

## **“She is Always Doing the Work”: Perspectives of Latino Adolescent Males about their Single Mothers**

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**Abstract:** *Marianismo refers to the prioritization of Latina mothers concerning their children and families. This term acknowledges the selflessness of Latina mothers. This study explored the perceptions of thirteen Latino adolescent participants following their experiences of being raised by a single mother. To study this relationship, an adapted version of Narrative Analysis was used. While the analysis focused on participants’ relationships with their mothers, relationships with their biological fathers and other father figures (i.e., natural mentors) in their lives were explored. The study’s findings are contextualized through the lens of attachment theory, social learning theory, and the relevant literature. This study shines light on the important impact of mothers and natural mentors on the lives of Latino male adolescents. Social workers from varying professional domains who are working with Latino families can take the marianismo cultural value into account in their own interactions and services with their clients. Additionally, just as the Latino adolescents in this study were keenly aware of their mothers’ many positive values, strengths, and contributions to their lives, it is vital for social workers to do the same.*

**Keywords:** *Culture; family; male adolescents; marianismo; mothers; Narrative Research*

By 2060, 40% of the children in the United States will be Latino (Kapke & Gerdes, 2016; Kapke et al., 2017). The Pew Research Center (2018) reported that in 2017, 23% – nearly one-quarter of the Hispanic children in the United States lived with a single mother. The Latino population in the United States faces unique challenges due to systemic inequality and discrimination that are embedded in the country. Latinos experience many forms of discrimination, including prejudice against their physicality, cultural background, and abilities or potential difficulties with speaking English (Arellano-Morales et al., 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Cobb et al., 2017). Latinos are typically portrayed in a negative light in the media. Specifically, the population is often pigeon-holed in a specific job sector, or commonly casted as unauthorized residents in the United States or as criminals. These negative images and stereotypes further perpetuate fear and bigoted views of the population (Steinberg, 2004; Tukachinsky et al., 2017; Vasquez-Tokos & Norton-Smith, 2016).

In contrast to negative media images, Latino families exhibit many strengths. *Marianismo* is a term that is sometimes applied to acknowledge the great lengths that Latina mothers go for their family members. Simply put, this word refers to how selfless Latina mothers are for their families (Piña-Watson et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2013). According to this cultural value, Latina mothers put their family members’ needs before their own, regardless of whether it is for their spouses, their parents, (Mendez-Luck & Anthony, 2016), or their children (Piña-Watson et al., 2014). The mother-son relationship is crucial and unique, considering the cultural relevance of family and the maternal role in Latino households.

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In alignment with the *marianismo* cultural value, Ceballo and colleagues (2012) found that Latina mothers placed a lot of emphasis on having good communication with their children, as well as building trust with them. Vargas et al. (2016) completed a qualitative study via individual interviews to better understand the experiences of male adolescents who were growing-up with single mothers. The participants shared about their mothers' heavy workloads, the fact that their mothers served as the sole caregiver at home, as well as feelings of jealousy when witnessing fathers and sons in public spaces (Vargas et al., 2016). The adolescents provided rich information, as they were willing to be open and vulnerable in order to share difficult emotions. These types of first-hand accounts are not prevalent in the social work literature with this population.

### **Natural Mentoring**

Like mothers, natural mentors can be beneficial assets to adolescents' lives. A natural mentor is an informal mentoring arrangement that does not necessarily stem from a formal mentoring program; rather, they occur from organic relationships that adolescents build with adults (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Sáenz et al., 2015; VanDam et al., 2018). Regardless of what part of the adolescent's life a mentor comes from the natural mentor serves as a source of guidance and support for adolescents (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Sáenz et al., 2015; VanDam et al., 2018). Mentors can come in the form of extended family members, teachers, coaches, or neighbors.

