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Latina Young People's Perspectives on Healthy Romantic Relationships: A Strengths-Based, Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

There is a dearth of research examining the relationship perspectives of Latina young people, a population that reports disproportionate rates of teen dating violence (TDV). This strengths-based, qualitative study utilized critical narrative inquiry to explore Latinas' relationship perspectives through in-depth interviews. Rigorous analysis revealed participants' desire for freedom from violence/abuse, open communication, independence, and egalitarian values in relationships, while reporting relationship models and media representation as their main influences on relationship perspectives. Our findings demonstrate that although patriarchal gender norms influence romantic relationships with Latinx cultures, many participants rejected traditional gendered power dynamics that can lead to violence, providing important information for practitioners seeking to promote healthy relationships among this population.

Adolescence and young adulthood are crucial developmental periods for exploring and forming perspectives, values and goals around romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009). It is important to understand how young people experience dating because early relationship experiences can impact their development and well-being into adulthood (Milbrath et al., 2009). Much research has been done surrounding romantic relationships among white adolescents and young adults, but less attention has been given to the dating experiences and perspectives of ethnic minority youth in the United States (Romo et al., 2002). The current study addresses this gap through a focus on views of healthy relationships held by Latina young people - a sizable population in the United States that reports among the highest levels of teen dating violence (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2019).

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A Strengths-Based Perspective

A substantial amount of scholarly literature focused on Latinx young people's romantic relationships aims to identify risks for teen dating violence (TDV) - a form of intimate partner violence that occurs between young people in the context of a romantic involvement (Cala & Soriano-Ayala, 2021). However, an over emphasis on violence within Latinas' romantic relationships may contribute to perceptions of Latina young people as "at-risk" young women who make poor choices in dating partners and/or are susceptible to unhealthy relationship dynamics. The "at risk" model has been criticized for blaming and stigmatizing the minority populations it aims to serve (Swadener, 1995), rather than recognizing that risk factors are the result of structural oppression and should not be pathologized (Abrams, 2002).

Consistent with the values of social work, this research applies a strengths-based perspective, rooted in a health promotion model (Nash et al., 2005) to identify the values, qualities, and priorities that Latina young people strive for in romantic relationships. Highlighting the many personal, familial, and cultural strengths of Latinas that help them adapt and succeed, this approach centers the voices of Latina young people themselves, challenging deficit thinking by affirming Latinas' independent and authentic identities despite various risk factors (Abrams, 2002). By exploring romantic relationships through this lens, findings can better inform healthy relationship education initiatives and other interventions for Latina young people by acknowledging and building upon the strengths they already possess.

Contextualizing Latinas' Romantic Relationship Beliefs

Because beliefs about relationships influence relationship experiences (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999; Impett & Peplau, 2003), especially with regards to risk for dating violence (Reed et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2016), it is important to understand Latina young people's relationship perspectives. TDV is a leading cause of death among young people, especially Latinx Americans (Cala & Soriano-Ayala, 2021), with over 19% of multiple-race Latinas reporting experiences of TDV (Kast et al., 2016). One of the most frequently investigated predictors of TDV is traditional gender role attitudes and beliefs (Ulloa et al., 2004), which often manifest in Latinx cultures as *machismo* (masculine gender ideology intended to emphasize strength, control, and power) and *marianismo* (feminine gender ideology emphasizing submissiveness to males, chastity and motherhood) (Cala & Soriano-Ayala, 2021; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). Latinx culture is often characterized as patriarchal, sometimes prescribing these

traditional gender roles out of logistical utility and/or lack of financial opportunity (Haglund et al., 2012). *Machismo* and *marianismo* can result in a gendered experience of dating in which expectations, roles, and consequences within heterosexual romantic relationships differ for boys and girls (Bouris et al., 2012; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). While girls are encouraged to seek a long-term, monogamous partner, Latino boys are more likely to be encouraged to "play the field" with many casual partners (Martinez et al., 2021). Traditional gender roles within Latinx cultures also promote heteronormativity, which can be damaging to sexual minority youth (SMY) within this population, whose romantic relationships and identities do not conform to prescribed norms (Patrón, 2021). Traditional gender roles may also promote attitudes of acceptance of TDV among Latinx teens (Boyce et al., 2022; Ulloa et al., 2004), by creating relationship environments that are permissive of coercive control (Lopez et al., 2012; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2022).

