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Latino LGBQ Young Adults' Coming-Out Experiences

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LATINO LGBQ YOUNG ADULTS’ COMING-OUT EXPERIENCES

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Bachelor of Arts – Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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Department of Couple and Family Therapy
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The Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

There is limited research on Latino LGBQ individuals and their coming-out experiences. To understand the coming out process of Latino LGBQ individuals, interviews were conducted with 10 Latino LGBQ young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. Using Moustakas (1994) phenomenological approach, six themes derived from the study: (a) The disclosure process impacts family closeness and distance, (b) Latino LGBQ individuals’ family members enter a state of disbelief about their sexual orientation, (c) control of disclosure influences Latino LGBQ young adults’ perception of their coming-out experience, (d) the experience of coming-out for Latino LGBQ individuals is influenced by the cultural value of religion, (e) the experience of coming-out for Latino LGBQ individuals is influenced by the cultural value of traditional gender roles, and (f) disclosure of sexual identity is a continuous process for Latino LGBQ individuals. Clinical implications and areas for future research are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Latino population continues to increase in the United States. According to the United States Census Bureau (2016), the Latino population reached 56.6 million in July of 2015, which is a 1.2 million or 2.2 percent increase since July of 2014. With the increase of Latinos in the United States, the number of Latinos who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer, LGBQ, increases as well. Fifteen percent of the LGBQ population in the United States identify as Latino (“Same-sex Couple”, 2016). Although the number of Latinos who identify as LGBQ is high, there have been a limited number of studies that focus on Latinos who identify as LGBQ. Little is known about how Latino LGBQ individuals experience the process of disclosing their sexual orientation to their family members.

Studies on LGBQ individuals show that there are mental health disparities between LGBQ individuals and their heterosexual counterparts (D’Augelli, 2006; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Shilo & Savaya, 2011). LGBQ individuals experience higher rates of mental distress, suicide ideation, and substance abuse due to negative societal responses (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Although studies have not been conducted solely on Latino LGBQ individuals, research shows that racial minority LGBQ individuals encounter mental health issues (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004). Latino LGBQ individuals may encounter higher levels of mental distress than other minorities due to the emphasis placed on the Latino cultural values of familism, or family loyalty, (Campos, Rojas-Perez, & Guardino, 2016), traditional gender roles (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006) and religiosity (Wolfinger, Wilcox, Hernandez, 2010). Given the cultural context and the unique experiences of Latino LGBQ individuals, the development of a sexual identity model that addresses these issues is relevant, timely and useful. To begin to address these gaps in the literature, the present study aims to
understand the disclosure experiences of Latino LGBQ young adults and its effects on sexual identity development.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Latino Population in the United States

The Oxford online dictionary defines the term Latino as “a person of Latin American descent”. In July of 2015 there were approximately 56.6 million Latinos living in the United States (U.S Census Bureau, 2016). Although the United States Census Bureau has not released an approximate number for 2016, it can be inferred that the number of Latinos living in the United States has increased since 2015; the Latino population increased by approximately 1.2 million individuals from 2014 to 2015.

In 2016, the Pew Research Institute released percentages for 2014 for the ten states with the largest Latino population. The five states with the largest Latino population, in rank order, include New Mexico (48% of total population), California (39% of total population), Texas (39% of total population), Arizona (31% of total population), and Nevada (28% of total population). Florida, Colorado, New Jersey, New York, and Illinois were also among the ten states with the largest Latino population. Along with releasing the ten states with the largest Latino population, the Pew Research Institute also released the top 40 counties with the largest Latino population growth. Clark County, Nevada was ranked sixteenth among the 40 counties in 2014. Other counties included Los Angeles County, California; Harris County, Texas; Maricopa County, Arizona; Cook County, Illinois; Bronx County, New York; and Miami-Dade County, Florida.

The Importance of Cultural Competency in Mental Health Treatment

Given that the Latino population is increasing in the United States, it is important that marriage and family therapists (MFTs) are culturally competent to serve this population (Bean, Perry, & Bedell, 2001). To provide culturally competent care, marriage and family therapists
must engage in the following: (a) acknowledge the importance of culture, (b) incorporate culture to their treatment, (c) assess the intersectionality of cultures, (d) gain awareness of the cultural differences between themselves and their clients, (e) acquire cultural knowledge, and (f) adapt their interventions to meet clients’ cultural needs (Betancourt et al., 2003).

There are various skills that marriage and family therapists can engage in to become culturally competent therapists. When beginning treatment with individuals from other cultures, MFTs should take a “not-knowing” stance; MFTs should approach their clients with humility and curiosity (Goolishian & Anderson, 1990). Odell et al. (1994) explain that marriage and family therapists should become aware of their ethnocentricities or cultural biases. Gaining awareness of these cultural biases can be the difference between successful and unsuccessful treatment outcomes. One of the most important skills that marriage and family therapists should acquire to be effective therapists is the skill of flexibility and openness (L’Abate, 1997). MFTs willingness to adapt their treatment and practice to include different cultures leads to culturally competent treatment (L’Abate, 1997).

It is important to note that being a culturally competent therapist is not a given task; it is a skilled that is learned (Odell et al., 1994). MFTs who plan to serve the Latino LGBQ community and be culturally competent should gain awareness of the intersectionality of Latino LGBQ individuals’ two identities: ethnicity and sexual orientation (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013) and the role that these play in their everyday lives. Acquiring knowledge about the Latino LGBQ community will allow MFTs to better serve the Latino LGBQ community.

Cultural Values of Latino Community Living in the United States

**Familism.** The Latino community stresses the importance of family unit, otherwise known as the concept of familism (Campos et al., 2016; Zea, Quezada, Belgrave, 1994).
According to Miranda, Frevert, and Kern (1998), the family is the center of Latin culture and a Latino’s sense of self. Loyalty to family is one of the most important Latino cultural values. The concept of familism is described as having three components: (a) family obligations, or the perceived obligation to provide material and emotional support to family members, (b) perceived support, or the perception of family members as a reliable source of help and support, and (c) family members who serve as behavioral and attitudinal role models (Sabogal, Marino, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Because of the concept of familism, Latinos have a greater willingness to “engage in behaviors that fulfill family obligations and have a preferred reliance on family members as sources of social support” (Campos et al., 2016, p. 82; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Sabogal et al., 1987; Triandis, Marin, Betancourt, Lisansky, & Chang, 1982). “Familism values emphasize interdependent family relationships that are warm, close, supportive, and prioritize the relationship before the self (Campos et al., 2016, p. 82; Campos, Ullman, Aguilera, & Dunkel-Schetter, 2014). Some research indicates that the cultural emphasis on the family may be detrimental to the Latino individual’s mental health (Fuligni et al., 2009; Koerner & Shirai, 2012; Zayas & Pilat, 2008; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). The concept of familism is associated with higher levels of psychological distress (Schwartz et al., 2010).

**Gender roles expectations.**

*Machismo.* The Latino culture holds the ideal that men are the most influential beings in the family (Mendez-Villarubia & LaBruzza, 1994; Miranda et al., 2006). The concept of machismo emphasizes the importance of men possessing attributes socially viewed as masculine such as “physical courage, virility, domination of women, and aggressiveness” (Miranda et al., 2006, p. 270). Latino men are also expected to exercise control over all decisions that may affect
their wives or partners and their families (Miranda et al., 2006, p. 270). Because of the concept of machismo, the exercise of control may be viewed as authoritarian and dominating. However, the expectation is a way of men caring for the well-being of their family in the Latino culture. Men hold the responsibility of meeting their family’s needs and fulfilling this role is very important in Latino culture (Mendez-Villarubia & LaBruzza, 1994; & Miranda et al., 2006).

**Marianismo.** In Latino culture, “the traditional role of the Latina women is child-rearing, attending to the primary needs of the family and home, and meeting the needs of the husband or partner” (Miranda et al., 2006, p. 270; Mendez-Villarubia & LaBruzza, 1994). In addition, Latina women are also expected to be honorable and dedicated (Miranda et al., 2006). The concept of marianismo stems from religion and is an admiration for the virtues of the Virgin Mary (Miranda et al., 2006). In other words, the identify formation of Latino women is heavily influenced by religion and the desire to possess characteristics similar to that of the Virgin Mary, such as self-sacrifice (Ramirez, 1990).

**Religion.** According to Wolfinger et al. (2009), most Latinos in the United States are religious. A recent study on Latinos and religion concluded that 70 percent of Latinos identify as Catholic and 23 percent identify as Protestant (Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2005).

Regarding Catholic religious views, research suggests that there are two groups in the religion that Latinos identify closely with: observant Latino Catholics and Progressive Catholics (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011). Research indicates that observant Latino Catholics, or those who attend Mass regularly, are more likely to follow the Catholic teachings (Ellison et al., 2011). The Catholic religion holds the belief that a marriage is a sacred bond between a man and a woman. The rationale behind this religious belief is that to uphold God’s desire for new life, the main purpose of marriage is procreation (Ellison et al., 2011). Recently, the concept of
Progressive Catholics has developed in the Catholic religion. Progressive Catholics “stress the gracious, communitarian thrust of Catholic social teaching over the focus on individual moral and sexual deportment that has been reemphasized by the Vatican in recent years (D’Antonio, 2007; Ellison et al., 2011, p. 38). In other words, Progressive Catholics hold more liberal religious attitudes. Because of these liberal religious attitudes, Progressive Catholics have a more accepting view of homosexuality and same-sex marriages than observant Latino Catholics (Ellison et al., 2011).