According to Barron-McKeagney et al.'s (2000) description, the Family Mentoring Program (a community-based program that strives to address adolescent violence) aims to mentor children and to include parents in their program's services and interactions with the adolescents. In a similar vein with the inclusion of trusted adult support and guidance, Sánchez and colleagues (2011) conducted a longitudinal mixed-methods sequential explanatory study to assess the access of impoverished Latino adolescents to natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) during their transition from high school. Overall, the mentees (94%) reported that they received various types of support from their mentors, including emotional support, directive guidance, and informational support (e.g., assistance with homework and financial advice; Sánchez et al., 2011).

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory provided relevant context about the life-altering influences that primary caregivers can have on a child's development. The inclusion of this theory was useful prior to the development of the study's methods and supported a deeper understanding of the importance of adult relationships in Latino youth's lives.

Developed by John Bowlby (1988), attachment theory espouses the idea that a child's attachment with their parents can impact their decisions, behaviors, emotional regulation, and future relationships throughout their lives. Bonding with one's caregiver in childhood is crucial to be able to depend on others (Bowlby, 1988; Peacock et al., 2003). An ongoing relationship presents the opportunity for strong emotional connectivity, allowing adolescents to view their caregiver as a safety net during difficult times (Gross et al., 2017).

According to this theory, adolescents who have a sensitive and responsive caregiver view that figure as a dependable person in their life and are more likely to have a secure sense of self (Bowlby, 1988; O'Connor et al., 2013). Adolescents' attachment with their caregiver is impacted by the care and consistency the adolescent is shown with regard to their needs (Bowlby, 1988; Gross et al., 2017).

Insecure attachments between adolescents and their caregivers are linked to weak bonds, a lack of a consistent reaction when the child feels distressed, and a lack of physical closeness between the adolescents and their caregivers (Gross et al., 2017). When there are weak bonds between the adolescents and their caregiver, acting-out behaviors can occur during adolescence, including drug use, violent behaviors, and problems at school (Peacock et al., 2003). Many adolescents do not have secure attachments with their caregivers. In this circumstance, it is possible that they will seek attachments outside the home (Hurd et al., 2009). If these adolescents seek out a role model elsewhere, it is more likely that the adolescents will be exposed to unfavorable influences (Hurd et al., 2009).

Zilberstein and Spencer (2017) integrated attachment theory in their literature review with attention to mentor-mentee relationship endings. Specifically, they discuss how mentees develop attachments with their mentors, which leads to beneficial outcomes in many domains. From their assessment of the literature, they found that premature endings to relationships with mentors lead to adolescents feeling lost, disappointed, and rejected. Adolescents can have a decreased inclination to continue mentoring services if their services cease prematurely (Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017).

Dallos and Comley-Ross (2005) incorporated attachment theory in their qualitative study of six young people who were involved with mentoring. They report attachment theory was directly related to adolescents' relationships outside of their home (i.e., with mentors) and ultimately, their establishment of trusting relationships with others. Based on interviews with adolescents and two focus group discussions with mentoring program mentors and staff, Dallos and Comley-Ross (2005) found that the adolescents felt that mentoring positively impacted their lives. Some saw their mentors as additional parental figures.

### **Social Learning Theory**

As with attachment theory, social learning theory was applied to gather deeper knowledge surrounding the impact of an adolescent's relationships, regardless of whether or not they are primary caregivers. Children's behavior is significantly impacted by their life experiences, depending on what they are directly or indirectly exposed to within their homes, schools, and communities (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2017; Bandura, 1977; Brauer & Tittle, 2012; Chavis, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2013). Children model what they see and hear in their environments and imitate behaviors that result in rewarding experiences (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2017; Bandura, 1977). Adolescents can learn desirable or undesirable behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Brauer & Tittle, 2012; Kelley & Lee, 2018). Specifically, adolescents can learn how to manage their emotions, resolve disputes, and engage with other people in a healthy manner (O'Connor et al., 2013). These skills are needed during adolescence as youth prepare for future developmental stages. Culture also

shapes individuals when it comes to their beliefs and norms (Chavis, 2011). The available literature is sparse on the narratives from the Latino adolescent population, and particularly those who reside with a single mother.

