

# Latino Family Group Interviews Report

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## Introduction

In recent years, Fond du Lac County's UW-Extension office has made significant efforts to reach Hispanic audiences. Measures taken to improve accessibility and delivery of programming for Hispanics have included: translations, hiring bilingual staff and volunteers, and crafting culturally sensitive curricula.

In the winter of 2012, a new effort to learn from area Latinos was initiated: group interviews. UW-Extension staff asked area Latino residents to participate in group conversations about different aspects of their lives in Fond du Lac County.

The information collected provides a snap shot of participants' perspectives and is summarized here for use by other service providers and area residents seeking deeper understanding of themes that impact the lives of Latinos in Fond du Lac County. Responses have been summarized by UW-Extension staff with explanation and context added where necessary. Users of the data should keep in mind that these responses are representative *only of the Latino residents and immigrants who participated in the study*. While it should not be used as a generalization of what all area Latino residents think, it is a good starting point for understanding the perspectives and issues that affect some of the newest residents of the county.



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**UW**  
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*We teach, learn, lead and serve,  
connecting people with the  
University of Wisconsin, and  
engaging with them in transforming  
lives and communities.*

## Description of Participants

For this study, UW-Extension staff spoke with:

- ◆ Adult students in two English Language Learning (ELL) classes from Moraine Park Technical College. The instructor provided class time for student participation. It was an optional exercise. *Not all participants were Latino, though all were immigrants.* These conversations were the only ones held mostly in English to meet class learning goals.
- ◆ Parishioners of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Fond du Lac after mass. During mass, a priest informed the congregation that they would have an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns to representatives of the University of Wisconsin-Extension. Families chose to stay at the church after mass for refreshments and the conversation.
- ◆ Families participating in the Head Start program. Participants were recruited to an evening group interview by a Bilingual Family Development Specialist, and the discussion was held at the Head Start facility at ADVOCAP.

- ◆ Employees of Lake Breeze Dairy farm who were informed of the opportunity to participate by the Owner and Manager of the farm. The conversation was held in a meeting room on the farm at the time of a shift change. Some participants left early and arrived late as they began and finished their work times. The farm owner welcomed UW-Extension and the participants and stayed in the room for most of the conversation.

Cumulatively, five group interviews garnered participation from approximately 50 individuals. All of the participants in the group interviews live or work in Fond du Lac County and are estimated to be in the range of 18-65 years of age. Most participants were Mexican immigrants.

UW-Extension staff did not ask about immigration status, though several participants referenced challenges of being undocumented. Interviewers also did not ask about annual household income though it became apparent that many earn moderate to low incomes, and many do physically demanding work for a living.

There were a slightly greater number of men than women who participated, and several spouses participated together at St. Mary's and Head Start.



