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## Pueblos y Ranchos: The role of Latino fathers and community leaders in serving Latino families in rural Northwest Iowa and Southern Minnesota

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*Pueblos y Ranchos*: The role of Latino fathers and community leaders in serving Latino families in rural northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota

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Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Rural Latino fatherhood, Rural Latino Leaders, Ethnography, *Testimonios*

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### Abstract

This ethnography study explored the role of Latino fathers in family life and their children's education before and during the pandemic. The study also examined the role of Latino and ally leaders in serving Latino fathers and their families in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota before and during the pandemic. The sample consisted of 40 Latino fathers from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua and 22 leaders of Latino and European American backgrounds. The study utilized different qualitative inquiries including the larger ethnography, *testimonios*, and observations to collect the data. Key findings included that the Latino fathers were moving beyond traditional interpretations of Latino fatherhood and masculinity, in particular *machismo*. Rather, they were focused on a new family dynamic and Latino fatherhood that highlighted positive Latino family values and egalitarian beliefs. It was discovered that Latino fathers were more actively engaged in their children's lives and education regardless of the circumstances. A key finding demonstrated that they showed resilience before and during the pandemic in efforts to serve their families. The results showed that leaders were actively advocating and serving Latino families before and during the pandemic, and these leaders showed progress in helping rural communities move toward equity, diversity, and inclusiveness for their communities. Implications for future research were provided.

### ***Pueblos y Ranchos: The role of Latino fathers and community leaders in serving Latino families in rural northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota***

The primary researcher traversed the Iowa-Minnesota *raya x* (state line), stopping at local Latino churches and merchants to learn more about the region and Latino communities. The beans and corn were moving closer to the fall harvest, and the Midwest seemed similar to previous years. However, this was no typical late summer in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota; it was the time of the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. Iowa and southern Minnesota had recorded some of the highest levels of COVID-19 infection rates in the country. Although the pandemic was an unexpected and unprecedented event, Latino families had been settling into the rural tapestry of this area for over 30 years, developing a family life that at times presented challenges to family resiliency. Consistently, Latino fathers and their families experienced a cadre of challenges, including linguistic, cultural, social, political, economic, educational, health, and other factors throughout the rural Midwest (Viramontez, Reyes and Chavez, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Latino fathers in their children's family life and educational experiences in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota. The study examined how factors such as shifting family values, father involvement in their children's education, Latino generational differences, cultural, social, and linguistic realities, the impact of migration and immigration, and other factors influenced the role of Latino fathers. This was one of the first studies to explore how Latino fathers in the northern rural Midwest were breaking away from hypermasculinity to modern fatherhood. Furthermore, we learned from Latino fathers about family resiliency before and during the challenges of the pandemic. Finally, we explored the role of rural Latino and other Allyleaders as they served Latino fathers and their families and communities.

This study is critical and relevant as it explores the role of modern Latino fathers in an area that has been rarely examined in scholarly research. It is of special importance as the rural Midwest continues to see the settlement of Latino families. Understanding Latino fatherhood and how it navigated daily family life during the pandemic provides critical insights into family and community systems. Moreover, these towns, school systems, and community social support systems often struggle with serving these groups. This study provides insight into how rural Latino and ally leaders served and worked with Latino communities, which is a research area that is also scarce. This is especially important information for rural practitioner leaders who serve Latino fathers and their families in different social contexts. The leaders served as a bridge to understand how this group is served in rural America. The connection between the Latino fathers and the leaders was holistic as it was critical to view how these groups navigated through the different social and community contexts. The leaders served as a vehicle of assistance and advocacy for fathers to promote a better family life and well-being. Finally, this study documented the struggles and triumphs of Latino fathers and their families to survive and thrive during the pandemic.

## Literature Review

### Demographics of northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota

Currently, there are over 62 million people who identify as Hispanic or Latino living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Of that total, nearly 216,000 reside in Iowa and another 345,000 live in Minnesota, mostly centered around meatpacking and agricultural job opportunities in new-growth Latino destinations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020; Gutierrez & Richmond, 2021), which are places where the ethnic and racial composition of the population has changed over the last two decades (Lopez et al., 2022). The Corn Belt of northwestern Iowa and southern Minnesota is an example of a new-growth destination and is now home to thriving Latino *comunidades* (communities) first drawn to the area in the early 2000s by economic opportunities (Grey et al., 2003).

Iowa and Minnesota have the highest concentration of Latinos in the region. They are the largest minority group in Iowa, representing over 2% of the total population in the state, and are the third largest population demographic in Minnesota, making up nearly 6% of the total population (Grey et al., 2003; Gutierrez & Richmond, 2021). The Latino population in Minnesota has grown 38% since 2010, and as of 2020 southern Minnesota is home to 49,628 persons of Latino descent (Gutierrez & Richmond, 2021).

### Impact of the Pandemic on the Latino Community in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota

As of July 2022, over one million people in the United States died from COVID-19 and more than 90 million were infected in the little more than two years since the pandemic began (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022, July 27). COVID-19 disproportionately affected the Latino community, which registered over 16% of all COVID deaths (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022, November 2). Latino frontline meatpacking workers in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota fared even worse, as in this region meatpacking plants can be the sole employer for miles (Fremstad et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021). Disruptions to the plant often disrupt the entire family system and community. This is relevant because meatpacking was one of the first industries to be impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks (Kline, 2021; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021). Over 33% of those employed by this industry identify as Latino or Hispanic and more than half of all employees are immigrants (U.S. Bureau Of Labor Statistics, 2022, January 20).

### Familismo

*Familismo* is a mechanism of resiliency, which is demonstrated in the multiple strengths that Latinos draw on to face hardship and guard against the negative effects of adversity on their well-being. *Familismo* was documented over 50 years ago and is a core cultural value defined by scholars as a strong identification and attachment of Latino persons to their nuclear and extended families that can be a protective factor that fosters resiliency within Latino families (Smith-Morris et al., 2013). It is exemplified by collectivism, by putting the needs of one's family over the needs of the individual (Smith-Morris et al., 2013). More than that, *familismo* is about the value of



connectedness and mutual support, something all populations are struggling with during the global COVID-19 pandemic (Smith-Morris et al., 2013). It also encompasses the importance of parental involvement in the lives of their children, as many Latino immigrants moved to the United States with the goal of improving the lives of their children through educational opportunities (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007).

