis should be fully bi-lingual
in order to keep the consistency in flow, rapport, and dialect in therapy. As Cata explains, speaking Spanish is essential, “The fact that I speak Spanish is essential. Sometimes you have the male has more proficiency in English. You have to have a therapist that speaks the language in Spanish. That’s essential.” T explained language is important for clients that need additional support services beyond PMC:

“How comfortable they feel speaking English. I found that I work with a lot of clients that did know English but they didn’t feel comfortable speaking it so a lot of times they didn’t advocate for themselves as they could have in other systems, you know like the welfare systems, or in school for their kids.”

George discussed the formality differences between Spanish and English that can make a big difference in therapy, “There is an adherence to formality, the use of formal pronouns Usted, Ustedes. Again, maybe that’s not unique to this culture exactly, but having competence in that area.” Although George did not think that this was something that was unique to Latino/a culture, it can present language barriers that affect how comfortable clients feel in therapy. George also made suggestions for ways therapists can handle language barriers in PMC:

“When making referrals a lot of the clients are afraid to call because of the legal status and also they don’t know if they’re going to be addressed in English or Spanish so they would really hesitate to do this. Oh, the last thing to recommend to therapists is they ask everybody you have in therapy whether they’re comfortable in English or Spanish. If you just have a couple you can ask them, but if it’s a whole family ask the kids even though they understand a lot of Spanish or some of it sometimes they don’t understand particular words. So you have to say it in English. So you may have to repeat things back in English and in Spanish.”

Religion

The influence of the Catholic religion on Latino/a culture and way of life is well documented within the literature. Religion was consistently addressed by the couples and therapists in this study. Three of the participants’ artifacts displayed some form of religious
representation. Maria and Lola presented the Virgin Mary and child as their artifact to represent Latino/a culture. Maria’s artifact is shown in Appendix N. Although neither of these participants reported being especially religious, they identified that Catholicism has a significant influence on Latino/a culture. For Maria, the pictures of the Virgin Mary and child represent the following:

“I’m not Catholic but these, to me, have always been something that I loved ever since I was a child. Maybe it was because my mother loved it and that was because she was Catholic. And I’ve always loved angels. I have angels all around the house. It’s a comforting feeling that whenever I look at it, it brings warmth to me.”

Ivan also agreed with Maria by explaining:

“The Madonna and child is definitely Mexican folklore. Whether you’re Catholic or not, you love the Madonna and child.”

Lola explained her artifact represented family which is a significant part of her culture:

“To me, it doesn’t represent the religious part of looking at the Virgin Mary. It really represents something that belonged to my family. It belonged to my grandmother and might be more than 100 years old and it represents family. You know, you have things from generation to generation. That doesn’t belong to me anymore it belongs to my daughter and she will give it to her daughter, hopefully…I think Mexicans have very tight family bonds and that’s one of the most important things for us. That represents my family and motherly nature that we are.”

Jerry also reflected his feelings regarding Lola’s artifact, as it had symbolic importance to him:

“I have the same feeling, I mean I knew her grandmother and saw that piece in her home. Everyone loved her she was really sweet and I loved her. So yeah, it leaves a little more of a religious impact on me but obviously when I see it the first thing I think of is her grandmother.”

Ana’s artifact was a cross with Christ on it. Ana explains that:

“I brought the cross, it’s a wooden cross and we have it above our bed because it is tradition to have crosses in the rooms and so we have one in every bedroom, and all our kids had a cross in their rooms, either a baptism
cross when they were first born...when they went to college I bought them a cross for their rooms, when they got their first apartment, we got them a cross. When I was staying home and I was putting them down for a nap I used the rosary or the crucifix, or our statues of the blessed mother. We always knew that good times or bad times that we could always go to the cross, we could always pray. So that’s how our kids were raised and we had the same beliefs and values. At every milestone in their growing up and in our lives we’ve always had a cross--in baptism, weddings, funerals, sickneses, and graduation.”

Ana and Guy talked about the overlap of culture, religion, cycles of life, and family.

Ana: “I think that one reason we always survived everything is because we always knew that no matter what we will be together and we knew that no matter what God will help us through it.”

Guy: “If you look at what God represents life and when the crops come, so the materials come from the earth and come from God. Now that’s our personal belief but it’s there all the time.”

José and Marge both emphasized that even though their views of religion have changed over time, they still both acknowledge the influence of religion on the overarching culture and in their lives:

José: “I think so because most of the people in Mexico are Catholic. That’s part of the culture and that’s something that even her or having her, I say her because she was doing her own thing but she would still go to the Catholic church and mass.”

Marge: “I went to church because I had to, and I still go and I still celebrate Christmas and Easter and it’s more like a having fun there than being there. I do pray, but I don’t have to be in church to pray.”

During the interview with Marge and José pointed out a painting of Jesus at the last supper that they had obtained from a Mexican artist in prison. They discussed that the painting meant a great deal to them, not necessarily because of the religious aspect, but because it was a representation of their home country.
All three therapists mentioned that the emphasis of religion was unique to Latino/a culture. Religion played a part in how they conducted PMC and also in how they approached subjects such as birth control. For Cata, Catholicism plays a role in the way couples view family and family planning, which she incorporates into therapy:

“There’s a very strong influence in power regarding the extended family, faith, religion, most of the clients have been Roman Catholic. Their faith plays a great deal in their lives, especially women. Their saints, The Virgin de Guadalupe, very powerful influential person and the issue of birth control is another issue…The faith, of course, is going to involve in how the couple or how the individual uses their faith. Their faith regarding birth control.”

Additionally, Cata discussed that religion and faith are often used to cope with stressful situations:

“We go back to faith and I think faith and coping is synonymous, you know, most people believe that there is a God and there are Saints and they pray to them and the really reach out to them. And so their coping is using that as a support structure, their church, their faith.”

Although religion is generally a part of culture, Catholicism, the saints, and celebrations were oftentimes central to ways of life for Latinos/as in this study. Which celebrations are emphasized, ways of life, church practices, utilizing faith as a coping mechanism, frequency of attending church, prayer, etc. are all topics that may need to be discussed in greater detail when working with Latino couples.

**Tradition**

Traditions were discussed in two sub subthemes: a) traditions associated with expectations of the family in regards to ways of living and roles, and b) traditions associated with celebrations. The importance of tradition regarding ways of living and roles was emphasized by the three couples that were first generation immigrants to the United States, but was mentioned less in interviews with intercultural couples and couples that were not
first generation immigrants. For Catty and Carlos, their villages emphasized different traditions:

“It’s rich. All our tradition is…every single village has their own tradition. They celebrate it in their own way. Also, this is the way we were raised. She was raised in one village and I was raised in another village. It’s a little different, mine is more traditional. We got more traditions from our past, so we just keep going with the present and with all those past traditions.”

And later Carlos discussed him and Catty breaking away from some of the traditions they didn’t agree with:

“So we want to change, we want changes. And the change is going to be in your family first, because if you want to do some changes, you have to start in your family and you have to break some rules. And that’s why we broke some of the rules. It was the influences. So we were young, together, and we want to change. We want to do things different. We want to keep some things, but at least something in the family has to be broken. You feel freedom.”

This was also a struggle for Marge and José and their extended family as Marge did not want to follow the tradition of being a housewife:

“A lot of things that my mom wanted me to do like learn how to cook, to be a good wife, and all that. They would work because my dad decided that that wasn’t a priority anymore. It was studying and being independent so that was a lot of, you know, pulling from one side to another. My mom grew up in the center of Mexico and she was still very basic things and my dad grew up in the U.S. It was kind of a combination of both, but I took more after the more modern things to do…I guess I don’t consider myself a traditional Latino Hispanic because all the laws that my mom wanted to instill in me, I didn’t agree with it…The thing my mom always tried to have me be, the way like a lady, and be a lady. I just, like I said, I was always against any rule and I was always in trouble because of that.”

Later Marge discussed tradition in regards to expectations of women, which she has rebelled against.

“We had friends that were very traditional in their ways. Their husbands would not allow their wives to be with me because they never went out because they never went out to go with their friends, by themselves, or go
out of town. Things that women don’t do. Women go with their husbands everywhere. And I will drive our car and be out till two in the morning, and it will be a big scandal in our neighborhood. My mom said everybody’s watching you and what are people going to say and the way you’re dressing. So that was my mom’s way of telling me you’re not supposed to do that.”

José did not want to follow traditions associated with boxing:

“My father was a big fan of bull fighting but he never took me to a bull fight. In another respect he wanted me to be a boxer and I didn’t want to be a boxer at all. And that was kind of a fight between my father and my grandfather.”

For Randy, tradition associated with farming and raising roosters was natural, as he is a third generation rooster farmer and still very much enjoys it. Randy discussed that raising roosters is not a pastime, but a way for him to carry out a Mexican tradition that is part of his family:

“Well it’s been in my family for generations. I’m the third generation. My father, my grandfather and my great grandfather. Which originally came from Mexico.”

Amelia also discussed Randy’s dedication to his profession and how his schedule is oftentimes dictated by his farming. For Amelia and Randy, choosing where to live was based on Randy’s family farm and his career.

The second sub subtheme of tradition was celebration. Celebration was discussed as an area of importance in Latino/a culture by all six couples. Amelia presented a piñata as her artifact as a way to show that celebration of people’s “birthdays, graduations, baptisms and quinceaneras.” Carlos discussed the following traditions as important, “[We] celebrated so many days of the Vatican…Dia de los Santos, Dia de los Muertos, Dia de Jesus.” Catty provided the following examples of celebration that are important: “Mothers day is very important our culture. Dia de los Muertos, this is another really important day too.”
As Guy discussed, even though he and Ana both consider themselves Latino/a, there were differences in their celebrations based on where they raised:

“The dance, the way they dress to celebrate, we had similar things like that at different times because the appearance of Guadalupe was at one time in Mexico and at a different time in Bolivia. But when it came to holidays like Christmas and things like that it was basically the same.”

As stated above, this was also true for Catty and Carlos, as they were raised in different villages. Maria discussed ways that she and Ivan integrated certain celebrations into their lifestyle in the United States:

“We tried to blend both [cultures] but we always tried to be a family and always tried to be together. After work or on the weekends. On holidays, our families would get together. I would cook on holidays. On Christmas, we have a lighting ceremony which we do. On Easter, we get together. And then, we’d have Christmas at my mom’s house and thanksgiving at my sister’s house. So we assimilated a lot of our traditions here and tried to bring whatever we could into the culture here.”

Most cultures have distinct celebrations, but within the Latino/a population these are closely linked to religion and family. Celebrations mentioned above are unique to the Latino/a population and are an important cultural value that many of the couples within the current study discussed as significant. Throughout the data analysis process it became evident that, despite my preconceived notions of celebration and immigration being linked, for most of the couples in the study celebration and keeping traditions alive were not impacted by immigration status. In other words, celebrations were equally as important to those couples that were intercultural or grew up in the United States as they were for those who were first generation immigrants. This was in contrast to the first category of tradition, which related to family roles and expectations. Tradition associated with family roles and
expectations seemed to be directly related to immigration and acculturation for the couples in this study. Hence, two sub subthemes emerged within the subtheme of tradition.

Extended Family

Within Latino/a culture, extended family is much more than just family. It is a support system, people to celebrate with, people to rely on for carrying down traditions within the family, and role models to espouse to. Extended family was mentioned as part of Latino/a culture in all the couple interviews. When Amelia was asked to explain unique aspects of her cultural background she discussed the following regarding extended family:

“To me it’s my family, family comes first. And I think we both see that because whatever we do, we do for our family. Everything we do is for our family and we help each other in whatever we have to do. We value that whatever we have because we both put into it.”

For Maria and Ivan, there was a distinct difference between the way Ivan, a second generation German immigrant, and Maria, a Latina, viewed family. Maria reported:

“He feels that if he doesn’t see them [family] then, he feels bad so he has to see them. But it’s not like I’m yearning, I’m aching, I need to see my mom. There not as much yearning and aching…We get depressed if we can’t see each other. Yes, at least in my family. I’m like I miss you, I need to see you. And it really affects me that way. I feel like I, I really just strongly miss them, and it’s like a tie that I don’t like when it’s being cut or held by a thread…I don’t think that family ties and connections are anywhere nearly as strong with the white culture in general as they are with most other ethnicities. For me it’s just good for my mental health to be able to be around my brothers and sisters, and my mom, and my dad. Whoever I can, whenever I can.”

For Catty and Carlos family and tradition were closely linked:

“Respect the aunts and uncles. When the godmother, the godfather, and when the family came to the house, to visit the house, and we don’t see for a long time we need to kiss the hand.”
Despite Ana and Guy living in the United States after their marriage, they continued to make living arrangements based on extended family needs. Guy made clear:

“I think, her mother took care of her grandmother and when her mother was passing away, we were close, a couple miles--that was important to her, when we were looking for a house to be close to her mother. And so, we stayed there for at least a month because it was important and for her mother too, and vice versa, and her mother felt comfortable because her daughter was there, and she was taken care of.”

Ana confirmed the emphasis of the extended family, but also stated that there were distinct differences between Latino/a immigrant families and Latino/a family members that were born in the United States. This was further confirmed in her member check, which she shared via e-mail:

“Immigrated families feel that the couple should have to live close by, visit on Sundays, and that the parents should live with the couple in their old age. United States-born Hispanics are more independent, have more mobility in where they live, have friends, and do not believe in the tradition of Sunday visits. They believe that the parents should be independent even in their old age.”

**Latino Marriage**

In this section I discuss several themes that emerged regarding unique aspects of Latino marriage. Additionally many couples and therapists provided advice for therapists that may work with Latino premarital couples regarding topics and things to consider. Due to the couples’ stories and therapist advice being interlaced so tightly and flowing together in a succinct manner, they are presented together in one section for the results and are discussed separately in the discussion chapter.