Twenty three percent of Latinos in the United States also identify with the Protestant religion. Like the Catholic religion, the Protestant religion holds certain beliefs about homosexuality and same-sex marriages. Biblically, marriages should be between a man and a woman. The idea that the purpose of marriage is to procreate is a view that the Protestant religion also possesses. In addition, the Protestant religion also holds the belief that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice and that it is not necessarily caused by genetics or biological factors (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Whitehead, 2010). In other words, the religion believes that those who engage in homosexual behaviors are willingly choosing to live a life of sin.

The cultural values placed on familism, traditional gender roles, and religiosity have an influence on the coming-out process for Latino LGBQ individuals. To better understand the influence of these cultural values, it is important to understand the coming-out process and the research on the coming-out process.

**Coming-Out Process for LGBQ Individuals**

For LGBQ individuals, the development and the integration of their sexual identity is known as the coming-out process (Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001). During the coming-out process, LGBQ individuals begin to adjust to their sexual orientation in a culture
where being heterosexual is the norm (Rosario et al., 2000). Research conducted on the process identified four dimensions that help in understanding adaptational and health-related behaviors: sexual identity, involvement in LGBQ activities, attitudes towards homosexuality, and disclosure of sexual identity to others (Cass, 1979; Cox & Gallois, 1996; Rosario et al., 2001; Troiden, 1989).

The act of disclosing sexual identity to one’s family and friends is often difficult. Research indicates that disclosing to family, especially parents, is often the most challenging (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2003). The perceived fears and negative consequences that occur make disclosure to family difficult (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). Research on parental reactions during disclosure indicate that parental reactions are often negative (Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Unsupportive parental reactions negatively affect LGBQ individuals’ mental and behavioral health (Willoughby, Doty, & Malik, 2008). LGBQ individuals who experience negative parental reactions “have elevated levels of suicidal ideation and attempts, depression, drug use, and unprotected sex” (Rothman, Sullivan, Keyes, & Boehmer, 2012, p. 188; Ryan et al., 2009).

**Sexual identity models.** Several models for sexual identity have been developed, but very few take into consideration the intersection of sexual identity and cultural identity (Eliason, 1996). Because a sexual identity model that discusses the intersection of cultural identity has not yet been developed, a model that focuses solely on Latino LGBQ individuals and their disclosure process is lacking (Eliason, 1996). Troiden’s Model (1988) is one of the few, if not the only model, that discusses the influence of culture on sexual identity development.

**Troiden (1988) Model.** Troiden’s sexual identity model is based on three assumptions: (a) people are born into a state of polymorphous perversity, (b) sexual preference develops
according to cultural scripts, and (c) sexual scripts are defined as norms and values regarding sexuality (Eliason, 1996; Troiden, 1988). Sexual scripts differ depending on culture and are learned in childhood and adolescence. They determine what behaviors are acceptable and how, when, and where they are appropriate (Eliason, 1996).

After reviewing the various coming-out models, Troiden developed his own model that represents both lesbian and gay development. He emphasizes that his model is not linear; individuals can move back and forth through stages (Eliason, 1996; Troiden, 1988). The model includes the following four stages: sensitization, confusion, identity assumption, and commitment.

The sensitization stage usually begins before puberty and the individual may consider him/herself as heterosexual. During this stage, the individual may have some experiences that lead to him/her feeling different. Usually the experiences that the individual encounters are gender-related experiences (Eliason, 1996, Troiden, 1988).

The individual considers the possibility of being homosexual in the confusion stage. The confusion stage is influenced by social stigma and the lack of information. The stigma that the individual encounters due to cultural norms and values usually prevents the individual from openly discussing his/her feelings or sexual experiences with others. To reduce the feeling of confusion, the individual may be in a stage of denial of his/her sexual identity, avoid the topic, display homophobic attitudes, immerse him/herself in heterosexuality, abuse drugs/alcohol, or adopt a temporary identity. If the individual accepts his/her homosexual identity, he or she moves onto the next stage (Eliason, 1996; Troiden, 1988).

The third stage, identity assumption, is characterized by the disclosure of the individual’s sexual identity to friends, family, and other gay or lesbian individuals. The assumption of a gay
or lesbian identity is influenced by social stigma and the amount and kind of information available to the individual. Individuals in this stage can manage their sexual identity by avoiding homosexual experiences or people, attempt passing as heterosexual, acting out lesbian and gay stereotypes, aligning themselves with the LGBQ community, or considering the homosexual community as superior to the heterosexual community (Eliason, 1996; Troiden, 1988).

In the commitment stage, the individual displays a comfort with his/her homosexual identity and roles. It is during this stage that the individual may integrate sexuality and emotional intimacy by entering a committed relationship. Individuals in the commitment stage manage their identity by either covering (admitting homosexual identity but keeping it hidden), blending (viewing their sexual identity as irrelevant and do not disclose it), or conversion (changing their worldview to gay pride and activism; Eliason, 1996; Troiden, 1988).

**Limitations of Sexual Identity Models**

Although the sexual identity models offer valuable information regarding the coming-out process for LGBQ individuals, there are limitations. One limitation of these models is that they do not consider the intersectionality of other aspects of identity (Eliason, 1996). Troiden’s (1988) model is the only model that discusses the influence of culture on sexual identity development. Although Troiden’s Model describes the influence of cultural identity on sexual identity, it is not specific to any culture. A second limitation is that much of the research conducted on LGBQ individuals to develop these models has been done on white, middle-class, educated samples (Eliason, 1996). Because the models have been developed from research conducted on white samples, a model that is specific to other ethnic identities, like the Latino LGBQ community, do not exist. Gaining an understanding of the disclosure process of Latino LGBQ individuals and addressing the limitations becomes important for the development of a sexual identity model that
outlines the Latino LGBQ coming-out process.

**Coming-Out Process for Latino LGBQ Individuals**

*Influence of familism on sexual orientation.* The concept of familism may have negative influences on the coming-out process for Latino LGBQ individuals. According to Muñoz-Laboy (2008), “In cultures where collectivism is a predominant value, the sexual orientation of individuals is no longer an individual issue, but rather a struggle between placing an individual’s orientation over apparent collective social order” (p. 774). Studies have found that for Latino LGBQ individuals, greater experiences of negative family reactions resulted in negative health outcomes (Ryan et al., 2009). Individuals who reported negative family reactions reported attempted suicide, higher levels of depression, illegal drug use, and unprotected sexual intercourse (Ryan et al., 2009). Their study also concluded that based on gender, Latino men experience more rejection from family than Latino females (Ryan et al., 2009). Familial reactions within Latino culture are influenced by level of acculturation (Bonilla & Porter, 1990). Latino families that are more acculturated with mainstream American culture may have more positive reactions towards same-sex attraction (Bonilla & Porter, 1990).

Research conducted by Diaz (1998), indicates that Latino gay and bisexual men exhibit higher levels of internalized homophobia if there are strong familial ties. He argues that Latino LGBQ individuals want to maintain psychological connectedness with their family which makes it difficult to denounce the family’s homophobia. This leads to an internalized homophobia (Diaz, 1998; Szymanski & Carr, 2008). In addition, researchers argue that to experience the benefits of close family ties, LGBQ individuals must conform to the social norms of the family network (Diaz, 1998; Diaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004). Muñoz-Laboy (2008) also concluded that the concept of familism plays an important role on sexual decisions of bisexual Latino men.
Although some research does exist, it is believed that more research is needed on the influence of familism on Latino LGBQ individuals (Cantú, 2001; González-López & Vidal-Ortiz, 2007).

**Influence of gender roles on sexual orientation.** Because the Latino community holds rigid gender roles (Diaz, 1998), coming-out becomes more difficult for LGBQ individuals. The concept of machismo creates difficulties and challenges for gender non-conforming Latino gay individuals (Estrada, Rigali-Oiler, Arciniega, & Tracey, 2011). Research indicates that one of the greatest insults for Latino men in Latin culture is to be accused of lack of masculinity (Asencio, 2011). According to Mirandé (1997), the Latino community holds the belief that being gay is the worst thing a man can do. Derogatory terms such as joto (fag) and maricon/marica (sissy) have been used by the Latino community to describe LGBQ individuals (Diaz, 1997). The use of these terms by the Latino community also reinforces the idea that Latino LGBQ individuals experience an internalized homophobia (Diaz 1998; Szymanski & Carr 2008). Research has also indicated that a strong endorsement of machismo and feelings of conflict with gender roles is associated with the experience of higher stress on Latino LGBQ individuals (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000).

The concept of marianismo also makes it difficult for Latina lesbian women to openly express their lesbian identity. Latina women are less likely to openly express their lesbian identity due to the expectations of the Latin culture. Latina women are expected to be submissive, virginal, respectful, and inferior to men (Sager, Schlimmer, & Hellmann, 2001). Because of these cultural expectations, Latina women are more likely to deny their lesbian identity to fulfill their cultural role (Sager et al., 2001). Latina women are also likely to withhold their lesbian identity from others to prevent bringing shame to their family (Espin, 1987).

**Influence of religion on sexual orientation.** Many Latinos identify as either Catholic or Protestant, and these religious teachings stress the notion of an LGBQ identity as a lifestyle
choice (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Whitehead, 2010). Research indicates that the teachings of Catholic and Protestant churches contributes to the internalized homophobia that LGBQ individuals may experience (Barnes & Meyer, 2012). Because Latino LGBQ individuals are affiliated with religious organizations more than their White counterparts, they may be exposed to homophobic messages more frequently. Therefore, they experience greater levels of internalized homophobia than White LGBQ individuals (Barnes & Meyer, 2012).