Despite the prevalence of TDV in the Latinx community and prior research's characterization of this population as "at risk," Latina women and young people are increasingly resistant to concepts of *machismo* and patriarchy, partly influenced by close maternal relationships and wisdom of older generations, which can mitigate problematic relationships and risk factors for TDV (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2014). Specifically, perceived parent caring and higher levels of parental communication regarding sex, dating and relationships have been associated with lower instances of TDV for both male and female adolescents (Kast et al., 2016). Maternal-child communication may also be protective against other negative outcomes, such as unplanned pregnancy and TDV (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2014; Romo et al., 2002).

Research with Latina young people has also shown that their perspectives and behaviors within romantic relationships are influenced by unconscious relational patterns called "scripts" (Emmers-Sommer, 2022; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Scripts significantly impact women's perceptions of and experiences within romantic relationships, and have potential health implications (Emmers-Sommer, 2022; Sanchez et al., 2017). Qualitative research with Mexican-American young women found that attitudes toward dating were influenced by two key sources of sexual scripting - familial gender role ideologies and media messages - which resulted in cautious attitudes toward dating (Sanchez et al., 2017). Some research has suggested that corrective scripts, in which a person is taught or is self-determined to do differently than previous generations, can alter unhelpful scripts that lead to unhealthy relationship patterns (Sharp et al., 2017). Correcting scripts that promote harmful dynamics or go against personal values provides a health-positive pathway to self-determination that draws on strengths.

Methods

Research Design

This study examined the perspectives of Latina young adults about healthy relationships utilizing a critical narrative inquiry research design (Hickson, 2016) to gather and analyze participants' firsthand accounts (Dillard, 2020; Hickson, 2016). Critical narrative inquiry combines a narrative methodological approach with critical reflection principles, such as: including diverse perspectives, critically examining values and assumptions of participants and researchers, and impartially evaluating procedures and results (Hickson, 2016). Critical narrative inquiry is appropriate for this research, given its ability to gather and interpret richly detailed narrative data, while also attending to underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs regarding knowledge, power, and reflexivity (Hickson, 2016). The present study analyzed participants' perspectives about healthy relationships to generate empirical insights in response to the following research questions: How do Latina young people describe a healthy relationship? What factors influence their views on relationships?

Research Setting and Participants

After obtaining IRB approval, a purposive sample of 25 Latinas residing in the New York City (NYC) metropolitan area was recruited for this study. This research setting was selected based on the notable representation of Latinx individuals in NYC, which is characterized by remarkable diversity and representation of various nationalities, among which Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans form the largest contingents (Bergad, 2022; Greer et al., 2017). Eligible participants for this study were Latina females aged 18 to 25, recruited through network sampling that leveraged the research team's connections to university-associated student groups and nonprofit organizations. Recruitment materials detailed that our study's aim was to "understand Latinas' perspectives on mental health, sexual health, and relationships to inform and improve social service provision." We conducted an online eligibility screening asking for the gender, age, national origins, and zip code of potential participants. Participants were selected using a maximum variation strategy based on the demographic information gathered. 33 eligible individuals completed the screening, and we invited the first 30 who replied to participate. Of those 30, five did not respond, leading to a final sample of 25 participants. The sample is illustrative of the wide range of nationalities among NYC Latinx individuals. Most participants were born in the US. All had attended or were currently attending college. Demographics of participants are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Participant Number	Age	Immigrant Generation	National Origins	Self-Reported Sexuality
1	21	2	Dominican Republic	Straight
2	21	1	Dominican Republic	Bisexual
3	21	2	Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico	Straight
4	22	1	Mexico	Straight
5	21	2	Colombia	Straight
6	18	2	Peru	Straight
7	21	2	Puerto Rico, El Salvador	Straight
8	19	1	Puerto Rico, Ecuador	Fluid
9	20	1	Mexico, Venezuela	Straight
10	19	3	Puerto Rico	Bisexual
11	23	3	Puerto Rico	Bisexual
12	19	2	Dominican Republic	Straight
13	18	1	Puerto Rico	Straight
14	19	3	Dominican Republic	Straight
15	18	2	Dominican Republic	Straight
16	20	2	Dominican Republic	Biromantic Asexual
17	18	1	Colombia	Straight
18	19	3	Puerto Rico	Bisexual
19	19	2	Mexico	Straight
20	19	2	El Salvador	Straight
21	20	2	Dominican Republic	Bisexual
22	19	2	Cuba	Queer/Lesbian
23	19	1	Puerto Rico, Cuba	Straight
24	19	2	Mexico	Straight
25	22	2	Mexico	Queer/Bisexual