***UW-Extension staff meet with students in an English Language Learner class of Moraine Park Technical College.***

## Group Interview Process

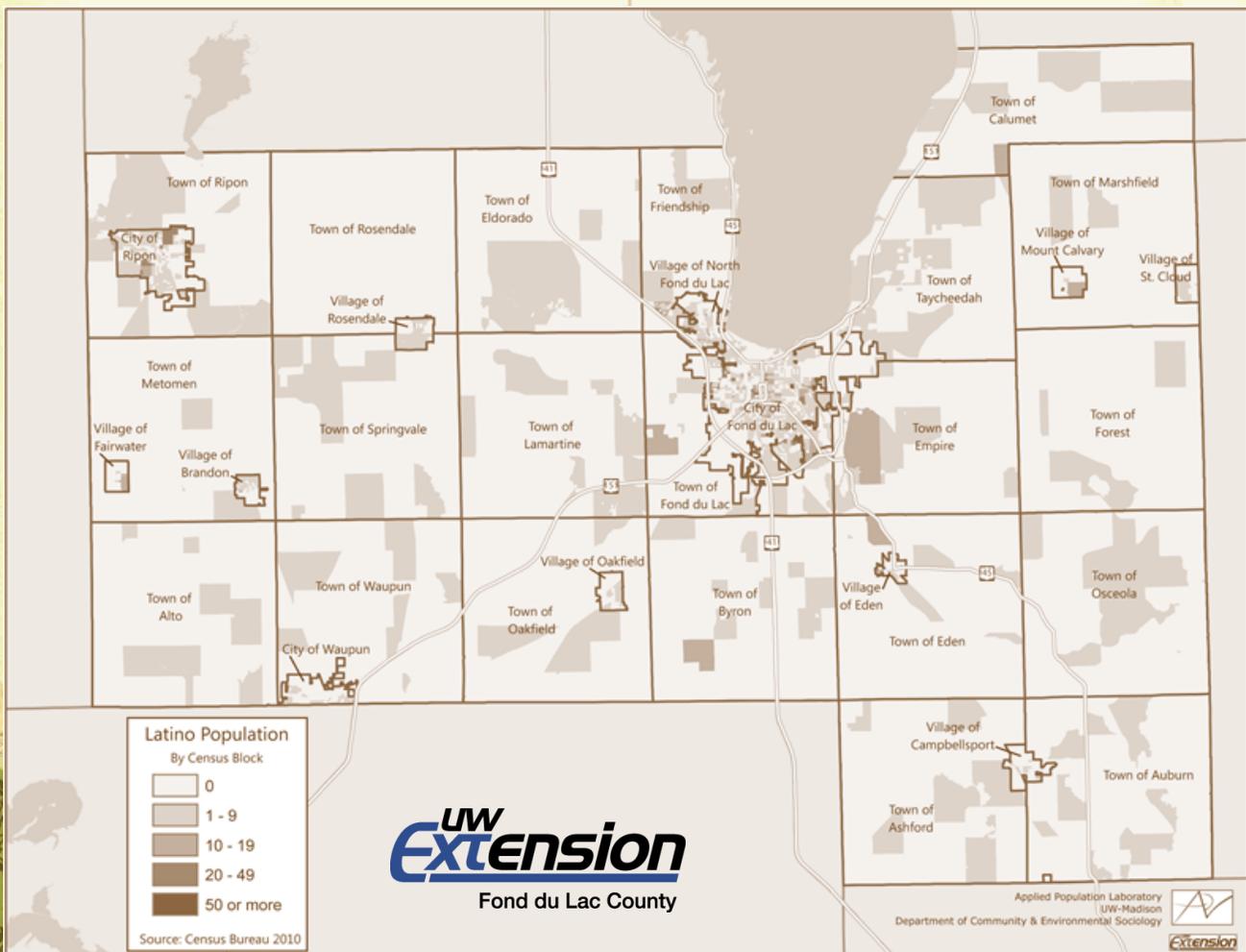
All five group interviews followed a similar procedure, with two or three UW-Extension staff facilitating. First, a statement advising participants of their right to voluntary participation and confidentiality was read. A set of previously formulated questions were then asked and responses recorded on a flip-chart for all to see. This ensured that the process of communication was clear and open, allowing participants to correct the recorder if necessary. The interviews generally lasted between 45-90 minutes depending on available time and the length of responses given by participants.

All conversations, except the two with ELL students, were held in Spanish. Subsequent to each session, responses on the flip charts were

typed and translated by the staff who had taken the notes. An effort was made to capture direct quotes as often as possible in the fast-paced conversations, though they are likely not exact and have been altered through translation for this report. It should also be noted that participants often responded to questions about life in Fond du Lac County by comparing it to their experiences where they previously lived, which for most was Mexico.

## Response Overview

Group interview responses are translated, summarized, and recorded in the next sections by topic. The conversations covered many aspects of life in Fond du Lac County and answers intertwined across sections. The questions interviewers used are included.



## Jobs

*What do you like about your work or work environment? In what ways could your work or work environment improve?*

- Many participants report liking their jobs because they pay enough for their families to live on.
- Many feel a greater sense of economic stability here.
- A change they would like in the community is getting better jobs.
- English, which has been challenging for some to learn, is a true requirement for most jobs and for promotions to better jobs.
- Many are doing physically demanding work on dairy farms and in factories, positions which they do not hope to move beyond



UW-Extension Milk Quality Training, 2008

- unless their English skills improve.
- Most jobs like this do not give benefits or health insurance, and many are seasonal which makes it difficult to make ends meet year-round.
- Some have to take multiple jobs to support their families.
- Work was described as exhausting and stressful, which participants connected with increases in their cholesterol and blood pressure.
- Participants with flexible work schedules commented on how nice it is to run errands or pick up kids before and after school and set their own pace to some extent.
- Some participants enjoy having weekends off to be with their families.
- Some mentioned being satisfied with stable pay and job security.
- Some workers employed on a dairy farm mentioned that they enjoy the cows and the fact that the farm owners help them learn.
- One dairy worker also stated that he believes the skills he's learning will help him start a farm someday in Mexico.
- Many believe that learning English is an important skill for advancing in their work.
- Those who do not speak English well can get promoted only so far without the ability to communicate with the majority of other workers and customers.
- Several participants work more than one job and wish they could make enough money on just one to spend more time with their family.
- Several stated that their jobs allow them enough time to take care of their children.
- Others said that having more options for childcare, especially before and after school, would be useful.
- Several indicated they feel discriminated against and exploited at work, giving