## Method

Using an adapted version of Narrative Analysis, this study aimed to shine light on the perspectives of adolescent Latino males in regard to their experiences growing-up with single mothers as well as other supportive figures in their lives. In a larger study, participants were asked to share about their experiences in a formal mentoring program. During the interviews the participants frequently mentioned their highly supportive single mothers. Thus, this analysis focused on the Latino adolescent males' views of their mothers who, for the most part, raised them as single parents.

Narrative Research is considered to be a strong approach for collecting information about people's experiences throughout their lives (Creswell, 2013). Based on participants' testimonies, the researcher can uncover how the participants assign meaning to their experiences, which can allow for unique experiences and perceptions as they relate to one's unique cultural heritage or upbringing. This framework takes into account the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences (Wertz et al., 2011). Though oral or written materials can be used within this approach (Creswell, 2013; McAlpine, 2016; Wertz et al., 2011), this study examined the participants' responses to the interview protocol for meaning-making, as they were given the opportunity to explain their experiences in-depth. A Midwestern urban university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study.

Thirteen Latino adolescents participated in this study. The eligibility criteria for this study were:

- self-identify as male,
- self-identify as Latino,
- attended the Boys & Girls Club for at least two months prior to the interview,
- lived with a single mother for longer than two years (if living with their father, there was a partial custody arrangement, i.e., living primarily with a single mother),
- between the ages of 12 and 18.

When working with human participants in the research process, ethical considerations and standards must be observed (Drewry, 2004). An assent form was available for children ages 12-14 and a Study Information Sheet was provided for adolescents ages 15 (+). The study information sheet was also made available for both English and Spanish-speaking parents. The adolescents' participation was strictly voluntary. Prior to the recorded individual interview process at a Boys & Girls Club site located in Central Florida, the researcher provided a reminder of the purpose of the study to all participants. This information was also explained to parents/guardians. Participants were assured that their involvement in the study was voluntary, that they were not required to answer every question that was asked, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

## Recruitment

The larger study focused on the mentoring services for Latino adolescents provided by the Boys & Girls Club, thus contact was made with the president/CEO at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida. The CEO was provided a copy of the study materials, including the study information sheets, assent form, and recruitment emails. The researcher submitted the study information for program staff to share with the participants and their guardians prior to making contact with them, which was primarily done via phone. As part of the assent process, the researcher shared aloud at the start of each interview:

*I am interested in learning about you and your experiences with your family, as well as your mentoring program. Remember that your input is voluntary. You are not required to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with. Also, you may end your participation in the interview at any time.*

## Participant Demographics

Thirteen participants ranging in age from 12 to 17 took part in this study. Each participant self-identified as a Latino male and was in either middle or high school. Pseudonyms were used to preserve participants' confidentiality. A summary of the participants' demographic information regarding their ethnicity, age, how often they attended the Club, etcetera, can be found in Table 1.

## Instruments

Participants were asked for basic demographic information (e.g., age, grade level, and who they lived with) via a written survey. The semi-structured interview protocol included questions about the participants' relationships with their mothers, biological fathers, and other natural mentors in their lives. Questions included:

1. Tell me a bit about your family.
2. Can you tell me about your dad?
3. Can you tell me about whether there is another man in your life who is like a father-figure to you?
4. Was your mother included in your mentoring services in any way?
5. How was she included?
6. What are your thoughts on her involvement with your services?
7. Would you have preferred for her to have been more involved?  
How might your experiences have been different if she was able to be more involved?