Individuals who are not familiar with the Latino culture may wonder why Latino LGBQ individuals remain affiliated with religions that are not supportive of their identity. Research indicates that Latinos will remain in non-affirming religions, or those that do not support LGBQ attitudes, because they derive personal meaning and are accustomed since childhood to their religious institution (Barnes & Meyer, 2012, p. 512).

Although religion influences the perspectives of many Latinos, it does not represent all Latino sexual perspectives and behaviors on homosexuality (Asencio & Acosta, 2007). For some Latinos, Catholic identity is connected to ethnic identity; Catholicism becomes part of what it means to be Latino (Maldonado, 2002). Latino individuals who follow Catholicism for this reason may not necessarily attend mass regularly or adhere to the policies of the Catholic church (Leon, 2004; Matovina, 2005). Research on mainline Protestant denominations has shown that Protestant religions have become more accepting and open about same-sex attraction than other denominations (Cadge 2002; Olson & Cadge, 2002).

**Outcomes of Discrimination**

Currently in our society, Latino LGBQ individuals face discrimination in the United States due to their Latino culture and for their sexual identity. The political climate in the United States has made it difficult for Latino individuals to live in the United States without
encountering discrimination (Quiroga, Medina, & Glick, 2014). LGBQ individuals encounter discrimination from society for their sexual identity (Rothman et al., 2012). Because Latinos identify with their Latino culture as well as with an LGBQ sexual identity, they encounter discrimination for both identities.

**Discrimination of Latinos.** The current political climate in the United States has created a hostile environment for Latinos (Quiroga et al., 2014). Discrimination towards Latinos increased after the September 11th terrorist attacks. Immigrants in general began to be viewed as the source of terrorism, crime, and unemployment within the United States (Ibrahim, 2005). Not only do Latinos experience discrimination from everyday citizens, but they are discriminated against through U.S. policies (Quiroga et al., 2014). Although all Latinos are not undocumented, the institutionalized policies and practices lead to discriminatory actions towards the entire Latino community (Quiroga et al., 2014).

The discrimination that Latinos encounter on a macro and micro level affects them in a negative way. U.S. policies negatively affect Latino families and increase levels of stress (Arbona et al., 2010; Brabeck & Xu, 2010). Latino individuals will often live in fear, experience higher levels of discrimination, and will live with added stress due to the uncertainty of law enforcement and government policies (Ayon & Becerra, 2013; Hardy et al., 2012). In general, studies have illustrated that discrimination and psychological distress are correlated within the Latino community (Moradi & Risco, 2006; William, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003).

**Discrimination of LGBQ individuals.** Latino LGBQ individuals experience discrimination from mainstream society as well as from their own ethnic community (Sarno, Mohr, Jackson, & Fassinger, 2015). Research shows that racial/ethnic minorities and sexual minorities are more likely to have poorer mental and physical health due to this discrimination
(Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011). In addition, LGBQ individuals experience increased levels of stress due to prejudice, discrimination and the internalized stigma they encounter due to their sexual identity (Rothman et al., 2012). Because Latino LGBQ individuals identify with the LGBQ community as well as with the Latino community, they encounter discrimination due to their identification with both identities (Sarno et al., 2015). Research shows that LGBQ people of color, Latinos included, “experience sexual orientation prejudice in their ethnic/racial community because in many communities, same-sex attraction is viewed as violating cultural and religious traditions” (Bieschke, Hardy, Fassinger, Croteau, 2008; Bridges, Selvige, & Matthews, 2003; Chan, 1989; Espin, 1993; Greene, 2000; Sarno et al., 2015, p. 551).

Along with experiencing discrimination, LGBQ individuals of color also experience heterosexism from their ethnic/racial community (Balsam et al., 2011). It is believed that the heterosexism that LGBQ people of color experience within their ethnic/racial community also influences the timing and process of coming-out (Balsam et al., 2011; Grov, Bimbi, Parsons, & Nani, 2006; Parks et al., 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). The heterosexism that Latino LGBQ individuals may experience from their ethnic/racial community may also be influenced by the level of acculturation. Asencio and Acosta (2007) note that Latinos that are more acculturated within U.S mainstream culture may have a different perspective on sexual identity.

**Gaps in the Literature**

Although there have been numerous studies on LGBQ individuals, much of the research has been conducted on White LGBQ individuals (Parks et al., 2004). Studies on Latino LGBQ individuals, or LGBQ individuals of color in general, are scarce. Even more so, research on the effect of familial reactions during the coming-out process on Latino LGBQ individuals’ identity
development has not been conducted. Because there is limited research on Latino LGBQ individuals and their families, ways in which marriage and family therapists can effectively intervene have not been identified. Therefore, the research question becomes the following: What are the lived experiences of Latino LGBQ young adults during the coming-out process?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Study Overview

The purpose of the study was to gain insight on the experiences of Latino LGBQ young adults during the coming-out process and how these influenced Latino LGBQ young adults’ coming-out experience. Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was used to gather descriptions of the participants’ lived experiences of a phenomenon rather than interpreting these experiences. Since there have not been previous studies specifically focused on Latino LGBQ young adults, understanding their lived experiences during the coming-out process become important for successful mental health treatment.

Purpose Statement

This study addresses the experiences of Latino LGBQ young adults during the coming-out process. A phenomenological approach was taken to explore the coming-out experience of Latino LGBQ young adults. I interviewed ten young adults who identify as LGBQ to obtain descriptions of their coming-out experience and any effects that their coming-out experience had on their sense of self. Exploration of the coming-out experience was intended to begin the development of a treatment model that can be used by marriage and family therapists when providing treatment to Latino LGBQ individuals and their families.

Participants

To meet the inclusion criteria for this study, participants self-identified as both Latino and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. On average, young adults disclose their sexual orientation to others between the ages of 14 and 18 years old (D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998). Because of the average age of disclosure, participants in the study were between the ages of 18 and 30 years old and disclosed their sexual orientation to family members within the last five
years. Morse (1994) has recommended that there be a minimum of 6 participants in a phenomenological study. To reach saturation, 10 participants were recruited for the study. The recruitment of 10 participants allowed for richer and thicker descriptions of the participants’ experience (Sandelowski, 1986).

Table 1  
Participant Information  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>LGBQ Identity</th>
<th>Family Member</th>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

The primary recruitment method was through word of mouth and flyers placed in various public locations on a university campus. Recruitment flyers included the topic of the study, a brief overview of the study, eligibility criteria, time commitment, and the researcher’s contact information (Appendix C). Recruitment flyers were posted throughout various public locations (i.e. Student Union, Library, therapy center) on the university campus. In addition, the researcher
provided recruitment flyers to the university’s undergraduate LGBTQ organization. Lastly, participants were recruited via social media outlets. The social media blurbs provided the same information as the recruitment flyer (Appendix D).

When potential participants showed interest in participating in the study, I contacted the participant by phone to discuss the study and answer any questions the participant had. If the participant continued to show interest, I scheduled an appointment to interview the participant. Participants were given the option to be interviewed in person, via a video call, or by phone. If the participant failed to attend the scheduled interview, I followed-up with one phone call to reschedule the interview. If the participant failed to show up for the rescheduled interview, it was assumed that the participant no longer wanted to participate in the study and no additional phone calls were made.

All participants in the study opted to do the interview through video call or by phone. When participants were video called or phoned, I introduced myself, reviewed the purpose of the study and the timeframe of the interview. Interviews with the participant took approximately 60 minutes and were recorded with a digital audio recorder. I reviewed the informed consent with the participant and answered any questions they had. Once questions were answered, I asked participants to sign the electronic informed consent document. Additional informed consent was solicited for the use of audio recording. The participant was asked to fill out an electronic demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). The demographic questionnaire did not contain any identifying information.

The interview and audio recording began once informed consent had been obtained and demographic information was completed. The audio recording did not contain any identifying information and was deleted as soon as data transcription was complete. Participants were asked
a series of questions created ahead of time regarding their experience during the coming-out process. If the participant chose, he or she had the opportunity to end the interview at any point without consequence.

**Instrument**

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide the interviews. I had questions available but had the ability to probe for more information. The interview protocol used for this study had been adapted from a previous study conducted by D’Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) on LGB youth and disclosure to their families. The questions provided in the interview protocol pertained to the disclosure experience of Latino LGBQ young adults. Some examples included: (a) describe your experience disclosing, (b) describe your thought process prior to disclosing, and (c) discuss your decision to not disclose your sexual orientation to a particular family member. For the complete interview protocol, please refer to Appendix A.

**Data Analysis Plan**

I conducted a qualitative analysis using Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method; this type of analysis is frequently used in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1998). The steps for the analysis include: description of researcher’s own experience, horizontalization of the data, textural description, structural description, and essence.

**Description of researcher’s own experience.** According to Sandelowski (1986), qualitative research is enhanced when researchers interpret their own experiences in relation to the experiences of the participants. The first step of data analysis tends to this idea. The first step of analysis requires the researcher to “provide a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 147). To engage in this step, I provided a brief description of how I have experienced the phenomenon of identifying with the Latino culture and coming-
Horizontalization of the data. Horizontalization focuses on the experiences of the participants. During this step, I found statements in the participants’ interviews that described how they were experiencing the topic (Creswell, 1998). Once I identified the significant statements, I listed them and treated them with equal value (Creswell, 1998). I then created a list of statements that were non-repetitive and non-overlapping (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Textural description. The statements that were identified were grouped into “meaning units” (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Once the meaning units were created, I listed the units and wrote a “description of the ‘texture’ of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). In other words, I wrote about what was experienced and the meaning individuals experienced (Creswell, 1998).

