The Impacts of not having a Male Role Model on Latino Youth

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Abstract

This paper explores multiple impacts of not having a male role model on Latino youth. A large proportion of the people who are living in the United States are Latinos. Much of the Latino population is comprised of youth. According to relevant literature, it is advantageous for male youth to have consistent, strong bonds to their parents. Similarly, male youth not having a bond or relationship with their parents can lead to negative outcomes. A qualitative research study was conducted on three Latino males. During in-depth interviews, the study’s participants reflected on the ways in which they were impacted by not having male role models living in the home as youth. The study’s data was analyzed via an adapted version of Charmaz’s Constructivist Grounded Theory. Four main themes and relevant sub-themes were extracted from the data. The study’s implications include the need for future research on the benefits of having a consistent, dependable female role model and the benefits of engaging in therapy for Latino, male youth without a male role model in the home.

Keywords: Latinos, youth, adolescents, male role model
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Introduction

Many of the Latinos living in the United States are adolescent-aged (Mayo, 2008). The stage of adolescence is considered to be a difficult stage of the life cycle (Kehoe, Havinghurst, & Harley, 2014). Regular contact with and support from parents is positive for adolescents (Hendricks et al., 2005).

Currently, scholarly information is lacking regarding qualitative research that includes Latino youth without a male role model in the home’s narratives on how they are impacted by the lack of a male role model in the home. Similarly, relevant literature is lacking on the services or benefits this population feels other youth from the population could benefit from. Lastly, research stemming from a theoretical grounding is lacking in the relevant literature surrounding this population.

Through utilizing Charmaz’s Constructivist Grounded Theory, this study’s participants’ narratives were analyzed. Participants’ narratives indicated four major concepts, which consist of the following: participants’ perceptions of their mothers’ strong roles, the negative sentiments participants had toward their fathers’ lack of involvement, the benefits of therapy in regard to their fathers’ lack of involvement, and participants without a male role model in the home’s acting out behaviors.

Literature Review

Population Information

Latinos have been reported as the largest growing minority population in the country (Prelow, Loukas, & Jordan-Green, 2007). Likewise, it is estimated that over 25% of the United
States population will be comprised of Latinos by 2060 (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Of the Latinos living in the United States, 30% are under age 15 (Mayo, 2008).

Importance of Parental Support

Regarding Latino adolescents’ relationships with their parents, nurturing from both parents on a daily basis is reported to be important for youth (Hendricks et al., 2005). Positive, consistent paternal involvement is generally a positive asset to youth’s development and life trajectory (Brent & Behnke, 2005). Additionally, it has been reported by Jones (2004) that fathers have more of an impact on males/sons than mothers do. This speaks to the importance of Latino adolescents having a male role model present in their lives.

Adjusting from childhood to adolescence is a difficult transition for youth (Kehoe, Havinghurst, & Harley, 2014). In general, Latino households offer a “buffer” against difficulties in their family members’ lives, as generally speaking, family is such a dependable group of people for this population (Suárez, 1995). Researchers report that youth who do not have a high amount of support from their parents are more likely to experience stress during life experiences (Katz, Esparza, Carter, Grant, & Meyerson, 2012). Family is commonly viewed with high regard and importance in Latino households (Fischer, Harvey, & Driscoll, 2009). Researchers suggest immigrant children’s success is largely impacted by their parents’ involvement (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008).

Latino Cultural Values

*Familismo* is a term based around the importance of family for Latinos (Fischer, Harvey, & Driscoll, 2009). According to Valdivieso-Mora, Peet, Garnier-Villarreal, Salazar-Villanea, and Johnson (2016), familismo is attributed to Latinos’ “respect, support, obligation, and reference” toward family (p.1). Youth feeling a sense of familismo has been reported to be advantageous for
their mental health and development (Valdivieso-Mora, Peet, Garnier-Villarreal, Salazar-Villanea, & Johnson, 2016). Family’s support is reported to help youth when they are in a crisis or psychological distress (Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, & Gonzales-Backen, 2011).

Gaps in Knowledge

There is not a sufficient amount of literature available regarding male Latinos’ narratives about their experiences of not having a male role model present in their homes as adolescents. Additionally, the literature available on Latino youth who do not have a male role model does not include information regarding the types of resources this population feels they could benefit from. Lastly, there does not seem to be theory-guided research available regarding Latino male youth without male role models.