There were several themes that were overlapping within the context of Latino marriages which included extended family ties, birth order, tradition, and immigration. Because birth order was so closely overlapping with parenting and the way the couple
understood their role within marriage it is discussed in this section, while tradition is
discussed above. Extended family ties and immigration are discussed in both sections as they
present unique attributes to Latino/a culture, in general, and more specifically to Latino
marriage. The themes of roles, communication, and respect and trust directly related to
Latino marriage, which is embedded in Latino/a culture. When these topics (roles,
communication, and respect and trust) were discussed by participants of the study they were
explicitly noted to be part of Latino marriage. Sex was considered to be a theme within
Latino marriage as it too was discussed within the context of Latino marriage. Immigration is
overlapping with parenting and extended family as immigration status had an effect on how
the Latinos/as in the study parented (i.e., how much the extended family was integrated into
their lives and the ways in which children were parented). This section’s headings are
organized as follows: extended family ties, birth order, parenting, roles, communication,
respect and trust, sex, and immigration.

Extended Family

The extended family has a central role in how cultural understanding is formed.
Although the extended family is mentioned above I also thought it was important to discuss
the extended family more directly in terms of Latino marriage, as there were some unique
aspects revealed through the data analysis process. For example, T provided advice on ways
to talk with the couple about the role of the extended family within the marriage:

“The social support, and cultural support. How do they view family? Do they, you know, some Latino families believe in having multiple generations in one household. Is that something that this couple values? How will they handle changes in their situation when their kids start their family—are they going to be supporting those kids in their homes? If mom gets sick, and can she move in, is that all right with everybody?”
Ana discussed the impact of Guy’s mother on their relationship, as she had a significant impact on Guy’s expectations of marriage, both before and during his and Ana’s marriage. As Ana explains:

“If the sons are closer to the mother, you know, no matter what it’s ‘her.’ And I think that the saying is, this is my family unit and this is my wife. There’s a lot of negotiation between the mother-in-law and the daughter. I think it’s stronger in the Hispanics, and I think it’s strong in all cultures, but especially strong in the Hispanic culture.”

Ana also confirmed the notion that extended family ties run deep in her member check when she discussed that immigrants oftentimes live close to their family, whereas United States born Latinos/as are more independent, meaning they often live farther away from their families, and rely less on their extended family for support.

Ivan and Maria discussed the importance of family in their interview as well. Ivan discussed how he had to adapt to Latino/a culture by understanding the importance of the extended family. Ivan provided the following advice for therapists working with Latino couples:

“I think it is very crucial for premarital counseling, how important family is to the Hispanic culture, to a Mexican person. You’re not just marrying a person you’re marrying a family. They rally around each other…So in premarital counseling, if you are marrying a Mexican person and you like that person but you don’t like their family it’s probably not going to work because you’re marrying the family.”

Cata, a Latina therapist, discussed the consequences of unclear boundaries between the extended family and the couple:

“The dependent, independent idea, very powerful influence of the parents, grandparents, adults, aunts and uncles, in-laws with young adult married people or children. The family, they’re close but there’s also a lot of unclear boundaries. That becomes a real issue in therapy and that I’d like to talk about later. So there’s a very strong influence in power regarding the extended family.”
Later in the interview, Cata sums up the importance of discussing extended family issues with the couple and ways to talk with the couple about the extended family.

“I have couples coming in with problems around the power of the extended family. Because the Latino culture puts a great deal of respect to the older members of the family; the older members use that power in any way that they feel they need to which can interfere with the development of the relationship. And a word that we use clinically is enmeshed. There are a lot of boundaries that are so skewed and blurred that we have couples coming because their mother or their aunt is coming in and telling them they can’t do this, this is how you have to cook, and this is how you have to do this. And because they have such respect for them, we have problems with the development of a couple. So talking about how does one set limits, loving and caring limits with their extended family who wants to care for them and love them so it doesn’t overwhelm them and create conflict for themselves. For me, that’s one of the biggest goals the therapist needs to know, both talking with a young couple that is thinking of getting married, how much is grandma involved. If the family lives nearby how are they going to negotiate them being two adults developing a new little unit. How do they negotiate all the energy that’s coming from the extended family and how do they develop their own uniqueness.”

Cata’s response further emphasized the need for therapists to understand the extended family unit in addition to understanding the couple unit, as the extended family plays a central role in the development of the couple’s understanding of marriage. Moreover, after the wedding ceremony the extended family continues to play a central role in the development of the couple and the development of the family of procreation the couple creates. As Cata stated, it is important for the therapist to talk with the couple about the function of the extended family unit in decision making, role development, finances, and living arrangements in order to assist the couple in reducing conflict in the future. Additionally, Cata promotes post-marital therapy where the couple continues to work with the therapist on the transitions that occur following marriage (i.e., children, role of the extended family, gender role conflict).
Birth Order

The findings of this study suggest that birth order has an effect on the way the couple communicates, interacts, and solves problems. Ana discussed this in regards to her relationship with her husband, as they were both the eldest children. This caused some tension in their marital relationship, as they both wanted to lead, since that is what they were expected to do when they were younger. Ana explained being the oldest sibling can be helpful at times: “When we had any cousins or nephews we were always carrying them or changing them. So for me, having a child was no big deal, I mean I was used to it.” Guy also recalled having the responsibility of bringing his brother across the order to the United States because he was the oldest.

“When it came time for my brothers, myself, and my mother to come [to the United States], I had to make sure that I had one suitcase with whatever we needed, and my youngest brother. Those were my responsibilities. My mother had my other brother because he was a little bit more wild, but as long as I had my youngest brother, it was fine. But when we came to the US, the first line we would go through, the youngest ones would follow you and see what you would do, and so you would still have the responsibility.”

Ana expanded on her thoughts regarding birth order in her member check as well:

“The first born is expected to be the patriarch or the matriarch when the parents become old. They carry the responsibility of helping the parents with the family. Much responsibility is placed on this person. Within their family, they are the leaders, the ones who are responsible and, make the final decisions. When both are first born, the husband makes the final decision.”

Cata also confirmed the important role of birth order and the distinct differences between first born, second born, and so on in the family. According to couples and therapists within this study, level of responsibility within the family of origin and the family of procreation may be greatly impacted by birth order. This can have direct effects on the marital
relationship as both partners may want to be the leader in the relationship. This may cause conflict in times of decision making and may need to be parceled out more with Latino couples as compared to other couples. As Ana discussed, the couple may need to talk about ways they plan to care for elderly parents, as this is the eldest child’s responsibility.

**Parenting**

Parenting was mentioned by two of the three therapists and in all six couples’ interviews. All the couples in this study had children and discussed ways that they have raised their children, and parenting roles and skills they have used. Couples vacillated between sharing their own stories and providing advice for topics to be discussed in PMC. When sharing their stories couples discussed struggles, who provided them with support, immigration issues in regards to parenting, and the importance of their children learning about culture. Therapists provided guidance to other therapists that are working with PMC Latino couples in regards to unique aspects of culture that may need to be addressed within the subtheme of parenting skills.

Cata emphasized that many times the Latino couple lives in the moment within their relationship, which prevents them from thinking about issues that may arise when transitioning to having a family. In the following quote Cata shared her experiences when introducing parenting skills through a hierarchy of needs in order to encourage the couple to think ahead and be planful when considering having children:

“A lot of the population that I’ve worked with are uneducated, or limited in their education so their understanding of other ways, such as the concept of prevention and planning. I don’t want to take this out of context, but what comes to mind for me is the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and I think that Latino families, low income Latino families and couples that are new to the states and have these issues of immigration or language. They’re just functioning in the lower realm of life, day to day. So the idea of planning
and preventing, which are coping skills, if you strategize and prevent you
eliminate some hardships and problems and if that’s not the way you
function then you’re coping.”

Marge and José reiterated that they both thought it was important to discuss parenting skills
in premarital counseling as they struggled themselves with parenting at times:

“You might know everything, that you want to know, but raising the kids,
they don’t know the instructions and it’s hard to do. Sometimes I got home
and she was crying along with my daughter and I started crying too because
we didn’t know what to do, and then we go the family.”

This quote also speaks to the ties to the extended family, as José and Marge would turn to
their extended family in times when they felt stressed or overwhelmed, in this case with
parenting. Ana and Guy also agreed that there is a great need to discuss parenting skills,
especially when considering immigration status:

“I would say that there’s a tremendous need for parenting skills. So they
weren’t taught them or their family is in Mexico, and they’re here. They
don’t have someone they can go to, to help them or guide them.”

Ana and José reported that they spent time communicating with one another while
Ana was pregnant about their priorities in parenting. They established that giving their
children a high-quality education was a priority for both of them. In their interview they
shared the story of how they each took turns driving the children the 90 minute trip to school
and back. For Lola and Jerry, a intercultural couple, there is value in their children
understanding both of their cultures and living in both Mexico and the United States for some
time. They would like their children to share a deep understanding of culture the way that
they have within their marriage, in order to broaden their worldviews and their understanding
of culture.
George and Cata, both therapists, discussed the importance of parenting skills as a discussion topic within therapy. Cata emphasized the importance of getting males into therapy as they oftentimes do not recognize how crucial their role is as a father and partner:

“There’s a lot of outreach with the males that I used to not do, but now I do everything. The other issue that comes up with couple that most of them have children and if the couple is not working together there’s problems with the children, so learning about collaborative parenting. So we address issues that are initially not as threatening as possible and bring them in. I recruit them and that’s very specific to Latinos.”

George mainly sees families in therapy. George suggested discussing ways that the parents can work together, as a team, to raise their children. George explains the difficulty in working with fathers:

“The father has the ability to make it easier and enforce certain rules in the house. Many times a complaint that I have from the mother is that they go home and try different strategies with their children and the father will say no, that’s not what I want, and instead of respecting boundaries, for example, the punishment, the father will reward the child in another way. And many times the mother will tell me that the father doesn’t want to because the father is coming home, he’s tired, and he doesn’t want to deal with this and he doesn’t want to deal with the kids. So he doesn’t want to take responsibility and discipline the children.”

Additionally, George discussed talking with the couple about being the bosses of the family as a way to discuss parenting:

“The parents are called chief, which translates directly to jefe and jefa. So I use those particular words and the mother and the father are the chief of the family and no one else can dispute their authority, not even me. You are the chief and I’m going to make some suggestions, but you are the one who is going to say if that is good for your family or not.”

Cata discussed talking with the couple about how they plan to discipline the children and who is going to get up with the child at night as a way for the couple to begin thinking about their future as parents. Therapists and couples agreed that planning for children and ways of
parenting are topics that should be discussed in PMC as a way to alleviate future stressors for the couple. Responsibility of roles, ways to cope with stress of parenting, setting boundaries and using the extended family support, and leadership roles within parenting are all topics that were discussed above that are unique to the Latino/a population.

Roles

Traditionally, gender roles have been more strictly defined within the Latino/a culture, which may look like the woman staying home, taking care of the children, cleaning and preparing meals, while the man provides financially for the family. All three therapists supported discussing gender roles specifically with Latino couples. Cata explained that in general, gender roles are crucial to discuss within Latino premarital couples:

“The issues that come around gender roles and responsibilities are, depending on how current they are to the US, and where they were raised, the roles, the gender roles, whether they are male or female are very distinguished, so when they come together as a couple that becomes an issue because if they’re too separate, the roles, it’s very hard to work collaboratively. So we have a real split in responsibilities. So we have the real typical the wife has to stay at home and watch the kids or the wife has to work and still take care of the kids and still take care of the household and do the cooking and shopping. Depending on how much they take in, the culture, or their beliefs, or their values, or their guiding principles of the Latino culture will kind of polarize the man and the women in their roles which makes a really difficult relationship when it’s not working for one or the other. In premarital one of the things that a clinician really needs to think about is talking about all the responsibilities that come. So, how do you feel about working, how important is that, who is going to take care of the money, who is going to make decisions?”

Ana also considers the level of acculturation of the couple as a contributor to role expectations:

“I see that now Hispanic woman are getting educated and they’re going through a lot of the same things that woman in the 60s did. Some men are not supportive of it. You know, some of them have to do it out of necessity because they’re divorced and have children they have to raise. So
consequently we’re starting to need support groups. So I don’t know, I’m starting to see that education, for females in the Hispanic culture, it’s at a milestone right now.”

Marge shared the following insights in regards to how her and José established clear gender roles, and provided the following suggestions for therapists working in PMC:

“The sharing of the housework, you both are going to work. It’s not the big earner that gets most of the things. I don’t know. That’s mostly what the argument is about. Money, or spending too much money or you’re not making enough money, and the housework. Who’s going to do what? And we kind of start doing it, what do you want to do and he asked me, what do you like to do and I said nothing really, but if I have to chose should I make the bed, no, and I know he doesn’t like to cook, so I did the cooking and he does the cleaning after cooking so that has worked. So somebody does whatever they hate the least.”

For Maria, who is in a intercultural relationship, being submissive is something that she is content with and enjoys in her relationship as she and Ivan both agree that woman are submissive within a marital relationship. As Ivan explains:

“I think one body can only have one head. You know, two become one and with all these American woman thinking that they’re equal and they can be the head of the household…On the surface they might be accepting it, but underneath they’re rebelling against it by bowing out of the marriage secretly, or giving up on the marriage. Because they’re tired of fighting for their financial position of being the head and the king, which is the way I think that God created man to be.”

