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Fatherhood Among Gang-Involved U.S. Latino Youth: Qualitative Inquiry Into Key Stakeholders' Perspectives

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Most crimes committed by adolescents in the United States are linked to gang activity, which is disproportionally present in Latina/o communities. Although most gang-involved teenage fathers wish that their children would not join gangs, their parenting tends to foster gang involvement in their children. An improved understanding of fatherhood among gang-involved U.S. Latino youth can inform the development of parenting- and fatherhood-focused interventions. To foster such understanding, we conducted interviews and focus groups with purposive samples of young gang-involved Latino fathers, parents of gang-involved Latino youth, and individuals who provide services or supports to gang-involved youth. Guided by Marshall and Rossman's (1995) broad qualitative approach, we analyzed transcripts of these interviews and

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discussions, extracting 24 themes, which we organized into 7 categories and three higher order content groupings. We discuss the manner in which these findings describe the experience of fatherhood among gang-involved Latino youth, and point to influences on their parenting- and fatherhood-related attitudes and behavior. We discuss, also, the implications of our findings for the development of parenting- and fatherhood-focused interventions for gang-involved teenage Latino fathers.

Public Significance Statement
Most crimes committed by U.S. adolescents are linked to gangs, which are disproportionally present in Latina/o communities. Although most gang-involved teenage fathers wish that their children avoid gangs, their parenting tends to foster gang-involvement in their children. We discussed parenting with young gang-involved fathers, parents of gang-involved youth, and people providing human services to gang-involved youth. These individuals' insights can guide the development of parenting-focused interventions for gang-involved teenage fathers.

Keywords: Latino, gangs, fatherhood, adolescents, parenting

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Criminal gangs—relatively permanent, organized groups of people with elevated levels of unlawful activity (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001)—account for significant proportions of crime and violence in the United States. For example, 13% of U.S. homicides and up to half of homicides in specific U.S. cities are gang-related (Egley, Howell, & Harris, 2014). Thirty-six percent of U.S. gang members are under 18 years of age (Barrett, Kuperminc, & Lewis, 2013), and gang-involved youth account for up to 70% of crimes committed by U.S. adolescents (Dmitrieva, Gibson, Steinberg, Piquero, & Fagan, 2014).

Among a complex set of factors fostering youth participation in gangs (e.g., environmental stressors, ecological disruptions), family influence and fathers' involvement are notable because of their profound developmental impacts and because they are relatively more amenable to intervention (Barrett et al., 2013; Belitz & Valdez, 1997). Having gang-involved family members directly increases the likelihood that youth will join gangs (Barrett et al., 2013). Among gang-involved youth, up to 77% have gang-involved family members (e.g., Decker & Curry, 2000), and about one in four report that their family's gang involvement influenced their decision to join (Decker & Curry, 2000).

Within the context of the family, fathers uniquely influence children's risk of gang membership and related outcomes (Barrett et al., 2013). Children have improved well-being, emotional regulation, and cognitive development when their fathers are involved in their upbringing (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). Father absence raises the likelihood of their children's disruptive behaviors, low academic achievement, and persistent poverty for mothers and their children (Fagan, Barnett, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2003; Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008). There are additional positive effects for adolescent mothers when they are satisfied with the involvement that their children's father has with their children, such as reduced likelihood of postpartum depression symptoms (Fagan & Lee, 2010).

Providing parent training to gang-involved youth who have—or are about to—become fathers can have important beneficial effects for their children, for these youth, and for the communities in which they live. Most youth gang members do not wish for their children to be involved in gangs (e.g., Decker & Curry, 2000), and becoming a father motivates many gang-involved youth to stop their criminal activities and leave gangs (e.g., Giordano, Seffrin, Manning, & Longmore, 2011; Lesser, Tello, Koniak-Griffin, Kappos, & Rhys, 2001; Moloney, Mackenzie, Hunt, & Joe-Laidler, 2009; Parra-Cardona, Sharp, & Wampler, 2008). These two factors suggest that gang-involved youth who have recently become fathers may be motivated to participate in parent training interventions. Although motivation alone is not enough for teenagers to leave gangs (Gior-

dano et al., 2011; Moloney et al., 2009), it can foster participation in interventions that target the additional factors influencing their gang involvement, such as deficient workforce skills, academic underperformance, problems with their family of origin, and emotion regulation difficulties (Moloney et al., 2009).

Gangs in U.S. Latina/o Communities

Up to half of all U.S. gang members are Latina/o[1] (Barrett et al., 2013). As is the case across U.S. ethnic groups, gang activity in Latina/o communities is most prevalent among youth (Lopez, Wishard, Gallimore, & Rivera, 2006). More than half of U.S. Latina/o 16- to 25-year-olds report gang activity within the schools they attend (or attended), and one third report having a friend or family member who is involved in a gang (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Across the United States, gang presence is more prominent in schools in which more than half of students identify as Latina/o (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

The gangs that are active in U.S. Latina/o communities tend to be affiliates of gangs with a broader geographic scope and whose membership aligns with national ancestry (Esbensen et al., 2001). For example, most Latina/o gang members in the city of Indianapolis affiliate with Mara Salvatrucha (an international gang whose members are primarily Salvadoran), Mexican Mafia (a national gang whose members tend to be of Mexican ancestry), or Latin Kings (a regional gang whose membership—though inclusive of diverse Latina/o backgrounds—is predominately Puerto Rican; Tapia, 2012). Each gang has distinctive traditions, symbols, and vocabulary (Esbensen et al., 2001). For example, Mara Salvatrucha emphasizes blue and black clothing, distinctive tattoos (e.g., the letters "MS," the number "13," devil's horns), and a military-like command structure (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). The relations among these gangs are complex, influenced by the goal of earning income through crime. For example, Mara Salvatrucha and Mexican Mafia have historical ties enhancing their ability to distribute illegal drugs (Skarbek, 2011; U.S. Department of Justice, 2013).