*Many believe learning English is an important skill for advancing in their work.*

## Jobs—Continued

examples including working longer at lower pay, no holidays off, no vacation time, and no benefits.

- One person mentioned having more pressure to complete his jobs and produce more than his counterparts in a factory environment.
- Several others said they are required to work the entire shift even when they have met their quotas for the day.
- Another mentioned he is not allowed a lunch break.
- One said he is required to have a note excusing him from work rather than his supervisor trusting his word.
- Participants desire more respect at work.
- They noted employers do work with them to be successful, even with a lack of English skills.
- Participants reinforced the need for working permits so that they, as undocumented residents, can “come out of the darkness” and work legally.
- Participants emphasized the need for good jobs and the ability to start their own businesses in a better economy.

## Health & Well Being

*Living in Fond du Lac County, what has helped you lead a healthy lifestyle? What has had a negative impact on your health?*

- Participants have a desire for more affordable health insurance.
- They see that hospitals treat everyone regardless of immediate ability to pay or insurance status and like the availability of affordable services for people with lower incomes.

- Participants also noted a high cost of medical care, even for preventative visits, and a lack of affordable dental care.
- They observe that health insurance is quite expensive to purchase.
- Safety regulations make visiting the doctor safer here than it could be in Mexico
- They think they are able to eat better here with the income they now have, although they find that healthy food is too expensive, which results in buying less nutritious food to cut costs.
- Parents think their children need to learn more about nutrition to make better choices when they have options at school.
- A barrier to buying healthy food is the inability to read nutrition facts [on food items] in English. Mexican grocery stores have labels in Spanish, though it was noted that Mexican food can be high in fat.
- The American custom of driving to even nearby locations limits opportunities for exercise, as do the cold winters.
- Lack of family members nearby and a feeling of disconnection from their neighbors contributes to participants having a negative sense of their own health.
- There are transportation concerns for access to medical care, with participants mentioning the additional barriers of high costs, language, and potentially long waits in the emergency room.
- While children who are born in the U.S. and meet income guidelines are eligible for Medicaid, other family members with different immigration statuses may not be. This leads to the paradoxical situation one participant described of having both high trust that emergency services would respond to a 911 call and at the same time no desire to call

*Participants expressed trust in police officers and other emergency responders and also noted hesitancy to use services like 911 due to the high cost of medical care and a lack of health insurance.*

## Health—Continued

because of the high charges that would be billed to their uninsured family.

- Participants noted that they need to have good health to be able to work.
- Many noted that they want to live with less fear, stress, and anxiety.
- They expressed that health insurance is something they want and need.