Jerry, who is also in a intercultural relationship, sums this up by simply stating that “American woman are not good housekeepers,” to which Lola agreed. Lola discussed that Latina woman learn to be good housekeepers by living with their family until they are married, which also may contribute to their submissiveness within the relationship. Jerry also clarified that submissive does not equal lazy as he believed Lola is one of the hardest working women he knows.
As is shown by the above discussion, there is variance in the ways Latino couples believe roles should be divided within the household. This is true for all cultures, but unique aspects of Latino/a cultures include division of labor in regards to household responsibilities, parenting, and finances. Additionally, there is the underlying subject of who will be the “head” of the household. For four of the six couples in this study, the man’s role was explicitly discussed as the head of the household. Couples discussed that communication was needed around responsibility of roles, which may also need to be discussed within PMC.

*Machismo* was an underlying theme throughout the interviews for this study; however, an interesting theme emerged that included another side of machismo. For the Latino males interviewed in this study a desire for control and power was evident. This was shown through being responsible for the finances of the home, which was directly discussed by Carlos, Ivan, Randy, and Guy, while Maria, Ana, and Catty discussed being primarily responsible for the cooking, cleaning, and parenting.

On the other hand, there was also a sense of heightened responsibility from the husband to the wife, and the family members. For Ivan, *machismo* was shown by being the head of his household, for Carlos this was through making decisions for his family, for Randy this was shown by deciding where his family would live based on his career, and for Guy this was shown by having control over the finances. This theme emerged early in the data analysis process and I was then able to reflect on this theme through; memos, the interview review sheet, and probe into this more deeply in later interviews. For example, when interviewing Ana and Guy, I was able to spend some time reflecting on this theme with them:
“I think that’s one thing that’s come up in the other interviews I’ve done is that, there is still kind of machismo, maybe kind of, maybe not so much. But the male also holds a lot of responsibility too, in that, to take care of this family and to care for his wife and to really be there for her. Maybe more than other cultures, would you agree with that?”

Guy responded with the following:

“Yeah I think so that the Hispanics, the father feels he’s got to be the protector, the provider and make sure if anyone needs anything he’s there. And I know the mother does that as well, because the mother will defend their child to the end. You would see mothers in competition that their child’s the best one. I think a father has inside. That feeling, that he’s responsible for the love for his family. So I think that’s true.”

Ana concurred:

“I think it’s very true because the one thing I know is that, no matter what, he’s going to support our family, he may have lost a job, or left a job but I know immediately he had another job. So I never feel the pressure because I always know that he supports our family and he always has. And I realized that at the very beginning when he was out working all the time because he had this family, he had this child and he is feeling all this pressure that he needed to support that family. So I think that’s very true, very true.”

I was then able to reflect and emphasize the importance of these insights:

“I think that’s maybe one side of the male role that doesn’t come out very often, we don’t hear about that there is this idea that the male makes the decision and is the head of the household, but there is another side of that. So I think that’s one really interesting thing that has come out across the interviews and I’m glad that that resonates with you as well.”

This conversation was crucial to solidify the emerging face of machismo within the data. The sentence where Guy stated, “That feeling, that he’s responsible for the love for his family,” resonated very strongly with me. I interpreted Guy’s statement to mean he is responsible to create love, show love, express love, role model love, and foster love within his family. This is a hefty responsibility for Guy, and could also be true for other Latino men.
The level of responsibility and meaning of responsibility is something that may need additional attention with Latino couples.

I was also able to follow-up on this theme in subsequent interviews. The strict gender roles were also true for bicultural couples such as Ivan and Maria, as shown above. Maria also contended that women are to be treated with admiration within the relationship:

“At the same time though, while I let my husband be head of the household… I love him being head of the household, and I chose him as my husband, and I guess this goes back to my cultural background, because he treats me like a princess, like a prize jewel. And if he didn’t treat me like a princess and didn’t have respect for my thoughts and opinions I also wouldn’t have married him. But he has. He definitely has the final say so, he listens to me and has respect for me.”

Ana also believed that her husband listened to her opinion, despite him having the final decision:

“It is good that he listens to me, or he’ll ask me, or I’ll tell him what I think that he considers that and we’ll discuss it. He doesn’t just say well this is the way it is, because I think that would be really hard for me.”

For José, the idea of providing for his family was instilled in him from his grandfather, “My grandpa was always telling me that you need to provide for the wife and go find a job, you need to provide for your family.”

In summary, although gender roles are clearly defined by culture and cultural background for the Latino couple, it is still very important for the therapist to address with the couple as it (the balance of gender roles) can vary based on the cultural background of the couple, immigration, acculturation, education, and support. According to these interviews, it is also important for the therapists to address the role of the man and his sense of responsibility to his future wife and family, as this was reported to be important to the men of this study.
Communication was discussed by all three therapists and all six couples. Communication is a part of all the PMC programs described in the literature review. In this section, I discuss aspects of communication that may be unique to the Latino/a culture based on couples’ experiences and insights. In the interviews, couples talked about ways that they communicated regarding cultural issues. For example, Ivan and Maria talked about their cultural background, and how they planned to mold the two together prior to their marriage. Maria felt that she always had a voice when talking with Ivan despite him having the final decision, as discussed in the gender roles section. For Marge and José, Marge was able to express herself and share her opinions with José, which José enjoys.

Amelia provided the following insight for therapists regarding discussing communication:

“I guess by letting them both voice their opinions and letting them communicate, and put out what their particular problems are. I mean you’re never going to get anything settled if you don’t put out the problem, or we don’t talk about it. It will just get worse.”

T suggests the following for therapists in regards topic to discuss in PMC:

“Support, social support, work employment, that’s another issue that probably needs to be discussed. Does the husband want the wife to work? What is their view of family? Do they have a traditional view where the husband goes out to work, does the wife stay at home with the kids? Do each of them prescribe to that? What happens if something happens to the husband? Would he mind the wife going out and working? Or what if the wife didn’t need to work but just wanted to? How would he respond to that? Or do they both believe in kind of being equal partners in the relationship and both being able to work outside the home and having the responsibilities for taking care of the kids. I think those would be important, work, discussing how they will socialize…Encourage the communication about those issues, maybe give some homework, bibliotherapy, just to start the conversation about that.”
In regards to finances, Ana and Guy discussed that they both agreed that Guy would be a better bookkeeper for their family finances, given that Ana had tried to organize the finances and did not enjoy this task:

“But we realized when we were doing bills that I didn’t want to do that, and it gave me a headache so he does the bills… I mean, I know I could do the bills if I had to and I did them in college and I did them while we were first married, but he’s better at it and enjoys doing it more, so I say go for it.”

A discussion surrounding finances was reinforced by T and Cata, who stated that finances can be a source of control for male, how money is spent, and who gets how much money is a topic that needs to be discussed within PMC as it has a direct link to machismo. T explains:

“I think employment, financial, the financial stuff, employment how is that going to be handled. Is it ok for the man to be away working? Is it ok for the woman to be working at all? What kinds of work opportunities are appropriate for each person? How will the money be handled? How much access will the wife have to the accounts or vice versa. I’m trying to pay attention to the inequalities I saw, or not even that, they’re not necessarily inequalities, but in abusive situations they turned out to be. So I think that would be important to discuss--to head off some of the sequela to abuse.”

As shared by many of the couples and therapists, communication around certain topics such as finances, parenting, roles, and boundaries is important. One topic that was not specifically addressed, but is discussed in most PMC programs, is problem solving. Although problem solving may be implied by talking through the issues above, specific problem solving strategies were not represented in the interviews. This may be one area that does not require as much direct communication about with Latino couples.

Respect and Trust

Although respect and trust can be considered distinct in regards to their contribution to marriage, they seemed to be closely linked and overlapped in many of the interviews for this study. Many times one was not discussed without the other; therefore, these were
considered one subtheme for the purpose of this dissertation. When Catty and Carlos were asked to talk about what they believed were important topics to address in PMC, Catty responded with the following, “I think love and respect. Always I think the respect and patience, because it’s very easy to lose respect and patience. I think if the couple loses that…” Carlos then added, “Nothing will save the marriage. You don’t respect your love, people they say love, but they don’t really mean love.” Carlos also discussed the role of honesty, which was closely aligned with trust for him and Catty, “So I think honesty is the most important tool to suggest to these people, honesty with your partner and yourself.” For Carlos and Catty respect and love were intertwined within their relationship. This was also true for Amelia and Randy. Amelia explained that therapists can help by addressing the following:

“I think the thing that would help is that in Mexican and Hispanic culture you are supposed to obey your spouse and respect each other. Trust is the main thing in the relationship and without that…you always have to respect and trust each other.”

José shows Marge respect by letting her do what she wants and also not putting pressure on her to act like others in their friend circle. Marge says:

“In Iowa, when we went into people’s homes they will have the food and all the woman will get up and get their husbands the food they wanted and serve it. And I will go get my food and sit down and they come and ask, you didn’t get anything for your husband and I’ll say he doesn’t want to eat now he’ll eat when he wants.”

José then added, “And I always tell them she’s not my servant, she’s my wife.” For Maria and Ivan, respect comes when Ivan treats Maria like a princess, and was a major contributor to why she married him, “If he didn’t treat me like a princess and
didn’t have respect for my thoughts and opinions I wouldn’t have married him. But he has.”

One interesting finding within this theme was that respect and trust were mentioned by four of the six couples as something that was important and a key part of their relationship, but none of the three therapists directly discussed respect as an important part of the PMC process. T discussed respect under the guise of violence and decreasing violence through respect for the woman’s independence. George mentioned respect in regard to the couple building one another up and showing support. Cata discussed respect in regards to each member of the couple understanding one another’s past hurts and bringing those into the relationship. None of these therapists explicitly discussed respect as a unique factor in Latino marriages.

All three therapists did discuss ways that infidelity can ruin trust and needs to be discussed within PMC. For example, when asked a probing question regarding infidelity and Latino marriage, T explained that, “[Infidelity is] more tolerated…accepted, I don’t think I would say it’s appreciated or liked. But I do think it’s tolerated. Especially when the women feel like they don’t have any other options to support their families.” T believes that Latina women who do not have other resources or support are more likely to stay in a marriage after infidelity occurs. Cata discussed trust within the relationship regarding infidelity as well, “When you start working with infidelity, which is a big issue in Latino families and couples…it’s promoted by the culture for males; it’s that dominant position that males can do that.” There seemed to be a disconnection between what therapists discussed surrounding respect and trust, and couples’ perceptions around respect and trust. This is discussed in greater detail in the discussion section.
Sex

Sex and preventative strategies to pregnancy were discussed within five of the nine interviews. It is important to discuss sex and family planning with Latinos/as, as Maria explains, “Mexican women are very fertile…and we’re very sexual. We just are. We’re definitely more sexual than white women.” Additionally, Maria added the following statement in her member check, “I think that Hispanics are perhaps more sexual in nature in comparison to Caucasians.” Ana, who speaks through a Catholic lens, stated that her family was more open to discussing sex and is important to discuss with premarital couples, especially in regards to family planning and contraception:

“Sex was very open and we discussed it. I think that’s important for females in the Hispanic culture partly because they’re Catholic because they don’t believe in premarital sex and contraception, but it is something they have to discuss and know what it’s about so they can know.”

Furthermore Ana added the following in her member check, “Sex is more openly discussed and seen as a sign of machismo. Females should understand the different forms of contraception and that it is not more wrong than having sexual intercourse outside of marriage [per her religious beliefs].” Cata also discussed women’s feeling regarding sex, “The other issue for women in the Latino/a culture is if you’re a good girl or you’re a bad girl and how you work that through on your own and become an adult and an intimate sexually rewarding partner. It’s complicated sometimes.”

In addition, Cata discussed sex in regards to prevention and family planning:

“Our faith regarding birth control. That affects intimacy and that’s a big issue Latino, or not. That’s a big issue if one of the members is not satisfied and very different place they are with intimacy, sexual relationship, how are they, so working on that is pivotal. And those are the items that come to be really important to make sure we cover in our very affected by the Latino culture.”
Marge discussed talking about the how the couple’s sexual relationship is affected by other aspects of the relationship:

“The other part, most of the couples think it’s about sex, you know it’s not all about sex. And I think the sex is better when the other things are resolved…the money and who’s doing the housework, so I think that kind of gets resolved itself, unless it’s somebody really weird, but that really gets resolved when the rest of it is. Because if somebody is not having enough sex it’s because they’re fighting about something else.”

Sex was also referenced in regards to infidelity within the relationship, as mentioned in the trust and respect section. When probed about infidelity, T explained that she has the following experiences with infidelity and the Latino/a culture, “[Infidelity is] more tolerated…accepted, I don’t think I would say it’s appreciated or liked. But I do think it’s tolerated.” Cata explained infidelity in the following way, “When you start working with infidelity, which is a big issue in Latino families and couples…and it’s promoted by the culture for males it’s that dominant position that males can do that.”

Infidelity was also mentioned in Catty and Carlos’s interview when discussing how their culture has affected their marriage, “The men, if they have some problems like if he’s drunk or a Latin lover that’s ok…For Latin women it’s ok if the man has an affair. It’s like, he’s a man it’s not a problem.” Catty reported that she was clear with Carlos that having a “Latin lover” was not acceptable to her and something that she would not tolerate, despite this being more accepted by their culture. In general, the sexual relationship is discussed in PMC, but more attention may need to be given to infidelity, family planning, and the sexual relationship when working with Latino couples.
Immigration

Immigration was a topic that was addressed by all three therapists and was lightly discussed by five of the six couples. For the couples, each presented a unique perspective of the effects of immigration on them as a couple. As stated earlier, José and Marge had a need to “keep” certain aspects of their culture alive. I interpreted this as meaning that it was important to keep aspects of their cultural background alive and well for them as individuals and also for them as a couple. Lola, a Mexican immigrant who married to an American, discussed that some things were more difficult to adapt to than others:

“So that’s why there’s certain things I’m going to have to accept when it comes time, only because I’m here. Not because I agreed to them.”