Parenting and Fatherhood Among Gang-Involved Latino Youth

Gang involvement uniquely increases the risk of teenage fatherhood among youth in Latina/o communities (Belitz & Valdez, 1997). Attitudes and behaviors related to parenting and fatherhood are meaningfully influenced by social environments (Barr et al., 2011), and Latina/o gangs tend to encourage a version of Latino masculinity defined by aggression, dominance, and power (Belitz & Valdez, 1997; Kassab et al., 2014; Valdez, 2007). Compared with their peers who do not adhere to said version of masculinity, those that do are more likely to father children (Goodyear, Newcomb, & Allison, 2000) and less likely to be involved with these children (Glass & Owen, 2010; Wiemann, Agurcia, Rickert, Berenson, & Volk, 2006). As a whole, research findings suggest an intergenerational cycle of gang involvement increasing the likelihood that young men will become teenage fathers whose parenting, in turn, fosters gang involvement in their children.

Changing parenting among gang-involved Latino fathers can be challenging in light of the complex and powerful forces driving their gang involvement (Miller, Barnes, & Hartley, 2011; Moloney et al., 2009). Adolescents who become involved in gangs typically have experienced difficult ecological disruptions and tend to live in areas of low economic opportunity and high social marginalization (Young, Fitzgibbon, & Silverstone, 2014). For these adolescents, gangs often provide the material (e.g., shelter, sustenance), social (e.g., shared norms and a sense of belonging), and psychological (e.g., a sense of identity) supports that other adolescents receive from their families (Miller et al., 2011; Moloney et al., 2009).

[1] Throughout this article, the term *Latinas* is used to refer to women and girls who live in the United States and claim a heritage in a Latin American country. The term *Latinos* is used in reference to men and boys with this same heritage, and the terms *Latina/o* and *Latinas/os* are used in reference to mixed gender groups. Other terms are used only when the use of our preferred nomenclature would obscure a relation to the established literature (e.g., when prior studies have focused on a specific Latina/o group).

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Among Latina/o gangs, shared norms often feature a common understanding of values and behaviors associated with cultural heritage (Belitz & Valdez, 1997). The focus on cultural heritage is highlighted in the names of the most prevalent Latina/o gangs in the United States, including Mexican Mafia, Latin Kings, and Mara Salvatrucha (e.g., Tapia, 2012). As gangs replace the developmental influences typically exercised by family and culture, gang membership—and exemplary adherence to the norms implied in such membership—plays a central role in a teenage gang member's identity (Belitz & Valdez, 1997; Young et al., 2014).

The central role of gangs in members' identities may, in part, drive the desire to curb or terminate gang involvement that has been documented among members who become fathers (e.g., Giordano et al., 2011; Lesser et al., 2001; Moloney et al., 2009; Parra-Cardona et al., 2008). The violent masculinity fostered within gangs—along with the loyalty and dedication required by the gang—may be incompatible with the perceived responsibilities of fatherhood (Moloney et al., 2009). In order to support the long-term effectiveness of gang-involved fathers' efforts at change, parenting interventions may have to tackle the difficult task of supporting these fathers' disentangling of identity, masculinity, cultural heritage, and gang subculture.

Study Aims

Hoping to establish the basis for the development of interventions that promote responsible fatherhood among gang-involved U.S. Latino youth in a midsized Midwestern city, we gathered the perspectives of three key stakeholder groups likely to be involved in these interventions: (a) gang-involved teenage Latino fathers, (b) parents of gang-involved teenage Latino fathers, and (c) the personnel of a community-based organization (CBO) that provided services and supports to gang-involved fathers. Our goal was to answer two questions:

1. What influences gang-involved young Latino fathers' parenting- and fatherhood-related attitudes and behaviors?
2. What is the experience of being a father like among gang-involved Latino youth?

Method

Research Paradigm and Qualitative Approach

Our project was guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles emphasizing collaboration between researchers and the communities that are the focus of study (Acevedo-Polakovich, Beck, Hawks, & Ogdie, 2016). We focused on the community involved in the CBO's work with gang-involved teenage Latino fathers. CBO personnel and university-affiliated researchers collaboratively designed, implemented, analyzed, and reported the research. Because we were interested in synthesizing the perspectives of three key stakeholder groups within our target community who were likely to be involved in subsequent interventions, we selected Marshall and Rossman's (1995) broad qualitative framework.

Context

The mission of the CBO partnered in this research is to *provide unmet social services to the Hispanic community* in a midsized Midwestern U.S. city. Over two thirds of the population in the four census tracts surrounding its facilities identify as Latina/o (New York Times, n.d.). At the time of the study, the CBO had over 40 years of existence, offering services and supports specifically targeting gang-involved youth (e.g., job training, educational engagement) for the past 2 years. Our partnership originated when the first author inquired about the CBO's needs regarding services and supports for youth. The author's rapport with the CBO was facilitated by the fact that 10 years prior he had lived in the community for 6 years after emigrating from Latin America, working for the CBO as a youth services provider and administrator.

Researcher Characteristics

Based on our primary work settings, we classify the authors of this article as either CBO-affiliated (Authors 6 and 11) or university-affiliated (all others). One CBO-affiliated author identifies as Indigenous Latina and the other as Salvadoran. During the research, both of these authors worked for the CBO. One holds a master's degree in public admin-

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istration and the other is a certified gang specialist. Both had extensive prior interactions with the participants. Among the university-affiliated authors, three identify as Latina/o, one as Chaldean American, one as South Asian American, and the rest as European American. At the time of their initial involvement in the research, two university-affiliated authors held doctoral degrees (Authors 1 and 14), one was completing her undergraduate education (Author 5), and the remainder were enrolled in doctoral studies. Excepting Author 14, university-affiliated authors were supervised by Author 1.