A recent study identified resilience as one such protective factor among Latinx adults in terms of a range of prevalent behavioral health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research study identified protective factors related to greater resilience on the individual (social mobility, education), community (spirituality), and cultural levels (familism) (Mayorga, et al., 2022).

### **Modern Latino Fatherhood**

Historically, masculinity and fatherhood have been closely entwined, but emerging research is beginning to tease apart fatherhood from masculinities across different cultures (Roy & Allen, 2022). Within some traditional Latino families, masculinity has been defined as *machismo*, a learned pattern of aggressive, retaliatory, chauvinistic behaviors and beliefs towards women and family members (Hendy et al., 2021). In its more toxic form, it is referred to as *machista* (Hendy et al., 2021). Fathering is influenced by intergenerational processes, and the family system and structure, as well as intersectionality factors including culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education level, migration and immigration, language, and other factors (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014; Hendy et al., 2021; Roy & Allen, 2022). It is a multidimensional phenomenon where fathers and their children develop alongside and heavily influence each other, mediating and moderating each other's development (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014). For some modern Latino fathers, the impact of culture and tradition intersecting with the above factors has resulted in a familial shift away from traditional views of the hypermasculinity found in *machismo* (Roy & Allen, 2022).

### **Leaders**

Rural new destination areas often lack formal immigrant-serving infrastructures (Lopez et al., 2022). For example, different infrastructures including education, government, health, social, and other systems might not have the culturally responsive trained staff and resources to serve Latino families. In the absence of formal services, Latino residents step up as leaders and act as cultural brokers (Lopez et al., 2022). Cultural brokers are those who have an interest in leading, supporting, and advocating for their communities and who have strong connections and serve as a bridge to different social

systems and infrastructures (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Kellstedt et al., 2021; Shiffman, 2019). Cultural brokers also serve as a bridge for Latino fathers and their families to help pave the road, not only for the present, but for better family life and well-being in the future. Latino leaders are often bilingual, know how to navigate various systems, and often come from the local community to help Latino families connect to it (Lopez et al., 2022). Research has also demonstrated that ally leaders and allies can have a positive impact on communities of color. Ally leaders are part of an ingroup that works toward fairness for people in an outgroup. Ally behaviors include calling out discrimination and fighting for inclusion of outgroup members, including public and private behaviors. As such, White allies can be an important means of reducing racism against people of color (Williams et.al., 2021; Smith et. al., 2015)

In summary, the literature has provided an overview of the limited emerging research on Latino fathers and family life and how that is changing in the modern era while retaining resilience mechanisms. Furthermore, the leaders' literature serves as a bridge to how critical leaders serve Latino fathers and their families in rural regions. The current study builds on this existing research to explore how Latino fathers in the rural Midwest view fatherhood, their role within the family, and how they work with local community leaders to navigate the difficulties of settling in the rural north and the struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Bronfenbrenner (1989) ecological model was utilized in this study to holistically understand Latino fatherhood and family life in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota. This framework also provides a lens to comprehend how rural leaders navigated the different ecological challenges to better serve Latino fathers, their families, and their communities. This framework was used by the researchers in an earlier study that explored rural family life in the Midwest (Viramontez et al., 2013). At the macrosystem level (societal and cultural system) of the Bronfenbrenner model, the framework provided a lens to understand the reality of the settlement process of Latino fathers and their families in the rural north, their cultural, linguistic, and social adaptation to the region, and how different communities responded. The theory provided a means to help understand the role of leaders and how they paved the road for Latino fathers and their families to not only feel safe, but more importantly have a sense of belonging in the region. At the exosystem (indirect) level, this system served as a focus to understand the social, cultural, and political environment for Latino fathers and their families. This system was used to explore how the pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant sentiment in the region impacted Latino fathers. The exosystem also helped illustrate the role of the leaders in connecting these groups to the different social infrastructures such as educational, nonprofit, health, and other social services.

Exploration of the mesosystem was used to highlight the role of Latino fathers' engagement within the intersections of the Latino family, school, and community connection and how this involvement was influencing their children's education and lives. The role of the leaders within these systems and how they served and led was critical to understanding how these leaders were impacting Latino fathers' engagement with the different mesosystems in rural communities. For fathers, the microsystem consisted of their families, and understanding their role in the family and their children's lives was essential. The study also explored modern Latino fathers through how they interpreted family values and their associated role. Also, the microsystem

helped bring forward how Latino fathers were adapting to living in a pandemic and how that impacted their community. For the leaders, the microsystem clearly focused on how they saw themselves as leaders and their purpose in a rural society when serving diverse families.

The Bronfenbrenner (1989) theory also utilized a system based on time, called the chronosystem, which represents temporal changes in ecological systems. The chronosystem helped disentangle the settlement process over time for better understanding Latino fathers, their families, and their communities. However, this study was uniquely different and was one of the first studies to examine how the chronosystem during the pandemic was truly impacting Latino fathers and their communities and how rural leaders were responding to daily challenges.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored in this study.

1. What do Latino fathers consider to be important Latino family values, family dynamics, and characteristics of being a father?
2. How are Latino fathers involved and what is their role in family life and their children's education?
3. How do Latino fathers demonstrate resilience to the challenges that they face in the changing rural tapestry within family, educational, and community contexts before and during the pandemic era?
4. What is the role of Latino leaders and other ally leaders in serving Latino fathers and their families and communities before and during the pandemic era?

### **Methods**

Specifically, this study primarily explored the resiliency of Latino fathers in the changing rural tapestry within family, educational, and community systems. It also explored the role of leaders in serving Latino fathers, their families, and the Latino community. The methods presented here, including the sample, design, procedure, protocol, and data analysis, were part of the larger research project. The overall sample of this study consisted of 40 fathers and 22 leaders.

### **Study Sample**

Snowball sampling was utilized to identify both Latino father and community leader samples. The primary researcher worked in the community to identify participant fathers through community leaders, community members, and other families. This process was always kept confidential. Community leaders who served the Latino population were identified through non-profits, educational organizations, local businesses, and government agencies. This method was supplemented by extensive internet research to identify community leaders serving the Latino community. Community leaders were also identified via snowball sampling as these leaders organically mentioned other leaders that would be useful for inclusion in the study. In both cases, the process for identifying participants was kept confidential. Snowball sampling is a fruitful strategy for identifying participants as it draws on the power of social networks to reach populations that may be geographically dispersed or that may feel alienated and thus difficult for researchers to reach (Parker, C., Scott, S., & Geddes, A., 2019).