Structural description. I attempted to identify all possible meanings and perspectives of the phenomena in structural description. I then constructed a description of how the phenomena was experienced by using these meanings and perspectives as a frame of reference (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Essence. The previous three steps all lead to essence of the study. By reducing the textural and structural meanings of the experience, I developed a brief description that was representative of the experiences of all participants (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, it lead to the essentials of the participants’ experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness & Rigor

Credibility. For a study to be credible, the researcher should engage in reflexivity, or an awareness of self (Williams & Morrow, 2009; Rennie, 2004). A variety of methods can be used during the reflexive process. Bracketing is used in the reflexive process to help the researcher
identify any biases (Williams & Morrow, 2009). In Moustakas’ (1994) analysis, bracketing is achieved through the epoche process. The epoche process reduced researcher bias by increasing my awareness of the underlying biases I have about the Latino culture and the coming-out experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The awareness of my biases allowed me to look at the Latino coming-out process through a different lens (Creswell, 1998). Although I used epoche to minimize any biases, it is important to note that Moustakas himself said that eliminating all biases is not completely possible.

**Dependability.** To achieve dependability, the researcher reported researcher’s biases. I reported how experiencing the Latino culture and the phenomenon of coming-out influenced my perceptions. In addition, dependability was achieved through the transcription of interviews because it allowed for coding and re-coding of the data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Once participants completed the interview, each interview was transcribed before beginning the analysis process.

**Transferability.** Transferability was achieved by providing thick descriptions of participants’ experiences with the phenomenon of coming-out (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell 1998). By providing thick and rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences, readers can determine the applicability of the findings to similar situations (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition to providing thick descriptions, transferability for the study was achieved through purposive sampling (Anfara et al., 2002). The participants had to meet eligibility criteria to participate in the study.

**Confirmability.** To achieve confirmability, I engaged in reflexivity (Anfara et al., 2002). The identification of biases in the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994) is the form in which reflexivity was achieved.
Self of the Researcher

This study was conducted as my master’s thesis for my degree in marriage and family therapy. I am a twenty-five-year-old, cisgender, self-identified heterosexual, Latina. Being the daughter of Mexican immigrants, I grew up with a strong association with Latino culture. I grew up witnessing the influences of traditional gender roles as well as the influence of religion (i.e. Catholicism) on everyday life.

I am passionate about research on Latino LGBQ individuals. I have several family members who identify as LGBQ and growing up, heard about their experiences with coming-out to family members. The negative experiences that some of my family members experienced with their disclosure and the lack of research on the therapeutic treatment of Latino LGBQ individuals sparked my interest. My hope is that through this study, MFTs will gain a better understanding of the unique experiences of Latino LGBQ individuals and become culturally competent and sensitive to serve the Latino LGBQ community.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings from the in-depth interviews are presented. The first section includes a summary of each participant’s lived experience when disclosing their sexual orientation to a family member. The second section describes the essential themes that were derived from the in-depth interviews conducted with each participant.

Participants

Jennifer. Jennifer is currently a twenty-four-year-old Latina woman who identifies as lesbian. She initially disclosed her sexual orientation to her immediate and extended family using social media. When she disclosed, her mother was very upset and had difficulty accepting Jennifer’s sexual orientation. To her surprise, her father, who she described as sometimes abusive, was supportive of her sexual identity. Jennifer also disclosed her sexual orientation to her extended family.

Rachel. Rachel is a twenty-five-year-old Latina woman who identifies as lesbian. She describes her disclosure experience as a period of confrontation due to her parents’ reactions. When she initially disclosed, both of her parents were unsupportive and did not accept her sexual identity. Her only familial support during disclosure was her older sister. She explained that their unwillingness to accept her sexual orientation was and is still heavily influenced by their religious beliefs.

Rachel is currently engaged to her partner and does not foresee her parents attending her wedding. Although Rachel’s mother has met her partner, she is still uncomfortable with their relationship; Rachel’s father has chosen not to meet her partner. Rachel described her current relationship with her parents as being more distant than prior to her disclosure. She stated that her extended family knows about her sexual identity and most are supportive.
**Jack.** Jack is a twenty-nine-year-old Latino man who identifies as gay. He initially disclosed his sexual orientation to his siblings during a family trauma. He described his siblings as supportive of his sexual orientation. When his parents discovered his sexual identity, his mother did not talk to him for two weeks. Currently, Jack describes his mother as being supportive of his sexual identity. He mentioned that she is somewhat concerned about his inability to follow their religious practices due to his sexual identity, but describes it as not being a detrimental factor in their relationship.

When describing his relationship with his father, Jack mentioned that he is a lot closer to his mother and her side of the family. He stated that his extended family knows about his sexual orientation and that he must monitor how he speaks about his sexual identity based on the family he is engaging with.

**Patrick.** Patrick is a thirty-year-old Latino man who recently disclosed to his father. Jack had a positive disclosure experience. He was initially fearful of disclosing to his father due to the lack of relationship between the two and his father’s “conservative” views. To Jack’s surprise, his father was supportive of his sexual identity. Jack assumed that his father accepted his sexual orientation due to his assimilation into American culture. He believes that his father might have been less accepting if he upheld traditional Latino cultural values.

**Jenifer.** Jenifer is a twenty-two-year-old Latina woman who identifies as gay. She recently disclosed her sexual orientation to an aunt and uncle, which was a positive experience.

Jenifer’s parents do not agree with homosexuality and will not understand her sexual orientation because of their “old-school” thinking. Jennifer will continue to disclose her sexual orientation in other settings, therefore, she describes the disclosure process as continuous and ongoing.
Renée. Renée is a twenty-five-year-old Latina woman who identifies as pansexual. She recently disclosed to her siblings and cousins. She describes her disclosure experience with her siblings and cousins as positive. She continuously feels supported by her siblings and cousins.

Renée does not feel the need to disclose to her mother due to their distant relationship and has not disclosed to her father due to his religious beliefs. Renée was raised by her grandmother and has chosen not to disclose to her due to fear of rejection. Though Renée is not emotionally ready to disclose to her grandmother, she would like to do so someday.

Cali. Cali is a twenty-five-year-old Latina woman who identifies as pansexual. She recently disclosed her sexual orientation to her cousins and described herself as being fearful prior to disclosing. Cali states that religion heavily influenced her fear of disclosing to her cousins. Her relationship with her cousins has become more distant but not necessarily because of her sexual orientation.

Cali hopes to disclose to her grandmother soon, who she describes as being special to her, but finds that fear prevents her from doing so. Cali describes her grandmother as very religious. Because Cali has not disclosed to her grandmother and other family members, she describes her disclosure process as being continuous and ongoing.

Matt. Matt is a twenty-three-year-old Latino man who identifies as gay. Matt was the only participant who was outed by someone else. He described feeling powerless when his mother and father confronted him about his sexual orientation. Although he stated that his relationship with his parents was never close, he describes his current relationship as being more distant than prior to being outed. Matt believes that his father does not understand or accept his sexual identity due to the traditional gender roles followed by the Latino community. He believes his mother’s inability to accept his sexual identity is influenced by her religion. He has not
disclosed to any other family members due to his parents’ reaction. Matt does not receive support from his family but instead receives support from his university’s LGBTQIA+ club.

**Bob.** Bob is a twenty-nine-year-old Latino man who identifies as gay. He describes his disclosure to his family as positive. Bob explained that both of his parents are supportive of his sexual identity and he has a close relationship with his parents. Bob did not disclose until recently because of the religion that he and his family follow. Bob feared that his parents and family would not accept his identity and would isolate him. To Bob’s surprise, his parents accepted his sexual orientation. In addition to his parents, Bob disclosed to his extended family. He described his extended family as supportive of his sexual identity.

**Sarah.** Sarah is a twenty-year-old Latina woman who identifies as bisexual. When Sarah disclosed to her parents, she described them as being unsupportive. She was reluctant to disclose to her parents because both of her parents are very religious. Sarah believes her parents are more comfortable with her sexual orientation since her disclosure but she describes her relationship with them as distant.

**Essential Themes**

The coming-out experiences of Latino LGBQ individuals are depicted through six overarching themes (see Figure 1). The disclosure process influences Latino LGBQ family closeness and distance. The family of Latino LGBQ young adults often enter a state of disbelief after disclosure. For Latino LGBQ individuals, control of disclosure influences how they perceive their coming-out experience. The Latino cultural values of religion and traditional gender roles affect their disclosure experience. Lastly, the disclosure process is continuous and ongoing for Latino LGBQ young adults.
Theme 1: The disclosure process impacts family closeness and distance. All participants shared their experiences with familial support during the disclosure process. It is important to note that when defining the term family, all participants included extended family in their definition. Four participants expressed that their families were not supportive during their disclosure. Because they did not receive familial support during their disclosure, their relationships with their families became more distant. Three participants shared that they had received support from the family members they disclosed to, but found themselves withholding their disclosure from family members they assumed may reject them. Three participants had fully disclosed to all family members and received the familial support they needed.

Four participants believed that the lack of family support throughout their disclosure process caused distance in their family relationships. For these four participants, coming-out to their families was a negative experience. Jennifer stated, “[My mother] didn’t talk to me for
Jennifer believes that her mother could not provide the support she needed at the time because of fear of family judgment.