All researchers were trained in the application of CBPR and qualitative methods to the current study. During training, researchers identified their biases, the potential impact of these upon the study, and practices to minimize said impact. Biases held in common by all authors are described in the ensuing subsection. Group and interview facilitators received additional training in facilitation.

Reflexivity

All authors hold four common sets of assumptions and interests. A first set involves our belief that CBPR is an appropriate approach to inquiry in structurally oppressed communities, including that on which our work focused. Relatedly, despite a history of structural oppression, we assume that U.S. Latinas/os are as capable of identifying and effectuating their own personal and communal needs and goals as are non-Latinas/os. A second set involves our project's focus. Informed by our experiences working with, and studying, our target community, we believe that parenting interventions for gang-involved Latino teenage fathers are an important unmet need. Relatedly, we believe that gang-involved youth can, and do, examine and modify their behavior and attitudes, both generally and as related to fatherhood. Based on descriptions of the development of interventions for gang-involved youth (e.g., Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2017), we assume that understanding gang-involved teenage fathers' experiences with fatherhood is a foundational step for the development of needed interventions.

A third set of common assumptions centers on our method choices. We believe that qualitative inquiry is appropriate and feasible given our goals and context. We assume that properly trained and supported research teams can monitor, and account for, their biases. We believe that adequately trained non Latinas/os can understand Latina/o perspectives, offering input and support to Latinas/os' efforts to identify and effectuate personal and communal goals. A final set of common assumptions guides our sampling. We believe that the perspectives from three key stakeholder groups likely to be involved in future interventions—gang-involved teenage fathers, the CBO staff who serve them, and the parents of gang-involved fathers—can usefully guide the development of interventions. Relatedly, we believe that key informants from these stakeholder groups can help us understand these perspectives.

Sampling

Because the subsequent development of interventions for the CBO was a key intended use of research findings, we purposively sampled from the populations of gang-involved teenage Latino fathers, parents of gang-involved teenage Latino fathers, and staff affiliated with the CBO. This approach is best described as homogeneous sampling, a category of purposive sampling deployed when targeted participants must meet narrow criteria, and appropriate when research aims imply limited sampling populations (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Recruitment

CBO personnel recruited gang-involved teenage fathers and parents of gang-involved teenage fathers in person and through phone calls. Recruitment followed IRB-approved guidelines requiring a description of the research and of participation demands, and emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation. CBO personnel were recruited by a university-based author using e-mail and phone calls (i.e., Author 2), and following the same IRB-approved guidelines.

Participants had to belong to one of the three targeted stakeholder groups and agree to participate in the research project. Two gang-involved teenage fathers reversed their decision to participate on the day of their focus

group. They later shared that this reversal occurred because they did not want to risk being observed interacting amicably with the remaining focus group participants, all of whom belonged to a rival gang.

Ethical Issues Pertaining to Human Subjects

Study materials and procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Central Michigan University. Recruitment followed IRB-approved guidelines. Interviews and group discussions followed the same informed consent process. Before participation, participants reviewed IRB-approved consent forms and were given the opportunity to ask questions. Participants were compensated $10 per hour of participation. Participation times ranged from 45 to 90 min.

Participants

Gang-involved fathers. As summarized in Table 1, five gang-involved Latinos who became fathers as teenagers participated in this study. These participants were between 19 and 21 years of age ($M = 20$, $SD = 1$) and had received CBO services. All self-identified as Puerto Rican and belonged to the same gang. Whereas their self-report of current gang involvement ranged between "no involvement" and "involvement including partaking in serious crimes," their highest self-reported retrospective gang involvement ranged between "strong association with other gang members" and "involvement including partaking in serious crimes."[2]

Parents of gang-involved fathers. Three mothers of gang-involved teenage fathers (M age = 38, $SD = 4.36$) participated in this study. Two identified as Puerto Rican and one identified as Mexican.[3] Whereas their report of their son's current gang involvement ranged between "no involvement" and "some association with other gang members," their highest level of reported prior gang involvement ranged between "some association with other gang members" and "involvement including partaking in serious crimes." Two male caretakers, one father (Age 43) and one grandfather (Age 63), holding primary custody of a Latino gang-involved teenage father also participated. They identified as Mexican American and Mexican, respectively. Only one of them reported his child's current gang involvement, which he indicated as "no involvement." Both indicated the highest level of prior historical gang involvement as "some association with other gang members." It is worth noting that—in contrast to their reports on the background form—during the focus group, the fathers discussed their sons' involvement in gang-related criminal activity, including their arrests and involvement with the justice system.

CBO personnel. One woman and two men who worked for the CBO participated in this study. At the time of participation, their ages were 31, 32, and 32. They identified their ethnic origin as Indigenous Latina ($N = 1$), Mexican American ($N = 1$), and Salvadoran ($N = 1$). Their jobs involved engaging gang-involved Latino youth into health and human services and supports. One of them supervised the others.

Data Collection Method

Because questions in the CBO staff interviews asked for feedback on the focus group protocols, these interviews were conducted before the focus groups were. To facilitate confidentiality, interviews were conducted in a location away from the CBO's facilities.