The participants of this study consisted of 40 Latino fathers and their families who lived in the rural Iowa-Minnesota state line region. Ages ranged from 27 to 61.

The fathers originated from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Most fathers had three children. The fathers' educational levels ranged from elementary school in their home nation or the United States to a university education in the United States. Five of the fathers completed six years or fewer years of formal education in their country. Thirty-one of the parents had completed secondary education from 7th to 12th grade in their own country or in the United States. A few fathers participated in higher education—two completed two years of college education or vocational skills trades education and two obtained a university degree. Occupations ranged from meat packing plants and other agricultural related employment, small business owners, the service industry, construction, and other private industries. Most worked in one of the two primary industries in the area, with 27 of the fathers working in either the local meatpacking plant or other agricultural related work. The occupations of the remaining 13 fathers included two who worked in construction, three who worked in private industry, four who were small businesses owners, and four who worked in the service industry.

### Leader Participants

The participants of this study also included organic leaders who served the Latino community to more formally educated and trained leaders. These local leaders ranged from those who had little to no formal education or training to those who had received advanced education and training to serve in educational settings, non-profit organizations, health, and private industries.

Participants who served Latino fathers and the Latino community consisted of 22 rural leaders. There were 15 females and seven males. Eighteen were of Latino descent and four of European American background. Leader's ages ranged from 23 to 64. The education background ranged from 12 years of secondary education to graduate school studies. Occupations included business owners, health administration, education administrators, non-profit leaders, private industry, meatpacking supervisors, and leaders in agricultural related jobs.

### Research Design

This was one of the first pandemic era studies to explore the modern Latino father in the Iowa and Minnesota state-line rural tapestry and community leaders serving the Latino community. In this study a *testimonio* methodology was utilized, as it has been shown in the research to be a culturally relevant methodology when studying Latino families and their communities (Delgado Bernal et al., 2019; Rendon, 2009). Thus, the essence of the design was to learn through the fathers *testimonios* (testimonies) about their role. *Testimonios* methodology-based research has been documented in previous qualitative research to be effective with Latino communities (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). This methodology was used as a culturally responsive vehicle to listen and learn from the Latino fathers about their familial, social, and political experiences. Rendón (2009 p.3) stated “*testimonios* about writing what we know best, familia, barrio, life experiences. Through *testimonio* pedagogy we are able to hear and read each other's stories.” Lenkersdorf further shared (2008, p.12) “no matter what form a *testimonio* takes, listening is central to the pedagogical practice of *testimonio*...As a listener, another's *testimonio* is much like a gift—the listener unwraps the *testimonio* to reveal the heart of the matter.” Delgado et al. (2012) further delineates that *testimonios* differ

from other qualitative methodologies. They state: “*testimonio* differs from oral history or autobiography in that it involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experience within sociopolitical realities.” At the heart of *testimonios* is the collective suffrage if one listens and learns about one’s life, they can learn about the realities of many.”

In this study, the first author served to document the *testimonios* of the Latino fathers, Latino leaders, and ally leaders. This author served as primary researcher in the collection of the data by conducting interviews, leading data analysis, and writing the manuscript. Thus, the author was able to lend a window to better understanding the intersectionality of modern-day immigrant Latino fatherhood, rural Latino families and communities, and the daily cultural, familial, social, immigration, educational, health, and linguistic challenges that the fathers faced in providing a positive family well-being during the pandemic. Equally important through the research *testimonios*, the first author also learned and documented about the Latino fathers and their families’ resiliencies and strengths that they demonstrated within the family, school, and community context. The author was able to document the *testimonios* of the role of the Latino leader and ally leaders in an ever-changing rural context. The *testimonios* methodology in this ethnographic research project helped provide a context to develop trust and mutual respect so that the researcher could continue to learn about the respondents through follow up meetings, observations, and active participation while keeping in mind the harsh realities of the pandemic. Conducting the interviews was challenging, as they took place when social distancing, wearing face masks, and reduced interactions were important considerations for the health and safety of communities. As this research was performed during the pandemic, some interviews were conducted in unusual environments, including outside in cold weather, large meat lockers, through a window, outside with mosquitos, and in a large empty church meeting hall with no heat. These interactions demonstrated the commitment of the researcher to create a safe environment during the COVID-19 pandemic along with the importance of being culturally responsive and maintaining in-person relationships with the participants. Although this resulted in a challenging research environment, rich data was collected, and trusting relationships were formed between the primary researcher and the participants.

## Procedures

At the center of the ethnographic research design was the commitment to being culturally and linguistically responsive throughout the research process. Using the *testimonios*, the researchers were able to create a better foundation to carry out this ethnography in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota. Spending countless hours in the field and building trust with the respondents, the first author was able to better document the stories of Latino fathers and their families, Latino and other ally leaders. The primary researcher was fluent in Spanish and had over 30 years of experience working with immigrant Latino families and schools, which created a natural avenue to build a strong connection with the participants. The primary researcher was also raised in a similar rural environment and came from a Latino immigrant family. Moreover, the primary author had also served as a rural Latino leader in multiple states. These attributes enhanced the cultural capital and in turn made for a more culturally responsive study.

As part of the larger ethnography in the tradition of this methodology, the primary researcher lived and visited this region for more than a one-year period and continues

the respondents, and as result the ethnography lent itself to observations and continued follow ups. This field research was conducted in community centers, public places, restaurants, farms, businesses, educational settings, and outdoor locations.