I probed:

“So you’ve had to adapt to some things you don’t want to?”

Lola answered:

“Well some things, you might not like but because you chose, I chose to come back here and live here and marry somebody who was not from my culture. Those things that even if you don’t like, you need to accept.”

I again probed:

“Is that easy or hard for you to do?”

Lola responded:

“Hard, some easy, some hard. Some things you just go along with and others you have to understand.”

Jerry has taken the time to embody and embrace aspects of Lola’s culture, “You better be ready to own it. Own it meaning, in our case, I sacrificed living in that person’s country, live fluently and efficiently and daily in that culture.” Later Jerry adds:
“You have to have a very strong commitment to the other person’s culture. To the extent that you own it, you’re proud of it. I mean, I’m Mexican and I tell people I’m Mexican. My wife’s Mexican, my children are Mexican, and I’m just as much Mexican as I am Texan. I’m just as proud of it and just as happy about it and know, not everything about it, but I think you have to have that deep sense of ownership of the other person’s culture or the drive, love, for that person to say, I’m all in. That culture defines them and I will make sure I get it.”

In many respects this statement shows the commitment between intercultural couples that is needed to accept, support, and embody one another’s culture, especially when one partner is immigrating to the other’s country. For Maria and Ivan, another intercultural couple, the transition of merging two cultures through marriage was much easier. Maria explains that this is partly due to her being a fourth generation immigrant and feeling very Americanized. Ivan explained the way they an integrated three (Latino/a, European and American) cultures:

“Well both of us feel like we’re American. So I think culturally we’re both Americans and yet our hereditary…and hers is Mexican and mine’s European, so things that she just pointed out; the coldness, the stiffness of my side, the European side is all true. And the fun, easygoing, festivities and laughter, and cooking in the kitchen are all very Mexican. All very culturally true of her background and we’re both proud of the backgrounds and because that probably doesn’t mix that well, as she was telling you, our parents don’t really see each other hardly at all. In fact, they haven’t seen each other since we got married. And they like each other and it doesn’t bother us at all because we have sort of mixed those two traditions of cultures, and traditions together for our marriage. Because we like a healthy dose of both…I wouldn’t say that I’ve become her culture or I’ve made her become my culture. We’re sort of a combination.”

For Ana and Guy, their children have shown them that immigration and acculturation has an effect on the way they view the world and relationships. As stated above, Ana and Guy’s children speak some Spanish based on how much they were exposed to Ana’s mother and grandmother when they were younger. Ana and Guy have also worked at teaching their children the traditions that both of them experienced in their childhood, as well as traditions
that they have accepted here in the United States. Guy reported that he emphasized soccer for his boys as a way of carrying out the tradition of sports that he was taught when he was younger. Ana discussed teaching her children Catholic practices and the emphasis of helping the extended family and the community as a way to carry down Latino/a traditions.

Catty recognized that there is a distinct difference between first generation immigrants, and second, third, or fourth generation immigrants:

“The other thing I want to mention about the Latin families, I think in the U.S. we are two kinds of Latin families. It’s like this one, who coming from our country, and my daughter, born here. Well she was not born here, but she grew up here. And they’re growing in between the two cultures. And it’s hard to keep our culture because I cannot put my kids in the cage, nothing in or nothing exit. Those families start to think a little bit different. It’s not like this couple. And maybe the counseling on where you born and how long you here because I think that the couples are going to be a little different. That’s what I think. And for couples coming [to the United Stated that were] married in Mexico it’s hard to stay together because here is another lifestyle and it’s a big change. And sometimes one is able to do some change and the other is not able to do the change, and you start to have the problems.”

Later she adds:

“I think Carlos and I have our problems because when the kids started growing up here they learned how it’s different than what we expect, because we grew up in another country, with other rules and another lifestyle. We have been surprised here because we think my son is going to do it like I say or like I teach, and it’s not. And this is another reason we have the problems because sometimes it’s like I say sometimes they can agree more with this style, and the other one is not. They start to have disappoints. It’s not easy.”

As stated above, immigration was a subtheme for all three therapists. All three therapists discussed the importance of acknowledging and working with immigration and acculturation issues. T explained the following in regards to immigration in therapy:

“If those stories and the history of their family is important, and influences them still two and three generations down, but definitely for first generation immigrants. The story of how they came here is very important because that
may influence, that may cause them to fear getting counseling. That may cause them to, it’s going to impact everything, access to healthcare, the relationship with their kids, how they’re going to advocate for their kids, the marital relationships. I definitely found that to be a factor. Who they marry even and for what reason, so I think that’s very important. Level of acculturation.”

George provided this account regarding connecting with Latino/a clients:

“The other thing I do almost immediately after talking about what brings them in is to share where I’m from. I’m from Mexico and we talk a little about that, then a little about myself and where I come from, my dad, my mom and that kind of stuff. And then I also tell them a little about my parents. My father was a shoe repairman. And I specifically make it known to them that I come from a family with lower SES. So I’m really trying to connect with them. I’m just like you.”

Later George shared:

“And then I also talk about how long have you been here, in the U.S.? How long have they been in the U.S. One of the very delicate issues is whether they’re here in the U.S legally...But the background of the people that I work with, especially with their background...they have more internal locus of control. Why? Because they’re immigrants. And the immigrant population is a very self selected group that is much different from the general population in Mexico. They’re the people that are lower SES, but they’re the people daring enough to pick up and go to a different country. Not only that, but they go to a country where they’re probably not welcomed, they’re probably not legal, they don’t speak the language. They don’t know the culture. All these things and yet they come. Which, to me, is indicative of a very internal locus of control. I can make it and I can change my future. And yet, I see very little of that...Other things to explore, that are specific to the Hispanic community. What were their initial plans coming to the U.S.? In fact, even growing up, you hear this myth that people come here because they want to be a part of it, they want to live here, this American dream, and they want to be here forever. But the truth is, at least in the Hispanic community, if you start talking, one of the very common themes is that they came here to make some money so that we could go back home and start a life. And unfortunately what happens is that they come here and they have children and by the time their children are five, six, seven years old they realize they can never go back. My kids don’t even speak Spanish very well. How will we ever go back, and what you find is that parent has to say goodbye to their dream and the plan is to come over here make a little bundle of money then go back. It’s like they were on a journey a temporary thing and they were waiting to start their life, and then
they realize that life is gone. I’m never going to go back to my home, my family they’re all gone. And not only that, but my child doesn’t even understand me all that well. So that’s a completely different thing but I think addressing the issue of what their initial dream was and discussing that in detail and how that’s affecting them now.

As shown above, George is passionate about helping his clients understand their immigration journey and how it might affect their own well being, and their relationship with their spouse and family. By using internal and external locus of control George assists couples in looking at ways they can take control over certain aspects of their life while also letting go over things they do not have control over. This can be helpful to premarital couples when looking at ways their immigration story, or even the immigration story of their parents, has affected the way they understand control and their upcoming marital relationship.

*Premarital Counseling with Latino Couples*

Therapists and couples had advice regarding PMC with Latino couples. Across interviews, therapists and couples did not always agree on how to counsel premarital Latino couples, but all participants could agree that PMC was important for Latino couples who were considering marriage. Subthemes that emerged included: delivery of PMC, cost, religious influence, and therapist training.

*Delivery of PMC*

PMC topics are presented in couples sessions that can be spread across several weeks, one couple session, group sessions that are spread across several weeks, or a weekend group encounter where couples spend an intense weekend focusing on their relationship. The delivery of PMC was important for many of the couples in this study. Cata had suggestions for the length of PMC, “I think a good 15 sessions or 20 sessions of really getting down to who you are, what are your plans, what are your dreams?”
At times, couples disagreed, across interviews, on ways to deliver PMC effectively to Latino couples. Marge and José thought it would be important to conduct PMC in a setting where the couple feels comfortable, “The place where they meet doesn’t look like the office, it looks like a living room, where you feel more comfortable.” José later added, “So they can feel comfortable and talk.” Additionally, Marge and José proposed that a group setting allows for couples to learn from one another and feel more comfortable. Ana and Guy emphasized that PMC should be delivered in a church setting, as religion is a big part of the Latino/a culture and Ana and Guy’s way of life. Cata also emphasized the critical role of the alliance between therapist and client,

“For a couple, it’s an interesting situation, because you’re looking at two people that the therapist has to develop a clinical alliance of safety and non-judgment with. It takes a great deal of experience to make the two people feel safe and heard.”

Marge and José recalled attending sessions for about a week when they attend PMC, which they thought was too fast. As Marge explains:

“I was thinking, because of the way we did the premarital counseling, it felt like it was shoom and out the door. It was too fast, so I’m thinking it should be done more spaced out, so you have time to think about and we have time to talk on Monday and then come back four days later for a second thing. Space it out so you have more time to think about things. And maybe not right before the wedding because you’re thinking about all the arrangements because now a days the wedding is like a big show, a big deal.”

**Cost**

As Catty points out the cost of therapy is expensive for couples and can at times deter couples from attending PMC, “I agree with the counseling. The only thing I don’t like about it here is that it is so expensive.” Marge and José also mentioned that cost can be an influential factor in whether a couple attends PMC or not. Currently the average cost of PMC
ranges from $0 to $500. As stated by these couples, the cost of therapy is important in determining if the couple will attend PMC.

*Religious Influence*

For Guy and Ana, religion played a pivotal role in their everyday life. They advocated for PMC to be held in the church by a priest. Marge and José disagreed with this and thought it might be better for the couple to seek someone outside their religion with whom to discuss premarital and marital matters. José reflected:

“We went over to a church and that, itself scares you, and why, because there’s a priest there, and the priest is never good news. It’s like you always did something wrong and that’s why you’re there. Maybe ask the couple, what do they like?”

Later, José suggested asking the couple about the location they prefer to have PMC and how much religion influences the couple, as a way to discuss religious issues in PMC. As is shown above, religion has a central role within Latino/a culture, but it may be important to consider that not all couples would like to seek PMC services through the church. It would be imperative for the therapist to assess for religious influence, but to also consider how much religion has a direct affect on the couple based on individual and the couple’s opinions, and cultural expectations (i.e., extended family influence).

*Therapist Training*

All three of the therapists in this study reported having extensive training on Latino/a culture. George and Cata reported that most of their training came from their own Latino/a background and from continuing education credits that they earned post-graduate training. George reported that he received more of his training from additional reading, his own experiences, and continuing education units than he did from his one course on cultural
diversity in graduate school. Cata reported that she attends continuing education units on cultural diversity and specifically new developments within Latino/a culture whenever she can. Cata reported that this is a way for her to stay current within the field and provide the best services possible to her clients. T reported receiving most of her training from her post-graduate internship placement at a local agency where she saw mostly Latino/a clients. She emphasized that her work in the field and additional training assisted her in providing culturally appropriate services to Latino/a clients.
DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this study, I aimed to explore Latino couples’ and therapists’ perceptions of important aspects of culture to address in PMC with Latino couples. I interviewed six couples and three therapists versed in Latino/a culture. As a result of couples’ interviews, I was able to utilize narrative analysis to explore the couples’ stories of important aspects within their own marriage that relate to Latino/a culture. Therapist interviews provided one form of triangulation as well as further content to analyze. The data analysis process involved transcribing interviews, reading and re-reading transcripts to form codes, identifying themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes within and across interviews. Codes were also chunked to support themes, subthemes, and sub subthemes within the study. I kept a close audit trail and produced memos on a regular basis in order to promote rigor. Member checks with participants as well as peer reviews with three therapists were conducted as measures of triangulation promoting rigor. The results from the data analysis were presented above and were summarized in the conceptual map. As stated in the literature review, culture is defined within the ever evolving “context of a narrativized past, a co-interpreted present, and a wished for future” (Laird, 1998, pp. 28-29), which is manifested through customs, traditions, food, rituals, language, shared values, family of origin, and ethnicity. This definition resonates in the conceptual map in several ways. First, the Venn diagram format of the map shows the construction of meaning in regards to culture that is layered and rich. Second, the topics shown in the circles represent several of the manifestations of culture that were included in the definition. Furthermore, these topics show the past, present, and wish for future that is encompassed by culture. For example, immigration represented both past and
present topics that couples suggested for PMC (e.g., Guy discussed his past immigration story that showed ways he was responsible for his younger siblings which has an effect on the more present leadership roles within his marriage).

In this section, I discuss the findings of this study in regards to how they relate to the research questions:

1. What are Latino couples’ (and the therapists who work with these couples) insights into what is important to attend to in PMC?

2. What aspects of Latino/a culture do participants feel are important to attend to in PMC?

3. How do participants believe clinicians can craft PMC programs to be more sensitive to Latino/a culture?

The responses build on what little literature has been produced as well as provide therapists with new insights regarding PMC and Latino/a culture. Furthermore, the following section addresses growth experienced by the researcher, implications for clinicians, future research, strengths and limitations of the study, and final conclusions.

Insights Regarding PMC

Immigration status and cultural background of the couple were the two major themes that emerged as an answer to this research question. Research shows that immigration status plays a significant role in the way the individual views their background, family, heritage, and tradition (Halford et al., 2003). In turn, this affects the way the couple makes decisions, communicates and carries out traditions of their cultural background. Studies have shown that couples that immigrate to the United States, either together or separately may struggle to
find cultural identity together (Falicov, 2003), which can lead to increased conflict and potentially heightened risk of partner physical abuse.