Focus groups were conducted at the CBO's facilities. Because CBO staff felt that mixed gender groups would prevent frank discussion, the parents of gang-involved teenage fathers were assigned to discussion groups by gender. The fathers' group was cofacilitated by Author 1 and Author 11. The mother's group and the

[2] Following best practices for the assessment of gang involvement among youth (e.g., Bjerregaard, 2002), participants selected from a list of items describing levels of gang involvement. This list included "No involvement," "Some association with other gang members," "Strong association with other gang members," "Belong to a gang, not involved in serious crimes," and "Belong to gang, involved in serious crimes."

[3] We know, anecdotally, that at least one of the participants in the parent focus groups was the parent of one of the participants in the gang-involved fathers group. However, it was not a requirement for participants to be related to each other (as this would have further limited our sampling populations), and we did not formally track the relations between participants in our focus groups.

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Table 1
Stakeholder Group Characteristics

Stakeholder group	*n*	Age (years) *M* (*SD*)	Ethnicity	Past level of gang involvement: Highest rated	Current level of gang involvement: Highest rated
Gang-involved fathers	5	20 (1)	Puerto Rican ($n = 5$)	Involvement including partaking in serious crimes	Involvement including partaking in serious crimes
Parents of gang-involved youth					
Fathers of gang-involved youth	2	53 (14.14)	Mexican ($n = 2$)	Some association with other gang members	No involvement
Mothers of gang-involved youth	3	38 (4.36)	Puerto Rican ($n = 2$) Mexican ($n = 1$)	Involvement including partaking in serious crimes	Some association with other gang members
Community program personnel	3	32 (.58)	Indigenous Latina ($n = 1$) Mexican American ($n = 1$) Salvadoran ($n = 1$)	(Not asked)	(Not asked)

Note. In the case of the gang-involved fathers, reported gang involvement levels represent self-reported levels of current and past gang involvement. In the case of parents of gang-involved youth, self-reported gang involvement levels represent parental perceptions of their children's past and current involvement.

group for gang-involved teenage fathers were cofacilitated by Authors 1 and 6.

Data Collection Instruments and Technologies

Background information forms. All participants completed background information forms. CBO staff forms included demographic (e.g., age, national origin) and professional (e.g., education and training) background items. The forms for gang-involved fathers included items about personal background, gang involvement, and engagement with the CBO. Parent forms included parallel questions; however, the demographic items focused on their own background, whereas the gang involvement and CBO engagement items focused on their gang-involved child. All forms were available in Spanish and English.

CBO staff interviews. CBO staff interviews first focused on obtaining feedback on the proposed parent focus group protocol. They then focused on participants' observations of interactions between parents and their gang-involved child around fatherhood and parenting. Subsequently, CBO personnel reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed gang-involved father focus group protocol. The interview then focused on participants' observations of gang-involved youths' experiences as fathers.

Parent focus groups. Parent focus groups first focused on participants' perceptions of the experiences that taught their children about fatherhood. They then focused on participants' own practices and experiences when raising their gang-involved child.

Gang-involved fathers group. The focus groups for gang-involved fathers began with a discussion of participants' rearing environments (e.g., family of origin) and the parenting practices encountered therein. Facilitators conceptualized and discussed rearing environments broadly (e.g., foster care, fictive kin). Discussion then focused on participants' experiences as fathers. Specific topics were probed, including aspirations for their children, the characteristics of good fathers, the parenting behaviors thereof, the influence of various groups on participants' perspectives of fatherhood (e.g., gangs, society, family), relationships with chil-

dren's' mothers, and the influence of fatherhood on participants' goals and values.

Language. Per participant preferences, research procedures were conducted in English with CBO personnel and gang-involved fathers, and in Spanish with the parents of gang-involved youth. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The accuracy of all transcriptions was verified by the first author, an English-Spanish bilingual with a record of professional publications and presentations in both languages, including a period as coordinator of translation and interpretation services for a large health care corporation.

Data Analysis

The analytical team was comprised of university-affiliated authors with experience in qualitative research, parenting research, and Latina/o psychology. Data analysis was guided by Marshall and Rossman's (1995) broad qualitative approach, as it facilitated the synthesis of perspectives from the three stakeholder groups of interest. In this approach, themes and categories are extracted from the data. Our first step was for two experienced, bilingual team members to each review the transcripts, identifying potential themes. Step two involved comparing Step 1 findings and creating, through dialogue and consensus, a unified list of themes to code. During Step 3, these team members used the unified list to independently code transcripts. They then compared the results of their independent coding and resolved disagreements through dialogue and consensus. As a cross-check, four separate authors then examined the results to ensure that the coding adequately represented the transcripts. No major discrepancies were observed. As a group, the analytical team gathered the themes into categories, looking for thematic triangulation both within and across focus groups. Categories were then merged into higher order content groupings. Results were presented to CBO staff for member checking. These participants felt the results adequately captured their interviews but clarified the content of certain themes.

Trustworthiness

Because of small samples drawn from limited sampling populations, we were unable to establish thematic saturation. The selection and management of our team members can inform decisions about our trustworthiness. Our research team included CBO-affiliated and university-affiliated members with ample experience in community-engaged research. All team members are published coauthors of peer-reviewed papers in Latina/o psychology, prevention science, parenting, and the application of these fields to gang-involved youth. These skilled team members were carefully trained and monitored in the implementation of this study's protocols.

Five aspects of our analytical approach contribute to our effort's trustworthiness. First, team members who developed our coding list were selected because of documented expertise in Latina/o psychology, qualitative methods, and parenting research. Second, each worked independently before comparing results. Third, an independent group of authors cross-checked their thematic findings against the transcripts. Fourth, our analyses relied on triangulation both across and within groups. Finally, CBO staff were engaged in member checking.