Data Collection and Processing

The second author conducted narrative interviews with every participant using a virtual conferencing interface (Zoom). This individual interaction facilitated rapport between the researcher (a seasoned interviewer and licensed social worker) and the participants, improving their willingness to openly discuss their experiences. Interviews used a semi-structured interview guide, which ensured consistency in the topics explored among all participants, while also allowing for flexibility to further discuss specific areas of interest raised by the participants. The average duration of interviews was 59 min, and all interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. $50 Amazon gift cards were given upon completion. We used NVivo automated transcription software to transcribe audio files, which were checked for accuracy by research assistants. NVivo was utilized throughout data analysis to process and organize data.

Data Analysis

In line with the critical narrative methodology, the research team used an inductive and iterative analytic process to develop a comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of participants' viewpoints on healthy relationships (Dillard, 2020; Hickson, 2016). Holistic-content and categorical-content strategies were used to define themes within and across narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998), in conjunction with Hickson's (2016) approach to critical

Table 2. Analysis process.

Approach	Description	Responsible Parties
Holistic-Content Analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998)	Observed emergent themes and global impressions while listening to each interview	All authors
Holistic-Content Analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998)	Analyzed transcripts to note contextual and temporal patterns	All authors
Critical narrative inquiry (Hickson, 2016)	Examined the influences of power, knowledge, and reality in each transcript	All authors
Critical narrative inquiry (Hickson, 2016)	Discussed and refined interpretations and critically examined personal influences on interpretations during team meetings	All authors
Holistic-Content Analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998)	Recorded themes and global impressions of each transcript	2nd author
Categorical-Content Analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998)	Conducted open coding of all transcripts and met regularly to discuss	2nd and 3rd author
Categorical-Content Analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998)	Ordered and grouped codes into themes and drew final conclusions	1st and 2nd author
Categorical-Content Analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998)	Re-examined the data within each theme and wrote analytic memos	All authors
Critical narrative inquiry (Hickson, 2016)	Finalized interpretations by applying principles of critical reflection in a final review and discussion of each theme	All authors

narrative inquiry that integrates critical reflection into the analysis of narratives. Our approach throughout the analytic process was collaborative and team-oriented to optimize the integrity of our data interpretations (Church et al., 2019). Our team's analytic approach is detailed in Table 2.

Evaluative Criteria

Following the principles of naturalistic inquiry, this study incorporated Lincoln and Gubas's (1985) recommendations of triangulating data sources and researchers while maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process. We performed an intercoder reliability assessment to enhance credibility, which yielded a Kappa's coefficient of .88, signifying near perfect agreement (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). We also conducted member-checking with participants by providing each participant with their personal transcript and a summary of initial findings, inviting them to provide feedback. Lastly, we performed negative case analysis to further improve the reliability of our results and reveal our data's strengths and limitations.

Findings

All 25 participants discussed their views on healthy relationships. This topic was referenced 122 times, providing a substantial amount of information for analysis. Results are presented as two main categories, following our research questions: views on healthy relationships and influences on relationship perspectives. Themes within each category are presented in order of salience within the data.

Views on Healthy Relationships

We identified four themes related to views on healthy relationships: (1) freedom from violence and abuse, (2) open communication between partners, (3) independence, and (4) egalitarian values.

Freedom from Violence and Abuse

Many participants expressed their views on healthy relationships by describing unhealthy relationship patterns they wanted to avoid, including controlling, jealous, and manipulative behavior, as well as intimidation and aggression. Thus, freedom from violence and abuse was a major theme within participants' beliefs about what constitutes a healthy relationship. Participant 2 described having no tolerance for early warning signs of controlling behavior in relationships:

> That red flag for me would be controlling behavior. At the beginning, they're like, "Okay, yeah, I want to hang out with you." But then they're like, "Oh, I don't want you to hang out with that person" or like, "Why don't you hang out with me instead of hanging out with your friends?" and stuff like that…That's a major red flag for me…I don't like that possessiveness.

