Sibling Relationship Quality in Emerging Adulthood:
A Phenomenological Study of Latinx College Students

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological research examined Latinx college students' sibling relationships in emerging adulthood. Researchers developed and employed a coding schema based on the work of Buhrmester and Furman (1987) to code for relationship quality. A thematic analysis revealed differences in relationship quality based on participants' culture identity.

INTRODUCTION

The project will qualitatively examine Latinx college students' concepts of sibling relationships. Specifically, this research project has four main purposes:

1. To better understand the nature of Latinx college students' concepts of sibling relationships during the period of emerging adulthood.
2. To paint a qualitative picture of sibling relationships from their early memories through emerging adulthood.
3. To analyze and better understand early relationship quality in emerging adulthood
4. To examine and contextualize the nature and relevance of sibling relationships of Latinx college students in emerging adulthood.

The current study examined the distinct sibling relationships of Latinx college students and explored the unique characteristics of Latinx culture through qualitative inquiry. The present research design analyzed thematic themes centering on the concept that Latinx culture is influential in the participants' sibling relationships during the emerging adulthood, as well as in their personal lives.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

Participants were seven college students ranging from ages 18-21 with multiple gender identities (four women, two men, and one non-binary person) who all self-identified as Latinx with at least one sibling. Participants were recruited through the State University of New York at Geneseo-specific outlets, such as the class year email listservs (e.g., Class of 2020), the Latinx Student Association, and the Access Opportunity Programs. An electronic questionnaire asking for students' demographic information was required prior to eligible participant selection. The survey asked a series of questions pertaining to the individual's perception of how in touch they, their parents, and their siblings are with their Latinx culture. Two groups were organized by rigorous criteria to explore potential differences in sibling relationships across individuals who expressed differing levels of connectedness to the Latinx culture. Researchers aimed to diminish feelings of disenfranchisement among participants who disclosed being less in touch with Latinx culture compared to their peers. Prior to video recording, participants were classified into two groups: one Low group (three individuals) and one High group (four individuals). Whereas students in the Low group self-disclosed feeling that they, and their immediate family members, were less in touch with Latinx culture, those in the High group felt that they, and the family members around them, were more in touch with their Latinx culture.

Individual Interview Questions

- What does Latinx culture mean to you?
- Did your parents or siblings act as role models to help maintain or strengthen your understanding of your culture?
- What do you think your parents' thoughts are on sibling relationships in your culture? (think about changing the wording of the question)
- How have your parents affected your relationship with your siblings?
- Could you tell me about how your cultural values changed since you moved to America?
- Can you elaborate on your childhood and whether or not you had a different experience compared to your siblings?
- Who do you feel parented you the most? And why do feel this way?
- What roles have your siblings specifically played in your life?

Data Collection and Preparation

At the time of recruitment, participants were given a demographics survey on information about their siblings and their/family's cultural background. At the arrival, participants were assigned an ID number. The ID number maintained confidentiality and was based off the year of their recruitment and their participant number.

Prior to the individual and group interview sessions, participants were informed about what the session would entail, including audio and video recording. The individuals signed consent forms regarding any personal and audiovisual data related to them. It was made clear that signing was voluntary and consent and/or involvement may be rescinded at any time with no consequences, whether it be before, during, or after the conclusion of the individual interviews.

The individual and group interviews were held by at least five research assistants. The researchers set up the camera to clearly see each participant's face. One researcher acted as a mediator who would read the questions, provide typed versions of each respective question for easy viewing, follow conversation, and ask follow-up questions while the other researcher took notes and analytical memos. At the end of the session, each participant was monetarily compensated with a gift card.