Jennifer stated the following:

Her concern was about what everyone else in my family was going to say. So, when I came out to her she said, “I’m going to have to respond to your tias and tios”. I feel like maybe she hadn’t gotten to the point of her dealing with that and she was very much thinking about what everyone else was going to say.

When asked about her relationship with her family after disclosure, Jennifer stated, “I think immediately after [disclosure] it was more strained. I went about two months without talking to anyone in my family.”

Like Jennifer, Rachel’s family was unsupportive during her disclosure which led her to have a more distant relationship with her family. She stated, “After I disclosed, my mom kicked me out of the house.” Rachel and her immediate family did not speak for about ten months. She stated, “During that time, I was really not speaking to my parents and my sister because I was really hurt.” She mentioned that her father continues to be unsupportive of her sexual identity. She stated, “My dad still hasn’t met my partner. He will call me occasionally, once or twice a month, but I rarely see him.” When describing her current relationship with her family, she expressed, “Since I came out, there’s been distance and you know, kind of a rip.”

Sarah’s parents were unsupportive when she disclosed her sexual orientation to them. When asked about her expectations for her parents’ reactions, Sarah stated, “I felt that they would have been a little bit more supportive than they were.” She explained, “Well, my dad pretty much used the Bible against me by saying that it wasn’t Godly.” She described her current
relationship with her parents as being more distant than before she disclosed. Sarah stated, “At that moment [prior to disclosure], we were closer than we are now.”

Unlike Jennifer, Rachel, and Sarah, Matt did not choose to come-out to his parents, but instead was “outed” by a family friend. When describing his family’s reaction, Matt mentioned that his mother was and continues to be in denial of his sexual orientation. He stated, “Occasionally, she will talk about me getting married to a woman. At this point I tell her, ‘Stop lying to yourself’.” When asked about his father’s reaction, Matt stated that his father’s response was “Oh, you have to pick to be a man or a woman. One or the other.” In addition, Matt describes his relationship with family as practically not being there. He stated, “In general, it makes me interact with them less and makes me have less of a relationship with them because I know they aren’t supportive as humanly possible.”

Three participants shared that they received the support they needed from the family members they disclosed to. In addition, all three participants shared that there were certain family members that they chose not to disclose to for fear of rejection and isolation. Their inability to disclose to certain family members appeared to cause emotional turmoil for each participant. When Jenifer came-out to her family, she decided to come-out to her aunt and uncle. When asked about their reaction, she expressed, “They said, ‘Well we love you the same; nothing changes. We know that you’re the same person; it doesn’t matter’.” When asked about her relationship with the family members she chose to disclose to, she stated “It’s been pretty much the same, if not better because it’s easier to talk to them.” Although Jenifer received support from the family she disclosed to, she expressed that she has not yet disclosed to her parents for fear of them not understanding. Jenifer stated, “My mom is still saying it’s [sexual orientation] just a phase.” She believes that her parents’ inability to understand is their
“generational thought process” or in other words the influences of the generation that they grew up in.

When Renée disclosed to her siblings and cousins, she mentioned that she received positive responses and support from all of them. She went into detail to describe the support that she received from her male cousin. She stated, “He’s okay with it [sexual orientation]. He’s the one that acknowledges it more and will bring it up and doesn’t make me feel like I’m some sort of outcast.” Renée expressed that she wishes she could disclose to her grandmother, the woman who raised her, but has chosen not to for fear or rejection. She describes it as follows: “Part of me fears that if she doesn’t [accept it], then I’m going to lose the only individual who’s been a true parent figure.” Like Jenifer, Renée believes that her grandmother may not understand or accept her sexual orientation due to generational influences.

Cali disclosed her sexual orientation to her cousins and received support from them. Cali stated, “I kind of felt silly for having been nervous because they just always accepted me for who I am. I don’t think anything I tell them could have ever changed that at this point in my life.” When asked about other family, Cali stated that she would like to disclose to her grandmother but fears that her grandmother will not accept her sexual identity due to her religion. She states, “She is very special to me. She is also very, very Catholic.”

Out of ten participants, three reported that they received the support that they needed during their disclosure. When Jack disclosed to his family, his family was supportive of his sexual identity. He stated, “I see myself as fortunate to have family that are open.” Jack mentioned that his mother did not speak to her for a period of two weeks after his disclosure, but when questioned about it, he expressed that still received the support that he needed.
Patrick recently disclosed to his father and expressed that to his surprise, his father was accepting of his sexual orientation. Patrick stated, “He [dad] said, ‘It doesn’t matter if you’re gay or straight. Your sexual orientation shouldn’t mean anything’.” When asked how he felt after he received the support from his father, he stated, “I felt like a weight off my shoulders.”

When Bob disclosed to his family, he stated that it took approximately two to three years for his parents to feel completely comfortable with his sexual orientation. Although his parents were not completely comfortable with his sexual identity, they provided Bob with family support. He states, “My mom has become very involved in my life.” In addition, he feels fortunate that his family did not turn their back on him because of his sexual identity.

**Theme 2: Latino LGBQ individuals’ family members entered a state of disbelief about their sexual orientation during the disclosure process.** Five of the participants believed that the family members they disclosed to experienced a period of disbelief following the disclosure. For Jennifer, her mother experienced denial during her disclosure. Jennifer stated, “She [mother] asked, ‘Do you like boys or do you like girls? You like boys; I want you to like boys. Its better if you like boys’.” After Jennifer disclosed, her mother was in a state of disbelief. Although her mother reacted in disbelief, Jennifer believes that her parents always knew about her sexual orientation but were in denial. She stated, “They knew, but they never said it.”

For Rachel, her parents’ period of disbelief and denial continues. When Rachel disclosed to her family, her parents had a difficult time accepting her sexual orientation. She stated, “My parents were both crying and were saying how they didn’t raise me this way; that I knew that this [being lesbian] was not okay.” When describing their current state of disbelief, Rachel explains, “They’re not yet accepting of it [lesbian identity] and it makes our relationship…it’s very difficult.”
Matt explains that his mother was in a state of disbelief and denial when he was outed and continues to be. Matt explained that his mother will occasionally talk about him getting married to a woman in the future even though he has disclosed to her that he is gay. In addition, Matt stated that his mother did not want him to act on his sexual orientation because she has the idea that it is a phase. He explains, “She [his mother] was more like, ‘You’re not ready because it is a phase’.”

For Jenifer, her parents’ denial of homosexuality has influenced her decision not to disclose her sexual orientation to them. Her parents’ reactions to other family members who identify as LGBQ lead Jenifer to believe that her parents will not accept her sexual orientation if she decides to come out to them. She explains, “I have a cousin and she’s been with her girlfriend for twelve years and my mom continues to say that it’s just a phase.” Although Jenifer challenges her mother, her mother continues to view sexual orientation as a phase.

When Bob disclosed his sexual orientation, he explained that his mother thought that he identified as gay due to possible sexual abuse. He explains, “At first she thought I was molested or touched inappropriately or that a member of the church could have done something to me.” Once he explained to her that he was not sexually abused, he explained, “She was worried that it [sexual identity] was just a phase.” Bob shared that his mother asked him to speak with church leaders to see if they could influence a change in his sexual identity.

**Theme 3: Control of disclosure influences Latino LGBQ young adults’ perception of their coming-out experience.** Some of the participants described how having control of their disclosure influenced how they perceived their disclosure experience. Jennifer described how she actively decided to disclose her sexual orientation through social media. Before choosing to disclose, she had concluded that she would be fine regardless of her parents’ reaction. Jennifer
stated, “And if it [parent’s discovering her sexual orientation] happened, I told myself ‘You know what? Whatever happens, I’m fine’.” Because Jennifer had control over her decision to disclose, she was better prepared to face her parents’ reactions.

Although Rachel disclosed to her parents, she describes it as being involuntarily. She explains, “It was more of a confrontation when they approached me so I couldn’t really say no, so I kind of just admitted it.” Rachel explained how she had chosen to not disclose to her parents up until that point due to fear of their reaction. When Rachel admitted to them that she identified as lesbian, she was forced to confront what came after.

Jack tried to reduce his fear associated with disclosing by controlling when he would disclose. When he first came out to his sister, Jack actively decided to come out during a “family trauma”. When asked why he waited for a family trauma to occur, Jack stated, “I think it was just easier…no one would focus on me.” He decided to disclose to his brothers in the same manner. His ability to control his disclosure to a time where no one would focus solely on him helped Jack with his fear.

Because Matt was “outed” by a family friend, he did not have control over his disclosure. When asked about his experience of being “outed”, Matt stated, “I felt kind of powerless because I didn’t get a choice. I won’t be able to come out again in the same way and I won’t be able to emotionally prepare myself for that.” When asked how he felt about his experience, Matt stated, “That [disclosing] will never happen again, so I guess regret and anger.” Matt described his disclosure experience as being overall negative and unsupported.

**Theme 4: The experience of coming-out for Latino LGBQ individuals is influenced by the cultural value of religion.** All participants expressed that religion played a role in their coming-out process. Jennifer expressed that her mother was and continues to be very Christian.
When Jennifer disclosed her sexual orientation, her mother expressed fear of the possible punishment that Jennifer would encounter due to her sexual identity. In addition, Jennifer expressed feeling fearful when attending her mother’s church. Jennifer explained, “I got scared and thought I was going to burst into flames.”