Participant 7 described her experience with a trajectory of violence that she considers unhealthy in relationships, and hopes to avoid in the future:

> Aggression. I think that's definitely a big red flag. Either emotionally or physically and verbally…From what I've experienced…it starts off more verbally and then it kind of escalates to physical…I also think isolation from people that I usually talk to, so if I become isolated from friends or family members that I used to talk to on a daily basis, but then I get into this relationship and all of a sudden I become very isolated, I think that's also a red flag.

Participant 10 expressed a desire to freely express herself without fear of escalation: "Obviously, arguments happen, and, like, yelling happens, but if you try to speak to someone and they yell at you every single time, that's, like, they're trying to drown your voice out." Participants described many forms of violence and abuse they considered to be unhealthy, demonstrating their desire to be in a relationship free of such behaviors.

Open Communication between Partners

Numerous participants noted that open communication was key to a healthy relationship, especially in the context of conflict resolution. Participant 1 shared:

> I think in any relationship in general, communication is key. Like just being able to talk to your partner about whatever is going on, even if you experience a conflict, like just being able to express to them how you feel and the partner being willing to listen to you. It has to be like both, like you feeling comfortable enough to share and them feeling like they're willing to hear you out.

Participants also discussed the importance of being comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings, even when they may not follow sexual or gender scripts. Participant 4 reflected:

> I would define a healthy relationship now as like having really good communication and no fear communicating. I think my experiences with relationships before my current partner has been very much like me being scared to communicate for whatever reason. It is kind of also being so socialized to kind of be like, "Oh, if you want what you want with a man, you kind of have to stay quiet on some things." But now that I'm older, I'm realizing what I'm looking for in a healthy relationship is not having a fear to communicate and not having a fear of not being able to tell my partner everything I want to tell him.

These participants saw open communication between partners as a vital aspect of healthy relationships.

Independence

Several participants discussed the importance of independence of both parties in a healthy relationship, which was connected to the self-esteem and self-actualization of each person. Participant 15 described the importance of self-love and independence as key to entering into a healthy relationship, noting:

> I think loving yourself first is important because if you cannot love yourself, what makes you think somebody else is going to love you? … Because if you're very insecure yourself and you're very codependent, I don't think that's necessarily healthy in a relationship. I think somebody who is independent and has their own thoughts and has their own hobbies. And I say that specifically because I feel like a lot of people tend to forget their friends and what they genuinely loved before they got into a relationship because they make that person their whole world.

Similarly, another participant reflected on a past relationship in which she felt she had lost her independence, noting struggles with codependency and insecurity that made her relationship painful and difficult. Participant 18 stated:

> A healthy relationship for me would just be one that both people are separate entities who are able to love and care for each other. I think I definitely fell in that co-dependent trap in my relationship in high school where I didn't have a concept of who I was outside of that. And that was super harmful.

Another participant described the long-term effect of seeing a loved one change for a partner, describing her aunt's relationship as a loss of the strength and independence that made her who she was. Participant 21 shared:

> I have this one aunt who I perceived as like a badass. Like she didn't need a man in her life. She was fine by herself. She raised two kids. She was doing amazing. And then recently she got a boyfriend and that just all went downhill. Where was this

amazing woman that I knew her to be? Where is this independent woman who didn't take anything from anybody?…She changed herself for her partner, and I just don't want to do that at all.

For many participants, a healthy relationship was defined by one's ability to maintain a sense of independence and individual identity within the context of a relationship.

Egalitarian Values

Participants often discussed relationships within the context of gender norms, especially those influenced by traditional gender ideologies within their cultures. Several participants reported a desire to move away from traditional gender roles and have more egalitarian relationships characterized by an equal division of labor, power, and influence in the relationship. Participant 5 grounded this concept in the idea of mutual respect and responsibility:

I think that a healthy relationship is one where partners are being supported. You know, there's a mutual understanding and mutual respect for one another…I think it goes beyond typical gender roles. I think [in] a healthy relationship that the woman isn't just spending time at home cooking and cleaning for her husband, and the man isn't just being the breadwinner. I think that there's a mutual respect and understanding that both people have responsibilities that need to be shared.