Results

We summarize our results in Table 2. As observed, we identified 24 themes and grouped them into seven analytical categories: limited parental involvement, discipline and corporal punishment, parent's struggle to influence gang-involved children, lack of fatherhood role models, balancing negative and positive conceptions of masculinity, fatherhood as a source of joy and motivation, and good fathers actively foster good behavior in their children. We merged the categories into three higher order content groupings: family-of-origin influences on parenting and fatherhood, cultural influences on parenting and fatherhood, and experience of fatherhood. Results from each content grouping are presented in dedicated subsections.

Family-of-Origin Influences on Parenting and Fatherhood

Four categories, representing 14 themes, referred broadly to participants' perceptions of family of origin's influences on gang-involved youths' parenting- and fatherhood-related experiences and attitudes. The categories were limited parental involvement, belief in strict disci-

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Table 2
Summary of Qualitative Results

Content grouping Theme Category	Source
The experience of being a father among gang-involved youth	
Fatherhood as a source of joy and motivation	
Being a father is joyous	GF
Having a child drives fathers to pursue personal improvement	GF, S
Good fathers are involved, fostering positive behaviors in their children	
Good fathers are involved with, and provide for the material needs of, their children	GF
Good fathers model appropriate behavior for their children	GF
Good fathers keep their children away from gangs	GF
Good fathers discuss gangs with their children before adolescence	GF
Early discussions about gang involvement	GF
Would have delayed fatherhood if given the option	GF
Family of origin influences on parenting and fatherhood	
Limited parental involvement	
Limited parental supervision	F
Unaware of the extent of the teenager's problems	F
Employment interfered with parental involvement	M
Belief in strict discipline and corporal punishment	
Firm and strict parenting practices are important	F, M
Corporal punishment acceptable in family of origin	GF, M
Corporal punishment acceptable in current family	GF
Parent's struggle to influence gang-involved children	
Gangs control their teenage members	F
Gangs control of their teenage members emotionally impacts parents	F
Gang involvement results from community moral decay	F
Teenagers must be accountable for their decisions.	F, S
Teenagers focus on living for the moment	P
Lack of fatherhood role models	
Uninvolved or absent fathers	GF, M, S
Fathers' absence contributes to generational cycles of gang involvement	S
Learning fatherhood from peers and siblings	GF
Cultural influences on parenting and fatherhood	
Balancing positive and negative conceptions of masculinity	
Influence of gender roles emphasizing male dominance and female submissiveness	S
Struggle to reconcile conceptions of masculinity with those of fatherhood	F, GF

Note. GF = gang-involved father; M = mothers of gang-involved youth; F = fathers of gang-involved youth; S = community-based organization staff.

pline involving corporal punishment, parents' struggle to influence gang-involved children, and absence of an experienced fatherhood role model. Each category is described in a subsection below. As a group, the categories describe a family-of-origin environment in which parents—especially fathers—tend to be absent and tend to be ineffective at influencing their children's behavior. This results in gang-involved fathers having little exposure to experienced fathers and in their turning to siblings and peers as sources of knowledge about fatherhood.

Limited parental involvement. The parents of gang-involved youth reported limited parental supervision of their children, which increased the likelihood that these youth would engage in risky behavior. One father of a gang-involved teen stated, "[the children] spend a lot of time by themselves, and then they take their own path as they see fit." Perhaps related to this limited supervision, parents felt unaware of the extent of the teenager's problems. One father of a gang-involved youth explained, "I didn't notice that my son was making poor choices because he is a very quiet, very respectful kid, so I didn't notice." Parents often attributed their lack of supervision to the fact that employment interfered with parental involvement. One

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mother of a gang-involved youth reflected on the limited time with her children resulting from her choice of an evening shift job (for higher pay compared with day shift): "At 3 pm I get only one hour with them. You know what? That has been, I think, the biggest mistake in my life."

Belief in strict discipline involving corporal punishment. The parents of gang-involved youth stressed that firm and strict parenting practices are important to assert authority and enforce rules. A father of a gang-involved teen explained, "In my house, you don't make the rules. Here in my house none other than me rules." Gang-involved fathers and their parents described corporal punishment as a common parenting practice. Some participants focused on restrictions on corporal punishment, such as when—comparing parenting norms in her country of origin with those of the United States—one mother stated, "At least back there I can give my son a spanking." However, other participants described corporal punishment escalating into violence, such as when a gang-involved father shared, "My dad was the one with the picking them up, picking us up, slamming us, dropping me." Perhaps because of past experiences, gang-involved fathers believed corporal punishment was an acceptable parenting practice if preceded by verbal warnings or set rules. One gang-involved father described his own use of corporal punishment: "I ain't gonna lie, I gave him a little spanking when he was little."

Parents struggle to influence gang-involved children. Parents reported limited success passing on their values and beliefs to their children, specifically identifying their children's gang involvement as preventing their success. The fathers of gang-involved youth believed that gangs control their teenage members. One father explained, "They [youth who are involved in gangs] are slaves, because the night that the gang calls them, they have to go." Gangs' control of their teenage members has an emotional impact on the teenagers' parents, who reported that their children's behavior—and their inability to influence it—caused sadness, disappointment, and frustration. As one father of a gang-involved youth reported, "I would tell him [his gang-involved son] 'look, it's not what you are stealing, it's the way you are insulting society' . . . that affected me a lot." Many of the parents believed that gang involvement is a consequence of moral decay in the community. The comments of one father of a gang-involved teen are illustrative: "The young kids, they have no direction other than . . . unfortunately what they're teaching in school, but you know they don't want anything to do with morals or God's word."