Like Jennifer, Matt also describes his mother as being very Christian. He expressed that his mother encourages him to be abstinent and follow God’s words to prevent him from enacting on his sexual orientation. In addition, Matt’s mother has mentioned The Rapture in hopes of persuading him to not identify as gay. Matt stated, “She mentioned The Rapture twice this last year. It’s [religion] affected it insomuch that I’m probably never going to be Christian.”

Rachel’s described both of her parents as being very religious. Rachel expressed that she was raised Seventh-day Adventist and grew up in a religious household. When she contemplated disclosing her sexual identity to her parents, her religious community influenced her decision. She expressed, “I knew that it was going to reflect badly on them [parents] and I didn’t want them to go through that.” In addition, she believes that her father’s inability to accept her sexual orientation is due to the religious idea that it is sinful.

For Renée, her father identifies as Catholic and her mother as Jehovah’s Witness. Renée mentioned that she is fearful of coming-out to her father because he is very Catholic and knows that he will describe her sexual orientation as sinful. When asked about disclosing to her mother, Renée stated that she believes her mother would not be accepting of her sexual orientation because her religion is stricter than the Catholic religion. She expressed, “If she didn’t accept blood to live, how would she accept her daughter being pansexual?”

Sarah’s family identifies as Orthodox Christian. Sarah expressed that it was difficult for her to disclose because of her parents’ religion. She stated, “It was very difficult because my dad
at that moment was very religious.” She continued to say, “I knew that they were going to have a negative response because of their religion.” When she decided to come-out to her parents, her father referenced the Bible. Sarah stated, “Well my dad pretty much used the Bible against me by saying that it wasn’t Godly.” She mentioned that growing up she was taught that homosexuality is a sin. She stated, “I’m not sure what Scripture it is but it states, ‘Thou shall not lay with men as they do with women.’ It is a sin and you will be sent to hell and won’t be accepted into heaven for it.”

Out of the ten participants, religion appeared to be a major role in Cali’s disclosure process. Cali and her family identify as Catholic. When disclosing to her cousins, Cali feared that their Catholic views would influence their views on her sexual orientation. To Cali’s surprise, her cousins were supportive of her sexual identity. Although Cali received support from her cousins, she expressed confusion with her own identity as Catholic.

She expressed the following:

The Catholic faith has always, as far as I’ve been told by other people, viewed homosexuality as a sin and being pansexual, being interested in both men, women, and other genders/sexualities…I’m considered a sinner in my faith. I struggle with that sometimes but I also like to believe that the God I believe in, what I feel in my faith and in my heart, isn’t as judgmental as the Catholic faith has portrayed him to be.

Four of the participants expressed that religion played a role in their disclosure, but did not describe it as being a negative experience. Jack expressed, “My mom was a little upset that I wouldn’t be able to get married in the Catholic Church. I told her that there’s nothing I can control about that.” Jack stated, “I still am Catholic. I don’t go to church every Sunday but I still identify as Catholic.”
Patrick shared that his father, which he recently disclosed to, identifies as Episcopalian. He described his father’s religion as “Catholic-lite” or less strict than the Catholic religion. He explained, “Women are allowed to be priests and I know that there’s much more of a push towards LGBT issues. I’m wondering if that’s why he chose to be Episcopalian as opposed to Catholic.”

Jenifer shared that her family follows the Catholic religion but their religious identity did not negatively influence her disclosure experience. Jenifer stated, “My family is Catholic but they’re not super big Catholic.” In other words, Jenifer’s family does not necessarily follow Catholic values.

Growing up, Bob and his family identified as Latter Day Saints. He expressed that the religion stresses the importance of family and therefore, believes that his family is supportive of his sexual identity because of this religious value. He stated, “We are always there for each other, so I grew up in the LDS background where family comes first.” Bob mentioned that when he first disclosed to his parents, his mother took him to speak with a Bishop.

He described his interaction with the Bishop as follows:

They gave me options. They said, “We can pretend that we don’t know you’re gay and you can live a gay-free lifestyle, we can excommunicate you, or we can try and help you with counseling to see if we can get those thoughts out of your head’.

Although some may view the interaction that Bob had with the Bishop as negative, Bob expressed that it did not have a negative impact on him because he was comfortable with his sexual identity. He stated, “It was a little bit of a negative impact but not much because I was already in a point in my mind that I identified with my sexuality and was so comfortable just being who I was.”
Theme 5: The experience of coming-out for Latino LGBQ individuals is influenced by the cultural value of traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles influence the coming-out experience of Latino LGBQ individuals. Some participants shared their experience and the influence of traditional gender roles. Jack experienced feelings of shame for not meeting the traditional gender role of machismo. Jack expressed, “When I first came out, I didn’t want anyone to talk to me. I did feel the stigma of the Mexican man having to be macho and be the head of the household. I didn’t want anyone to talk to me because I’m not what they pictured me to be”.

Like Jack, the concept of machismo influenced Bob’s disclosure experience.

Bob stated the following about his experience:

I grew up with a father who is very Mexican. It’s one of those things in our culture; it’s not fond of seeing a gay man. They are seen as weak. They have an image of a man who is a hard worker, a breadwinner.

Sarah described that the traditional gender roles that her father upheld influenced her disclosure process. She explained, “My dad is very Mexican so because of the way he raised, he feels like we all had to be straight.” Sarah elaborated by explaining that her father believes that men and women are supposed to behave a certain way. She stated, “Women [in our family] had to be at home to clean and cook while my brothers and him, the men of the house, would work and provide for the house.”

For Matt, the concept of traditional gender roles influenced his father’s reaction to his sexual identity. When Matt’s father confronted him about his sexual orientation, he stated, “You have to pick to be a man or a woman; one or the other.” Matt stated that that was the only and last time he and his father ever spoke about his sexual orientation.
Theme 6: Disclosure of sexual identity is a continuous process for Latino LGBQ individuals. Most of the participants stated that the disclosure of their sexual identity is a continuous process. For many, their disclosure is continuous because they have not yet disclosed to extended family. Jennifer expressed, “I don’t know who knows or I think that people know but every time I bring my girlfriend around it’s like a new thing.” Renée stated, “I feel like at some point, if the right question is asked, [the rest of] my family will eventually find out. It’s definitely not going to end with those four.” Patrick described his disclosure with his father as continuous. He stated, “It might come up in future conversations with him but as of now it’s only come up once.” Matt explained that he must first gain independence before he can continue to disclose to other family members. He expressed, “If I gain more independence or the power dynamic has changed between us [with parents], then maybe more steps can happen, more disclosure but right now it’s a stance.” Cali agrees that her disclosure is continuous. She explains, “I definitely have not told some people that are important in my life and I think it is something that is continuing.”

Rachel and Jenifer explain that their disclosure is a continuous process because they have yet to disclose in other social settings. Rachel expressed, “When I meet new people, we are just having a conversation and it will come up if I’m married and I respond ‘No, but I’m engaged with my partner.’ I say partner a lot so they question me if I’m gay.” Jenifer stated, “People don’t understand that I’m gay or they always ask about boys. Then I have to say, no, actually I’m gay.”

In sum, these six overarching themes depict the experiences of Latino LGBQ young adults during the disclosure of their sexual identity. For Latino LGBQ young adults, obtaining family support during the disclosure process is important. Like other ethnic groups, Latino LGBQ families may experience a period of disbelief which affects Latino LGBQ individuals’ experiences. Participants often felt that having control of their disclosure influenced the outcome.
of their disclosure experience. The cultural values of religion and traditional gender roles influenced the coming-out experiences of Latino LGBQ individuals. Lastly, the disclosure process is a continuous process for Latino LGBQ young adults. The themes derived from the analysis help us gain a better understanding of the coming-out experiences of Latino LGBQ young adults.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to conduct research to gain a better understanding of the disclosure process for Latino LGBQ individuals. Using relevant literature on the disclosure process and Latino cultural values, the discussion will address the findings. Implications for clinical practice will be discussed. Lastly, the study’s limitations and areas for future research will be addressed.

Impact of Disclosure Process on Family Closeness and Distance

The participants in the study shared their experiences disclosing their sexual orientation to family members. Some participants expressed receiving familial support which resulted in closer familial relationships. Participants who developed closer familial relationships after disclosure expressed that family support influenced their relationships positively. Research on family relationships indicates that children who have a quality relationship with parents before disclosure are more likely to disclose and receive positive reactions from their parents (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). For some participants, the relationship they had with family members before disclosure influenced their decision to disclose. These participants decided to disclose because they perceived their family as being close and supportive prior to disclosure. Because their family responded in a positive manner (i.e. providing family support by accepting their disclosure), they perceived their relationships as being closer after their disclosure.

It is important to note that although some participants described their familial relationships as closer after disclosure, it does not necessarily mean that they had an “easy disclosure”. All participants shared fears of rejection and isolation from their families prior to disclosure. It is not uncommon for individuals who have not yet disclosed to fear rejection from parents and other family members (Beaty, 1999). The participants in the study revealed that
some of their fears stemmed from their Latino upbringing. The influence of cultural values on disclosure will be discussed in-depth under its corresponding theme.

Participants that did not receive support from their family during disclosure developed more distant relationships with their family members after disclosure. The literature on the effects of disclosure on family closeness and distance supports the findings. A study conducted by Cramer and Roach (1988) found that the disclosure of sexual orientation to a parent often causes stress in the parent-child relationship. D’Augelli, Grossman, and Starks (2005) also concluded in their study that family relationships, specifically parent relationships, are challenged around disclosure or coming-out.