Participant 13 discussed the prevalence of *machismo* in her culture, asserting her belief that a strong female personality is a positive counterweight to the problems of toxic masculinity:

I can tell it's a bad relationship when the woman stays silent and the man is the dominant one. Although there is this whole idea of *machismo*, I think that's really unhealthy. I know that's a stereotype [that] every Latina woman is very strong-willed. And in many cases, they're much more dominant than the men. So unless physical force is being involved, I feel like when the woman has kind of the control in the relationship, that's healthy.

Participant 19 described experiencing pressure from her mother to adopt a more traditional gender role mentality to prepare her for a successful marriage. However, she disagreed:

My mom, sometimes she'd be like, "Oh, you need to learn how to cook, you need to learn how to like, clean." I'm like, "I don't know why you think I'm going to be doing that when I'm older,"…She's like that because that's how it's been like for people of her generation. But I always tell her that it's going to be equal, like, yeah, I'm going to do that sometimes. I'm not saying that I'm never going to do that. But… something really big [for me] is equality. If we can both work, we can both cook, we can both clean.

These participants valued egalitarian roles in romantic relationships and saw an equal balance of responsibilities as healthy.

Influences on Relationship Perspectives

Regarding what influenced participants' relationship perspectives, two themes were identified: (1) relationship models growing up and (2) media representations.

Relationship Models Growing Up

Many participants described learning about healthy and unhealthy relationships from the relationship models they witnessed growing up. Most participants said they had no or very few positive relationship role models, and instead formed concepts of what they did not want. The few who did recall a positive relationship model painted a picture of friendship, compromise, and acceptance of the other. Participant 2 shared her experience learning from a couple she knew in her native country, and the strong impact they had on her perspective:

> There was this little couple in the Dominican Republic. It was like this elderly couple, and they were just so sweet to each other. I think that that's where I got the whole notion of communication and trust, actually, because it was most definitely the first I had. I remember having a conversation with that old lady about, "How come your relationship is so different from all the relationships [in the neighborhood]?" And she would just be like, "Oh, you just have to have communication with your partner."…I really hope that I get in a relationship like that one day.

Negative relationship models were more prevalent, and descriptions of poor emotional regulation including yelling, extreme anger, and crying were the drivers of these relationships. Some participants reported seeing the impacts of alcohol abuse and unfaithfulness on relationships, including one participant who discovered that her father had a secret second family. Participant 9 discussed wanting a relationship much different than that of her parents, which she considered unhealthy, sharing:

> So, I had my parents, and I think I've been trying to base an ideal relationship off of *not* what they have. So, I think it's an example of what I don't want in a relationship.

Participant 11 also described how negative relationship role models provided an undesirable precedent regarding which behaviors are acceptable and which are damaging:

> I definitely did not want to be in a relationship like my mom's. I did not want to be in a relationship where there was yelling and fighting all the time or crying all the time or like being in that tense household…But I feel like it's hard to tell sometimes what [relationships are] supposed to be like. This could be a really bad thing, but then it's like, "Oh, well, maybe it's just like a normal thing that people do all the time," but we'll find out later, like, no, that's not really OK and normal.

As this participant explained, she came to realize as she got older that the unhealthy dynamics she witnessed as a child in her mother's romantic relationship were not typical, and she eventually determined those behaviors were not acceptable to her.

Other participants explained how they learned cultural norms about romantic relationships and marriage from relationship models growing up, although they did not necessarily want to subscribe to those norms themselves. Participant 21, for example, shared that she chooses not to date people who come from the same native country as her because of what she has witnessed in relationships in her cultural community:

> I'm Dominican and I'm just like I do not want to date a Dominican because I know how they act. So Dominican men? First of all, they cheat a lot and then they're not honest. They lie to their partner. It's just like they're not trustworthy and they're very stingy. Just like seeing that from the relationship from, like my uncles and my aunt's boyfriend, seeing how they are gears me away from ever dating somebody from the same nationality as me.