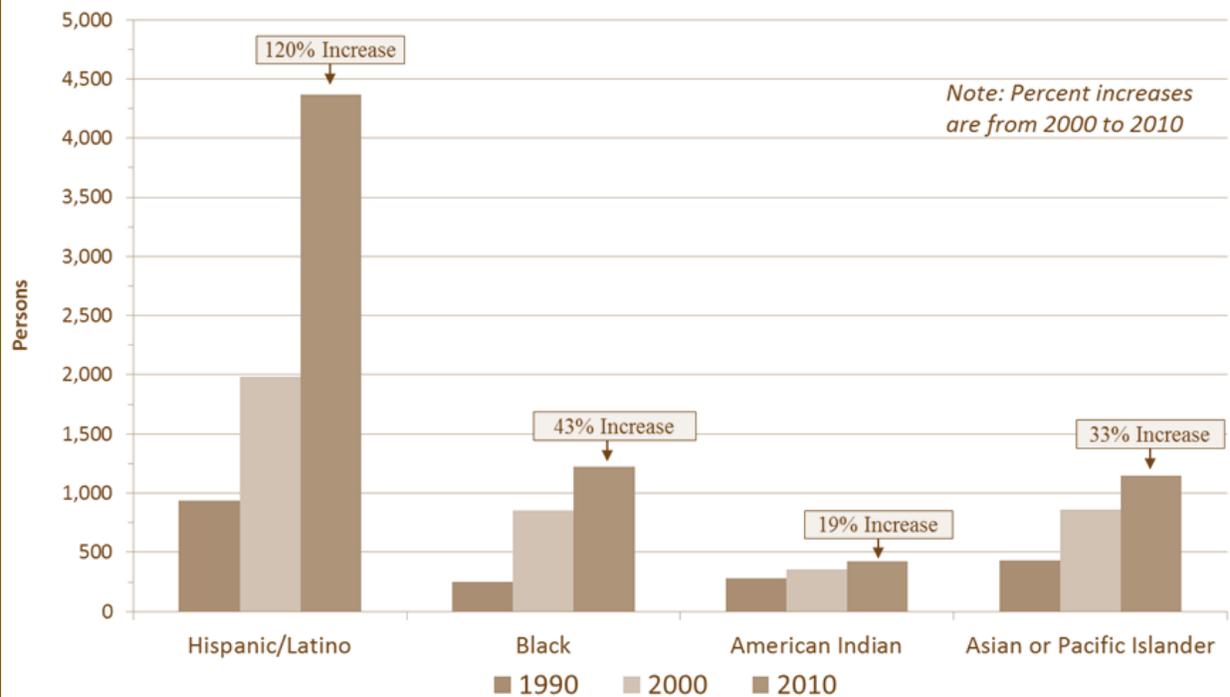
*Participants acknowledged feeling significant and ongoing stress due to concerns about immigration status, the lack of driver's licenses, and work.*

## Transportation

*This theme emerged out of several sets of questions including Job, Community Environment, and Family.*

- Many participants desired an ability to get drivers' licenses, currently not available in Wisconsin to persons who are not lawfully present (undocumented).
- The lack of drivers' licenses creates fear for those who must drive to work, to school, and to do errands.
- Participants noted that public transportation options are only available near the City of Fond du Lac with limited routes and schedules.
- Some participants do access public transportation to get to work.
- Participants feel fear on a relatively constant basis because of the need to drive and the inability to obtain driver's licenses.

**Growth of Race/Ethnic Populations, 1990 to 2010**  
Fond du Lac County  
Applied Population Lab



## School & Education

*What do you like about your children's school? What opportunities would you like your children to have? In what ways could your children's education improve?*

- Participants like having their children in schools with teachers who they think teach well.
- Children have many opportunities for lifelong learning regardless of their family's income.
- Children are getting high quality educational opportunities now which will transfer into better jobs and economic advancement in the future.
- Parents lament the high cost of college.
- Although there is a language barrier with the school when parents don't speak English, they feel that their children are getting a good education.
- They appreciate the efforts to have interpreters available for parent-teacher conferences.
- Parents have found teachers are accessible, try to help, and call when something needs attention.
- One family was glad their daughter could take advantage of special education classes she needs.
- One family noted that their children were happy to go to school.
- Parents see that school buildings are reliably heated and conducive to learning.
- One family said that their daughter in a special needs class is made fun of by peers and wished that could be improved for her.
- Some expressed the desire for their children to study, go to college, and eventually get jobs that pay well.
- Parents and children have better opportunities through economic advancement and learning English.
- Parents do not want to rely on children or interpreters; this is a big motivation to continue learning English.
- Parents want more children and family members to get educated and go to college.
- They are teaching their children a "road to success" and understand that learning English is a critical component of that.
- When asked about suggestions for improving the school environment, participants suggested having fewer students in each class and improving the safety of schools.
- One person noted that schools in Mexico he/she knows of usually have metal detectors and inspections of backpacks at the entrance. The individual doesn't like how easy it is here for children to take weapons to school.



