



## Papí and I Don't Talk, We Argue

Tatianna has always questioned authority. As a girl, she'd push back on rules, gender roles and limitations, annoying her family, and especially her dad. As an adult, her feminist ways clash with his machismo. A therapist who focuses on Latinas, men and the families who love them joins the show to help Tatianna and the rest of us find a better way.

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Juleyka Lantigua-Williams:

Hi, everybody. Welcome back to How to Talk to [Mami and Papí] About Anything, and hey new listeners! We're so glad you're here. I'm Juleyka Lantigua-Williams. As those of you who've been listening know, I talk to adult children of immigrant parents and key experts about ways we can grow closer to them and better understand one another across the generational gap. In this episode, Tatianna shares how her dad's man of the house beliefs often clash with her more feminist ideals. Something she says has been happening since she was a child. Let's get into it.

Tatianna: I'm Tatianna, and I was born and raised in the island of Puerto Rico, and in Puerto Rico we call our parents mami and papí. I would say my relationship with my parents was pretty interesting and fun. You know, I have a brother, and he was the good kid and I was the black sheep, if you will, and growing up I was always the challenger. I was always questioning everything they said, they told me, everything they asked me to do, everything they said, to the point that I drove them insane. And I was always kind of like questioned my dad, "Why did you say that?" And, "What makes you think like that?"

And that bothered him and annoyed him to no end, but I guess it shaped me to be how I am today and who I am today, and I grew up in a pretty misogynistic culture, and yeah, and other places may be worse, but in my eyes, it was like, "Oh, because you're a girl, you can't do that. Your brother can do it because he's a boy, but you can't do it, because you're a girl." So, I would immediately jump into that and say, "Why? But what's the difference between me and him? What makes you think that way?" And I would always dig for more, and more, and more, and my dad would be like, "Callate, You're a girl, he's a boy, and that's it."

So, now as an adult, the dynamic hasn't changed at all in terms of my relationship with my dad. Yes, it's true that when they become grandparents, they soften a lot, and even I go, when my daughter does something, I'm like, "You would never let me get away with that when I was her age." But he still has this whole man of the

house mentality, and fast forward, there's certain life situations that have made my parents live with us, and my dad gets uncomfortable about the way I am sometimes. Like if I'm talking to my husband and I feel like he's in the wrong, I stand up and tell my husband he's wrong. I'm not the way my mom was, because my mom was a housewife and a stay-at-home mom. I'm a working mom. Dad, he used to mention it more. He doesn't anymore, because we had a couple of come to Jesus moments of like, "There's a line and if you cross it, you're in my house now." So, he doesn't like that I talk like that, but I'm like, "I gotta set those boundaries."

In the Latino community, there's a lot of walking around eggshells with your parents, and a lot of not wanting to cross that boundary and disrespect them. I would say I'm like that with my mom, but for some reason, because I've been doing it since such a young age, I'm very comfortable confronting my dad with some realities. I'm gonna give you examples. If he tells me, "Well, you're the woman, he's the man, and I don't think you should do that." I'd be the one going, "I'm an adult. I married him. He married me. He knows how I am. We got this." no te mentas. You know, don't get into it. And he gets offended when I do that, but I have to constantly remind him, "I'm an adult now, and I don't parent the way you parent, and I am not the woman my mom is. I mean, my mom is a perfect human being. I love my mom. She was an amazing stay-at-home mom and an amazing housewife, but that's just not who I am.

And the fact that I'm not like my mom kills him. The fact that I don't behave like my mom and I don't keep quiet when I should, when he thinks I should... Plus, fast forward to now, my mom has, living with me has made her wake up a little bit, and he resents that part, too, because my mom now stands up for herself. When he says something, my mom kind of like "fights back," and he doesn't like it, and he blames me for it.

I feel like every time my dad and I talk, there's a confrontation. This whole COVID situation, because I had to work from home, my husband had to work from home, we had both kids at home and both of my parents home. For two months we did this, and that, the fact that I had to interact with him 24/7, every day, it became hard, so it gave me like a tough realization where I had to be like... And even my mom, I believe she spoke with him about, "She's her own person. This is not your house. We live with her. You cannot parent her anymore." Because I don't have a problem with him parenting and disciplining my kids, because let me face it. I'm working, they're the ones stuck with my kids at home. I tell them, "You guys do what you need to do in order to keep them in line."

But when it comes to me, he has a hard time understanding that I'm an adult now, and sometimes he forgets that I have to constantly remind him. So, in the past few weeks, I think working from home has made us realize that our relationship is a constant argument. So, now we can have a functional conversation now without having to yell at each other, because we're constantly yelling at each other. If my dad was in this call, what would I say to him? I think he did a hell of a job raising

me. I think he did, despite all the things. I believe a part of who I am and how I am is because of him. We may have different views, but in the end, I feel like I'm this person that I am now in terms of like always standing up for myself, and always not letting people walk all over me, I learned it from him. I learned that from. My goodness.