Another participant conveyed that it was somewhat of an accepted cultural norm amongst older generations to marry for reasons other than love; however, she was opposed to this outdated idea. Participant 6 discussed her views on marrying for utility rather than romance:

> Especially in the Peruvian community, there's a lot of marriages that are just like: "We got married out of….why not? And we're still together 30 years later. We don't really hang out with each other. We don't even love each other. We're just together just 'cuz."…And thinking of the relationships in my family, like even my own parents, seeing how they get along, I'm like, "Do I want a relationship like that? No."

Most participants expressed that observing the relationships within their families and cultural communities growing up influenced their own perspectives. Participants explained that what they considered to be healthy was different from the relationship models they had seen.

Media Representations

Several participants noted the depiction of unrealistic or romanticized ideals of relationships in media, which they realized were influential in shaping their perspectives. Participant 2 described her experience in learning about relationships through media:

> Social media, any television shows that romanticize high school experiences and relationships and stuff like that. These magazines that tell you, like this is how you should look so that the guys want you, stuff like that…But I think that we get it subconsciously, like we look at different media and stuff like that and we're like, "Oh, maybe I should do this, maybe I should do that."

Another participant noted the that young people tried to emulate relationships they had seen in the media. Participant 8 shared:

> Growing up, it was seen as a sign of maturity to actually be going out with someone, even though that relationship was not mature at all, let me tell you. Jesus. But it was definitely an attempt to, kind of, follow what everybody sees in the movies and the shows.

These participants' accounts demonstrate how romantic scripts are internalized from media representations.

Other participants discussed their recognition of and resistance to media stereotypes, which influenced their dating experiences. Participant 17 shared:

> I say, "I'm from Colombia." [Men are] like, "Oh, you're from Colombia?" and they start flirting, you know? They don't even know me. And then it's already a flirtatious situation, and it's kind of uncomfortable…They romanticize it. They see like J.Lo…. So that's sort of like a media version of Latinas that's not real.

Similarly, Participant 15 felt that media stereotypes influenced others' perceptions of her as a potential romantic partner, stating:

> The spicy trope of Latinas being passionate, aggressive or like sexy, I just find that so ignorant and annoying. Like, not every Latina girl you are going to meet is combative or like "passionate and aggressive." There's other girls who are shy and introverted. But that don't make them less Latina…Another stereotype for Mexicans specifically, the submissive wife. I think that is so offensive, especially towards Mexican women.

Media representations were described as a major influence on participants' perspectives on romantic relationships, although participants generally recognized that media depictions of Latina women and relationships were unrealistic and potentially harmful.

Discussion

Using a strengths-based lens, this study revealed Latina young people's views on what constitutes a healthy relationship as well as the factors they believe influenced their perspectives. Participants in this study articulated their desire for healthy relationships characterized by freedom from violence and abuse, open communication between partners, independence, and egalitarian values. When examining how they shaped these perspectives on healthy romantic relationships, participants frequently noted the influence of relationship models growing up and media representations, and demonstrated the strengths they possess in resisting the unhealthy or unrealistic examples they've witnessed in real life and on screen. In accordance with script theory, these findings suggest that family relationships and the media are important sources of sexual/dating scripts for Latina

young people, although they often make the courageous choice to resist or re-write those scripts in accordance with their own values and desires.

The most frequently mentioned characteristics of a healthy relationship were freedom from violence and abuse and open communication between partners, which attest to participants' existing knowledge of what constitutes healthy behavior in romantic relationships. Participants also shared many stories of negative relationship models that were characterized by violent and abusive behavior and cited them as examples of unhealthy patterns they did not want to replicate in their own relationships. These findings suggest an apparent contradiction between participants' desire for violence-free relationships and the high rates of TDV within the broader population of Latina young people (Kast et al., 2016; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2019). Extant research has also found that even in the face of high TDV prevalence among peers or family members and/or personal experiences of TDV, Latina and other minority young people maintain high aspirations for healthy future relationships (Abrams, 2002; Munoz-Rivas et al., 2022). Although cultural, familial, and sexual scripts stemming from patriarchal gender norms may facilitate, normalize, or encourage the acceptance of abusive relationship dynamics (Cala & Soriano-Ayala, 2021; Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2016) and/or silence young women's voices (Emmers-Sommer, 2022), our participants conveyed a desire to make different choices than their predecessors, explaining that they learned from family members' missteps to align themselves with more health-positive relationship values (Byng-Hall, 1985). This corrective script is a salient example of participants' strengths and capabilities in formulating their own perspectives for healthier relationships (Sharp et al., 2017).