This study also included semi-structured interviews with Latino fathers and leaders for the duration of approximately 35 minutes to one hour depending on COVID-19 conditions. Pandemic guidelines were provided by a University of Colorado Denver COVID-19 research committee. The primary researcher continued to stay updated on the guidelines and restrictions for pandemic research from the summer of 2020 to present day. Changes to interview duration, mask wearing, social distancing and other pandemic factors were made accordingly by the primary researcher throughout the study including the semi-structured interviews, follow ups, observations, and other interactions. Key to data collection was respecting respondents during the pandemic thus, the primary researcher conducted interviews and follow up interactions indoors in large spaces and outdoors. Consent was explained at the beginning of the interviews. Participants were told of the voluntary nature of the study and the fact that they could withdraw at any time. Participants including fathers and leaders were offered the opportunity to complete the interview in English or Spanish. The recruitment of the respondents was carried out in a purposive manner. Different Latino community leaders, European American leaders, and others helped identify fathers and leaders for the study. The participants were offered a grocery store gift card for participating in the study. The University of Colorado Denver Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study.

## Protocol

The semi-structured interviews were the first step of the larger ethnography that led to observations and follow-up interactions. The interview protocol included a canopy context that asked Latino fathers about their role in the family, their children's education, and their role in the community. Open-ended guided questions included content concerning family values and adjustment to migration and/or immigration, what they considered important Latino family values as fathers, family challenges and resiliency, and other Latino family dynamics. Participants were also asked how their families were adapting to living in the rural Midwest during the pandemic. All leaders were asked about their role in serving Latino fathers, families, and their communities. Specifically, Latino leaders were asked questions including how they became a leader, what it was like to be a Latino leader in a rural environment in serving families in school and community settings, what challenges and resiliency they saw as leaders, and other questions related to serving Latino fathers and their families in community and school settings. Latino leaders were also asked what they considered to be their role in serving the Latino community during the pandemic. The interview protocol was based on the primary researcher's 30 years of research and work with rural immigrant Latino families in multiple states. Also, because of the nature of the culturally responsive ethnography, respondents were asked to speak freely through their *testimonio* experiences as Latino fathers and leaders in rural northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota. The respect and reciprocity to interact led to continued interactions, which is the essence of an ethnography, even during a pandemic.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis process focused on identifying and analyzing through the culturally responsive ethnography *testimonios* stories that unfolded with the Latino fathers, Latino leaders, and ally leaders. As a backdrop to this analysis, mining of data provided insight

about the daily social, cultural, political, economic immigration, education, economic, and other realities of Latino fathers and their families. These factors were also critical to understanding the role of Latino and ally leaders. Several steps as informed by Creswell (2018) were utilized during the analysis. First, ethnography consists of different components including interviews and *testimonios*, observations, and multiple interactions with the participants, resulting in the data coming in different forms; Second, large codes and themes were identified by the researcher as a result from numerous hours of interactions with the respondents. Third, the research team led by the primary researcher eventually identified crystalized themes that surfaced from the research and the continued interaction with the participants. Finally, these themes were presented in a culturally responsive manner to help bring light to the strengths and challenges of Latino fathers and leaders in rural Latino communities. These themes were a result of the saturation of the data, as they continued to “rise to the top” in the importance of understanding the modern Latino father. Despite the pandemic, the primary author continued to communicate with the participants to further triangulate to establish trustworthiness of the data as recommended in the previous literature (Raskind et al., 2019; Renz et al., 2018).

## Findings

Key critical themes developed organically through the ethnography, the use of the *testimonios*, continued interactions with the respondents, and observations. The first theme: *los hombres no lloran* (men don’t cry) explored the role of Latino fathers in the family, understanding Latino family values and dynamics, and important characteristics of being a father. The second theme: *revisa la mochila* (inspect the backpack) emerged through the *testimonios*, which unpacked the realities that Latino fathers faced as they were involved in their children's education. The third theme: *resistencia* (resiliency): *pueblos y ranchos* (towns and ranches) illustrated the different challenges the Latino fathers faced in rural areas and the resiliency that they endured before and during the pandemic. The last theme: *maskarillas y lideres* (masks and leaders) provided a window through the *testimonios* of how Latino and ally leaders served the Latino families and communities before and during the pandemic. This theme also demonstrated the connection between Latino fathers, their families, communities, and leaders and specifically how the leaders served as a bridge through their advocacy and service to the Latino community.

### ***Los Hombres No Lloran***

Within Latino families (including the families of the first three authors of this paper) it is common to hear the words “*los hombres no lloran*” (men don’t cry) from Latino fathers. The majority of the fathers in this study had been raised in families in Mexico and Latin America where family values included *respeto* (respect), hard work, language, *educacion* (moral character), strong faith, and other familial-collectivistic beliefs. Moreover, for some traditional families, at the center of the Latino family system was the role of the father and the gender role socialization process of boys, who were educated in becoming men and possibly fathers, often with a focus on hypermasculinity rather than fatherhood. The fathers in this study focused on creating a new family dynamic, which was developed by shifting their role as Latino fathers and men. Fathers in the study maintained certain core values but also realized a modern Latino fatherhood with their children and family life. One father from Mexico who lived in northwest Iowa on the Minnesota state line and had family in both states shared his experiences about his father and how he identified his own role as a father and family

I remember in Mexico, times were different back then with fathers, men, and family. My father was physically harsh and often unforgiving with us. There were no exceptions; we were expected to be obedient. He would be considered a *machista* with the family. I have behaved in a different manner with my wife and children and large family. My children are now adults, and I am a grandfather. My wife and I make decisions together and I have raised my sons to respect their wives. Our family is very close and even though I have had to work hard in this country, I have focused on family.

Another father shared his experience about Latino fathers, family life and the Iowa context:

What I have noted in Iowa from the Latino community is that machismo does exist depending on the family. *Machismo* is a problem with family socialization, referring to if a man was raised in a family where the father was a *machista* the likelihood is that sons will be the same. My father said (referring to his own father) a child is an empty glass, you fill it (socialize) in different manners and often sons who became a *machista* it is a result of how they were raised it is what they learned from their father in the family. As a result, a man treats a woman with a lack of respect, you don't do this, you don't go because I am a man. It is a lack of social education. I do believe it is changing with the younger generations, there is more communication in the relationships. With my wife we have always focused on *el respeto* with each other, communicating and sharing the responsibilities with our children. We have tried to pass on our family values and beliefs to our children.