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	School Level	Parental/Caregiver Structure	# of Siblings	Club Involvement	
						Days per Week	Duration
Aaron	Puerto Rican	14	9th	Mother full-time	5 or 6 (unsure)	5	2 years
Brandon	Puerto Rican	15	10th	Mother full-time	4	4	4 years
Christopher	Puerto Rican	17	12th	Mother full-time	1	5	6 years
David	Puerto Rican	13	8th	Mother full-time	1	5	3 years
Evan	Puerto Rican	13	8th	Mother full-time	9	5	1 year
Flynn	Puerto Rican	17	12th	Mother full-time	11	1-2	1 year
Gregory	Mexican & Cuban	14	9th	Mother 5 days & father 2 days/ week	2	5	2 years
Henry	Puerto Rican	12	7th	Grandmother full-time	1	5	1 year
Ignacio	Spanish, Irish, & African-American	13	7th	Mother full-time	2	5	6 months
Juan	Puerto Rican	16	10th	Mother & step-father	2	4	5 years
Karl	Puerto Rican, Cuban, Italian, & African-American	14	7th	Mother full-time	1	5	1 year
Lenny	Puerto Rican	13	8th	Mother & step-father	0	5	4 years
Michael	Puerto Rican	14	10th	Mother & step-father	3	5	7 months

### Data Tracking and Coding

The narrative data from this study, the coding documents, and the list of themes, sub-themes, and their categories were maintained electronically on Google Drive via password protection. As an initial step of the coding process, the researcher completed a step called *unitizing*, meaning the simple bits of information pertaining to the studies' questions and its purposes were simply noted (Rodwell, 1998). Units could range from words, sentences, or paragraphs. The next step of the process was *sorting*. In this phase, each of the units were compared with one another and based on their commonalities and distinctions, relevant themes were identified. Similar units were combined into their own corresponding themes, a process known as *lumping*. The individual themes, sub-themes, and categories have their own distinctions and definitions. Any "miscellaneous" items were initially noted, then placed in any corresponding themes that might be relevant (Rodwell, 1998). After this step, all themes, sub-themes, and categories were reviewed to ensure they are non-redundant and conceptually make sense. Per Rodwell's (1998) recommendation, the number of themes was intentionally limited.

For this study, three overall themes were identified. Each unit was re-reviewed to ensure its unit assignment was correct, as well as to confirm its theme, sub-theme, and when applicable, category assignments were accurate and conceptually sound (Rodwell, 1998). Ultimately, the potential relationships between the differing participants' narratives were identified and compared to each other, leading to the study's themes, sub-themes, categories, and the overall findings.

### **Member-Checking**

Study participants were invited to participate in a member-checking process after the individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and analyzed. They were given the opportunity to approve or if needed, correct the researcher's interpretation of the specific information they provided during their interviews (Carlson, 2010). A total of nine participants participated in member checking. Each of the nine participants confirmed the findings based on their interviews as accurate.

### **Reflexivity**

The researchers' demonstration of reflexivity in Narrative Research is vital (Carlson, 2010; Etherington, n.d.). An audit trail consisting of a detailed account of the research process was maintained throughout the study (Carlson, 2010; Etherington, n.d.). The study's audit trail consisted of the list of themes, sub-themes, categories, and each of their definitions from the data analysis process. The researcher participated in reflexive journaling regularly during each phase/step of the research and analysis processes, as well as when emerging thoughts occurred regarding the research process, which could include new ideas, beliefs, confusion, or concerns (Carlson, 2010; Cope, 2014; Rodwell, 1998). This study's reflexive journal contains a variety of information, such as activities that were conducted from day-to-day, plans for the study for the upcoming days, weeks, etcetera, the researcher's understanding of the interviews that took place, contacts made via phone, email, or texts during the study process for recruitment, and member-checking.

Throughout the process of engaging in reflection, the researcher came to important realizations about the research process. Specifically, it appeared as though the generally negatively-toned social sciences published literature regarding Latinos was impacting this author's own emphases, writing style, etcetera. Upon this realization, the author made a concerted effort to acknowledge the study participants and their mothers' many strengths.