Many participants also challenged traditional gender role ideologies, expressing a strong desire for both independence and egalitarian values in romantic relationships. In fact, many participants specifically stated they wanted a relationship unlike that of their parents, and disavowed the concept of *machismo* in Latinx culture, describing it as undesirable in their ideal relationship. Instead, participants sought to maintain independence in their relationships, which is associated with well-being and better-quality romantic relationships (Emery et al., 2021), and enact more egalitarian values, which are also associated with women's health in relationships (Lopez et al., 2012). While research has shown that deviating from sexual/dating scripts in this way does at times cause conflict with one's family of origin (Raffaelli, 2005), studies with Latina women have also revealed many instances when older family members, especially Latina mothers, encouraged Latina young people to challenge those scripts that are disempowering to women (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2014; Romo et al., 2002).

Media representations provided another source of sexual/dating scripts for participants, influencing their perspectives on romantic relationships. Although participants acknowledged the prominent role of mass media and social media in shaping their ideas about relationships, they also critically reflected upon the need to evaluate romanticized relationship ideals depicted in media and expressed opposition to unrealistic stereotypes of Latina women and their roles in social life. Extant research supports participants' views that overly romanticized relationships and hyper-sexualized views of women can promote problematic concepts of romantic love such as aggression, violence and control, and the objectification of women (Cala & Soriano-Ayala, 2021; Gonzalez-Guarda, 2014). However, the results of this study suggest that Latina young people are skilled in evaluating romantic relationships depicted in media and are able to determine that some portrayals are unrealistic or even harmful to adopt in the real world, a finding that is supported by other research on this topic (Sanchez et al., 2017).

Limitations

The current study placed Latina young people's own perspectives at the center of our analysis, yielding a deeper understanding of the population's views on healthy romantic relationships. However, the results are not intended to be generalized to all Latina young people in the New York City area, and additional research is needed to expand on the current findings, especially in diversified geographic areas. Although narratives were analyzed both holistically and categorically, without the individual context of participants, the results can only provide a fragmented view of participants' life experiences and perspectives on relationships. Our sample was diverse, but we did not gather information related to socioeconomic status, which could help to contextualize findings. Furthermore, participants' responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias. It is important to note that our sample included 9 participants who identified as SMY, adding to the diversity of perspectives presented. However, future research is needed to focus on the perspectives of Latina SMY to generate theory and knowledge particular to this group.

Implications

Our findings bear implications for practitioners working with Latina young people, as understanding this population's perspectives on healthy relationships can be useful in shaping culturally-specific therapeutic approaches that draw upon their inherent strengths. Our findings suggest that Latina young people have formulated their own perspectives on what constitutes a healthy relationship and may benefit from therapeutic support from

clinicians who understand the dialectical conflict between these self-generated perspectives and those rooted in traditional gender roles and gendered power differentials (Banister & Jakubec, 2004). Therapeutic approaches that center gendered power dynamics may be particularly effective with Latina young people to facilitate the examination of traditional gender roles within Latinx culture (Malhotra et al., 2015; Storer et al., 2020).

The acknowledgment of TDV as a significant nationwide health issue has spurred endeavors to create initiatives targeted at promoting healthy teen relationships, primarily through school-based educational initiatives that teach young people to recognize healthy vs. unhealthy behaviors (Finnie et al., 2022). However, only a few studies have specifically examined the effectiveness of such programs among Latinx young people, and models that are culturally-tailored to Latinx young people are lacking (Malhotra et al., 2015). As seen in the current study, Latina young people have culturally specific strengths and are forming their own perspectives and beliefs about healthy relationship development. This creates the invaluable opportunity to build upon those strengths with relationship education programs and culturally-sensitive clinical service delivery for Latina young people in order to help them form and maintain relationships that reflect participants' stated ideals: independence, communication, egalitarian roles, and freedom from violence and abuse.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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