How Study Will Address and Contribute to the Body of Knowledge

This study will be advantageous in gaining a better understanding of some of the needs of Latino, male youth without male role models in the home. This study served as an opportunity for its participants to share their insights and experiences regarding how they have been impacted by not having a male role model as youth/adolescents. This study also gave its participants the opportunity to speak about the types of services and benefits they feel other Latino youth without a male role model in the home could benefit from. Lastly, this study is theory-guided, unlike the majority of the existing literature that is available about this population.

Methodology

Aim of Study

The main aims of this study were to gather participants’ narratives regarding their lived experiences of growing up without a male role model in their homes, as well as their opinions of the types of services or benefits that youth in similar positions could benefit from.
Collection of Data

The participants from this study hailed from separate regions and a separate continent than the researcher of this study. Due to this, the interviews were held via individual FaceTime interviews with each participant. Ecamm software was used to record the interviews for the purpose of transcribing them after they were completed. After the transcriptions were completed, the recorded interviews were destroyed, in order to ensure of the security of the study’s participants.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was completed for this study, as there were specific participant criteria required in order for participants to be eligible for the study, due to this author wishing to assess participants based on this set of criteria. The participant criteria for this study consisted of the following: male, Latino, at least 18-years-old, and grew up without a male role model living in the home for at least one year as youth.

Appropriateness of Methodological Approach for the Aims of the Study

An adapted version of Constructivist Grounded Theory was the methodological approach that was used for this study. Constructivist Grounded Theory is an inductive level of reasoning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This methodological approach aims to allow applicable information to stem solely from the data gathered during the research process (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). This author’s aim was to give the research participants a platform to provide their unique insights on their personal experiences, as well as their opinions regarding what they feel people from similar backgrounds can benefit from. Charmaz (2009) also intended for Constructivist Grounded Theory to compare participants’ narratives and the meanings behind their narratives to the large society or populations. This author’s aim was also to compare the participants’
narratives with the existing information available regarding the study’s population and the ways in which they are impacted by not having a male role model living in their homes.

Data Analysis

The data from this study was analyzed via an adapted version of Charmaz’s Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivism was developed by Charmaz in 2006 (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivism is based off the researcher’s intention to explore how research participants make meaning out of their lives and previous life experiences (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivism acknowledges and accepts the fact that the researchers will inevitably have an individual vantage point from which they will interpret the research phenomena they observe (Charmaz, 2014).

Overall, the data was coded line-by-line, as recommended by Charmaz (2014). Gerunds and in vivo coding were also used when appropriate (Charmaz, 2014).

There are four stages of coding under Constructivism’s approach to analysis (Charmaz, 2014). The four coding stages consist of the following: initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). For the purpose of this study, initial coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding was completed. Focused coding was not completed, due to the author feeling as though this level of coding was not necessary for this study. This also aligns with the methodology Corbin and Strauss endorse, which does not consist of focused coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Trustworthiness

This study was approved by the author’s affiliated academic institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Trustworthiness was maintained for this study via the author keeping an in-depth audit trail throughout the duration of the study. The audit trail consisted of reflexive journaling by this author, typed transcripts of each participant interview, each level of analytic
coding that occurred, titles of the themes and sub-themes that were created, written memos in relation to the themes and sub-themes that were created, and the participants’ quotes that related to the themes and sub-themes. Additionally, each of the relevant study materials were included in the audit trail, including the recruitment email, recruitment flyer, and the study information that was given to each participant prior to the interview process.

This authors’ doctoral-level Advanced Qualitative Research Methods course’s professor is a highly-experienced qualitative researcher and assisted in ensuring trustworthiness was maintained throughout this author’s research process by reviewing the plan of study, the plans for the study’s analysis, as well as the entire audit trail. Applicable commentary and suggestions were given to this author by her professor on the aforementioned components of the study.

Findings/Results

Study Results

Through an analysis of the participants’ transcripts, four main themes and 11 sub-themes were discovered. A theory was also developed from the data analysis process. The list of the four main themes can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1- Main Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers’ strong role (Participants 1, 2, &amp; 3)</td>
<td>Negative sentiments toward fathers (Participants 1 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>Benefits of therapy (Participants 1 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>Acting out behaviors (Participants 1 &amp; 3)</td>
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Theme 1: Mothers’ Strong Role

Each of the three participants emphasized their perceptions of their mothers’ strong role and influence in their lives. Participant One was mainly raised by his grandmother, yet he emphasized his mother’s positive influence over his life multiple times. Participants Two and
Three were both mainly raised by their mothers. Based on the varying messages that were conveyed by the participants, three main sub-themes were created for this theme. The three sub-themes are as follows: influence on love, positive feelings toward mother, and mothers’ strong influence on others’ feelings.