Both fathers' *testimonios* were congruent with the larger sample where fathers were trying to conserve positive Latino family values. On the same note, these fathers provided a window to what they were trying to accomplish, which is to move beyond the hypermasculinity and focus being on a father that is dedicated to the family's well-being. One father stated:

Well look I say the most important role of a dad is to give them good advice to a child and teach him, more than anything the respect like I said...and give them good advice to give them good roots and in the future they will be good people, it will benefit their homeland you see? We must talk to them to create good roots and be a good example as a Latino so they can say...and that that will study and have a career too, so that one day they can say, look, Latinos came here but there are people who...who turn to see Latinos and say, we're wrong about them, they didn't come to rob us, nor to violate, nor to eat someone else's food but to work and they came to better this country.

Another father reinforced the importance of being dedicated to the family with their children's events and being present and listening to them and stated:

Well I hear them, they tell me all about school, all of their experiences and of the other kids that attend, that they go to music (lessons), they don't work on Saturdays, they go to speech, I go with them because my wife works in the mornings and I in the evening, if I am not there she goes and if there is something in the morning I go to the school...when we aren't working we try to



be together talking...always trying to be there when they need me in the events, one always goes, sometimes when there is time we both go and if not one or other we are always there.

*Los testimonios* demonstrated that fathers were making efforts to challenge the traditional aspects of fatherhood within Latino families including the *machismo* where the focus was on hypermasculinity. Rather, in the *testimonios* the fathers showed that the new family dynamic would center on engagement in family life and dedication to relationships and their children. Moreover, it was not the goal of the fathers to raise their sons to be *los reyes del hogar* (the kings of the household) that showed no weakness or compromise within the family and the community. It was the objective of the fathers in this study to raise their boys to be men with good character including moral character, to center on the *familismo* and the strengths of the family. At the same time to raise their boys to become young men that demonstrated compassion, empathy, sensitivity towards their children, their spouses and to other individuals in society.

Fathers focused on aspects of academics and intelligence rather than the physical attributes of masculinity *los hombres no lloran*. Fathers did not want their sons to rely on physical strength as they had back home and in the United States. They wanted their sons to study and *lograr* (earn) a college degree in a profession they would enjoy to have a better way of life. Even more pressing for Latino fathers was how they helped chart a path for their daughters. It was clear in the *testimonios*, the follow up interactions, and the observations that fathers wanted their daughters to have a better life in the United States. Fathers reported that in some Latino families that they often had seen that women and girls were oppressed, and there was an expectation for women to be subservient in the traditional Latino family. It was apparent that the fathers were clearly trying to blaze a new trail for their daughters. Fathers focused on encouraging their daughters on education, future careers, and the importance of the family. Similarly, fathers were focusing on the goal towards egalitarian relationships with their spouse, balance of relationships within family life, raising children, family financial planning decisions, and other important family dynamics.

### Revisa La Mochila

Consistently Latino fathers shared that it was no longer enough to be a “financial provider” for the family. Rather, the participants believed that the modern Latino father had to be engaged in every aspect of their children’s lives, including family life, formation of values, activities, and education. Most fathers’ daily struggles to meet their needs in their home country resulted in a sense of urgency to be active so that their children would have a better life. Almost all fathers saw their journey of thousands of miles across multiple countries as a sacrifice that was well worth it if their children received a good education in the United States. Fathers shared that earning a higher education and career was one of the greatest contributions a Latino father could give his children. For most fathers, this signified long, difficult days of work followed by consistently being engaged in their children’s education. For most fathers, despite the fatigue, language and cultural barriers, educational discontinuity with the American education system, migration and immigration realities, economic challenges, and other factors it was well worth it to be engaged in their children’s future. One father shared how he believed in the importance of engaging in his children’s education and formation of their values:

One tries to guide one’s family on a good path, that children will not get into problems, and that they will focus on their studies and the rest is one’s

responsibility and try to talk to them. Do not get into problems because it will not just be you, you will take your Mom, your Dad and your siblings, you will take your whole family...(you) must avoid all of that. Always giving them advice, notice who you are hanging out with and who you surround yourself with. When you are in one's home and it depends on one's rules, one has to abide by them as well. Don't abandon them in your studies, because if one as a dad doesn't support his kids, the kids they will leave school to work and they start to get money and they will not want to return to school. Where I work is very hard work, and I would not want to see you there working, and I must support with what they need.

Another father who was well recognized in the Latino community shared about the role of fatherhood and education in the Latino community:

I sometimes believe that my wife and I gave our older daughter too much responsibility. We own a store, and my daughter has always been there helping since she was a child and while in high school, she has helped us run the store. Now I am not one of those Latino fathers that would guilt my daughter into staying after high school to manage the store. No, I want her to live her dreams and that is to go to college in California. We have always been supportive of her education and encouraged her to be in sports and she has been on the swim team and track. Myself and my wife attend her events. We encouraged her to volunteer and help her community and she has been volunteering for some time now. Even though I am at the store most of the day I make time to make sure I am involved in my children's lives and education. We attend my other children's events at their school and in the community. For my wife and I we don't believe that youth should be held back. Sometimes Latino youth are not encouraged and stick around here in town when they could have moved away for college or work. I will always do my best to promote my children's dreams. I do my best to listen to them so that I can help.

Yet another father reinforced the same message that most of the fathers voiced in the study, that he believed that current fathers need to be more engaged when compared to previous generations. He believed this would help children reach higher levels of education. He stated:

For me, I believe the most important role of a father is to guide my children on a positive path, and that they do better than I have done, much better than me, that they not be like what I am. I want to see my children become doctors. I have a sister who attended a university in Oregon, my other sister attended one of the University of California schools. They are my younger sisters one works for Google, and the other works for Facebook. My younger sisters have traveled, they have been to China, Japan, and Europe, they have been everywhere. They have the privilege of earning high salaries because they sacrificed in their studies. My mother did not pay anything, my sisters lived in the dorms and earned big scholarships, and I want this for my children. To be involved in your children's education, that takes time, and sometimes that is difficult because a lot of the fathers here work at the meatpacking plant and they have long shifts. In my opinion, you have to review homework, ask how things are going at school, and you need to inspect the *mochila* (backpack) and ask what did you learn today and what did you see. Take time with your children. However, there are fathers that don't inspect the *mochila*. They don't take the time to learn about how things are going at school. At night, my wife and I work with our children.

Sometimes I do it and other times she does. You must be focused on your children. I believe all professions are good, however there is a difference. What does your son do, he is a doctor. What does your son do, he works in landscaping. There is a lot of difference between the two professions economically and studies. It is important to point out that there is a difference for one that has a job and the other who has a professional career. I want my children to have a profession not a job like myself.