Couples that were born in Mexico and were first generation immigrants showed a greater desire to carry out the traditions related to expectation of roles, language, dress, and impact of religion, as compared to second, third, or fourth generation immigrants. This was evident in Catty and Carlos’s interview (they were first generation immigrants from two small villages in Mexico) when they discussed that tradition is still very much a part of their everyday life. They celebrate all the holidays that are celebrated in Mexico, speak Spanish in their home, and have instilled the importance of these traditions in their children. Carlos put it very simply when saying, “The past is still a part of us.” Catty and Carlos discussed their immigration to the United States as something that unified them and brought them closer together as a couple. This is noteworthy to therapists, as immigration can be a stressful time for couples.

Guy, who immigrated to the United States with his family of origin when he was a child, discussed unification of his family of origin when talking about his role in bringing his younger brothers to the United States. George, a Latino therapist that works mainly with Spanish speaking clients, emphasized the need to understand the individual and couple’s initial expectations of coming to the United States as they often times have the “American dream” when thinking of becoming an American, getting rich, being accepted, and providing for their family in their home country. George uses his own immigration story as a way to join with couples and assist couples in feeling comfortable in therapy. As supported in the literature, there are differences in the ways that first generation immigrant couples relate, communicate, and utilize resources when compared to American-born Latinos/as (Snyder et
al., 2007). Although each individual and each couple’s experience varies, immigration is something that may need additional discussion within PMC, as this has shown to impact couples (Snyder et al., 2007).

Couples that are intercultural function differently than couples that have similar cultural backgrounds. Studies have shown that intercultural couples may face adversity with the following topics: deciding where to live, problem-solving, decision making, and child rearing (Crippen & Brew, 2007). Crippen and Brew (2007) suggest that intercultural couples require a higher level of accommodation, negotiation, and self-reflection. Maria and her husband, Ivan, have taken the time to examine both of their cultural backgrounds, as well as their current cultural surroundings (i.e., more of an American culture) and communicated about what fits within their marriage. Maria discussed that Ivan is able to embrace her Latino/a culture by speaking the language, being comfortable with her family, and accepting that she is very close with her family and that they continue to play a major role in the support she receives. Jerry and Lola discussed embracing and accepting one another’s culture as a way to ease the stress of Lola’s immigration to the United States. As supported by Jerry, each partner needs to embrace the other’s culture in order to promote understanding and strengthen support among the couple.

These examples of couples in which both members have cultural roots in Mexico and intercultural couples show contrasting frameworks in the ways the couple understand Latino/a culture. It is important for the therapist to recognize the extent to which couples embrace their cultural background. Past studies have also supported therapists taking additional time to assess for the impact of immigration on the couple and the extended family when working with the Latino/a population (Falicov, 2003). Cultural background was
defined by participants as traditions, celebrations, rules taught by family members, and expectations of roles within marriage. Couples’ cultural backgrounds varied based on immigration, family dynamics, ancestry, and community dynamics. Cultural background plays a significant role in one’s past as well as in the ongoing narrative. By learning about each couple’s cultural background I was better able to understand their personal and dyadic narrative. Additionally, when working with intercultural couples, it would be important for the therapist to discuss the impact of each person’s culture on the children and ways the couple plans to incorporate or not incorporate one another’s culture in parenting, as shared by Jerry and Lola when they discussed the importance of their children understanding each partner’s cultural background.

In summary, couples’ insights vary based on their own cultural background, the background of their partner, and the recency of their immigration to the United States. Although the purpose of this research question is not to compare and contrast couples, as this is not consistent with the narrative analysis, there are clear and distinct differences that arose. As reported by the literature, individual factors impacting marriage include relationship history with family of origin. The family of origin provides an understanding of roles, rituals, socialization, and communication (Halford et al., 2003). The impact of the family of origin was evident in all couples for this study, such that family of origin continued to have a significant impact on the couple following the marital union (i.e., familismo). The impact of familismo on the couple is unique to Latino/a culture and the therapist needs to be aware of boundary and interpersonal conflict that may arise within the couple if the role of the extended family is not clearly defined.
Halford et al. (2003) reported that when couples have different expectations of the roles, rituals, and communication in marriage it can lead to higher levels of discontentment for the couple. Couples that are reared with similar cultural backgrounds have higher levels of homogamy, which is a predictor in marital satisfaction (Larson, 2002). Within the current study, intercultural couples were unique in presenting an increased awareness and understanding of their partner’s culture as a way to lessen differences in expectations, therefore decreasing levels of marital conflict related to cultural expectations. Assisting couples in understanding, embodying, and owning each partner’s cultural background may be an important topic to cover for premarital therapists working with intercultural couples where one member is Latino/a.

Aspects to Attend to Regarding Culture in PMC

Multiple themes emerged in relation to this research question during the data collection and data analysis process. In general, couples and therapists had suggestions regarding the importance of culturally sensitive topics to attend to in PMC. The main themes that surfaced were extended family ties, birth order, parenting skills, gender roles, sex, communication and problem solving, respect and trust, and immigration status.

Extended Family

As stated above, the extended family was talked about in all interviews with couples and therapists. Family was also represented in the artifacts presented by two of the woman, Lola and Maria, who showed the Madonna and child. It became apparent that when a member of the Latino/a culture is married there is a sense of welcoming the other person into the family, rather than “handing off” that is typically pictured in European-American families.
PMC programs discuss the extended family in regards to how communication occurred in the family of origin and ways that the couple has learned to communicate in an intimate relationship (Halford et al., 2004), but does not necessarily discuss the ways that the extended family will impact or have an effect on the marriage. The role of the extended family was especially influential on the married couple’s relationship for participants in this study. In general, most PMC programs look at the family of origin as something that has influenced the way the couple will interact and communicate, but not necessarily acknowledging the extended family role in the couple’s relationship. Therapists should be aware that Latino couples may need to spend more time discussing boundaries of the extended family and ways the couple feels comfortable incorporating the extended family into the marital relationship. As Cata shared, establishing boundaries and receiving support can be positive but can also hinder bonding between the couple and potentially cause conflict among the couple if they do not agree on the extent of extended family involvement in their lives.

Sibling Roles

In Latino families, older siblings are given a greater responsibility within the family; this may involve caring for younger siblings, more financial responsibility, more responsibility in household duties, or caring for parents when they have health needs (McHale et al., 2008). As Guy and Ana explained, they chose where to live after they got married based on where Ana’s mother was living. This decision was made for two reasons, first, so Ana’s mother could provide childcare when Guy and Ana had children and, second, so Ana and Guy could provide Ana’s mother with care when she was older. When working
with Latino couples, the decision of where to live may be based more on familial needs rather than on other factors, such as education or employment.

**Parenting**

As Marge and José pointed out, parenting is stressful for everyone, but can be particularly stressful for Latino couples that have immigrated to the United States and have to cope with the adjustment to a new country and also raising a baby in the new country. Catty discussed the different rules and lifestyle associated with parenting children in the United States versus parenting in Mexico. Catty pointed out that preventative planning and thinking ahead is not something that many Latino couples consider. The therapist may need to spend additional time on the skills needed to be a successful parent. According to the outline and information reported by the PMC programs in this document, parenting skills are not one of the major topics covered. In addition, many Latinos/as are Catholic; therefore, religious beliefs hamper their use of contraceptives, and consequently becoming a parent may come sooner for Latino couples as compared to other couples that use contraceptives. It would be important for the therapist to assess for and talk with the couple about their religious beliefs and how this relates to contraception and family planning.

**Gender Roles**

Stahmann’s (2000) reported that the PREP program focuses on gender roles in regards to who is going to be responsible for which household chores and finances. Financial planning and “role relationship” is also covered in the PREPARE curriculum (Stahmann, 2000). Ana and Guy reiterated that this was important within their relationship, as Ana attempted to pay bills and organize the family finances, but quickly discovered that Guy thrived at balancing the finances and reversed their roles. Although gender roles are often
defined by financial decision making and household responsibilities, it can be more complicated than this within the Latino/a culture. This may be due to *machismo* and *marianismo*; cultural concepts that impress a responsibility to live out a certain role within the marital and familial relationship for each member of the couple. This can be further complicated by conflicting beliefs presented in American culture that promote independence for both members of the marital dyad. As presented by many of the participants of the current study, Latino couples’ gender roles expectations extend beyond the desire to complete household chores and reach a deeper sense responsibility, which may need to be fleshed out by therapists in PMC in order to avoid future conflict.

*Sex*

The sexual relationship and intimacy of the couple is something that is explicitly discussed in four of the five PMC programs discussed above (i.e., RE, PREP, PAIRS, RELATE). For the participants of this study, sex presented a distinctive position within the culture as family planning and the sexual relationship are oftentimes tied to religious beliefs. The therapist may need to talk with the Latino couple about sex, intimacy, and family planning through a religious lens. As discussed by Ana and Maria, sex and healthy sexual relationships were topics that were discussed within their family; therefore, the clients may have already discussed sex with their family of origin. Additionally, Cata discussed sexual relationships as being conflicting for women at times, as women are associated with being either “good” or “bad” when it comes to intimacy. Discussions regarding sex from the family of origin seem to leave a particular impression on Latina women and may also need to be discussed as partners may have received different messages from the family regarding sex.
Communication

Communication and problem solving are also popular topics within all of the PMC programs listed above. Moreover, many of these programs focus on communication and problem solving for the couple. In regards to this study, many of the couples mentioned communication issues as a topic of discussion. For example, Amelia talked about the need to be heard by her partner and have a voice in the relationship. This also resonated with Marge, Ana, and Maria, who all discussed the desire to feel as though they were “heard” in their marriage. Although specific topics regarding what to communicate emerged, as well as women feeling as though they had a voice in the relationship, a theme did not emerge about how to communicate or problem solve that was unique to the Latino/a population. In fact, problem solving was not explicitly stated as a topic unique to Latinos/as by any of the couples in this study.

Respect and Trust

Respect and trust are implicit topics in many of the PMC programs listed above. Unique aspects that arose within the interviews for the current study were respect from the woman to the man, which is often expressed through marianismo, but also the need felt by the male to provide, respect, listen to, and attend to his wife. As Ivan puts it, “treat her like a princess.” Guy discussed his responsibility and desire to provide for his family runs deep; this was also acknowledged by Ana. Catty noted that without respect you cannot have love within the couple’s relationship. For therapists working with PMC, it may be important to discuss the role of respect and trust for the couple and their expectations of respect from their partner.
Infidelity is known to be more tolerated within the Latino/a community (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Because of this, it is important to discuss the role of trust specifically in regards to infidelity. This was emphasized by T and Cata, who have worked with many Latino couples and have seen the impact of infidelity on couples. Catty also mentioned how infidelity was not tolerated in her marital relationship. Other couples did not mention infidelity as having an effect on their marriage. As discussed in the results section, therapists framed respect and trust in regards to infidelity and being able to trust the partner’s commitment, whereas couples described respect and trust in regards to roles and the way each partner treats one another. This was a difference between therapists and couples on the common sub theme of respect and trust.

Immigration

As supported in Snyder et al.’s (2007) research with Latino couples, immigration can be a source of stress for the couple and is often a topic in therapy when seeing Latino couples. This is also an important consideration for therapists that are working with premarital couples, as couples are oftentimes adjusting to immigration, or adjusting to parents’ views of acculturation. José reported that it was important for him to “keep” certain aspects of his culture alive, both for himself and his family. I liked the idea of “keeping” certain aspects of the Latino/a culture alive and present for the couple. It may be important for therapists to discuss aspects of the culture that they wish to “keep alive and present.” George explained that many individuals come to the United States with hopes of the American dream and are oftentimes disappointed, which may also need to be discussed when the couple most likely has expectations associated with the American dream for their marriage. This notion of keeping culture alive, hopes and dreams associated with
immigration, and new ways of life can be a way to present sensitive topics of acculturation and immigration to premarital couples.

_Crafting Culturally Sensitive Premarital Counseling Programs_

This question was supported by one main theme and four subthemes. The theme of PMC with Latino couples was supported by four subthemes that emerged: religious influence, delivery, cost, and therapist training. These subthemes were discussed by therapists and couples throughout the interviews.

_Religious Influence_

Stahmann (2000) found that there were three main providers of premarital therapy, one of which was religious appointment individuals (e.g., clergy members, elders within the church, church appointed mentors); other professionals included physicians and mental health professionals. Of the six couples, two had been mentors to premarital couples through their church (Guy and Ana, and José and Marge). This was a position that was appointed by the church, which required training through the church. Mentoring premarital couples involved talking with the couple about their experiences, coaching the couple through difficult topics, and being a role model for the couple. In addition, José and Marge had also lead weekend marital encounter groups through the church in the past. Both couples stated that this was a beneficial experience for them and that they enjoyed doing it.

Guy and Ana reinforced that they believed that PMC should continue to be through the church and that going through the church for their PMC was helpful. José and Marge shared that they thought that going through the church was not helpful and recommended that couples have the option of going to someone that is not affiliated with the church. They supported this by sharing that they thought this would help couples to feel more comfortable,
be more honest, and assist couples in opening up to one another. Catty and Carlos reinforced that they believed the counseling environment needs to be one of caring, where couples can feel safe to share their desires and wants with the therapist and their partner.

Cata pointed out that it is important for the provider to have received training and education in both cultural aspects of Latino marriage and in premarital counseling in order to provide the best services. George and Cata have both attended multiple continuing education trainings regarding systemic aspects of the Latino/a culture, which they recommend to other therapists working with the Latino/a population. In summary, who delivers the service and where the service is delivered may be a consideration, but it is also important for the therapist or provider to have adequate training in both PMC and Latino/a culture.

Delivery

Stahmann (2000) reports three main delivery methods of PMC: group settings, weekend encounter session, and individual counseling. Marge and José recalled going to PMC in a group setting for a short period of time. Ana and Guy remembered receiving their education about marriage through the Catholic school. Both couples reported not remembering very much about their experience. One of the main purposes of PMC is to prepare the couple for a lifelong relationship, by providing couples with the skills needed to prevent future problems (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Halford et al., 2004; Hawkins et al., 2008; Stahmann, 2000). In other words, it is important for the couple to remember what they have learned in PMC in order to prevent future conflict.