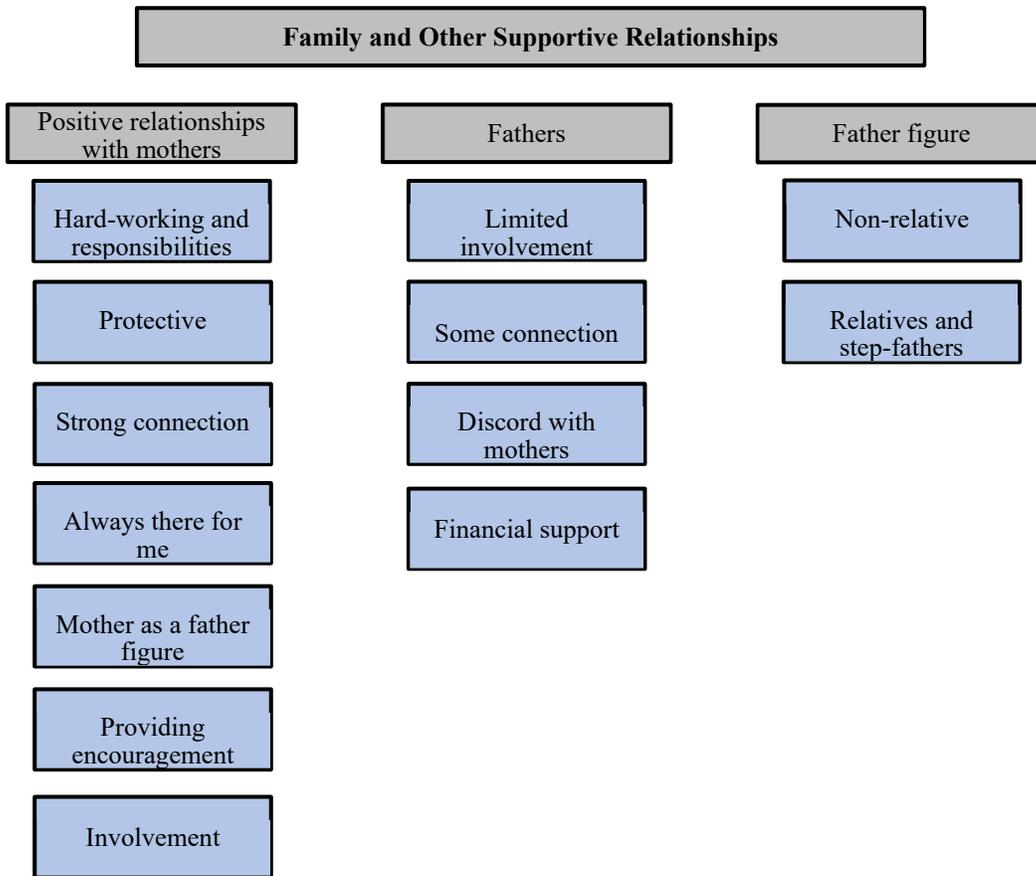
## **Results**

Three main themes were identified within the narrative data: positive relationships with mothers, varied relationship dynamics with fathers, and supportive relationships with varying types of father figures.

### Family and Other Supportive Relationships

The participants described their mothers as hard-working, steadfast supporters of their homes, as well as of their lives. Regardless of situations that can occur in life, the participants felt they could depend on their mothers. Their fathers' level of contact and involvement varied. Some participants were not familiar with their fathers, whereas others had a relationship with their fathers. Several participants have step-fathers who had really shown an interest and dedication in serving in a father-like role for them. Aside from step-fathers, other participants reported that they have father figures who are relatives (e.g., a grandfather) and non-relatives (e.g., a friend of their mother's) who provide that type of role for them. A visual representation of the findings can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Family and Other Supportive Relationships*



#### Positive Relationships with Mothers

The participants' mothers demonstrate various maternal aspects in their relationships with their sons, such as being protective, having a strong connection, tending to the family's responsibilities, etcetera. There were a few reports of mothers and providing a

fatherly role for them as well. The participants repeatedly expressed that they could depend on their mothers to provide and care for them.

***Hard-Working and Responsible.*** Several participants spoke about how hard-working their mothers were, such as when David (age 13) stated, “she achieves her goals” or when Aaron (age 14) said, “my mom’s always doing the work.” These participants’ mothers do what needs to be done in order to maintain their families and household.