Fathers believed that if they were engaged in their children's education and lives, they would pave the road for their daughters and sons not only to complete their education, but to pursue a career. Some were engaged more than others—some were actively involved in coaching and leading their children's activities in the community, at church, visiting the school, and communicating with teachers and other staff about how they could be involved. Although there were different levels of participation, the common denominator was that most of fathers believed there had to be a departure from previous generations who were not as involved, believing participation was the role of the Latina mother. These fathers believed that it was critical for them to be present for their children to have a positive life in the home, at school, and in the community. Most fathers described the reality that if you are not present, one day your children will question "where were you?" It was clear from the testimonios and the other data that this was always on the mind of many fathers. Another aspect that developed from the *mochilla* theme, through the *testimonios*, follow up interactions, and observations was that fathers believed that it was long overdue that Latinos be present in high level careers such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers and other professions. It was no longer acceptable to be considered by the American society as mostly *la mano de obra* (unskilled labor force). Latino fathers believed that their role in this transition was essential.

### ***Resistencia (Resiliency) en Pueblos y Ranchos***

The theme *resistencia en pueblos y ranchos* (resiliency in towns and ranches) illustrated the challenges while at the same time the continuous efforts of fathers, who illustrated the challenges and resiliency in raising children and being involved in the community. *Los Tigres del Norte*, a legendary Mexican band and social justice advocates, has described the struggles and resiliency of immigrant Latinos in the United States through its music over the last 30 years. One lyric states "*I have spent my life exploring other lands to give my children a better life*" (Los Tigres del Norte, 2000). *Tigres'* classic ballads discuss the cultural and linguistic discontinuity, familial generational shifts, migration and immigration challenges, economic hardships, and other challenges that Latino fathers face in the United States to provide a better life for their children and their families. For fathers in the study, *Los Tigres'* message was front and center, from their work to other challenges in their lives. As one father stated about the hard work at the meatpacking plant - *puercos matan, hombres mueren todos los días* (at the meatpacking plants thousands of hogs are processed, however, men die every day). He was not only referring to the intense back breaking hardships, rather the slow withering away of the men's spirit over the long hours and years of work. However, through the *testimonios*, a familiar ballad of hope and resiliency continued to develop on the horizon. Resiliency was found in family life and their children's future. This resiliency was tested during the COVID-19 pandemic as the meatpacking communities of Iowa and Minnesota recorded some of the highest infection levels during the pandemic.

his children's future, suddenly found himself in the fight for his life. He shared:

I was in a coma for a month, in a coma, one month, and one week entirely in a coma, sleeping. That was in May, in June I was really strong, and all of the people there when I was infected, they all died, I was the only one who saved myself. A lot of people died, it's barely been a month and they stopped the therapy, they would give it to me here in the hospital, but from there they sent me to the hospital. Only two weeks to give therapy for the basics, how to shave, put my shoes on, change my clothes, but only with one hand, this hand I could not move, it was completely numb. Also, with a gadget they would put my socks on, for shoes they gave me therapy, little by little it was here that I began to recuperate more in therapy. It was there that I lost all of my savings, apart from the insurance paying their part, I had to pay my part. I paid a lot of money. A lot there, my savings of 20 years, there it all went, ambulances everything. I have healed a lot because I couldn't move, and when I was in the hospital where they gave me therapy, they would stand me up and I wouldn't last even 5 seconds standing, I would fall, I couldn't walk, not even 15 steps.

Another father discussed the struggles that his family had with COVID-19, how he lost his job, and how he had to persevere for his family. He stated:

Yes, yes, like I said, I have worked with that American in the cement, and when we contracted COVID-19, I lost the job and they no longer wanted to call me to work. I would say that I was sick and could I get help, or could they wait for me to work, and he got mad... and then he hired other people to work and he no longer called me. But thank God, one day when I was going to the store of the boss, we had no money and he gifted me a pig to eat. He [the boss] told me "No cousin, I am very worried, well I don't have people [workers]."

Well, I myself, cousin, I have never worked in a store. And well thank God, he told me "Really, cousin."

I don't have much time working there with him, I have two months there and we are putting in our best efforts.

Yet another father demonstrated that he had to be dedicated to his children regardless of what the day brought.

There are times that I would not even get to the house to take a bath, I would go to my kid's theater or I would go to football, because I know that one day they would grow up and say "Dad, where were you?"

Fathers found resiliency in the big and small things, such as being present regardless of the circumstances, and continuing to be involved in their children's lives. While the pandemic brought major challenges to fathers and their families, they found the strength to navigate through it. Other times fathers demonstrated resiliency in day-to-day challenges. This study was a testament of fathers will to prioritize family. Even though the two fathers were still recovering from the effects of the pandemic they continued to be very much involved in their children's lives. A high percentage of fathers demonstrated resiliency. Even though their workplace could be detrimental physically and mentally, they still found the drive and motivation to show dedication. They showed resiliency by not only being good fathers but good men.

## Mascarillas y Líderes

The fourth theme described the role of Latino and ally leaders with Latino families and communities throughout northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota. It described how leaders were connected to Latino fathers through the process of service and advocacy. The leaders served as a bridge to better understanding Latino fathers, their families, and their communities' needs, and therefore worked to create responsive community services.

As the primary researcher traversed the region in both states, there was a variation in leaders and the causes and issues that they dealt with daily. As discovered by the researcher, some towns were slowly moving toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was in these municipalities that the researcher found Latino and ally leaders serving Latino families and communities in the nonprofit, educational, local, and county-level government, private industry, and other sectors. The discussion of moving from a diverse community of people of color that consisted of European Americans, different types of Latinos, different types of Asian American and Pacific Islanders, and different types of Africans to more inclusion and equity was a consistent reality. Yet there were other municipalities throughout that reflected a very different case for the role of Latino and ally leaders with Latino family and communities. In towns, small cities, and villages, the “justifying our existence” in the schools, community, and the workplace segments of the rural tapestry posed difficult and challenging obstacles, including anti-immigrant sentiments for the leaders. Moreover, it was clear that the foundation of trust, empathy, and acceptance that had been built, or was in the process of being built, would be tested with the onset of the pandemic. What follows are some examples of the *testimonios* of the leaders.

