

Fatherwork in the Crossfire: Chicano Teen Fathers Struggling to “Take Care of Business”

Katherine Fennelly and Helga Leitner

Working Paper No. 58

November 2002

ABSTRACT

This study explored how young Chicano fathers perceived fatherhood, constructed the meaning of fatherwork, and how fatherwork was influenced by structural and cultural forces. This paper relies on grounded theory techniques and in-depth interviews of thirteen informants who work with Latino families and children. The author found that not all teen fathers were negligible in their children's lives -- some contributed meaningfully and dutifully to their children's lives. Fatherhood for these young men was shaped by their perceptions of fatherhood, which in turn influenced their fatherwork.

Mothers influenced their sons' new role as fathers, especially in cases where their sons had no meaningful and/or positive relationships with their own fathers. Finally, fathers had a desire to be involved in their children's lives in meaningful ways and made many important and valuable contributions to the lives of their children and families. Those contributions were best understood within cultural and structural contexts. Some of the stories in this study represent extreme circumstances marked by poverty, crime, violence, drug abuse, and lack of educational, health, and employment resources. These conditions have not been endemic to Chicano or Latino communities, but have become increasingly part of the landscape of urban centers that have been hardest hit by the restructuring of the Midwest's economy.