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Abstract

This study explored the views of Latinx youth surrounding the intersections of faith and familial values, social justice, and change. Through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) researchers examined the stories of 15 Latinx young people across three domains: 1) Latinx Identity and Worldviews, 2) Problems with and in Religion, and 3) Creating Change. Findings from this investigation have resulted in 8 over-arching themes and several subthemes. The 8 themes include: 1) Immigration and Being Brown; 2) Sensitivity to the Plight of Others; 3) Intersections of Identity; 4) Forcing Religion; 5) Science, Society, and Spirituality; 6) Forming Friendships; 7) Adopting A Non-judgmental Attitude; and 8) Caring about and Helping People. Results shed light on some specific challenges and protective worldviews of spiritually and religiously engaged Latinx youth.

Literature

- Latinx youth are considered an at-risk group in the U.S. for varying mental health concerns, negative school outcomes, increased risk of teen pregnancy, high incarceration rates, elevated rates of poverty, and increased risk of community violence (Williams, 2018; Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; Winkelman et al., 2017; Analysis Reference Bureau, 2020; Santacrose, Kia-Keating, & Lucio, 2021).
- Although some research points to strong family support and engagement in extracurricular activities as strengths (Cupito et al., 2014; Knifsend & Juvonen, 2022), there is a dearth of research surrounding Latinx youths' resiliency pathways and resources for coping specifically related to family values, spirituality, and religious beliefs.
- Similarly, the recent impact of COVID-19 on ethnic and racial minority youth as well as the socio-political shifts surrounding the visibility of racism and xenophobia is still unfolding.
- There is little research on the ways Latinx youth draw from family and spiritual or religious values and engagement to cope with and make sense of personal and familial experiences of marginalization (Gonzales, et al., 2022; Bowers, et al., 2020; Perez Huber, 2009).

Research Questions

1. What has your family, culture, religion, and spirituality taught you about the ways to see and treat others who are different from you?
2. What are some elements of religion or spirituality that are challenging for you or others to accept?
3. How has your family, culture, spirituality, and religion shaped the way you understand hardships?
4. How has your family, culture, spirituality, and religion shaped the way you understand societal change and/or making the world a better place?

Setting and Procedure

- Participants recruited through purposive, non-parametric sampling, and word of mouth.
- Semi-structured interviews of three primary research questions, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes via telephone or zoom.
- Interviews were audio or video taped and transcribed.
- Transcripts analyzed using stage-like process of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith & Osborn, 2003).
- At each stage of analysis, information audited by individual with clinical and cultural knowledge of research area.

Participant Demographics

- 15 adolescents of Latinx descent (5 males, 10 females)
- Age ranged between 12-18 years ($M = 15.6$)
- All participants reported being of Mexican descent, with 26% being Mexican and mixed race
- Most participants reported being 3rd immigrant generation, while smaller numbers reported being mixed generational status.
- 86.67% Catholic, 6.67% Spiritual, and 6.67% Christian non-denominational

Expected Findings

- Personal and Familial experiences of immigration, prejudice, and economic disadvantage will inform youths' views of these issues today.
- Increased visibility of racism, sexism, and homophobia will inform youth's beliefs surrounding core religious and spiritual values related to these areas both within and outside of their particular religious traditions.
- Familial teachings, Spiritual, and Religious beliefs will shape the ways youth understand, navigate, and advocate for those who are disadvantaged.

Qualitative Findings

Domain 1: Latinx Identity and Worldviews

Theme 1: Immigration and Being Brown

Subtheme 2: Negative Judgement

How are you going to look at someone my age or younger than me and say you don't belong here, you need to get out? People need to be more open minded because you have one Mexican who does something bad and all of a sudden it's the rest of them. One of them became a drug dealer and now we are all drug dealers. -Josephina

Domain 1: Latinx Identity and Worldviews

Theme 2: Sensitivity to the Plight of Others

Subtheme 1: Familial Messages about Politics

At home, my mom has always told us no one is better than no one. We all matter just as much as they matter, you know what I mean? They [African American people in BLM movement] are no different than us, they're people too. She always tells me and my siblings, they're God's children too. When I talk to her about it, I always tell her I'll never understand why people look at them different because of the color of their skin. It really won't ever make sense to me. -Veronica

Domain 2: Problems with and in Religion

Theme 1: Forcing Religion

Subtheme 2: Discrimination within the Church

I always wonder...why is there never a girl up there [acting as a priest]? Like, I think representation is another big thing, too, because how can I just sit at church and watch men do things all the time? And it's only men...How can I be okay with that?...I feel like female views need to be shown too. -Trinidad

Domain 2: Problems with and in Religion

Theme 1: Forcing Religion

Subtheme 2: Discrimination within the Church

Like if you are gay, will God not accept you. Is there such thing as hell?...And all these homosexual and gay people that are killed, where did they go? Did they go to hell or did God let them in. Like, you know, what's going to happen to me, like, after death? -Guadalupe

Domain 3: Creating Change

Theme 2: Adopting a Non-judgmental Attitude

Subtheme 2: Respect

I've always been taught...respect...always respect them. Like never judge someone, always respect everybody. Treat everybody how you would like to be treated. Like, you wouldn't want to be bullied by someone because of your religion... -Mateo

Domain 3: Creating Change

Theme 3: Caring about and Helping People

Subtheme 2: Helping

...in another world that could have been me and if I have the opportunity to help somebody and to kind of bridge that gap...I think I can be the bridge for them. -Mari (discussing her interest in pursuing immigration law as a career)

Discussion and Implications

• Latinx Identity and Worldviews

- Personal and familial experiences of negative judgment and discrimination due to stereotypes was consistent with extant literature (Pasco, Flores-González & Atkin, 2022).
- Experiences of discrimination provided a unique appreciation for the struggles of undocumented immigrants today. Participatory action research engaged by Latinx youth today also highlights the potency of lived experience in motivation toward advocacy (González Ybarra, 2022).
- Familial values and religious teachings related to equality contributed to a sensitivity to the plight of other racial minority persons. This could be connected to histories of leaders within religious traditions acting as advocates for social justice and change (Espinoza, 2007) and/or notions of Mestiza/o spirituality and the sacredness of one's life journey (Cervantes, 2010).

- Losing language overtime due to shame or negative evaluation formed a barrier to accessing cultural knowledge today, consistent with extant research (Sánchez-Muñoz & Amezcua, 2019; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2013).

• Problems with and in Religion

- Female youth noted frustration with sexism in Catholicism and not seeing female leaders within their Church, this critical consciousness may be connected to why some of these young women adopted a more spiritual identity over one tied to a specific religious tradition (Winburn, 2019).
- Personal discomfort with the ways some religious people discriminate against gender and sexual minority persons as well as trouble navigating competing worldviews is consistent with recent research (Thamrin, et al., 2022).

• Creating Change

- Relying on familial values and broad spiritual notions of acceptance, equality of worth, and respect to resolve conflict between religious doctrine and care for others is consistent with the Mestizo perspective surrounding openness to diversity, mutual respect, and acceptance (Ramirez, 1983, 1998).
- Personal and familial experiences of struggle as well as familial, spiritual, and religious values motivated the desire to help others. This is connected to previous research related to Latinx youth's beliefs about activism (McWhirter, et al., 2019), solidarity and linked fate (Bañales & Rivas-Drake, 2022), as well as the Mestizo perspective and service to others (Cervantes, 2010).