Some participants described their relationships with family members as close prior to disclosure and then described it as distant after disclosure. Participants who described their relationships as distant after disclosure were impacted by Latino cultural values (i.e. religion, traditional gender roles). Many of the family members they disclosed to adhered to Latino cultural values that view same-sex attraction as inappropriate resulting in unsupportive attitudes.

Based on family members’ reactions and the influences that these had on familial relationships, it can be inferred that the concept of heteronormativity influenced the participants’ family members’ reactions to disclosure. Heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality, opposite-sex attraction, is the norm for understanding sexuality and gender (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Warner, 1991). The idea of heteronormativity in Latino culture is influenced and supported by the Latino cultural values. The Latino cultural values of religion and traditional gender roles view same-sex attraction negatively (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Diaz 1998; Szymanski & Carr 2008) which therefore, influenced familial reactions and relationships.
Participants who described their family relationships as more distant after disclosure experienced emotional distress when coming-out. Their experience of emotional distress is consistent with previous literature conducted on Latino LGBQ individuals and emotional distress (Ryan et al., 2009). Research conducted by Ryan et al. (2009) concluded that individuals who experienced family rejection experienced emotional health problems due to unsupportive family. 

Familism places an importance on the family unit. (Campos et al., 2016; Zea, Quezada, Belgrave, 1994). Because the concept of familism is specific to Latino culture, Latino LGBQ individuals’ sexual orientation is no longer seen as an individual issue but rather a family issue. Because Latino LGBQ individuals do not adhere to Latino family norms, a strain in the relationship occurs.

**Experiencing Periods of Disbelief**

Some of the participants shared that family members they disclosed to underwent a period of disbelief before acknowledging their sexual orientation. Literature on familial reactions to the disclosure of sexual orientation support the findings of this study. Research conducted by Roberts, Walters, and Skeen (1989) found that family members display grief-like reactions. Some of the reactions that family members are likely to display are disbelief, denial, and rejection (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Like their White counterparts, Latino LGBQ individuals may perceive their parents or family as being in denial of their sexual orientation. The Latino cultural values (i.e. religion, traditional gender roles) that influence the period of disbelief during Latino LGBQ individuals’ coming-out process will be addressed under their respective theme.

**Control of Disclosure on Perception of Coming-Out Experience**
Some participants in the study expressed that having control of their disclosure influenced how they perceived their disclosure experience. Research on disclosure supports the idea that having control over disclosure may positively influence the disclosure experience (Corrigan et al., 2009). Those who have control over their disclosure can prepare and consider the options available to them (Rivers & Gordon, 2010). The participants who had control of their disclosure expressed that they were mentally prepared to disclose their sexual orientation and reached a level of acceptance for the possible outcomes.

Those who felt like they were “forced” to come-out or were “outed” did not have control over the decision to disclose. These participants described their coming-out experience as negative, involuntary, and confrontational. Those who do not have control of their disclosure are not given the opportunity to weigh out their options (Rivers & Gordon, 2010). For example, Rachel was confronted about her sexual orientation by her parents. In that moment, she did not feel like she had a choice but to disclose. From that experience, her parents rejected her sexual orientation and isolated her.

Faulkner and Hecht (2011) conclude that individuals who are outed have “lost some choice in their enactment of identity” (p. 840). In other words, those who are outed do not have the choice on whether they want to disclose their sexual identity or continue living closeted. Matt, the participant who was “outed”, expressed that he felt powerless and was filled with regret. The regret that he felt was due to his inability to choose to come-out to his parents; he would never have that opportunity again.

**Influence of Religion on Coming-Out Experience**

Religion played a role in all participants’ disclosure experiences. Literature on Latino individuals has shown that most Latinos are religious (Wolfinger et al., 2009). Given that most
Latinos identify with a religion, it comes as no surprise that the disclosure experience of participants in the study were impacted by religion. Although most described religion as having a negative influence on their experience, others believed it influenced their experiences in positive way.

Most participants and their families identified with the Catholic religion whereas some identified with other forms of Christianity. Catholicism, in addition to other forms of Christianity, has a negative view on homosexuality. Homosexuality in Christian-based religions is viewed as sinful (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Whitehead, 2010). Some of the family members that participants disclosed to held this belief. The view of homosexuality as sinful either created fear within participants to disclose and/or influenced family members to respond negatively to the disclosure.

Families that identified closely to their religion and had a negative view on homosexuality responded in unsupportive ways. Some family members referenced the Bible or Christian teachings with an intent to persuade the participant away from their sexual identity. Because their reference to the Bible or Christian teachings were used with an intent to change the participants’ sexual identity, participants did not feel understood or accepted by their family. Research indicates that LGBQ individuals find themselves having to continuously resist power structures that view same-sex attraction as abnormal throughout the development of their sexual identity (Abes & Hasch, 2007).

Other participants believed that religion influenced their coming-out experience but in a positive way. Bob, who identified religiously as LDS, mentioned that the importance of the family unit within the Mormon culture (Marks & Dollahite, 2001) influenced his family to be more supportive. He believed that emphasis placed on family influenced his parents to remain by
his side during disclosure instead of rejecting and isolating him. Although Bob mentioned that
his family sought religious help to change his sexual orientation, he did not view it as a negative
experience. Instead, he perceived it as his parents seeking out help for something that they did
not quite understand.

There were some participants, whose family identified with the Catholic religion, that
described their family as supportive. These participants shared that their families identified with
the religion but did not practice it vigorously. The study’s findings, in regards to family members
that do not practice Catholic teachings vigorously, support the concept of Observant Latino
Catholics and Progressive Catholics (Ellison et al., 2011). There are Latinos who identify as
Observant Catholics and will attend Mass regularly and follow Catholic teachings. These are the
individuals who view homosexuality as sinful and are less likely to provide support. Progressive
Catholics are those who identify as Catholic, maybe because of cultural reasons, but are more
liberal in their views (Ellison et al., 2011). Some participants who described their families as
supportive also described their families as religiously liberal.

**Influence of Traditional Gender Roles on Coming-out Experience**

Latino traditional gender roles influenced some participants’ coming-out experiences.
The concepts of machismo and marianismo define how men and women should behave
according to their gender (Gonzalez & Espin, 1996). Latino men are often expected to exert
masculinity whereas women are expected to respect men, be sexually “pure” and attend to their
children (Gonzalez & Espin, 1996).

Although sexual orientation and gender are two different concepts, Latinos often group
the two together. Asencio (2011) notes that sexual practices are gendered in Latino society and
are used to determine who is perceived as homosexual. Men who identify as gay are viewed as
inferior to heterosexual men within the Latino culture because of their sexual preference (Carrier, 1985; Sager, Schlimmer, & Hellmann, 2001). The view of same-sex attraction is viewed as inferior to heterosexual attraction due to the emphasis that is placed on heteronormativity within Latin culture (Abes & Hasch, 2007; Warner 1991). Although Jack and Bob both had supportive families during their disclosure, both expressed feeling the stigma of machismo. Both Bob and Jack expressed that Latino culture places an emphasis on men being the head of the household and being the primary source of income. Because sexual orientation and gender identity are grouped together within the culture, men who identify as gay are viewed as being incapable of meeting those expectations and are therefore viewed as inferior.

Women who identify as LGBQ in the Latino culture are often stigmatized for not adhering to traditional gender roles. Research indicates that Latina women are more likely to deny their lesbian identity to fulfill their cultural role (Sager et al., 2001). Latina women are expected to be “submissive, virginal, respectful, and inferior to men” (Sager et al., 2001). In terms of sexuality and sexual identity, some within the Latino culture uphold the idea that the sexual “purpose” of Latina women is to sexually satisfy men. In other words, women’s sexual gratification is not a goal and often viewed as “taboo” within the culture (Greene, 1994). Identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or queer goes against the purpose of Latina women within Latin culture. It is for this reason that Latina women are likely to withhold their lesbian identity from others to prevent bringing shame to themselves and their family (Espin, 1987).

One participant’s father adhered to these traditional gender roles. Sarah was expected to take care of the home while the males in her family worked and provided the income. During her disclosure, she was concerned with coming-out to her father because he closely identifies to
these traditional gender roles. When she disclosed, her father proved to be unsupportive in part because of the Latino gender norms he followed.

**Disclosure as a Continuous Process**

Most participants described their disclosure as a continuous process. Rivers (1997) acknowledges that disclosure does not occur as a single episode; LGBQ individuals are continuously disclosing to new individuals in new situations. Many believe that they have not yet finished the disclosure process because they have yet to disclose to other family members. The feeling of having to disclose to extended family did not seem uncommon among the participants. Jennifer, Rachel, Matt, Reneé, and others expressed that they have yet to disclose to their extended family. It can be inferred that Latino LGBQ individuals may feel a need to disclose to extended family due to the concept of familism previously discussed. A sense of obligation to disclose to extended family may occur due to the emphasis placed on the family unit as whole.

In addition, some participants continue to disclose in other social settings (i.e. workplace, college, etc.). Because it is not uncommon to meet new individuals in new social settings, Latino LGBQ individuals may feel the need to disclose their sexual orientation in these new settings. Rachel and Jenifer shared that they continuously feel the need to disclose at work due to their use of language. Rachel’s use of the word “partner” and Jenifer’s omission of pronouns when talking about her relationship sparks curiosity among their peers. Instead of avoiding the conversation, they feel the need to address it and disclose.