*Participants believe their children are getting a good education in area schools and appreciate the efforts teachers make to communicate with parents.*

## Experience in the Community/ Cultural Understanding

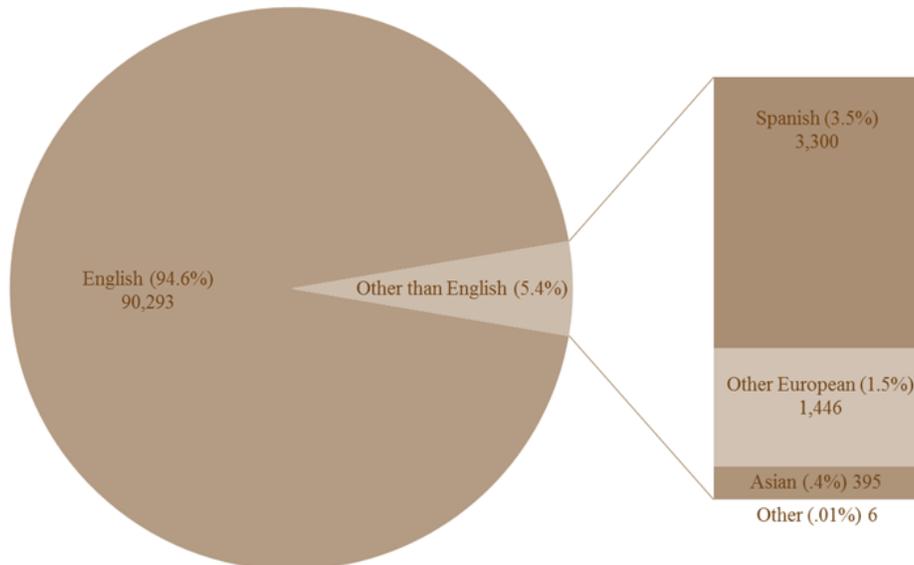
*How have you felt included in the Fond du Lac community? How have you not felt included in the FDL community?*



- Participants expressed appreciation for a society where they and their children are treated fairly and laws are enforced. This is in contrast to the widespread corruption many have seen in Latin America which awards rights according to money and family status and where life seems much more precarious for the majority.
- One person said he believes people laugh at him because of his low English skills.
- People tell them to “go back to your country.”
- They perceive they are treated differently at times from others because they are Mexican.
- Many say the U.S. is welcoming, and they have felt included locally since this is a “friendly place for Latinos” with fewer prejudices evident. Several community organizations were mentioned specifically including church, Family Resource Center, Moraine Park Technical College, and Head Start as welcoming places.
- One person thought that the Fond du Lac area was much more inclusive than other Eastern WI cities he had lived.
- Another person said that she felt welcomed by people from the same culture [Mexican] who she didn’t know before.
- The more individualistic American culture creates a different sense of community than they are used to, one in which they don’t always get greetings when passing people [when walking] and where the neighbors seem superficially friendly.
- Several individuals shared experiences such as:
  - ◇ “I was supported at the hospital when my [newborn] daughter died.”
  - ◇ “I have received a lot of help with my kids.”
  - ◇ “Me and my three kids have been well-treated.”
- Being referred to as “Latinos” or “Hispanics” was also a conversation point in one discussion. From their perspective, people from Mexico, Central America, and South America are all “Americans” geographically, so the language used to describe people in the United States is already divisive.
- One person said there had been demonstrations of whites against Latinos in a nearby community.
- At least one person had never experienced racism here.
- Participants discussed an observation that the whiter a person appears in skin tone, the more likely they are to hear racist things when others assume they are white.
- Another participant mentioned that students at the high school were rude to him at first, though the teachers were always courteous and treated him well.
- Several participants acknowledged that language is a barrier to being included, with at least one person having been asked not to speak in Spanish.

*In contrast to their experiences in Mexico, participants appreciate the United States for treating people justly and enforcing laws. Many feel supported and treated well here. Some shared experiences of exclusion or discrimination.*

**Language Spoken at Home for Persons Age 5 and Over, ACS 2008-2010  
Fond du Lac County**



**Cultural Understanding—  
*Continued***

- Another joked, “people speak English to me as if I understand!”
- Another stated that there will always be people who include and exclude regardless of location.
- Participants were unanimous in the desire to be treated with more respect and to have people here understand them better, both as customers and as community residents. They wanted others to know why they came here and what their lives are like.
- Similarly, several participants stated that they would like to get to know the local American culture better and “to achieve mutual understanding” with non-Latino residents.

**Community Environment**

Do you trust public or government services? Do you use them?

In what ways could your community environment improve?

- Many enjoy the Fond du Lac County area for the peaceful, rural environment and think Fond du Lac is a good place to live.
- They feel safe here because it is a small, peaceful community, and the people are mostly friendly.
- Participants are accessing many community services, and they enjoy using the YMCA, enrolling kids in soccer, and using local parks in warmer months.
- They wish there were more activities to do inside in the winter, an especially challenging time for young children in apartments.