***Protective.*** The notion of their mothers being protective was brought up by several participants. Comments about protection ranged from Gregory (age 14) stating, “...if I cut myself, it's a baby cut, she'll still make it a big deal...” to Aaron’s comment about “...she really don't want me walking around at 2 o'clock in the morning.” These participants’ mothers are looking out for them, regardless of the level of danger.

***Strong Connection.*** Several participants spoke about the strong connections they share with their mothers. Michael (age 14) stated, “... to get to see my mom happy. Yeah. Cause if she is not happy, I'm not happy. If she's mad, I'm mad.” Aaron (age 14) said, “My mom's really special to me. I think, if it's not my brothers, then it's my mom.” Several participants described how special their mothers were to them.

***Always There for Me.*** Karl (age 14) and David (age 13) reported about how their mothers were always there for them, such as by Karl stating, “well my mom has always been there for us. She's been the person who has always done things for us,” or David stating, “...she's always there for me, and for my little brother, always caring, and she's always working hard.” Brandon (age 15) spoke about how his mother provides him with encouragement with sports when he stated, “she would motivate me to do better and not give up, like usually I would get mad and stop playing half the game.” He also stated, “but if she was to watch me play, she would tell me to not give up. Just keep playing that you try and get the win.” The participants described their mothers as relentless and caring sources of support and stability.

***Mothers as a Father Figure.*** A few participants spoke about their mothers playing a fatherly role for them. Aaron (age 14) said, “My mom's really like a father figure. And she also acts like a dude and stuff, but mainly my mom's like my father figure and my mother figure, as well – a father figure to me, that I look up to and stuff...” Michael stated something similar when he said, “but, my mom is, she's being like a dad and a mom to us. And that's what I like, what I really want to do. I want her to do like that with us.” Thus, some mothers exhibited a caring presence that expanded to play fatherly roles for their sons.

## **Fathers**

Fathers’ involvement varied as can be seen from this theme’s varying sub-themes. Some participants’ fathers provided them with support and a certain level of connection, whereas other fathers were not involved.

**Limited Involvement.** Many participants reported that their fathers had limited involvement in their lives. Christopher (age 17) reported, “He likes to spend time with us, but he'd preferred if we do his hobbies at the same time with him, other than just spending time with us as a major point of his day.” Aaron (age 14) stated, “While I was near my dad still, he would not come to my basketball games or any of that.” Flynn (age 17) said, “I know who he is, I just couldn't do that if I wanted to” (regarding talking about his father). These quotes are emblematic of the participants’ fathers’ limited attention and time spent with them.

**Some Connection.** Some participants did have a connection with their fathers, as described by Lenny (age 13) when he said, “My dad, he's moving here. We have a good relationship.” Henry (age 12) spoke about his father’s involvement in his life on the weekends saying, “Oh, yeah, he's a good dad. He takes care of me weekends because he works every day, every day. And yeah, he... takes me only weekends.” These participants, as well as some others, maintain some level of a relationship with their biological fathers.

**Discord with Mothers.** A few participants’ fathers have discord with the participants’ mothers, as demonstrated by Evan (age 13) who said, “...like when it comes to like my mom, that he's was not very nice. So that's why my mom and him don't talk.”

**Financial Support.** A few participants’ fathers contribute financially, as Christopher (age 17) reported, “But my dad also contributes to the house” and Aaron (age 14) stated, “But then, he would try, and he would pay for the stuff that I did, too.”

### **Father Figures**

Aside from their mothers or fathers, multiple participants mentioned varying types of father figures. Some of the participants’ father figures are relatives, whereas others stem from outside of the family.

**Non-Relative.** Several participants have father figures from outside of the family unit. When speaking about his karate instructor, Aaron (age 14) said, “...and that man is very special to me. If something happens to him, I don't know. He's very important.” When discussing his mother’s friend, Ignacio (age 13) stated, “He was a good friend and he was like... He was a friend of my mom, but I was closer to him than she was to him.”