Sub-Theme 1: Influence on Love

One of the most poignant points made regarding the participants’ mothers’ influence on love include, “…she taught me how to love, she taught me everything I needed to know, you know, about life…” Additionally, regarding his mother, Participant One reported, “she loved me so much.”

Sub-Theme Two: Positive Feelings Toward Mother

Regarding the participants’ positive feelings toward their mothers, Participants One and Two both emphasized this sentiment. Participant One grew up with his father being uninvolved throughout his childhood and adolescence. Regarding mothers, he reported, “...they can take any situation, any adverse situation and they can make it better.” Participant Two is now a middle-aged man and he reflected on how his mother’s parenting/caregiving style was a positive asset for him to learn life skills and to learn about how he should behave in certain situations in public. He reported, “She was there for me whenever I needed her, but she was not on top of me, like over-protecting me and like, take this coat, take this jacket, don’t forget your…go over here, go over there, it’s gonna rain, watch out – nothing. Nothing of the sort. Very free-spirited and that was good for me. I found it very good. In life after that… I learned to be independent and to react in situations in the streets and all that being an independent guy and taking care of myself and learning with the university of life as well, and in the streets how to protect yourself and how to
get around things…I thought it was a good way and I achieved a lot of things in my personal life after that…”

Sub-Theme Three: Mothers’ Strong Influence on Others’ Feelings

Regarding the sub-theme of mothers’ strong influence on others’ feelings, Participant Three reflected on how his father’s physical mistreatment toward his mother led to him refusing to speak to his father for years. Participant Three reported, “He used to beat my mother, so that was the last thing I wanted to see. I held that against him for a while. Like, years.”

Theme 2: Negative Sentiments Toward Fathers

Participants One’s father was uninvolved throughout his childhood and adolescence, due to his own personal choice. Participant Three’s father was also uninvolved during his adolescence, due to his mother and father separating from each other. Participants One and Three both spoke about their negative feelings toward their fathers.

Sub-Theme 1: Feeling Angry Toward Father

Regarding the period of time that Participant Three refused to speak to his father, due to his father’s abuse toward his mother, Participant Three reported, “…so those three years we weren’t speaking to each other, I took the first step, even though I’m his son and he should’ve taken the initiative as the older person. I took the first step and called him and apologized to him, even though I wasn’t at complete fault or whatever the hell it was. Like, I had nothing to do with it.”

Sub-Theme 2: Feeling Abandoned

Participant One and Participant Three both reported feeling abandoned by their fathers. Participant One stated point-blank “…you feel neglected, you feel as if you’re not loved…”
Similarly, Participant Three stated the following about his father: “I felt like he abandoned us. And like he didn’t care…”

Sub-Theme 3: Lack of Fathers’ Affection

Both participants whose fathers were uninvolved while they were adolescents expressed how their fathers are not affectionate toward them. Participant One reported “I wrote a letter saying, ‘hey, you can come to my graduation.’ Hey, I did it – and nothing came from it other than ‘hey, here’s a letter from your dad,’ which was cash for college…” Likewise, Participant Three reported “no, we never sit down and talk about our feelings. He never says ‘I love you’ to me. It’s always me to him.”

Sub-Theme 4: Missing Out on Potential Life Lessons

Both participants whose fathers were uninvolved during their adolescence spoke about how they felt their fathers’ lack of involvement led to them not be exposed to valuable life lessons they could have learned from their fathers. Regarding this, Participant One stated “…you gotta deal with it, you gotta find out what it is to be a man – it’s like, wait a second – who’s gonna teach me?”