This procedure was standardized and was reran for every interview. All individual interviews lasted for a maximum of an hour and a half. The video and audio recordings of the individual and group interviews were digitized then transcribed. The transcripts and audiovisual data was coded into in-vivo and exploratory codes in three cycles by the same five researchers. These codes were analyzed and then organized into different thematic categories. Analytical memos from the sessions were also analyzed alongside the transcripts for triangulation credibility purposes.
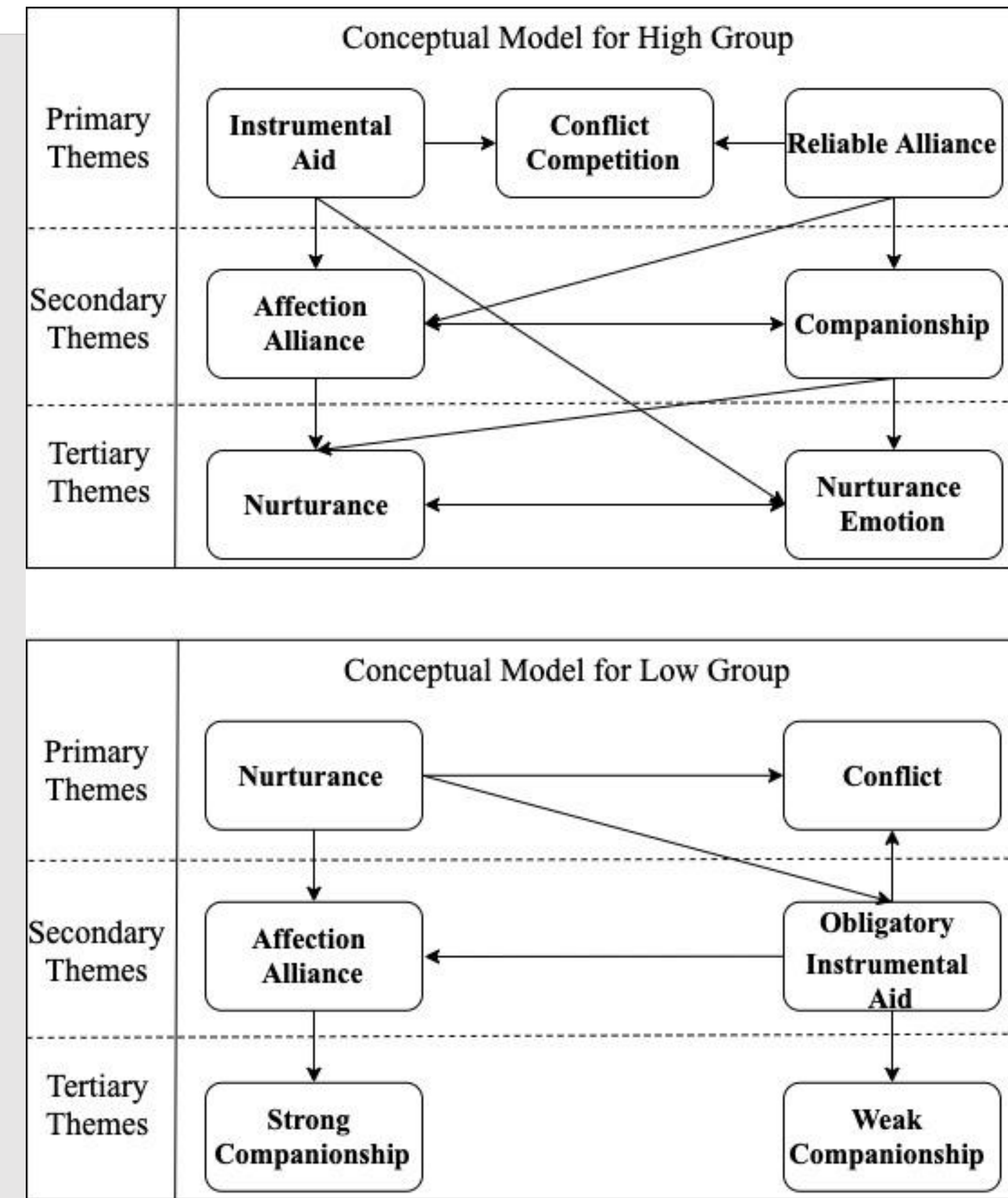

Figure 1. Group-specific conceptual models representing the emergent themes from the high and low cultural groups.

MATERIALS AND METHODS (cont'd)

Data Analysis

The methodological approach for the present study was qualitative interpretive phenomenology (Benner, 1994). The approach of this study used the process for thematic analysis posited by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a structure, in which to situate the inquiry of this present research. The specific analytic approach employed in this study was thematic analysis.

Coding Procedure

Phase 1: Each individual and group (e.g. high, low) interview transcript was coded and it was decided that we should attempt to capture some of the participant's voices in the study; thus, initial coding was dropped and the first-cycle coding was performed using the in-vivo coding method. This was a calculated decision made in order to allow the participants to tell the researchers what their sibling relationships meant to them and how they were perceiving the relationship dynamics.

Phase 2: Prior to adding a layer of in-vivo coding to the primary data set, the research team developed a coding schema based on the work of Buhrmester and Furman (1987). This coding schema focused on identifying data and capturing in vivo codes based on the following seven criteria: Companionship, Conflict, Instrumental Aid, Intimate Disclosure, Nurturance, Affection Alliance, Reliable Alliance.

Phase 3: Following the first cycle coding methods, and in following the guidelines for Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006, pp. 86-93) all of the codes were collated into "potential themes," the researchers refer to this collated group as thematic categories.