**Relatives and Step-Fathers.** Regarding his grandfather, Henry (age 12) said, “Yeah, he was like a dad to me, like a second dad.” Regarding his brother, Christopher (age 17) stated, “I mean, my brother tries to fill in the father role...” Flynn (age 17) mentioned his uncle when discussing father figures.

Three of the participants have step-fathers who are described as being like a father figure for them, or who provide financial contributions to the participants’ lives. Ignacio stated his step-father has “...always been there for me to give me advice. He's helped me through school, everything. He's been there supporting me.” Juan (age 16) spoke about

being able to depend on his step-father when he stated, "My stepdad is just always there and he just supports and helps..."

Three participants' step-fathers contributed financially, such as when Lenny (age 13) stated, "He's a hard worker and every time we need something, he always provides," or when Aaron (age 14) said, "...and he bought me basketball equipment and stuff, as well."

## Discussion

This study focused on the experiences of Latino adolescent participants growing-up with a single mother. Regarding the participants' mothers, there was a sweeping shared positive perception toward them, including reports of their mothers being protective and supportive, as well as having strong connections with their sons. This finding aligns with the positive findings surrounding the mothers from Ceballos et al.'s (2012) study, who value good communication and trust with their children. Given the strong attachments between the participants and their mothers, attachment theory importantly accounts for the well-being of Latino adolescents. For example, many participants' mothers provide a much-needed base of security and stability (Gross et al., 2017). This ongoing relationship was consistently described by participants as their mothers providing a caretaking role, consistent with existing literature (Bowlby, 1988; Gross et al., 2017). The care and consistency that the participants' mothers provided to their sons correspond to the behaviors associated with secure attachment as noted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Gross et al., 2017). These participants' mothers have clearly been vital, steadfast figures in their lives, which relates to the cultural notion of *marianismo* (Piña-Watson et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2013) as well as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; O'Connor et al., 2013; Peacock et al., 2003; Santos et al., 1998).

In alignment with social learning theory, parenting quality and techniques (Bandura, 1977; O'Connor et al., 2013) were described by the participants. Participants discussed their mothers' thorough and consistent involvement in their lives, both within and outside of their involvement with the Boys & Girls Club. The participants also spoke about their mothers modeling dependability throughout their lives, such as serving as a general source of support. Consistent with Vargas et al.'s (2016) findings, the participants also expressed how their mothers worked hard to provide for the family.

The findings are reflective of the *marianismo* cultural value (Piña-Watson et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2013). In addition, a few participants described their mothers as father figures. The closeness of the participants with their mothers is an important protective factor, especially considering many of these adolescents' biological fathers have limited involvement in their lives, which can result in a higher susceptibility to social-emotional problems (Huang et al., 2017; Langton & Berger, 2011).

When a father and son do not have consistent contact or reside in the same home, it can be more difficult to maintain a bond (Bachman et al., 2009). Findings from this study regarding participants' perceptions of their fathers seem to align with this notion. Two participants reported that though their fathers still contribute financially, their involvement with them is limited. These findings corroborate literature regarding how fathers leaving

the home tend to have minimal contact (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001), and can lead to detachment from their adolescent sons (Moore & Hotch, 1982). Some examples of the testimonies that led to the depictions of these weak relationships were a lack of financial support, fathers not engaging in a participant's and his other family members' preferred activities, and inconsistent or no communication. As for the participants who spoke about their fathers' apparent violence/discord with their mothers, it is anticipated that there could be some discord between a mother and a father post-divorce or separation. However, some fathers maintained a peaceful relationship with the mothers. Some participants maintained relationships with their biological fathers, which appeared to be due to their fathers' involvement in their lives (Plunkett et al., 2007).

In addition to their parents, study participants have many different supportive figures in their lives with whom they have close relationships. Both relative, and non-relative father figures took on roles that could be compared to an organic, natural mentoring relationship (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Sáenz et al., 2015; VanDam et al., 2018). For instance, some step-fathers, based on the participants' accounts, have really stepped-up in terms of providing a protective factor by serving as caring, supportive adults.