Marge and José promoted a group setting as they thought that it was helpful to them. A group setting provides couples with an opportunity to connect with other couples, may be less threatening than individual settings, and more inexpensive. Group settings will often
present a heterogeneous group of people, which may not allow the provider to attend specifically to unique cultural issues associated with the Latino/a population. Based on the results from this study it is recommended that providers doing group PMC attempt to recruit a culturally homogenous group.

Cost

According to the 2009 U.S. Census, 14% of the population is below the poverty line. When compared to the overall population 25% of Hispanics were below the poverty line, suggesting the cost effectiveness is essential to Latinos/as in order to received services (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Financial constraints and the expense of therapy were the third aspect of aspect of culturally sensitive delivery for premarital Latino couples that emerged. Finances are a topic that are often covered in premarital counseling programs (Stahmann, 2000) but the actual cost of therapy holds back many couples from being able to receive PMC. Catty reported that the expense of therapy has been one reason it can deter couples from seeking assistance before getting married. As stated above, group setting can provide a cost effective means to receiving PMC. Therapists should consider cost effective means to assist couples in obtaining premarital counseling.

Therapist Training

Ethically, marriage and family therapists cannot discriminate against those seeking professional assistance based on race, ethnicity, or national origin (AAMFT Code of Ethics, 2001). Therefore, it is important for therapists to understand culturally specific dynamics from multiple cultures and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, culture impacts the therapeutic relationship, the process of therapy and the goals within therapy (Padilla, 2001; Ponterotto et al., 2001; Sussman, 2004). The therapists within the current study emphasized
training on the Latino/a culture, both within graduate school and post graduate through continuing education units. All therapists discussed receiving additional training and information on the Latino/a culture as helpful. Moreover, additional training assisted the therapist in this study when working with the Latino/a population. Therapists encouraged others to receive additional training on topics regarding the Latino/a population.

A Comparison of Professionals’ and Couples’ Perceptions

This question was important to the researcher because often times there is a gap between what professionals believe is important and what the actual client believes is important in mental health services (Duncan et al., 2003). Furthermore, research shows that a major contributor to client outcome is the alliance created between the therapist and the client (Duncan et al., 2003). This subject emphasizes the participant’s voice within the study (i.e., the therapist’s voice and also the couple’s voice). It is important to attend to the differences between professionals and couples in order to promote culturally proficient mental health services.

Themes regarding topics to discuss in PMC for professionals included: finances, preventative planning (i.e., family planning and contraception), immigration, intimate partner violence, infidelity, extended family influence, and communication. For couples the themes that emerged regarding topics in therapy involved: parent skills, immigration, intercultural issues, communication, and respect and trust. These topics were discussed above therefore the following section will focus on insights shared by professionals in regards to the study. There were three distinct themes that arose with therapists that did not arise with couples. These included infidelity, preventative planning, and couple violence.
As reported by Campbell and Wright (2010), Latino men are more likely to engage in extramarital affairs. Two of the three therapists discussed that infidelity was viewed as acceptable by the Latino/a culture. Addressing infidelity can be a delicate issue for the couple, but as Cata explains, it is important to set boundaries for the couple in order to abate future conflict.

Preventative planning involves family planning, thinking ahead for future stressors, and an overall sense of preparation for the couple’s future together. As Cata pointed out, it is not customary within Latino/a culture to plan ahead, consequently, causing additional stress for the couple. T suggested talking about future stressors that the couple may have not already thought of, such as finances, and who will provide for the family. George discussed this in terms of using the therapeutic technique of internal locus of control, which involves looking at what the client has control over in their life, and within themselves, and utilizing this control to empower the client.

Research has shown that the reported rates of intimate couple violence are higher in Hispanic couples as compared to white couples (Straus & Smith, 1990). Two of the three therapists discussed intimate partner violence as an issue that needs to be discussed, and they suggested ways for therapists to address this by increasing woman’s support, increasing social support for both partners, and discussing power and control within the couple. T specialized in seeing battered women and had some experience working with violent couples. As she pointed out, the Latino/a population has a unique set of roles for the men and women in relationships and it can be difficult for men to adjust. Cata emphasized, in her work with families, that it is important to have the man attend therapy and be engaged in therapy. Cata suggested talking with the man about being a consultant to the therapist as a way to get him
in to therapy and engage him in the therapeutic process. T suggested several questions around the topic of intimate partner violence and expectations of roles.

Although differences were expected between professionals and couples the topic areas and themes that emerged were somewhat unexpected. It was expected that professionals would be more in tune to the aspects of communication, problem solving, and general layout of what needs to be addressed with premarital couples from a theoretical perspective, whereas couples would speak more about experiences in marriage, such as parenting. It was not expected that couples would address sensitive topics such as sex and infidelity. Additionally, all of the PMC programs listed problem solving, reducing conflict, and communication as essential parts of PMC, which none of the therapist discussed. It seemed to me that, in general, professionals discussed sensitive issues that couples may not be as apt to discuss (i.e., infidelity and violence). Therapists made suggestions for ways to approach and discuss these topics with couples that can be helpful for professionals when working with premarital Latino couples.

**Development of the Researcher**

As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the researcher is used as an instrument in the research process within qualitative research. It was important for me to spend some time reflecting on how I used myself as the instrument and how I grew in the process of data collection, data analysis, and reporting the results of this study. The following section is based on memos and personal reflections. Prior to this study, I had taken two courses on qualitative research and had participated in some of the data analysis process while working with professors and fellow colleagues in the field. Although the coursework was helpful and imperative to my overall understanding of qualitative research, my experiences and personal
growth in the current study was substantial. First, I experienced a great deal of
disappointment and loss of hope at times when I could not find participants for the study,
when potential participants did not return phone calls, or e-mails, or often replied that they
were too busy. I felt a sense of responsibility to bring light to the issues surrounding the lack
of support and cultural understanding of Latino couples in PMC, and naively thought this
was as important to everyone else as it was to me.

Through the process of interviewing I was able to realize that addressing culture in
counseling was often important to many participants, but that they were not aware that PMC
existed beyond a religious setting (i.e., church setting). This was an eye opening experience
to me, as I am often surrounded by those in the mental health and human development field
and issues of culture, mental health, counseling, development, and relationship are discussed
on a regular basis. Throughout the interview process, I was able to refine my probing skills to
direct the information I was looking for and related to past themes that emerged in the
research process. In many ways, having the participant interviews be more spread out
allowed for additional time to re-read transcripts and develop themes within each interview.
This, in turn, allowed for additional probing questions to emerge in later interviews, which
enriched the data. At first, the data analysis process seemed overwhelming. The amount of
data I had via codes, diagrams, and my own memos literally looked and felt overpowering
and with little direction at times. I would remind myself of the purpose of the study and the
importance of providing participants with a voice in order to help therapists working with
this population. This provided me with additional guidance and inspiration for this study. As
themes were developed and discussed with my major professor my confidence in being able
to provide participants with a voice grew.
In one particular memo I used the following metaphor to describe how I was feeling as the instrument in the research:

“The research process is ocean waves, ever coming and going, changing, shifting. Themes, sometimes presenting themselves with a loud roar, while other times asking for acknowledgement in soft fizzing bubbles. I am swimming in the waves, sometimes gasping for air, feeling lost and not knowing which was is up. Other times I see the clear direction and swim as fast as I can in the direction towards the light. There have been rocks that have hurt along the way, but there have also been times of clarity and peace when I am able to sit and look at the sea of waves and how the tides come and go in some pattern. The awareness brings harmony, happiness, a sense of accomplishment, and humbly, I am willing to go swimming yet again.”

As I near the end of writing the results of this study, I have a deeper, more comprehensive understanding, both of myself as a researcher and the purpose behind qualitative research. I now feel that I understand that this, potentially, is only the beginning for this research and my future journey as a qualitative researcher.

Implications for Clinicians

As stated by Garcia-Preto (2005), more research is needed on the Latino/a population as well as on this population’s needs within PMC. Several participants discussed the need to consider the extended family as a special unit that can either hinder or help the couple as they transition into their own dyadic relationship. Couples discussed ways that their family of origin has impacted where they lived, how they chose to either carry out or not carry out traditions, and how they developed ideas of what a marriage should look like based on their family of origin. Therapists reiterated the need to discuss the extended family, as boundaries can be blurred at times and cause additional conflict for couples.

Other topics that were discussed as important included the role of religion in the relationship, ways that tradition is carried out, and ways that the couple has been affected by
immigration and acculturation. These topics are not emphasized within the current PMC programs listed above and may need additional concentration when working with Latino premartial couples. In order to provide adequate services on the topics above therapists would benefit from attending trainings on the Latino/a population and the needs of this population. Continuing education trainings provide therapists with the opportunity to build their knowledge base on specific topics. Those therapists that may work with the Latino/a population would benefit from additional training regarding culturally sensitive approaches to the Latino/a population and culturally specific topics to discuss.

Through the narrative analysis process, I realized how important the couple’s narrative is to PMC. Their journey to becoming a couple, cultural experiences that have shaped who they each are, individually, as well as how they see themselves as a couple is crucial to the couple feeling satisfied in their relationship. The cultural background and experiences help build the identity of the individual and the couple. The sharing of these narratives can be beneficial to couples in order to create a better understanding of one another and their relationship. There are several ways that narrative may be unique within the Latino/a population, which include: the immigration story that George talked about as being important and that Guy shared, the role of the extended family and how the individual feels they fit into the extended family, which was shared by Guy and Ana, Marge and José, and Cata. Through the process of understanding narrative analysis within qualitative research I have been reminded of the importance of stories, both in research and in therapy.

One theme that was highlighted by professionals and couples was the importance of the immigration story for the individual and the couple. As George affirmed, immigration to another country is a substantial decision for individuals and families. Immigration dreams are
filled with being able to provide for the family, yet many times the future hopes of immigration fall short or can be stressful for individuals and couples. As George suggests, utilizing the therapeutic technique of internal locus of control can be helpful to couples to process ways in which the couple can come together and lessen stress through empowering themselves and one another.

The idea of *machismo* often carries a negative connotation and is connected to the use of power and control over the female partner in Latino relationships. Although this can be the case, this study highlighted the ever-evolving Latino relationship and ways that *machismo* has shifted for the couples in this study. Although the couples acknowledged power differentials at times, men expressed a sense of responsibility, not only to the family, but also to the wife. The responsibility was to please her, keep her happy, and treat her with respect. This may vary greatly for Latino couples roles; ways of communicating, and division of household labor would need to be discussed in greater detail with Latino couples.

As emphasized by Cata, Ana and Guy, George, T, and Marge and José, parenting skills are much needed within PMC. Although parenting skills are generally helpful for couples of all backgrounds, it is something that may need additional emphasis when working with Latino couples. Parenting skills around role expectations, support from extended family, basic parenting skills (e.g., changing diapers, feeding, etc.), and ways the couple can support one another were topics that were suggested by couples and therapists.

Artifacts were shown to be a powerful part of this study which promoted understanding and collaboration between the researchers and participants. Artifacts can also be used as a tool in therapy by inviting the couple and/or individuals to bring artifacts into therapy as a way to promote understanding and spur further discussion around culture. By
promoting conversation around culture the therapist and couple can more readily identify cultural topics that may need to be acknowledged or discussed in therapy. This may be especially helpful for premarital couples as they are combining two cultural backgrounds and may not be aware of the impact that cultural background will have on their marriage.

I hope that by reading the above information that clinicians find the information useful when working with premarital Latino couples. I hope that this consequently creates a welcoming environment for the couple and the therapist and the couple can feel comfortable and confident in the therapeutic process. By understanding the needs of the client the therapist can provide better services and the client can terminate therapy with new skills and confidence in their relationship.

Strengths

This study provides several strengths for participants, the literature, and professionals working with the Latino/a population. First, this study allows participants to share their story and ways that Latino/a culture has impacted them. Through the feedback given by couples, the study allowed couples time to reflect on their marriage, talk prior to the interview about topics that they hadn’t talked about ever or in quite some time, and allowed them to tell their story to someone who was willing to listen and retell it in a way that is constructive to others seeking help through PMC. Feedback given by professionals revealed that the interviews also allowed them time to consider ways that culture has influenced the work that they do with Latino/a clients and share their insights that were based on life experiences and education. All three professionals emphasized the need for cultural research aimed at understanding clients and professionals viewpoints and two thanked me for doing this research and allowing them to be a part of it.
Second, the study found several unique themes and aspects that need to be emphasized or considered when working with premarital Latino couples. These themes are helpful in adding to the current body of literature on Latino/a culture and in guiding future research on Latino couples and PMC. These themes can serve as a reference for therapists working with Latino PMC couples as a guide for topics to address and how to address them.

Third, I hope that this research provides professionals with several unique perspectives of several couples’ stories of ways their culture has impacted their marriage, and their suggestions when working with couples. Within qualitative research, there is room for interpretation that is not allowed by quantitative research. I am optimistic that the professionals that read publications related to this study are able to reflect on, interpret, and challenge the research done in this study.

Limitations

Qualitative research presents unique limitations that are common in all qualitative studies and this study is not immune to these. Because of the small sample size and lack of empirical measures, this study is not generalizable. I had a difficult time recruiting participants, and once recruited, participants seemed very interested and involved in the interview, but there was little follow-up in the member checks by the participants. The researcher attempted to contact participants for member checks via e-mail and phone, but little response was provided. Additionally, this study is biased by the researcher, specifically a European American researcher interviewing and analyzing data presented by mostly Latino/a participants.