One Latina leader in southern Minnesota who served Latino youth, families, and the community explained how even though her community was diverse, there were still daily struggles to be respected. She reflected on her experiences:

I arrived here while I was still in high school and the town was already diverse with different Latinos, Asians, and Africans; however, very few people were advocating for diversity. For me, it started at the basic level of families asking me to translate and serve as an interpreter to eventually running youth programs and serving as an activist for Latino immigrant rights. I currently run youth support programs that help with academics and life realities of our youth. For our youth, for a long time, they had no role models or anyone representing them. Most Latino fathers and mothers were working at the meatpacking plant, and they weren't seen as good jobs. I made myself available. I would attend different family, church, and community events. If the youth were playing in a volleyball game at the high school, I was there to support them. Over time, the youth have grown and now they help me in the community. Most of the work in Greater Minnesota had been done in the Twin Cities, and no one was working with Latino families here. I am one of the first over the last 25 years to speak out for the Latino families and other diverse families. I have organized marches to advocate for the immigrant families and youth in our community and other causes. Currently I am advocating for the workers at the meatpacking plant and their rights because of the pandemic. We try to help as much as we can.

This leader's hard work was recognized by the Latino families and youth of the community. It was quite clear that the community respected her and were appreciative of her contributions. She had worked at one of the local factories as a young woman,

and she considered southern Minnesota to be her home. For her, the pandemic brought devastating outcomes, as she lost family members and close friends. The meatpacking plant and other agriculture-based industries approached the rights and health of the workers, which were mostly immigrants, with little regard. As a result, she advocated every day for their rights and their health.

One of the ally leaders in Iowa discussed her perspective and stated:

I am not fluent in Spanish; however, I am always trying to communicate with the Latino families and making every effort to let them know that they are not only welcomed in all of our schools, but also that we want to hear their voice. We are always trying to make the district more inclusive for all the families and their children. We continue to encourage the Latino youth and diverse students to be active and promote the importance of our diversity, which is a strength. I meet with all the youth and encourage them to be active and help lead.

This leader had over the years worked in different schools and communities in northwest Iowa and had seen how some of the schools were developing positive partnerships with Latino family, school, and community partnerships, while other communities continued to struggle with cultural discontinuity and overall acceptance of diverse families. Thus, she was making every effort in her school district to promote the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. She often met with Latino fathers and their families to discuss how the district could better serve the Latino community. She regularly met with the district leaders to discuss important issues, and the district leadership also supported her efforts. For her, the school should go beyond the school building; rather, it should be an active voice in the community.

For the primary researcher the goal was to make every effort to learn from the leaders' *testimonios* and how they served. One of the religious leaders shared the following about the pandemic and leading:

My role as the minister is to serve my congregation. I communicate with Latino fathers and their families every day. The pandemic did not change this; we kept our doors open. I delivered food to families, met families here at church, met over the phone and online. We provided the families with information and connected them to medical professionals and other people who could help. We did everything to help the families during these hard times. Some of our families had COVID, and we were here to serve, as this is what we are supposed to do.

Another Latina leader shared about her service to Latino families and communities and other diverse families:

I coordinate the distribution of clothes, food, and other products to different families in need. We have a high number of Latino families come to our center for different resources. My coworker and I concentrate on listening to the families and asking them how we can help them. We provide them information in Spanish about other resources in our community. Sometimes people judge the families for asking for help and stereotype that only Latinos come to our center, which is not the case, as we see all the different cultures ask for help and services. This was before and during the pandemic. It was difficult during the pandemic; however, the people in this community have continued to help others in need through

donations and volunteering.

For the primary researcher, learning about the challenges that the Iowa and southern Minnesota Latino and ally leaders faced daily in serving Latino families provided a better understanding of their struggles. The Latino leaders believed it their duty to try to make a difference for future generations, as a high percentage of them did not grow up with Latino leaders advocating for them and their families and they rarely met leaders of color who were serving the larger culturally diverse community. Thus, even though at times they felt overwhelmed with serving in rural Iowa and Minnesota, they continued with their cause, as they believed it would help especially in promoting Latinos and education. Moreover, for most of the Latino and ally leaders, their *testimonios* illuminated a drive for social justice in serving Latino families regardless of cause. This was in the face of discrimination at different levels and in some communities a high anti-immigrant environment. The leaders also reported, depending on the community, that there was the continued movement of collaboration and a sense of openness towards diversity. This “hope for the future” was tested during the pandemic, as the Latino leaders were asked to further advocate for the Latino families in a different manner, including providing life-saving health information and spiritual and religious guidance, helping identify economic assistance, and identifying resources for needs. Many ally leaders believed that their major role in the changing rural tapestry was their effort to partner with diverse families and communities to promote equity and inclusion.

## Discussion

Our understanding of fatherhood among culturally diverse families has continued to expand since the early work of John McAdoo in the 1990s, which explored the intersectionality of fatherhood and masculinity, and resulted in the establishment of fatherhood and fathering peer reviewed journals. However, specific research related to diverse Latino fathers and their roles in the family has not been a major topic in the literature. More recent research has focused on Latino fathers and their role in the health of their children and family (Lindsay et al., 2021; Villar et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). The current study begins to fill the gap in the literature as it relates to the role of Latino fatherhood in family-school-community partnerships, which has received limited attention within the literature. It also contributes by understanding *padres* (fathers) in the rural space, which continues to be under-researched.

The current study also addresses the lack of literature using a culturally responsive ethnography and *testimonios* methodologies, follow-up interactions, and observations. As a result, four key themes emerged from the data. The theme *los hombres no lloran* explored and deconstructed the elements of traditional *machismo* and *machista* with the active role of fatherhood. Almost all the fathers clearly did not want to be considered *machistas* as they described their role in family relations. Rather, their engagement was fluid in serving their children, their spouse, and the larger community. For a father to consider himself to be a man of good character, it was essential for him to blend the traditional *familismo* and *respeto* to cultivate the new family dynamic. This embodied a lens that brings more of the focus of parenting rather than masculinity. Fathers’ daily realities were daunting because of social, economic, and cultural challenges; however, they saw being a dedicated father a duty. The *antiguo* (old) belief is that fatherhood should be grounded in showing no weakness and no compromise, known as *los hombres no lloran*. On the contrary, these fathers focused on being present, listening, caring, and mutual respect, which would have been in the traditional view. Some research with Latino fathers has

explored alternative egalitarian masculinities. Research has identified a type of healthy Latino masculinity called “*caballerismo*”, which is embodied by a pattern of more gentlemanly, respectful, and family-protective behaviors (Hendy et al., 2021). This has been shown in previous research with more highly educated Latino men (Hendy et al., 2021); however, this study demonstrated that *caballerismo* is present in working-class men. Moreover, this study further contributes to the literature, as this has rarely been demonstrated in the rural Midwest.