### **Study Limitations**

Like any study, there were limitations within this particular study. With one researcher being involved (and bringing an "outsider" perspective), this was a subjective process, particularly because this was a qualitative study and there was no formal study auditor. In terms of representation among the participants from the study, this was limited, as there was a common cultural background among the participants. The participants from the study are also living in the same geographic area. The researcher was able to review individual study findings (based on the individual interviews) with nine of the study participants. Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to get in touch with four of the participants to review their findings (multiple attempts were made to reach them via phone). Additionally, in terms of eligibility criteria, some alterations were made, as it was uncovered that one participant's parents have joint custody. Several other participants have step-fathers who are currently living in the home. Since these participants lived with single mothers for several years, it was determined that they would still be included in the study. For Juan in particular, this researcher was not able to determine when his step-father moved into the family's home. Lastly, though efforts were made to ensure the participants were aware their participation was voluntary and confidential, they might not have felt comfortable with being completely transparent because of the nature of the questions asked, thus, some responses might reflect social desirability bias (King & Bruner, 2000).

### **Future Recommendations**

Future studies may include the perspectives of Latino adolescents from a wider range of ethnic backgrounds. It is clear that the mother-son bond across the participant pool was extremely strong and deep. Similar studies on Latino adolescents grounded in strengths-based theory are needed. In future research regarding this population, there should be more

emphasis on the many strong, positive roles that single mothers and natural mentors can provide for Latino adolescents.

From a practice perspective, this author recommends considering the marianismo cultural value when it comes to social workers striving to engage in culturally-relevant practice with their clients. In individual and family therapy settings, when advantageous, social workers/therapists should consider the strong mother-son and natural mentoring bonds Latino adolescents have to clients' advantages, as this inclusion could help enhance culturally-relevant practice. Where needed, social workers can play an influential role in arranging natural mentoring relationships, as well as arranging connection to youth development agencies, which can serve as protective factors for Latino adolescents. Mothers can be invited to be included in the aforementioned process by providing recommendations (as available) for natural mentoring relationships that can be fostered through their own networks or by being included in youth development agencies' planning, and events.

School social workers can include students' mothers and natural mentors in the educational setting where needed and appropriate. If students are in need of further support, school social workers can help to identify natural mentors to bolster academic skills and resources where needed. Schools of social work should evaluate the degree to which their curriculum focuses on the values and strengths of this population in terms of the transformational influences of single mothers and natural mentors in Latino adolescents' lives. Further emphasis should be placed on the cultural relevance of attachment theory and social learning theory in applications to Latino culture.

### **Conclusion**

The types of strengths shared by Latino adolescents about their single mothers are not emphasized in the available literature. This study aimed to give Latino male adolescents who have grown-up with their single mothers the opportunity to voice their perceptions on how they have been impacted by their upbringing. Using Narrative Research, this study explored the participants' experiences to discover themes and sub-themes describing Latino adolescent males' views of their mothers. The participants shared sweepingly positive attitudes and perceptions of their mothers, describing their mothers as protective, supportive, and hard-working. Participants shared strong connections with their mothers. Though the participants have an array of different types of relationships with their biological fathers, they do have other supportive male figures (i.e., natural mentors) in various parts of their lives.

Participants from this study demonstrated maturity, critical thinking skills, integrity, and keen observations about their own social circles and the environments they surround themselves with. This study's participants demonstrated these positive traits during the interview process, such as openness to discuss various situations and challenges in their lives. Participants were willing to speak openly and directly. These adolescents are motivated and demonstrated gratitude for the supportive adults in their lives. Based on their supportive mothers, their mentors, and their impressive individual traits, it is anticipated that the participants from this study will continue to develop into wise, mature, and

impressive young men. Just as the Latino adolescents in this study were keenly aware of their mothers' many positive values, strengths, and contributions to their lives, it is vital for social workers to do the same.

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