The most significant limitation that was specific to this study was the difficulty in finding participants. The researcher was forced to change the research questions and some
methods of data collection and data analysis due to the shortage of participant recruitment. Recruiting therapists that conducted PMC with the Latino/a population also proved difficult, therefore some of the therapists that were interviewed were not as well versed in PMC as the researcher would have hoped.

Another limitation to the sample was that participants were required to speak English. This limited the researcher in recruiting participants that may have undergone PMC, but did not speak English. The researcher chose to not use a translator as there was a desire to communicate directly with participants and not risk descriptions being lost or misconstrued due to translation difficulties. It is possible that couples that only speak Spanish may present unique representations of acculturation that were not addressed in this study.

The subjectivity of the researcher is unavoidable within qualitative research, because I, as the primary researcher, am European American and I have biases that contribute to and hinder the findings of the study. I am an outsider to the Latino culture. Additionally, I have not been submerged in the culture for any extended period of time. I also speak very little Spanish. This, in turn, means that the data analyses and information presented in the current study are processed through the lens of my own cultural background and cultural biases.

The structure of the study was both a strength and a limitation. Dyadic interviews provided this study with thick and rich descriptions that were unique and important for literature. This being said a more comprehensive study may have also included focus groups and/or individual interviews, as well, in order to further investigate the systemic stories and themes that emerged. These techniques would also promote higher levels of triangulation.
Future Research

Although this study is helpful for professionals working with Latino couples, it only scratches the surface of the research needed for working with premarital Latino couples. George, T, and Cata point out that there is a great deal of diversity within the Latino/a population. Additional research is needed with specific ethnic groups such as Puerto Ricans, Peruvians, Argentineans, Mexicans, Dominicans, etc. Each ethnic group is unique and additional information on distinct differences and unique aspects of each group would be helpful for professionals to provide appropriate services to these couples.

There are distinct differences among first, second, third, fourth, etc. generation immigrants. In this study, it was found that acculturation affects traditions celebrated, roles, and language. When working with Latino couples it is important to remember levels of acculturation ways that roles and traditions are carried out for the couple. For couples that have immigrated to the United States, the immigration story can be helpful to address, but specific ways to address this and work with the immigration story would also be of assistance to professionals.

The intercultural couples in this study presented unique characteristics of their relationship that requires additional research. Both qualitative and quantitative measures would be helpful to provide professionals with a direction, topics, and a greater understanding of the intercultural couple’s needs. Within the current study, both intercultural couples consisted of a Latina woman and men of a European-American background. As shown above, this dynamic is unique and may be very different than a Latino man marrying and woman of European-American background. Jerry projected that the partnership between a Latino man and a European-American woman would not be a good match due to the
Latino’s man’s desire to be in control and the woman’s desire for independence. Jerry presented an interesting prediction, which needs additional research in order to understand better.

I believe that the couples in this study provided the current literature with a unique perspective based on their own experiences of marriage, which cannot be provided from younger couples that have yet to be married or are just married. On the other hand, couples that have been through PMC recently can provide details, comprehensive feedback, and rich descriptions of their experiences. The researcher of the current study was not able to recruit these participants, but research with couples that have recently experienced PMC may provide details of the experience and topics that this study was unable to. Additionally, therapists that are well versed in PMC and the needs of the Latino/a culture would be helpful in providing more adequate services and providing sights from a professional standpoint.

One topic that was of particular interest that was highlighted in the current study was respect and trust among Latino couples. This topic was implicitly discussed by many of the participants as “having a voice” and when the women reported feeling as though their opinion was important and heard by their husband. It seemed that respect was important to both members of the couple. It may be interesting to interview couples specifically regarding respect and trust over time. This may be accomplished by interviewing couples and comparing varying lengths of time of the relationship and the frequency of subject matter discussed regarding respect and trust.

Finally, accessibility and structure to PMC services was not addressing specifically in this study. These are two important components as financial concerns, and the stigma to seeking services are two factors that often hold couples back from seeking PMC. As stated
above, a more comprehensive data collection process would promote higher levels of triangulation and think and rich descriptions. Further research on ways to lessen these concerns for couples as well as utilizing multiple avenues of data collection (e.g., focus groups and individual interviews) would be helpful in broadening PMC services to Latino couples.

**Conclusions**

Cultural considerations have been shown to be important when working with clients in a therapeutic setting. Moreover, Latino/a culture presents several unique aspects that contribute to the ways people understand the marriage and expectations for marriage. Within this study several topics for consideration arose, based on participants’ experiences, either in their own marriage or in their profession. Interviews with couples and therapists revealed three main themes: unique aspects of Latino/a culture, Latino marriage, and premarital counseling with Latino couples. Subthemes within Latino/a culture included: dress, language, religion, tradition, and extended family. Subthemes within Latino marriage included: extended family, birth order, parenting skills, roles, communication, respect and trust, sex, and immigration. Subthemes within premarital counseling with Latino couples included: religious influences, delivery, cost, and therapists training.

I gave careful consideration to participants’ stories which emerged through the use of a narrative paradigm of looking at the data. Through stories of cultural background, immigration, transition to marriage, parenting, communication, and bicultural issues the researcher was able to further explain emerging themes. Therapists’ stories of how to work with Latino couples provided further insight into questions to ask and topics to address. I have personally learned a great deal about ways that Latino/a culture influences Latino
marriage, therefore informing the way I do therapy with Latino couples and Latino premarital couples. I hope that this study can inform others that are working with the Latino/a population and introduce topics to discuss in PMC with Latino couples. In closing, I would like to go back to a comment made by José regarding “keeping” his culture. I believe that no matter how long the couples had lived in the United States, their marriage continues to be influenced by Latino/a culture, so in many ways the couples in this study have “kept” their culture throughout the their marriage.
References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>PREP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 1</td>
<td>Listening for understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 2</td>
<td>Expression or effective speaking</td>
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<td>Topic 3</td>
<td>Discussion of problem solving</td>
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<td>Coaching and deepening dialogues</td>
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<td>Change/growth: Yesterday, today, tomorrow</td>
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<td>Consistency in love skills</td>
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Appendix B
IRB Approval

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 6/14/2010
To: Sonja Stutzman
3355 Blackburn Rd #7302
Dallas, TX 75204

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Premarital Counseling and Culture: A Narrative Inquiry of Couples' Experiences

IRB Num: 10-207

Approval Date: 6/11/2010
Continuing Review Date: 6/10/2011
Submission Type: New
Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.

- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website http://www.compliance.iastate.edu/irb/forms/ or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
Appendix C
Recruitment Materials

Contact with Therapists

Dear Therapist,

My name is Sonja Stutzman and I am a doctoral candidate at Iowa State University and am residing in Dallas. I am currently working on my recruiting participants for my qualitative dissertation on Latino couples experiences in premarital counseling. I am seeking participants who are English speaking, where one member of the couple considers themselves Latino. In addition, I am seeking participants that have participated in premarital counseling together within the last ten years from a marriage and family therapist. I am calling on therapists to assist me in recruiting participants by speaking with current or past clients about being a part of my study. I have attached a flyer that you can provide to participants or feel free to provide them with my contact information listed below. Please feel free to use the contact information below to provide to potential participants. If you have any questions regarding my study or recruitment of participants please feel free to contact me via phone at (214)-609-0094 or via e-mail at sstutz@iastate.edu.

Contact Information:

Sonja Stutzman, M.S.
Iowa State University, Doctoral Candidate
Phone Number: (214)-609-0094
E-mail: sstutz@iastate.edu
Craigslist Advertisement

I am a doctoral candidate at Iowa State University who is residing in Dallas to gain knowledge of Latino couples’ experiences in premarital counseling through my dissertation. The purpose of the study is to provide participants who have participated in premarital counseling with the opportunity to share their experiences and insights to improve future premarital counseling. This is an Institutional Review Board approved study seeking participants who are married or living together, speak English fluently, and have participated in premarital counseling within the last ten years from a marriage and family therapist. Your involvement would require two one-hour interviews regarding your experiences. Additional contact may be needed with the researcher in order to confirm the findings of the study. You would be asked to provide an artifact that represents your culture. There is a brief screening process. If you qualify for the study you and your partner would be compensated $20 for each interview that is completed. Participant’s identities will be kept confidential. If you believe you qualify or know someone who would qualify for this study please contact Sonja Stutzman by phone at (214)-609-0094 or via e-mail at sstutz@iastate.edu.
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE SEEKS LATINO PARTICIPANTS FOR DISSERTATION

I am seeking participants who are English speaking, where at least one member of the couple considers themselves Latino. In addition, I am seeking participants that have participated in premarital counseling together within the last ten years from a marriage and family therapist in order to share their insights and experiences with premarital counseling. I am hoping that through this qualitative study I can better assist therapists who are working with Latino premarital clients. I am calling on therapists to assist me in recruiting participants by speaking with current or past clients about being a part of my study. Participants will be compensated. Please feel free to provide potential participants with my contact information listed below. If you have any questions regarding my study or recruitment of participants please feel free to contact me via phone at (214)-609-0094 or via e-mail at sstutz@iastate.edu.

Contact Information:
Sonja Stutzman, M. S.
Doctoral Candidate, Iowa State University
Phone Number: (214)-609-0094
E-mail: sstutz@iastate.edu
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Do you feel that you have insights regarding Latino marriages that can assist counselors?

Are you or your spouse Latino/Latina?

Would you like the opportunity to provide other therapists and researchers with insights about premarital counseling and your culture?

Please Contact Sonja Stutzman at (214)-609-0094 or sstutz@iastate.edu

Potential participants will go through a screening process, and if selected will be expected to participate in one interview lasting between one to one and a half hours each. You will be compensated $20 for the completed interview.
**Appendix D**  
**Demographic Information**

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<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Years Since PMC</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
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Appendix E
Interview Packet

Tentative Interview Questions

1. How do you define culture?
   a. How did you come to this definition?
2. Please tell me about your culture.
3. Please tell me about the artifact you have.
   a. How does this artifact represent your culture?
   b. What does this artifact mean to you? To your partner?
4. Please tell me about your cultural background.
   a. What does your culture mean to you?
   b. What values do you hold based on your cultural background?
      i. More specifically, what values have impacted your marital relationship that relate to your culture?
   c. How has your cultural background affected your marital relationship?
5. Did you or your partner have any type of premarital counseling? If so, please explain the following:
   a. What were the aspects that were most helpful to you?
   b. What were the aspects that were least helpful to you?
   c. What are the aspects that you continue to use in your relationship?
6. If you and your partner did not have any type of premarital counseling please explain cultural aspects that you believe would be helpful to young couples.
7. What suggestions would you have for premarital counselors to make PMC more attuned to culture?
8. How could premarital counselors make PMC experiences more beneficial?
9. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed today?
Title of Study: Premarital Counseling and Culture: A Narrative Inquiry of Couples Insights

Investigators: Sonja Stutzman, Megan Murphy

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore Latino/Latinas couples’ and therapists insights and ideas in ways that premarital counseling can address Latino culture. It is hoped that the information gained from this study will provide clinicians and researchers with information about how and what to address regarding the topic of culture within premarital counseling. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a therapist that works with the Latino population or you speak English fluently, one member of your marital dyad considers themselves Latino/Latina, and can provide insight regarding premarital counseling and how culture has played a role within your marriage. You will also be filling out a survey to determine if you and your partner are eligible for this study.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

For therapists, if you agree to be a part of the study your participation will last for up to six months. You will be given a pseudonym that you will use to complete the demographic questionnaire. This pseudonym will be used to present the findings of the study and keep your identity confidential. Information that identifies your identity will be destroyed by June 1, 2012. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: first, you will complete a form describing your demographic information at the time of the interview. Second, the interview will occur and is expected to last one to one and a half hours. Third, after the interview correspondence about findings, researcher interpretations, and presentation of findings will occur on an as needed basis either in person, via telephone, or via e-mail. The researcher may ask you a few short questions in order to confirm or clarify interpretations from the interview. Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. Transcripts will be kept indefinitely. You may skip any question throughout the interview or demographic information that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

For couples, if you agree and are selected to participate in this study, your participation will last for up to six months. Prior to completing any paperwork you will be given a pseudonym that you will used to fill out the demographic and screening question, this pseudonym will also be used to present the findings of this study and keep your identity confidential. Information that identifies your identity will be destroyed by June 1, 2012. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: first, will complete a form describing your demographic information and an initial screening survey to determine your
appropriateness for the study, second, you will be contacted within one week of the screening by the primary researcher via phone or in person to let you know if you have been selected for the study. If you have been selected for the study the researcher will set up a time and place for the interview. Third, approximately one week prior to the interview you will receive the interview questions via e-mail or via mail. You are invited to look over the questions, reflect on potential answers, and discuss the questions and answers with your partner. Fourth, the interview will consist of a one to one and a half hour interview on the topics of culture, premarital counseling, and marriage. In the interview you are expected to bring an artifact that serves as a representation of your culture (e.g., a food dish, a picture, clothing, newspaper article, etc.) The researcher will take a photograph of the artifact. Fifth, after the interview correspondence about findings, researcher interpretations, and presentation of findings will occur on an as needed basis either in person, via telephone, or via e-mail. The researcher may ask you a few short questions in order to confirm or clarify interpretations from the interview. Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. Transcripts will be kept indefinitely. You may skip any question throughout the interview or demographic information that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks: emotional conflict may arise among participants. If this does occur and you feel you need additional counseling a list of providers will be provided.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit the therapeutic community (researcher and therapists) by providing information about how Latino/Latina culture affects the premarital counseling process and ways premarital counseling can be improved by addressing Latino/Latina culture.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will be compensated $20 for completing the interview.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY
To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. The pseudonym assignment sheet and the audio digital recordings are the only two pieces of evidence that will contain your actual identity. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

Information identifying participants’ identity will be kept in two different locked locations. Information saved onto a computer will be kept under a password protected file. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. All information containing identifying information will be destroyed by June 1, 2012. Transcripts, using pseudonyms, will be kept indefinitely.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Sonja Stutzman at (214)-609-0094 or via e-mail ssutz@iastate.edu, or Megan Murphy at (515)-294-2745 or via e-mail at mjmurphy@iastate.edu.