Another key finding, *revisa la mochila*, was truly expressed in the *testimonios* of the fathers. Researchers found that regardless of their realities, which included long work hours, fathers were active in their children’s education through involvement at school and other activities. While some research has been conducted to explore the role of the Latino father in their children’s education, the literature continues to be limited, and almost no research has been published about the rural space during the pandemic.

The third theme to emerge focused on resiliency in the lives of Latino fathers, who have historically faced many challenges, which was exacerbated by the pandemic. *La resistencia* was demonstrated in the father’s full engagement in their families’ lives regardless of their mental and physical challenges. This research furthers the body of work on Latino fathers as it highlights the multidimensionality of their resiliency and moves the conversation beyond the hard-working Latino father.

The final theme, *mascarillas y lideres*, illustrates the critical importance of the role of Latino and ally leaders in the rural United States. In this study, the *lideres* were primarily Latinas, who embraced this role in a way that encompassed a drive to not only support but empower the Latino community. These *lideres* came from within and outside the Latino community, and they saw the need for the growing Latino community to *superar la mano de obra* (rise beyond the unskilled laborer). Working-class Latino families had largely participated in manual labor and service roles. Their goal, however, was for the next generation to excel into more professional roles and leadership within the broader community. The pandemic had disproportionately negative effects on Latino immigrant families in rural communities, and these *lideres* were in many cases overwhelmed. In some communities, Latinos faced a backlash in response to the stressors of the pandemic, and in others *lideres* were already in place, working with Latino families to help them navigate its challenges. In these cases, Latino leaders and their allies provided a lifeline for the Latino community, and ally leaders often advocated for inclusion, equity, and empathy.

### Strengths and Future Research

A primary strength of the current study was the focus on largely working-class Latino fathers and families in rural areas that have received limited empirical attention. The study also used multiple types of qualitative inquiry including the larger ethnography, *testimonios*, follow-up interactions, and observations which provide a platform to gather rich data. Another strength was the cultural capital that the first three authors brought. As indigenous insiders with a combined over 50 years of experience of working with and researching Latino families and communities, the authors were able develop trust and elicit responses that were authentic from a community that has been historically silenced and ignored. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we were able to conduct in-person ethnographic research to document the experiences of one of the populations most severely impacted by the pandemic, and it was conducted in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner.



There are limitations to the current study. First, while we were able to conduct in-person ethnographic observation and interviews despite the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, it is likely that we were not able to collect information from families most affected by the pandemic or those that simply did not feel comfortable engaging due to their own protective protocols to avoid COVID-19. Second, Latino and immigrant families in the current study were largely from Mexico and Central America, and their experiences may not be reflective of the larger Latino diaspora throughout the United States. Finally, the experiences shared by families here may not be representative of other rural communities throughout the Midwest given the vast social, economic, and demographic variation across rural communities where growth is being driven by immigrant and Latino populations (Mathema, Svajlenka, & Hermann, 2018).

While the current study examined the experiences of Latino fathers and families in rural communities along the Iowa and Minnesota border, additional research is needed to examine these groups in emerging immigrant communities. Due to the unprecedented factors created by the pandemic, there were unique challenges to conducting in-person ethnographic research, limiting the ability to connect with the most vulnerable individuals and families. Future research should continue to reach out to the marginalized communities that have faced the most severe consequences of the pandemic, in particular to understand the ways in which they have navigated these challenges. Our current study has touched on the need for intersectional research on Latino fatherhood and the uniqueness of having Latino fathers discuss their beliefs surrounding fatherhood and family, and the ways in which *lideres* and allies who work in the community play a critical role in bridging the Latino and broader communities. Our future research will build on the emergent themes from the current study.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Latino fathers in their children's family life and educational experiences in northwest Iowa and southern Minnesota. The study also explored the role of rural Latino and ally leaders as the bridge and connection to serving Latino fathers and their families and communities. The study was important and relevant to the literature as it was one of the first to explore in the northern rural Midwest how Latino fathers were breaking away from hypermasculinity to modern fatherhood. These are family relations that have often not been investigated, and it is important to understand the modern Latino father role within family systems, school systems, and other social systems. Furthermore, this study was among the first to understand Latino fathers and family resiliency before and during the challenges of the pandemic in the rural north. Of relevance was also the connection and role of rural leaders and how they served and worked with Latino fathers, their families, and communities. This type of research is scarce and important to better serve and provide outreach to Latino families in rural America. Yet another relevant aspect of the study was the use of testimonios methodologies in understanding rural Latino fatherhood. Not only was this a culturally relevant method, but this was the first of its kind research in the United States.

Through the *testimonios*, we learned that the plight of culturally diverse fathers is often not understood in this country. For the primary researcher "chasing wind turbines" while listening to Los Tigres del Norte and George Strait had been his mission, and although he did not know what he would find on the state line of Iowa and Minnesota, the mission was to continue to chase despite the dangers of the pandemic. What the researcher found was that "hope is fluid" and that Latino fathers, despite daily obstacles that

included the pandemic, would tirelessly work to be better fathers for their children. In essence, fathers were beacons of hope shining on the past positive traditions and values that they learned from their fathers, while turning away from negativity. This study demonstrated that regardless of a father's economic, social, cultural realities, he can be there for his children and *revisar la mochila* (inspect the backpack), listen, and make family life the essence of importance. This study demonstrated that there is hope in the rural United States, where Latino fathers and leaders are working to serve the often-underrepresented Latino community. Through the *testimonios*, it also showed that the rural tapestry can move toward equity, inclusion, and diversity of all families. In summary, this study illuminated that through the ethnography, Latino fathers were sometimes running and other times walking and climbing to be better men.

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