Parents believed that teenagers must be accountable for their own decisions, including gang involvement. For example, one father of a gang-involved youth recalled saying to his son, "You have a will . . . I'm not going to force my will, and God's not going to force his will on you, you're going to have to choose . . . what you're going to do." In explaining teenagers' motivations for gang mores over their parents', CBO personnel pointed to teenagers' focus on living for the moment. One program staff member stated,

> Most of their survival instincts, you know, most of the time, it's hard for them to, to focus on, you know, five years from now. They're just going to focus on, well, what I need to do to survive tomorrow.

Lack of fatherhood role models. Gang-involved fathers, the mothers of gang-involved youth, and program personnel reported that fathers were mostly uninvolved or absent during a gang-involved teenager's childhood and youth. As one gang-involved father put it when attempting to explain his models for fatherhood, "Really nobody but my brothers." The mothers of gang-involved youth described raising their children without fathers as both normative and challenging. One stated, "For me that is very difficult, raising them on my own. Even though I have a boyfriend, it is not the same thing than for them to have their father there." Participants reported several reasons for fathers' absence, including employment demands, incarceration, substance use, neglect, and abuse. CBO staff added that fathers' absence contributes to generational cycles of gang involvement. One explained, "Because a lot of time we see grandparents kind of taking over, and then that young person doesn't learn how to be a parent and then we have this cycle again."

In the absence of role models, gang-involved teenagers developed their understanding of fatherhood primarily through interactions with siblings and peers. Gang-involved fathers who

grew up without fathers, but with older siblings, perceived these siblings as a main influence on a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors, including those related to sex, drugs, gangs, and social interactions. Gang-involved teenage fathers also saw peers as sources of knowledge regarding fatherhood. One gang-involved father described interactions with other gang-involved fathers, "Usually we [gang-involved fathers], like, 'Oh, how your son? Oh, he's straight [doing fine], he just got in the crib, laying down, you know what I'm saying?' And have a whole conversation."

Cultural Influences on Parenting and Fatherhood

One category, representing two themes, captured participants' perceptions regarding the influence of culture on gang-involved youths' parenting and fatherhood. We labeled this category "balancing positive and negative masculinity," as it describes the efforts of gang-involved fathers, and of their fathers, to reconcile conceptions of masculinity emphasizing dominance and toughness with conceptions of fathers as protective and nurturing.

CBO staff members observed that gang-involved youth are influenced by gender roles emphasizing male physicality, aggression and dominance and female submissiveness and loyalty. As one staff member described, "Gender roles are they really believe that men are supposed to sleep around and that girls should be virginal except for with them." Participants also reported that gang-involved youth and their fathers struggle to reconcile their understanding of masculinity with their vision of fatherhood. The fathers of gang-involved youth described a conflict between their perceived characteristics of a man—for instance, neither showing affection nor becoming involved in their children's lives—and of a good father (e.g., showing affection and being involved in their children's lives). One of them described his past behavior toward his children: "I couldn't hug them or tell them that I loved them, not anything." Gang-involved fathers described a desire to be a "responsible" man who provides for the needs of his family (including their children and the mother[s] of their children, no matter the status of their relationship). One of them explained his role: "Take care of my responsibilities. Make sure my daughter has everything, make sure the mother of my child has everything. Make sure everything, I'm doing good."

The Experience of Being a Father Among Gang-Involved Youth

Two categories, representing a total of eight themes, referred broadly to participants' perceptions regarding the experience of fatherhood among gang-involved U.S. Latino youth: fatherhood is a source of joy and motivation, and fathers should actively foster prosocial behaviors. Together, these categories reflect a positive perception of fatherhood among gang-involved youth, who could envision—and strove to acquire—the characteristics of a good father. Each category is described in a subsection below. Despite gang-involved fathers' overwhelmingly positive description of fatherhood, most reported that, if given the chance, it would have been beneficial for them to delay fatherhood.

Fatherhood is a source of joy and motivation. Gang-involved fathers described that being a father is joyous. One expressed, "You feel good inside, [being a father]." Another added, "You know, like, inside, like you just know you a good dad." Gang-involved teenage fathers also reported that having a child drove them to pursue personal improvement, motivating them to reduce negative behaviors—such as crime and substance use—and increase positive behaviors, such as seeking legal employment, developing a career, or pursuing higher education. One gang-involved father stated that, since becoming a father, his goals had become "[attending] college, graduate from college, get my PhD, and be set for life, and make sure my daughter is good." Program personnel also reported seeing a positive impact of fatherhood on the gang-involved youth that they worked with. One program staff member explained, "We have a kid in particular, and he's already a parent, he's 16, but he's more focused now, he's, because now he knows that he needs to provide for this child."

Fathers should be involved and should foster positive behaviors. Each of the gang-involved fathers who participated in the discussion believed that good fathers are involved

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with, and provide for the material needs of, their children. One gang-involved teenage father explained, "[Fathers are] . . . working, make sure you're spending time with your parents, your children." Another stated, "[As a father, you] Keep bread on the table."

Gang-involved fathers also believed that good fathers model appropriate behaviors for their children, specifically avoiding negative behaviors—such as substance use and violence—in the presence of their children. As one gang-involved teenage father stated, "Like, I'll try my best to quit [using substances] because I don't want them [his children] to do the same thing." This modeling of appropriate behaviors extended to gang involvement, as—despite their history of gang involvement (including, for most of them, current involvement)—gang-involved fathers believed gang involvement is bad for children and prevented their own children from being exposed to gangs. One expressed, "I won't bring my daughter nowhere near it [gang activities]." Relatedly, gang-involved fathers recommended that parents should discuss gangs with their children early on, focusing on removing the intrigue of gang membership and decreasing the desire to join. As one gang-involved father recommended,

> Yeah, like way before he [someone's son] even starts middle school, just talk to him about it [gangs]. By the time you get to middle school, that's when you see the rest of the people who are already in gangs.