I would say thank you. I would say thank you. I am this strong, headstrong woman because of you. I would say that. You know, there's a lot of great qualities that I know I have that are because of him, and I am thankful for that. I am very thankful for that.

Lantigua-Williams:

Tatianna's story is so relatable. There were so many times I would feel frustrated by the expectations put upon me as the oldest daughter, and my parents and I also got into it, like Tatianna and her dad do. But now that I'm older and I have small children, I want to be more aware of how anger builds over time, and I also want to learn how all of us can take a different approach, especially with our parents.

So of course, I called in an expert.

Claudia Cuevas:

My name is Claudia Cuevas. I am a licensed marriage and family therapist in California. I have a practice in south Orange County and I specialize in Latina women, men, and the families who love them, and want to break down barriers on how to have better relationships with each other.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, you heard Tatianna's story. What do you hear when you listen to that?

Cuevas: The first thing I thought was, "God, there's so many expectations of who she should and shouldn't be, and how she's presenting in the world, and how other people view her." Right? There's this perception that she's a bad girl because she's filled with curiosity, and wanting to know more, and she called herself a rebel, right? And what I thought of was I like, "Sounds like she got her dad's personality."

Lantigua-Williams:

I have to confess, I was Tatianna 100% when I was growing up. And so, I think I've gotten better, but I did not have the wisdom for a long, long time to try and ask questions. I would just straight up fight anybody who tried to tell me that I couldn't do something, that I couldn't speak at a particular occasion, et cetera. But what's interesting about this dynamic, which has never been the case in mine, is that her parents are now living with her. So, how do you think that's impacting this standing family dynamic between her and her dad?

Cuevas: You know, I really think it's this mirror reflection of each other. Dad sees in her what probably made his life a little bit difficult, and as a woman, and coming from a Latino background, it's a difficult road. For him, maybe it's the, "I'm trying to protect you." And for her, she's seeing, "You don't like me. I'm not good enough because I'm not like my mom," who she says is a Superwoman. Right? Because she's a stay-at-home mom, and she toes the line, and she's quiet, and she does what she's told.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, I asked her at the very end what she would say to her dad if he were on the line for us, and she actually had some really beautiful things to say about him, and one of the things was that he made her who she is. The strong, bold woman who can stand up for herself. There was a recognition on her part that there are those similarities. So, how can she utilize the proximity that they have now and her understanding that this is the situation that she wants to remedy to move forward? What are some of the things that she can actually start to implement between them?

Cuevas: I mean, really, to start off is to recognize the growth that she's in right now, which she's now seeing the positive to these experiences, right? Like self-acceptance is going to be her first step, and being proud of that person that she is. But I would really... I would want her to ask some more gentle and compassionate questions to her dad, like, "Are you proud of me? Do you think I make good decisions?" Because he's gonna reflect back to her. He'll be able to actually answer if this clash that they have between themselves, if it's fear based, or if it's really that he doesn't like her, right?

These types of questions would help her to repair that relationship or those negative cognitions that she internalized as she was growing up about her dad and her. And so, him being able to say, "Of course I'm proud of you, because you've done this, and this, and this, and of course you make good decisions because of this, and this, and this," helps repair that relationship. Both sides.

Lantigua-Williams:

Do you see this dynamic? Or do you see sort of like these conflicts, intergenerational and gender-driven conflicts, in your practice a lot?

Cuevas: A lot. A lot. I have a lot of family sessions with first generation, second generation, constantly having this... For the first generation or for second generation as being here, we're Americanized, and we're trying to sift through what it is to be successful and what it means here. And the parents clinging to traditions, and to not lose the roots, and then there's a clash, right? Because here is about individuality, money, success, notoriety, whatever that is. And back in our home countries and our family of origin, that's not the most important thing. It's a good thing, but that's not what's the most important thing. It's really about family, and

respect, and community. And so, I see a lot of them clinging to wanting to maintain the roots.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, what do you say to those parents in light of the conflict that them holding onto tradition is creating with their children?

Cuevas: I really ask the questions of what are you afraid of. What is your biggest fear about your kids or your adult children? What is it that keeps you up at night? What are you afraid of for them? And once we start sifting through what the fear is, we can see where the conflict comes from. And then we can address, well, do you trust your children? Do you trust that they make good decisions? Do you trust that they come to you if they have a problem? Are you part of the conversation to make these decisions? Would you like to be part of the conversation to make the decisions? And most of the time, if people are open enough to have a dialogue, the parents do get included into the conversation. I mean, I still call my dad to ask about money things, because I think he's great with money, and so he'll give me his opinion and I'll... and he says, "That's my opinion. It's what you should do." And he'll tell me what I should do, but he'll say, "But it's your decision," and then I make my decision, and they feel... That's how they can feel respected, and they also can identify for themselves where this anxiety is coming from.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay, so those kind of questions imply or require a certain level of intimacy, emotional intimacy, that sometimes we don't have with our parents. How do we begin to establish that in steps, so that we can maybe get to those big questions that take multiple conversations to have?