*The Fond du Lac area is appreciated by participants for being a peaceful, safe place to live.*

## Community Environment—Continued

- They note that the government responds to citizen requests and suggestions for needed services here.
- They were especially appreciative of this noting the contrast with Mexico where police are not trusted, and the government is more corrupt and removed from the reality of average people's lives.
- Those with children born in the U.S. were glad that these children would be able to claim all the advantages citizenship brings.
- Their children are growing up bilingual and bicultural, which they considered an advantage.
- Participants would like volunteer opportunities.

## Residency Status

*This theme emerged from questions about Family, Jobs, and School.*

- Those who are undocumented or who have undocumented family members find it difficult to rent apartments, run errands, or find jobs without proper paperwork.
- Undocumented participants are not able to access FoodShare, Social Security, or other social safety net programs with the exception of WIC, which they can and do use. *(See note below)*
- They want their children to be citizens, free of the burdens that non-citizens carry on a daily basis here.

- Having legal permission to work and legal drivers' licenses would greatly improve the lives of undocumented workers who are constantly fearful of being discovered at work or on the road.
- Participants felt a strong need for citizenship via a comprehensive immigration reform law.
- Participants described feeling fearful constantly because of immigration-related concerns and a desire to live without fear.

## Housing

*This theme emerged from questions about Family and Community Environment.*

- Residents in apartments noted a few concerns about landlords, with one participant indicating that the landlord is not as attentive to Mexican residents.
- Another participant commented that the area around the apartment building is strewn with trash and broken bottles which is dangerous for her children to play near.
- Another noted that other residents don't follow the rules of the apartment building.
- Additionally, it was noted that a credit card is often necessary to rent an apartment, which creates a barrier for those not using that type of financial tool.

*"The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children—better known as the WIC Program—serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on health eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care."*

*—Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/about-wic>*

## Shopping

*When you patronize a business, do you encounter any difficulties?*

*What would improve your experience as a customer? Have you contemplated starting your own business?*

- Participants noted that one change they would like in the community is having a supermarket which sells more Mexican products in one place.
- They expressed a desire for non-Hispanic residents, including police, business owners, and employees, to treat them with more respect, and to make fewer assumptions about their potential behavior or status based on physical characteristics, dress, or language.
- For example, a participant mentioned that employees sometimes assume they don't have money when they are shopping.
- At least one participant shared that other immigrants are rude to them at certain stores.
- Others thought they had been treated differently because of appearances.
- Participants noted having a perpetual struggle to find food products from their country of origin.
- Language is the major barrier that makes communication in stores difficult and frustrating at times.
- Some major purchases (car, rent, mortgage, etc.) require documents that some immigrants don't have.
- Several participants noted disdainful attitudes from staff at businesses toward themselves as customers, and some stated

that they or family members had been carefully observed or even followed in stores. They assumed that this is because store owners think they are more likely to steal.

- In two groups, participants had not experienced any negative experiences in businesses locally.
- Participants observe that having money "buys" respect; as long as they were shopping to buy, they felt tolerated by the store owners.

## Safety

*This theme emerged out of several sets of questions including School, Community Environment, and Experiences in the Community.*

- Participants note that both they and their children feel safe here.
- They believe this is a stable, safe community environment for their families.
- They believe the police are trustworthy and public services are not discriminatory.
- Most said they do trust the police and would call them if necessary.
- One participant noted that she did not feel safe having her children play outside by themselves where they used to live.
- Participants reinforced the need to be protected – equally – by the law.
- One person stated that they as immigrants could improve community relationships by informing themselves about how to behave around police and other public officials in the U.S.