Despite their positive description of fatherhood, gang-involved fathers would have chosen to *delay fatherhood* if given the option. As one of them stated, "I love my son, don't get me wrong, but I would, I would wait [to begin fatherhood]."

Discussion

What Influences Gang-Involved Latino Fathers' Parenting- and Fatherhood-Related Attitudes and Behaviors?

Family-of-origin experiences. The participants in this study identified two broad influences on gang-involved Latino fathers' attitudes and behaviors regarding parenting and fatherhood: their experiences within their families of origin and cultural values regarding masculinity. Gang-involved fathers' experiences within their family of origin were characterized by limited parental involvement, particularly their father's involvement. Parents' limited involvement tended to be accompanied by parental belief in strict discipline involving corporal punishment, which—perhaps as a result of limited parental involvement—was implemented inconsistently. Parents also tended to assign much of the responsibility for a child's behavior, including the decision to become involved in gangs, to children. This combination of factors—limited involvement; harsh, inconsistent, discipline; allocation of responsibility to the child—suggests a need to provide gang-involved fathers with exposure to, and training in, the type of authoritative, consistent parenting that can help them foster the outcomes that they desire for their children.

Our results align with findings from research on closely related populations, specifically with observations made by Parra-Cardona and colleagues (Parra-Cardona, Sharp, & Wampler, 2008; Parra-Cardona, Wampler, & Sharp, 2006) when examining the reactions of adjudicated Mexican American teen fathers to a parenting intervention developed by these authors, and by Barr and colleagues (2011) when developing parenting interventions for incarcerated U.S. ethnic minority teenage fathers. Barr and colleagues noted that because their participants—most of whom were Latino—infrequently received positive parenting, parent training began at foundational levels. Further, strategically involving the teen's caregivers—though arguably paradoxical given the youths' childhood experiences—fostered skill acquisition and retention. Parra-Cardona and colleagues (2006, 2008) suggest that—beyond making up for the absence of exposure to good parenting—parent-training interventions for adjudicated Mexican American teen fathers must support these youth in processing the neglect and violence that most experienced from their own fathers. In essence, it is important for interventions to foster improved relationships between teen fathers and their family of origin, and also between these fathers and their children's mothers.

The results of the current study highlight the influence of gang-involved fathers' family of origin, pointing to key components that should be incorporated into parenting and/or fatherhood training interventions for gang-involved teen fathers. The first is facilitating coping with

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emotions that may arise from the neglect and violence that youth have experienced in their families of origin. The second is teaching foundational skills (e.g., basic developmental expectations of children, basic expectations, strategies and techniques that fathers can use when raising children) and extending this training to the teen fathers' families of origin and the mothers of their children. The third component is attempting to provide these fathers with models of experienced and effective parenting.

Cultural values regarding masculinity. According to participants in this study, the influence of cultural values on young, gang-involved Latino fathers' parenting- and fatherhood-related attitudes and behaviors was centered on their perceptions of norms emphasizing male dominance and aggression, and on their struggle to reconcile these norms with their perceptions of ideal fathers as nurturing and protective. Such struggles parallel findings from research into the social construction of masculinity among non-gang-involved U.S. Latino men, which describe two facets to this social construction (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). The first, referred to as *machismo*, is associated with aspects of masculinity related to aggression, violence, and dominance. The second, referred to as *caballerismo*, is associated with aspects of chivalrous masculinity related to nurturance, leadership, wisdom, hard work, and caring for one's dependents. Whereas endorsing machismo is linked to negative outcomes including increased sexual aggression, hostility, and fear of emotions, caballerismo is linked to improved family functioning, life satisfaction, and overall wellness (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005; Liang, Salcedo, & Miller, 2011).

Latina/o gangs emphasize machismo (Belitz & Valdez, 1997; Kassab et al., 2014; Valdez, 2007), fostering the type of unbalanced view of masculinity linked with harmful outcomes. Despite gangs' emphasis on machismo, the gang-involved teenage fathers who participated in this study were familiar with caballerismo. They described their aspirational vision of fatherhood within the confines of caballerismo and struggled to reconcile positive aspects of masculinity emphasized in their role as fathers with the negative aspects of masculinity emphasized by their gang. These fathers may therefore benefit from interventions that foster caballerismo, emphasizing its consonance with a culturally grounded understanding of what it means to be a Latino man. Interventions focused on promoting a balanced, culturally responsive understanding of masculinity have been found efficacious among non-gang-involved U.S. Latino men (Liang et al., 2011). Given the importance of cultural identity to the well-being of gang-involved Latino youth (Belitz & Valdez, 1997; Young et al., 2014), highlighting behaviors of a nurturing, protective father as culturally consistent, may increase the likelihood that gang-involved fathers will engage in interventions that foster such behaviors.

What Is the Experience of Being a Father Like Among Gang-Involved Latino Youth?

Fatherhood is joyful and motivating. Results support the assertion that gang-involved Latino youth perceive fatherhood as joyful, and that they perceive good fathers as involved and exemplary. Gang-involved fathers reported positive feelings about fatherhood, adding that becoming fathers provided motivation for personal improvement. This finding aligns with research suggesting that it is normative for new fathers to find fatherhood both joyful and motivating (Åsenhed, Kilstam, Alehagen, & Baggens, 2014; Lesser et al., 2001; Moloney et al., 2009). Importantly, Lesser and colleagues (2001) found that fatherhood was a key developmental transition for non-gang-involved Latino youth. The 45 men they interviewed stated that fatherhood brought a new sense of happiness to their life and motivated them to become better for their child. Other research has linked fatherhood to positive changes in men's lives, including increased adherence to social norms, increased responsibility, and decreased risk taking (Borisenko, 2007). Overall, becoming a father is a life-changing experience that is described by new fathers as stressful yet joyful (Åsenhed et al., 2014). Current findings confirm that this profound effect of fatherhood also exists among gang-involved Latino youth. These findings support the argument that fatherhood is a key developmental transition that can foster increased prosocial behavior and decreased criminal involvement.