Cuevas: I think one of the best things to do, especially with our parents and our elderly, is they're great storytellers, and they have a lot of stories to tell, and they don't think that we are open to hear their advice, or hear what they're doing, if they haven't told us their story. And so, to be able to open that line of communication, there's nothing better than to listen to them. Ask them a question. How was it like when you were growing up? What do you remember about your childhood? That is the best way to build rapport with anybody, even in the therapeutic... For me, that's how I build rapport with my clients. I want to know their story. I want to be generally interested in who they are and what makes them who they are. And then we can have an exchange, because they feel like if I tell you something, you know where it's coming from.

Lantigua-Williams:

In Tatianna's case, it seems like a lot of these things built up to a point of anger, of explosion. I'm not surprised. I'm also very familiar with that dynamic. So, how do we, who are very passionate about certain things, when we get to that place of anger, how can we take hold of that moment and maybe try and transform it or

turn it into something useful, and then to try and break down that pattern that leads to an explosion?

Cuevas: It's really about the self-dialogue, right? It's really about you being able to catch yourself and say, "It's not that they don't love you." It's not that they don't accept you. Because that's where the anger's coming from. It's this resentment, this built up resentment of, "I'm not good enough. You never accept me. You don't like me." And that's not where it's coming from, right? It's coming from a protective way. Their intentions are not to hurt us. Their intentions are to make our life easier, so that we don't have to suffer as much as they did. Their approach, not necessarily always the best one. But they can only do what they can do.

So, it's really about this inner dialogue for myself. I am never... I've come to the conclusion. I've accepted it. Never gonna change my mom. Ever. The only person that can change the way that I interact with my mom is me. So, I take a deep breath, I take a physical step back, so I don't go into the anger engagement mode of fight mode, and I just look at her and I tell myself, "It's not because she doesn't love you." Right? She's afraid.

Lantigua-Williams:

Wow.

Cuevas: And then the tension goes down and you're able to... And some people have to walk away at the beginning, until they're able to master that ability. So, walking away, not saying anything, taking a deep breath, taking a shower, whatever it is. I mean, from college, I used to walk into the house, she would say something negative to me, and I would pick up my clothes and leave again, and then come back the next weekend. And then we start all over.

Lantigua-Williams:

What are one or two absolutes? Do not ever do this under any circumstances!

Cuevas: Don't ever hit below the belt. That might be hard for a lot of people, because they've already engaged in that type of behavior, but it's never too late to repair that. They're gonna hit below the belt. Understand that, know that, they know all the buttons to push on you. They are your Achilles' heel. But you don't hit below the belt.

Lantigua-Williams:

All right, let's recap what we learned from Claudia. Ask direct questions. Find out what your parents are thinking and why they think those things. Find the roots of their fears by eliciting stories from them about their own lives and about how they raised you. Recognize and verbally acknowledge the good things that you've learned from them. Let me repeat. Recognize and verbally acknowledge all the good and wonderful things that you've learned from them. Step back if you need to. If you sense that a situation will become negative, give yourself and your

relative space. And remember, don't hit below the belt. Stay honest, but avoid personal attacks.

When I spoke to Tatianna about a month ago, things were really tense. But since then, she appears to have made some really important changes in her life, and they've had a positive impact. Here's a voice memo we got from her.

Tatianna: So, I've been going to therapy, and the therapist and I are digging into the root of the relationship with my dad. Things are better at home. We are able to have conversations without arguing. It's been over a month since I can remember that we've had an argument or any type of "fight." I know in my part it's because of therapy, in his part, I think he just has learned to let go. I think he's starting to see that I don't deal and do things his way, and I believe he is starting to understand that.

Lantigua-Williams:

Whoa. That's just so cool. I'm so happy for her and her dad.

Thank you so much for listening. How to Talk to [Mamá and Papí] About Anything is an original production of Lantigua Williams & Co. Micaela Rodriguez produced this episode. Kojin Tashiro mixed it. Cedric Wilson is our lead producer, and Virginia Lora is our managing producer. We'd love to hear your stories of triumph and frustration, so drop us a line at [hello@talktomamipapi.com](mailto:hello@talktomamipapi.com). Even if you don't want to be on the show, email us, because your story might inspire a future episode. You can also hit us up on Twitter or Instagram @TalktoMamiPapi. Please, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and anywhere you listen to your favorite podcasts, and leave a review! We love reading those. Bye, everybody! Same place next week.

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