*Most said they do trust the police and would call them if necessary.*

## Access to Internet & Social Media

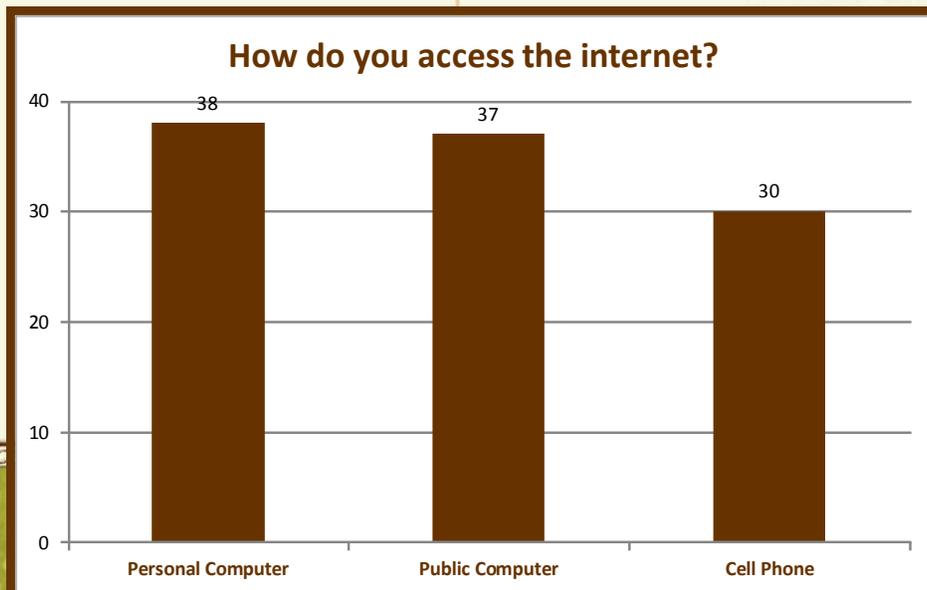
*Raise your hand if....*

- *You have internet access on a private computer, on a public computer, on your phone.*
  - *You use Facebook.*
  - *You prefer educational materials in Spanish.*
  - *You prefer educational materials in English.*
  - *You prefer educational materials in both Spanish and English.*
- In response to these polls, participants indicated they access the internet in multiple ways. Most (36) also use Facebook.
  - When asked about their language preference for written materials, there was a clear preference to have versions in both Spanish and English (*such as two-sided flyers with one language on each side*).
  - One ELL class participant noted that he tries to read the English side and likes to have the Spanish version to double-check himself.
  - 29 participants report feeling comfortable using English outside the home.

At the end of the conversation, reviewing the notes:

*What themes stand out from our discussion? What is the most important?*

- **Health:** Participants want healthy families, good health so they can work, appropriate nutrition to prevent illness, and health insurance.
- **English:** Participants want more education for their children and family members. Learning English is crucial for having more opportunities and for economic advancement. Participants do not like to depend on children or professional interpreters.
- **Work:** Participants want to get better jobs as the economy improves. They also want to work legally and have the ability to get drivers licenses. They emphasized repeatedly the fear and anxiety they feel for themselves and others as those who are undocumented work and drive on a daily basis.
- **Cultural Understanding:** Participants want others to understand their lives and would like to understand American culture better. They want to be protected equally by the law, especially in the areas of work permits and drivers licenses.



## Limitations of the Study

- Some of the participants in the ELL classes were not Latino, but their responses were included and were similar to the thoughts and perceptions of their Latino immigrant peers.
- One of the goals of the ELL class was to learn more about UW-Extension. Prior to the group interview, UW-Extension staff spent 20-30 minutes describing the educational programming available to students and how to access it. In the other interviews, UW-Extension programming was explained in a brief 5-minute summary.
- Because of the structured class schedule, ELL students were asked fewer questions and had less discussion. With the other groups, facilitators were able to go deeper into these topics and ask follow-up questions for clarification.
- All group interviews in Spanish were led by a native Spanish speaker and recording in Spanish was done by a non-native Spanish speaker.
- Notes were not immediately transcribed or translated after each group interview though efforts were made to do this as quickly as possible after each one and before the next one.
- Most of the participants lived in and around the City of Fond du Lac. Efforts to hold a conversation with a group of Ripon residents (located in another part of the county) were unsuccessful.
- Learning more about Latino culture from reliable sources of information and through personal interactions with Latino community members are important steps towards creating a more cohesive and harmonious community.
- Organizations in the private and public sector alike (businesses, non-profits, government offices, etc.) who wish to provide services to Latinos in an effective, equitable and respectful manner might consider the ways in which their employees can be made aware of some of the unique challenges faced by Latinos. Such challenges may be in the areas of language, transportation, access to health care, residency status, and discrimination. Employees could be trained to act with sensitivity to these issues when interacting with clients.
- Businesses may find opportunities to expand their client base and offerings by studying Latino consumer trends and making personal connections with local residents.

## Implications

- Individuals who hope to improve their interactions with Latino community members would do well to become aware of both the challenges that they have in common with Latino residents as well as some of the unique challenges that Hispanics in the community may be facing.

*Group interview process and questions available upon request.*

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