

## Dia de los Muertos

Scarlett Davalos

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

Dia de los Muertos is a traditional holiday celebrated in the Mexican culture. Catholicism forms an underlying foundation for this cultural tradition. Culture is defined as, “an invisible, share, implicit, design that governs our daily lives and shapes how we think, feel, and behave” (Carter-Black, personal communication, 2017). Within my culture, Dia de los Muertos, a tradition shared across all of Mexico, helps us cope with the death of loved ones. This holiday is a celebration of the memories we have of those who have passed, and helps us keep the deceased family or friends’ spirit alive. November 1<sup>st</sup> marks the beginning of Dia de los Muertos, and the celebration ends on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. There are several traditions associated with this celebration, but it begins with the passing away of a loved one.

In the Mexican culture, when someone you love passes away there is a time of pain and grief, but there is also a time of celebration. Because of the religious foundation, prayer is an important element in this cultural tradition. During the first nine days following the death of a loved one, there is a nine-day prayer, which begins the day that person dies. This nine-day prayer is a time for close family and friends to come together to mourn and pray the rosary for the deceased. The reason family and friends pray the rosary is to help the soul of the individual who has passed to reach heaven. The offering of these prayers also ensures their loved one’s body rests in peace.

This traditional nine-day prayer also contributes to the forgiveness of any sins the deceased may have committed. Further, the period of prayer helps the soul gain peace in situations where the deceased may have had unfinished business here on earth. These prayers serve to help the bodies and souls of the deceased to achieve tranquility. It also indicates it is time to prepare for Dia de los Muertos.

Inevitably, the passing of a loved one is a time of deep sorrow. However, for many of those who share my cultural identity, we try to lift our spirits by keeping the spirit of our loved one with us as much as we can. The preparation for the Dia de los Muertos celebration begins by building an altar for the deceased ones at the home of their immediate family. This act reassures the spirits of those who have passed the surviving members of their family still remember them. We place a lighted candle by the altar. By following the light, the soul is able to find its way back to us and then back to heaven when the visit is over.

In the Mexican culture, individual families continue these traditions and celebrate on their own at home. However, the entire country of Mexico comes together on Dia de los Muertos to remember all of the souls of our loved ones who have passed. This two-day festival requires weeks of preparation. Most of the celebration takes place at the graveyards where loved ones are buried. Friends and families bring flowers (typically marigolds), the deceased’s favorite food, and live music to the graves of their loved ones. At the grave sites family and friends proceed to eat and celebrate the memories of those

they loved. I hope to portray this message love and remembering through the photographs I have compiled. These images represent my deceased grandparents.

The definition of a dominant paradigm is “the most widely held societal values, or system of thought at a given time shaped...by the community's cultural background within the existing historical context”. Dominant paradigms differ across the wide and ever changing communities of people. Therefore, the way in which my community views and copes with death certainly differs from that of other cultural contexts (Carter-Black, personal communication, 2017). However, though there may be differences, there is also the “paradox of cultural diversity”. This paradox conveys the intersection of universal social phenomenon versus distinct social phenomenon. For example, all social groups must cope with death (universal), but how social groups cope with death differs (distinct) (Carter-Black, personal communication, 2017).

In the Mexican culture...my culture, Dia de los Muertos is a time to keep the spirits of our deceased loved ones alive by remembering and celebrating with them.