Current findings align with those of prior research suggesting that becoming a father motivates many gang-involved youth to stop crim-

inal activities and leave gangs (e.g., Giordano et al., 2011; Lesser et al., 2001; Moloney et al., 2009; Parra-Cardona et al., 2008). As a result of the motivation associated with their role as fathers, gang-involved youth may be more likely to participate in parenting- and/or fatherhood-focused interventions, especially if these are tailored to their needs and contexts. Such interventions can also provide a vehicle for engagement into a more comprehensive set of services and supports—including those focused on educational attainment and on employment training—that are more likely to support sustainably terminating criminal involvement (Moloney et al., 2009; Parra-Cardona et al., 2006, 2008).

Good fathers actively foster positive behavior in their children. Gang-involved youth emphasized a father's role as provider and role model for their children, an emphasis that aligns closely with caballerismo. Participants' perception of a father's role in modeling and fostering appropriate behavior included keeping children away from gangs, which gang-involved youth believed is achieved through ongoing discussions with children—beginning in early childhood—about the realities of gang involvement. Given the strictures associated with fatherhood, most of the participants would have chosen to delay it despite the many positive emotions they experienced in their roles as fathers.

The unfavorable attitudes of the gang-involved teenage fathers regarding the possibility of their children becoming involved in gangs are consistent with the findings of prior studies (e.g., Decker & Curry, 2000). Considered alongside the finding that becoming a father motivates gang-involved youth to stop criminal involvement, gang-involved fathers' reticence to have their children become involved in gangs suggests that incorporating training in strategies to prevent gang involvement into parenting- and/or fatherhood-focused interventions may further facilitate the involvement of gang-involved teenage fathers in such interventions.

Limitations

Current findings should be considered in light of this study's limitations. First, because our goals and design were exploratory, our findings are best understood as data-driven hypotheses amenable to testing. For example, future research might compare the effects of interventions that incorporate the recommendations based on current findings with those of interventions that do not. Second, as this study focused on young, gang-involved U.S. Latino fathers within a specific community who were already involved in services and supports, the degree to which current findings transfer to other settings is largely dependent on their similarity to this study's context. It is likely that there are meaningful differences between gang-involved fathers who are involved with services and those that are not. Additionally, the study focused on homogeneous samples most representative of populations already associated with the CBO partnered in this research. Although this approach renders a high degree of ecological validity to the current findings with regard to those populations, it further limits the transferability of the findings to other populations. Future research is needed to examine the degree to which current findings transfer to gang-involved teenage fathers in different settings.

Some individuals involved in this study held multiple roles with regard to each other and in terms of their research involvement. Authors 6 and 11, for example, were CBO employees involved in the services and supports offered to gang-involved youth, participated in the CBO staff interviews, and were researchers throughout the course of the study. Such multiple roles are not atypical in CBPR, and it has been argued that they facilitate more relevant, ecologically valid research (Brown et al., 2010). However, multiple roles require careful management to ensure that they do not lead to increased experimenter bias or adversely affect the ethical conduct of research (Brown et al., 2010). Throughout this article, we have described the processes that we implemented to manage these multiple roles (e.g., careful selection, training, and accountability of team members; limiting team member involvement in the analyses for which they would be most challenged in monitoring experimenter bias). We believe these processes were sufficient for us to monitor and account for our biases; however, experimenter bias is a possibility in all research.

Conclusions

Despite its limitations, this study provides insight into the experience of fatherhood

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among gang-involved young Latino fathers and into the influences that shape this experience. Our findings point to components that parenting and/or fatherhood interventions may have to integrate to be effective and engaging among gang-involved teenage fathers. These include addressing their family-of-origin relationships and their relationships with the mothers of their children; helping them address any sequelae arising from their own experiences of familial abuse or neglect; providing training at a foundational level; incorporating cultural constructs regarding masculinity; teaching fathers strategies to prevent their children's gang involvement; and connecting youth to the more comprehensive services and supports required for them to sustainably terminate gang involvement. The insights from our research can lead to interventions that break intergenerational cycles of gang involvement documented in many Latina/o families, positively affecting these families and the communities in which they live.

Abstracto

La mayoría de los crímenes cometidos por adolescentes en los EE. UU. están vinculados al pandillerismo, el cual desproporcionalmente aflige a las comunidades Latinas. Aun cuando la mayoría de los padres adolescentes involucrados en el pandillerismo desean que sus hijas/os no se afilien a las pandillas, su crianza de las/os hijas/os tiende a fomentar el involucramiento de estos en pandillas. Una mejor comprensión de la paternidad entre los jóvenes latinos estadounidenses involucrados en pandillas puede informar el desarrollo de intervenciones centradas en la crianza de los hijos y la paternidad. Nuestro análisis de datos cualitativos proporcionados por muestras intencionales de padres latinos jóvenes involucrados en pandillas, los padres y madres de estos, y de personas que brindan servicios y apoyo a jóvenes involucrados en pandillas resultó en tres agrupaciones de contenido que organizan siete categorías y los 24 temas que las conforman. Nuestra discusión se centra en las implicaciones de los resultados actuales para el desarrollo de intervenciones centradas en la crianza de los hijos y la paternidad para padres adolescentes latinos involucrados en pandillas.

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