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

***************************************************************************
***
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________

___________________________________________________ (Participant’s Signature)  ________________ (Date)
Participant’s Name (printed) _________________________________

_________________________ (Participant’s Signature)  ____________ (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_________________________ (Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)  ____________ (Date)
Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _______________________________________

Sex:  ____Male  ____Female

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____________________________________

Occupation: _________________________________

Highest level of education completed: ___________

Income: _________________________________

Years since had premarital counseling: __________

Age of marriage: ______________________________

Years/Months married: _________________________

Contact information (mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number)
Cultural Diversity Screening Questions

These questions were adapted from the UNK Cultural Diversity Survey.

Please use this scale to respond to the following questions:

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<thead>
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<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

___ 1. Discuss issues related to diversity with your partner?
___ 2. Attend groups or events that deal with diversity or culture?
___ 3. Challenge others who make racial/cultural/ethnic/sexually derogatory comments?
___ 4. Avoid language that reinforces negative stereotypes?
___ 5. Get to know people from different cultures and groups as individuals?
___ 6. Make extra efforts to educate yourself about other cultures?
___ 7. Make extra efforts to get to know individuals from diverse backgrounds?

Please use this scale to respond to the following questions:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
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<th>Slightly Agree</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

___ 1. I have participated in serious discussions with my partner about religious beliefs, life philosophy, or personal values.
___ 2. I have developed an awareness of different cultures and ways of life in the United States.
___ 3. I have developed an awareness of people and values outside the United States.
___ 4. My own background often influences how I view myself and others.
___ 5. My own background often influences how I view marriage.
___ 6. I am able to recognize intolerance among my peers.
___ 7. I find it difficult to distinguish facts from opinions when it comes to diversity issues.
___ 8. I communicate effectively with others from backgrounds different from my own.
___ 9. I communicate effectively with my partner about people from different backgrounds.
Interview Review Sheet Example

Interview # 2  Participants: Ivan and Maria
Today’s Date: 4/2/11
Interview Date: 4/2/11

1. Briefly describe/reflect on the interview.
   This interview provided me with a perspective of a couple that was “Americanized” as they put it. But it became evident to both myself and them as the interview went on that they were still influenced by their cultural backgrounds and their present culture. Both members of the couple identified several aspects of themselves and their marriage that were still influenced by their cultural background, mainly the influences of family of origin and the roles they each play. Although this couple was not from the same cultural background both members were able to speak to one another about this, despite disagreements at times. They mention of flexibility and understanding of one another’s culture and respect for one another’s culture was also important. This interview occurred at the couple’s home which provided me with insights into how much they have been influenced by the current culture, art, and traditions of Dallas. This couple was non-conventional as well which I believe may have influenced their lifestyle and the amount to which their culture influences them.

2. What were the main topics or issues that occurred during the interview?
   Main topics of the interview included flexibility, understanding, and respect for one another’s culture, even if they did not agree or felt uncomfortable with certain parts of their own or the other’s culture. They also spoke about the influence of family and how important Latino families are in a very different way than European families. Maria also discussed the submissive role of women within the Latino culture and they way that works well within her mixed culture marriage. Finally, Maria brought up an interesting point about how woman from the Latino culture are more sexual in her opinion and also has influenced her marriage.

3. Are there any additional questions you wish to ask in the next interview?
   It was difficult during this interview because I wanted to keep things focused on the research but I was just very interested in their relationship and ways they make things work, even beyond culture. I also want to respect people’s privacy and respect their marriage so I found it difficult for myself to draw that line during the interview and felt myself asking…is this to do with the research or for my own personal interest in their relationship? I felt that I kept it professional though.

4. Describe the interview in three words.
   Intimidating, loving (between couple), non-traditional couple

5. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, important in this interview?
Again, Ivan and Maria invited me into their home which was very kind of them. Their home was immaculate but yet they seemed very down to hear and in tune to one another throughout the interview. At the end of the interview they stood up to thank me, Ivan embraced Maria and gave her a kiss on the forehead which I thought was very interesting and showed the love and understanding between the two of them.
Appendix G
Data Analysis Flow Chart

Interview → Transcription → First Reading and Artifact Analysis

- Initial Themes/Ideas
- Initial Codes

Second Reading and Artifact Analysis →

- Finding Themes
- Coding
- Chunking

Organizing Data →

- Making tables of Codes/Interpretations
- Creating Visual Depictions

Across Interview Analysis

Meaning Making

- Interpretations
- Re-storying
- Member Check

Organizing and Presenting Findings
Appendix H
Transcription Format Excerpt

Catty: I guess I learned over the years of my life. And I think that for me it is the culture. And it especially now because I think when you move from your country from another country to another country it’s a big thing. You can really see your culture, you can see the differences. And that’s the way I get the definition of what culture is for me.

Sonja: Good. So tell me a little bit about Latino culture. You told me a little about the traditions. What else is involved with your culture?

Catty: For me, I think...how say...principles. For me that’s part of my culture too. It’s very important to me and I think...I think our culture is very very...how say...extensive but...

Carlos: It’s rich. All our tradition is...every single village has their own village. They celebrate it in their own way. Also, this is the way we were raised. She was raised in one village and I was raised in another village. It’s a little different, mine is more traditional. We got more traditions from our past, so we just keep going with the present and with all those past traditions. So we...in my village...it’s my traditions and in her village those are hers. Because we celebrated so many days of the...things like that. It shows to our little ones the way we do, we give thanks, the way we feel it. And then of course...and with our religion; we teach and even if...
Appendix I
Coding Excerpt

C1C2RAIS: Carlos: pg. 4: teach kids to celebrate
C1C6TRAD: Carlos: pg. 4: dia de la vedician, dia de guadalupe-traditions are religious and political
C1C4REL: Carlos: pg. 4: religion important, taught to kids,
C1C3RAIS: Carlos: Pg. 4: teach children religion
C1C1RULE: Catty: pg. 5: rules linked to how raised
C1C4RAIS: Catty: pg. 5: raising kids based on rules
C1C7TRAD: Catty: pg. 5: boys ask for hand of woman by having whole family come and ask family of woman
C1C1MAR: Carlos: pg. 5: marriage linked to religion
C1C1ED: Carlos: pg. 5 education part of culture
C1C5REL: Carlos: pg. 5: not caring about religion
C1C9DEF: Carlos: pg. 5: doctorin part of culture
C1C6REL: Catty: pg. 6: baptism, confirmation, first communion, quinerea
C1C2MAR: Catty: pg. 6: marriage important-linked to religion
C1C7TRAD: Carlos: pg. 6: past is still part of us
C1C5RAIS: Carlos: pg. 6: parents strict, tell children what to do, they obey
C1C1ART: Carlos: pg. 7: traditional hat from home town, popular in village, made by hand, expensive, hat 100 years old, hat=pride, get attention of girls
C1C1SPAIF: Carlos: pg. 9: don’t want to mix with Spainards
C1C2SPAIF: Carlos: pg. 9: Spainards destroyed face, Indians and Spainards mix, Indians have silver, gold
C1C3ART: Catty: pg. 9-10: Mokaheta, made from one piece of stone, all women own one
C1C4SPAIF: Catty: pg. 10: ancestors from Mexico so Indian Mexican artifact
C1C5ART: Catty: pg. 10: make salsa, special occasions now, but in Mexico used daily for spices, corn
C1C6RAIS: Catty: pg. 11: see differences in cultures based on how raised
C1C5SPAIF: Catty: pg. 11: mom’s family influenced by Spain, strictness from Spain
Appendix J
Coding Chart Example

Story
Couple 1 Catty and Carlos

Chronology

Epiphanies
-don’t have to follow culture but consequences for not
-when young independence values, older now value tradition more
-chose someone of similar culture to marry to own culture would not be destroyed

Event
-courting and marriage
-moving away from family
-ancestry changing

Plot

Theme 1
Contributors to culture and the definition of culture
Keywords: values, education, politics, religion, ethnicity, marriage, tradition, rules, family of origin, celebrations, raising children immigration

Theme 2
Break/change from cultural expectations
Marriage: respect, love, patience, childrearing, traditions, provides basis for understanding of love, how to

Theme 3
Culture related to marriage/PMC
PMC: gives basis for expectations of ceremony and courting, culture influences problem solving and perceptions, truth in love,

Characters
Catty, Carlos, Family of origins, Villagers family of procreation

Setting
Village in Mexico, Mexico City, United States

Problem
-when young and just met, struggle for independence and freedom vs keeping cultural values and traditions, caused conflict in family

Action
Kept some traditions, brother others, then had consequences for breaking tradition

Resolution
After time passed, healed wounds, reconciled with family that was upset about broken traditions, couple found balance in what part of their culture works within their marriage in the US

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Hello “Guy” & “Ana”,

I want to again thank you for taking the time to be a part of my dissertation. I really appreciated all of your insights and taking the time to share with me. I wanted to remind you of some of the things we discussed in our interview that I will be reporting on in my dissertation. I thought that it was important to note you felt that your roles have changed over time based on your nuclear and extended family needs. In addition to this you discussed the adjustment to submissive and non-submissive roles in your relationship over time. You discussed the importance of extended family and the admiration and respect you both had for your extended family. You talked about how birth order plays a part in the role, communication, and way the couple looks at their relationship. You also discussed the changing roles of woman as more and more woman are assimilated and getting a better education and job here in the US. You talked about machismo and the responsibility that Guy feels to his family and how he listens and relies on Ana’s input when making decisions. You discussed the need for parenting skills to be discussed in premarital counseling as well.

Some other key themes have surfaced in other interviews I have conducted and I would also like your feedback on this as well.

1. The influence of family extended family ties and that when a couple is married there is more or an incorporation of the extended family into their marriage. This extended family has more weight in where the couple lives, what the couple does, and how the couple lives their life. This is heavily influenced by immigration and if the extended family has immigrated to the US or not.

   Immigrated families feel that the couple should have live close by, visit on Sundays, and that the parents should live with the couple in their old age. United States’ born Hispanics are more independent. Have more mobilism in where they live, have friends, and do not believe in the tradition of Sunday visits. They believe that the parents should be independent even in their old age.

2. Birth order affects the role that individual has in the extended family of origin as well as the amount of leadership each person feels within their newly married family. The first born is expected to be the patriarch or the matriarch when the parents become old. They carry the responsibility of helping the parents with the family. Much responsibility is placed on this person. Within their family, they are the leaders, the ones who are responsible and make the final decisions. When both are first born, the husband makes the final decision.

3. Communication and the woman feeling as though she has a voice and can assist the man in making decisions. The woman likes to feel heard and respected, and the man likes to have her input in making the final decision. It is important for the woman to feel that she can weigh – in on decisions. Her thought processes, insights, and priorities are often different than the man’s. These need to be expressed, so that a balanced decision can be made.
4. The “other” side of machismo. Many times machismo has a negative connotation, especially from an outsider’s perspective. I have learned through my interviews that machismo has another side, where the man feels a great sense of responsibility for his family and his wife. This responsibility runs deeps and is very important to male, so when making decisions he does not take this lightly and will often want his wife’s input.

The male s do feel a deep sense of responsibility. Sometimes an inordinate sense of responsibility. He wants to do what is best for his family, for his wife, for his children, for his parents, and for his extended family.

5. Immigration status has a lot to do with the way the couple understands tradition and roles. The more assimilated the couple, the more likely the couple will be more equal in roles, decision making and household responsibilities.

Tradition and roles run deep. Even if they intellectually believe in equality, actually doing housework is difficult for Hispanic men to do because they feel that their male identity is threatened. Being the head of the household and making the final decisions are the male’s role. Housework is beneath them.

6. Women continue to be the caretaker for the home, family, and husband. Hispanic woman, in general, are more submissive to their husband, but also require a deep sense of respect, trust, and admiration from him. Additionally, as Hispanic woman become more assimilated these roles are changing and they become more independent which can cause conflict in the relationship and should be discussed in premarital counseling.

When a female does not work, she should be able to participate in outside activities, such as in clubs, church, and the community. As professionals, they have duties and responsibilities at work that need to be balanced with household responsibilities such as cooking.

7. Sex is something that is sometimes discussed in Hispanic culture, but is not always understood and pregnancy is not always discussed in terms of prevention. It is recognized that there are religious factors, such as the influence of Catholicism and not allowing sex prior to marriage, but some couples believe that Hispanic people are more sexual by nature and are having sex prior to marriage, which is something to be discussed in premarital counseling. This also involves discussing parenting skill in premarital counseling.

Sex is more openly discussed and seen as a sign of machismo. Females should understand the different forms of contraception and that it is not more wrong than having sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Female children should be encouraged to get an education, to be independent, to expect to be respected, as well as to want a family and children

Please provide your feedback on these topics and clarify if what I have found from your interview are the important points. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sonja Stutzman
Appendix L
Conceptual Map

Latino Culture
- Language
- Dress
- Religion
- Immigration
- Extended Family
- Latino Marriage
  - Sex
  - Tradition
  - Roles
  - Respect and Trust
  - Communication
- Cost
- Religious Influence
- Therapist Training
- Delivery
Appendix M
Representation of Carlos’s Artifact
Appendix N
Representation of Maria’s artifact