Phase 4: Three thematic categories (two primary and one secondary) that emerged from the codes included "the role of sibling responsibilities"; "age difference"; and "strong maternal roles." The thematic categories were constructed during group sessions in which a minimum of three researchers evaluated and sorted codes into evolving categories. This was done to pull together and meaningfully group data into units of analysis that would inform hierarchical theme-building.

Phase 5: Thematic categories from all interviews were evaluated individually by magnitude and relevance to the proposed research question in order to uncover salient themes. Themes that consistently emerged across all interviews were then compiled into one dataset. The most prominent of those were then able to be visualized in a conceptual model.

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RESULTS

Cultural High Group:
Primary Theme #1 : Reliable Alliance
Claim: Latinx siblings value maintaining familial relationships despite hardships.
- "The relationship I have with my sister like I can talk to her at any time no matter how rough situations are." (high, p.13)
- "I can't imagine what my life would be without having her in there as like my sister or someone there to talk to whenever I need help" (high, p. 21)

Primary Theme #2 : Instrumental AID
Claim: In Latinx families, older siblings have an influence on how participants understand their Latinx culture/identity.
- "Her (older sister) specifically moving here I think helps me really understand my cultural identity and values more." (high, p. 22)
- "It's a lot of talk about what is our culture, what it means to us and kind of like in a way, maybe because my sister feels like I'm abit more American, she always tries to remind me of who I am." (high, p.9)

Cultural Low Group:
Primary Theme #1: Nurturance
Claim: When it comes to nurturance, and taking care of their siblings, Latinx older siblings are expected to act as a role model by holding themselves to a higher standard.
- "I have to be a better person, do better things cause like he can then follow into that like go down the rabbit hole, things that are bad." (low, pg. 10)
- "I had to act a certain way so my brother could follow into my footsteps, like I couldn't do certain things, Cause then he would do them"' (low, pg. 33)

Primary Theme #2: Conflict
Claim: Competition between Latinx siblings fosters a dynamic climate of social and physical conflict within their relationships.
- "when my grades finally dipped below my sister's, that sort of like power dynamic shift, that was a lot, she used it as like a weak point to like ahh you're the one who fell down and I'm like wow wow that's horrible to say." (low, pg. 27)
- "She was not like a really supporter or enduring figure because it was very back and forth, bipolar like within the same day we'd be like playing around and joking and then like the it would just be very like wait wait wait we're not like kidding we're about to fight and get physical like detachment like I'm gonna go" (low, pg. 32)

Our results suggest that Latinx siblings rely on each other for mutual support and aid. In particular, college students who are more in touch with Latinx culture (cultural high group) emphasized the importance of a long-lasting bond with their siblings and described their relationships with their siblings as one that nurtures their own identity with Latinx culture and values. College students who are less in touch with Latinx culture (cultural low group) described their duty to serve as role models for their younger siblings, and sometimes this role strained or complexified their relationship with their siblings. These differences are reflected in the emergent primary themes between each group, which is supported by in-vivo quotes that differentiated the cultural high and cultural low groups and their experiences.

CREDIBILITY MEASURES

Negative Case Selection. During the final stages of the thematic analysis, the researchers began to label these cases within the data set and attached them to burgeoning themes in order to establish credibility of the data.
- "Only have a tight relationship with three of my siblings compared to all five of 'em. I dont know the oldest one." (High, p.10)
- "Um I feel like there was never Competition at all because I like always thought I was just like less so I was like th-like I never felt the need to compete." (high, p.17)
- "I think she sees me as an adult and that's why she doesn't really like me that much." (low, pg. 6)
- "I'm still tryna tutor her through the college process because I do have love for her and care for her" (low, p. 31)

DISCUSSION

In analyzing the cultural high group, it was revealed that reliable alliance and instrumental aid played a significant role in determining the quality of sibling relationships amongst Latinx adolescents. One can see how reliable alliance, a primary theme, is significant when it comes to Latinx siblings maintaining familial relationships despite the challenges they may face. Instrumental AID, the second primary theme, has a significant impact when dealing with older Latinx siblings and how they affect our participants' understanding of their cultural identity.

In analyzing the cultural low group, nurturance and conflict seemed to impact Latinx sibling relationships. It was seen that older siblings felt the need to act as a role model, and hold themselves to a higher standard through nurturance. When it came to conflict, it was clear that competition played a role in social and/or physical altercations between Latinx siblings.

Both of the cultural groups shared similar themes. However, based on their cultural identity, each factor that played a role in the quality of Latinx sibling relationships differed. For example, while nurturance came up within both the cultural high and the cultural low group, it plays a more important role within the cultural low group compared to the cultural high group. Therefore, while similar factors may impact the quality of Latinx sibling relationships, cultural identity affects how impactful those factors are within the relationship.

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