Theme 3: Benefits of Therapy

When asked about what they felt Latino youth without a male role model in the home could benefit from as a result of having that lack of support, Participants One and Three both reported from their personal experience, they feel engaging in therapy can be advantageous for this population. Participants One and Three reflected on how engaging in therapy helped them with the struggles they had from their fathers’ lack of involvement.
Sub-Theme 1: Helps with Coping

Participant Three reported therapy helped him with his coping skills. Specifically, he reported therapy helps him with “…dealing with my emotions, especially anger problems. Like, how to cope when you have an issue with somebody. Instead of pointing fingers, it is easier to explain how that person is making you feel. For some reason, that creates less of an argument…”

Sub-Theme 2: Understanding Experiences and Emotions in a New Way

Participant One reported he feels therapy helps him with reflection and introspection. Regarding therapy, Participant One reported, “I find it really effective to reflect on things.” He also stated “…the best thing that I realize out of all of my situations is having like psychology and just having someone to talk to, which is a person who is logical enough and clear enough to have a psychological conversation with no bias and understanding things from – almost a strategical understanding of things, and just having a conversation like that with a person like for an hour or two, you know – two hours a week, through an entire six months – one of the best things that ever happened to me because that helped me understand things a little better and even put me in a position to explain things to you better…”

Theme 4: Acting Out Behaviors

During their interviews, Participants One and Three both reflected on their acting out behaviors during adolescence. They both described how their female caregivers (mother and grandmother) had limited control over them, allowing for more acting out behaviorally on behalf of both participants.

Sub-Theme 1: Leaving Home

Participant One described sneaking out of his grandmother’s house consistently as a teenager. He stated, “I would just tell them I’m going to bed and sneak out my window.”
Sub-Theme 2: Age-Inappropriate Behaviors

Participants One and Three also reported about engaging in age-inappropriate behaviors as adolescents. Participant One reported that during the same time period in which he snuck out of his bedroom window consistently at night, he also snuck a female neighbor into his bedroom window at night to engage in sexual activities with her. Participant Three reported he was “rebelling”. He also reported he “started smoking pot” and “getting in trouble at school.”

Theory Developed

Based on the aforementioned themes and sub-themes that were drawn from the participants’ narratives, the following theory was developed from this study: For Latino, male youth who struggle with their father’s lack of involvement, consistent, dependable female role models and counseling can serve as significant protective factors for them.

Discussion

Relation of Results with Literature

The themes and sub-themes that derived from the participants’ narratives correspond with the existing literature that is available on this topic. The participants from the study whose fathers were not involved in their lives as youth and adolescents reflected on the deep impact this had on them at the time. These youth clearly felt stressed by their fathers’ blatant disinterest in their lives, as they felt abandoned and a lack of affection/love from their fathers. The participants’ responses also aligned with the notion of familismo. Each of them clearly had a high sense of regard and esteem toward their mothers, regardless of their mothers’ level of involvement in their lives.

Based on the existing literature on this topic, perhaps the most unique feedback that was offered by the participants was their emphasis on the benefits of therapy in aiding them with
coping with their negative feelings toward their fathers’ lack of involvement. Therapy’s assistance with them gaining coping skills and dealing with anger proved to be very helpful for these participants.

Implications for Social Work Research and Practice

The implications of this study can be attributed to both, social work research and social work practice. Based on the study’s findings, more exploration regarding the benefits of having a consistent, dependable female role model, as well as more exploration of the benefits of engaging in therapy for Latino, male youth without a male role model living in the home could be advantageous for this population and the professionals who work with this population. By gaining more insight on these potential benefits for this population, more efforts could be made toward ensuring stable bonds and connections for this population with their mothers and to support these youth in engaging in therapy. Additionally, regarding this population’s potential acting out behaviors while living with their single, female caregivers, it could be advantageous for more efforts to be made to provide support to single, female caregivers in terms of encouraging the male youth they are responsible for to not engage in acting out behaviors. Support for these caregivers could be in the form of providing insight on appropriate disciplinary techniques for youth’s acting out behaviors.

Limitations of Study

The main limitation of this study is its relatively small participant amount, making it less generalizable to the overall population of study. Additionally, face-to-face access for interview purposes to the study’s participants was limited, which required the interviews to be conducted via technology.
Need for Future Research

As reported, more narratives from the Latino, male population who grew up or are currently growing up without a male role model in the home need to be included in the relevant literature regarding this population. The benefit of including these narratives is that they help to ensure participants’ unique stories and perspectives are being made known. Additionally, more information is needed regarding the benefits therapy can provide for this population. Lastly, as reported, more theory-guided research needs to be conducted on this population.

Conclusion

This study’s topic relates to many Latino youth living in the United States. Thanks to the participants’ narratives and the analysis from this study, its relevant implications regarding participants’ mothers’ strong roles, the negative sentiments participants had toward their fathers, the benefits of therapy, and acting out behaviors could be made known. The implications from this study can be added to the current body of knowledge on this topic. This study’s implications can also be used to benefit current and future Latino youth without a male role model in the home in the United States.
References