**Implications for Clinical Practice**

The results of this study highlight important implications for marriage and family therapists and the treatment of Latino LGBQ individuals and their families. Although there are similarities among Latino LGBQ individuals and LGBQ individuals from other ethnic groups, it
is important that MFTs recognize that the experiences of Latino LGBQ individuals are unique. Becoming aware of this uniqueness in therapy will help MFTs become culturally competent to serve the Latino LGBQ community (Odell et al., 1994; Parent et al., 2013).

It is helpful for MFTs to understand how the coming-out experience influences family closeness and distance within the LGBQ community. When addressing family closeness and distance, therapists should be aware that Latino LGBQ individuals may define family differently due to the concept of familism (Campos et al., 2016; Zea, Quezada, Belgrave, 1994). All participants included extended family in their definition of family. When sharing their experiences, the disclosure to extended family was just as important as disclosure to immediate family for Latino LGBQ individuals. Because disclosure to extended family may be just as important, therapists may provide treatment to the Latino LGBQ individual, immediate family, as well as the extended family.

In addition, MFTs should keep in mind that the family unit is of great importance within the Latino community (Campos et al., 2016; Zea, Quezada, Belgrave, 1994). Latino LGBQ individuals who have developed more distant relationships with family after disclosure may experience emotional distress (Ryan et al., 2009). For Latino LGBQ individuals, their sexual identity is viewed as a family issue rather than an individual issue due to the concept of familism (Munoz-Laboy, 2008). Given that sexual identity is viewed as a family issue, the disclosure experience is not only significant for Latino LGBQ individuals, but for their families as well. Because sexual identity is viewed as a family issue and disclosure is a significant event for the entire Latino family, family therapy would be the most beneficial for families who want to work through the disclosure experience. It may also be more difficult for Latino LGBQ individuals to eliminate any “toxic” relationships with family due to the concept of familism. The concept of
familism emphasizes the importance of interdependent family relationships and places greater importance on these relationships than the self (Campos et al., 2014; Campos et al., 2016). In addition, Latino LGBQ individuals are more likely to want and seek support from their families than from other individuals (Campos et al., 2016). Because of these concepts, Latino LGBQ individuals may be less likely to cut off family members that are unsupportive or less likely to ignore family members’ opinions. Individuals who are experiencing an unsupportive family may seek therapy to process the stress associated with the lack of support. Having all of this in mind, therapists should be aware of any biases they have on the concept of family (Odell et al., 1994). In addition, marriage and family therapists should take a collaborative role rather than a hierarchical role to facilitate the acculturation of both cultures (Falicov, 1998) when working with Latino LGBQ individuals and their families.

Like other ethnic groups, family members of Latino LGBQ individuals may experience a period of disbelief after disclosure. The difference between Latino LGBQ individuals and other ethnic groups is that there are cultural values that may influence this period of disbelief. Participants in the study shared that both religion and traditional gender roles influenced their families’ disbelief. MFTs who work with the Latino LGBQ community should keep in mind that these cultural influences may exist and address them if they arise (Goolishian & Anderson, 1990; Odell et al., 1994). Therapists should be aware that because the disbelief may be rooted to Latino culture, family members may need to come to terms with what it will mean culturally to support their Latino LGBQ family member. To help the Latino LGBQ individual and their families with this, Falicov (1998) suggests framing this period of uncertainty within their culture as a cultural transition. Labeling the transitionary period as that of transition helps relieve the anxiety that the
Latino LGBQ individual and his/her family is experiencing because it allows the family to live within an “unfinished state” (Falicov, 1998, p. 81).

Latino LGBQ individuals’ perception of their disclosure experience was influenced by the amount of control they had over the decision to disclose (Corrigan et al., 2009). Those who had control over their decision felt more prepared to handle family reactions. Those who were forced to disclose or who were “outed” did not have time to prepare and therefore viewed their disclosure as a negative experience (Rivers & Gordon, 2010). Based on these findings, MFTs should be empathetic towards the individual’s disclosure experience (Odell et al., 1994). Those who did not have time to prepare for their disclosure may feel angry, regret, sadness, or shame. MFTs should be prepared to address any emotions arising from the negative experience. Falicov (2005) suggests using an experiential approach when processing emotions with Latino families.

As previously mentioned, the Latino cultural values of religion and traditional gender roles played a role in the disclosure experience of Latino LGBQ individuals. Many participants shared that these cultural values influenced their families’ reactions in a negative way. If MFTs are not yet familiar with the role that religion and gender roles play within the Latino community, investing some time into researching these values may prove beneficial for treatment (L’Abate, 1997). Therapists should keep in mind that the Latino LGBQ individual may not himself identify with a religion, but he or she lives within a community that does emphasize it (Wolfinger et al., 2009). There might be individuals who are still trying to understand where their sexual identity falls within their religious culture.

Therapists can help Latino LGBQ individuals and their families discuss sexual identity and culture by exploring their cultural meaning systems (Falicov, 1998). By exploring cultural meaning systems, Latino LGBQ individuals and their families can identify what cultural
meaning systems they want to integrate (Falicov, 1998). Falicov (1998) provides therapists with the following steps to help clients through the integration of meaning systems: (a) draw attention to the differences, (b) contextualize the differences, (c) reframe the problem as dilemma of coexisting meanings, and (d) preview future family patterns and cultural blends (p. 85). By following the steps provided, therapists provide Latino LGBQ individuals and their families the space for exploration, awareness, and integration of sexual identity and culture (Falicov, 1998).

Because the Latino community often groups sexual orientation and gender together, MFTs may want to empathetically provide family members with psychoeducation on the difference between the two. If the therapist decides to do so, he or she should remember to be culturally sensitive (Odell et al., 1994). It is important to keep in mind that family members may take some time to understand that there is a difference or may not change their view at all.

Lastly, most participants believed that the disclosure process is continuous and ongoing. Because not all had disclosed to their immediate or extended family, they did not perceive their disclosure as complete. Again, MFTs should keep in mind that Latino LGBQ individuals are more likely to include extended family in their disclosure. Therapists may want to explore the importance of disclosing to extended family. Other participants shared that they had yet to disclose due to fears of rejection and isolation. Marriage and family therapists should be prepared to address and process the thoughts and emotions associated disclosure. Therapists can take an experiential approach as suggested by Falicov (1998) or a cognitive-behavioral approach to address the thoughts and emotions associated with these thoughts (Ellis, 1978).

**Limitations**

Though the present study offers substantive contributions to the literature, it is not without limitations. Because everyone’s experience is unique, one of the limitations of this study
is that not all Latino LGBQ individuals and their families will experience disclosure in the same way that the participants in this study did. It is important to note that generalizability was not the goal of this qualitative study. The goal was to gain a better understanding of Latino LGBQ young adult’s experiences during their disclosure by providing rich and thick descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Another limitation of the study is the possibility of researcher bias. The researcher attempted to reduce researcher biases using epoche (Moustakas, 1994), otherwise known as bracketing, but it is impossible to eliminate all biases. It is likely that the researcher biases (i.e. attitudes, values, and beliefs about the Latino community) influenced the interpretation of the participants’ experiences, thus affecting the findings.

In addition to researcher bias, there are limitations within the sample. Participants were recruited on a college campus. Because participants were recruited on a college campus, it can be inferred that the sample for this study is an educated sample. It is important to keep in mind that the experiences of an educated sample might differ from those of the general population. Acquiring a more diverse population (i.e. age, socio-economic status, education level) may produce a wider variety of disclosure experiences.

**Future Research**

There are other areas for future research. This study focused on gaining an understanding of the disclosure experience through Latino LGBQ individuals’ perspectives. Researchers in the future should include Latino LGBQ families to receive their perspective on the disclosure experience. Understanding the disclosure experience from Latino LGBQ individuals and their families may provide a better understanding and thus shed a better light on the clinical needs of the Latino community and their families.
Another focus for future research that may prove helpful is a focus on generational differences. Some participants’ family members were raised in the United States whereas others were raised in their Latin country of origin. It appeared that those who were born here did not necessarily adhere vigorously to Latino cultural values. It is likely that these differences may have an impact on the disclosure experience. Because this study did not focus on these differences, research focused on generational differences may prove helpful.

In association with generational differences, future research should also focus on the role of acculturation on coming-out experiences. Level of acculturation and immigration influences Latino individuals’ perspectives on sexual identity (Asencio & Acosta, 2007). Those who are more acculturated with American culture may view same-sex attraction differently than those who identify more closely to Latino culture (Asencio & Acosta, 2007). Determining the differences that arise due to level of acculturation may prove beneficial.

Lastly, the development of a sexual identity model tailored specifically to the Latino LGBTQ community may prove helpful due to their unique experiences. The creation of a sexual identity model can help marriage and family therapists gain a better understanding of Latino LGBTQ disclosure process. Because this the first qualitative study on Latino LGBTQ individuals and their coming-out experiences, future research is needed to develop a sexual identity model.

**Conclusion**

Latino LGBTQ young adults’ coming-out experiences are different from those of other LGBTQ ethnic groups. Their experiences are unique in the sense that they are influenced by the Latino cultural values of familism, religion, and traditional gender roles. These cultural values influenced family closeness and distance, families’ periods of disbelief, Latino LGBTQ individuals’ perception on their disclosure experiences, and the need for continual disclosure.
Because most Latino LGBQ individuals in the study had unsupportive families, it is imperative that marriage and family therapists gain a better understanding of their experiences to provide culturally competent treatment. Further research on Latino LGBQ individuals would prove beneficial for clients and marriage and family therapists in general.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I will ask you questions about your experience of disclosing your sexual orientation to your parents and other family members and what those experiences were like for you. Please know that there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers to these questions and that your responses will not be identified with your name.

1. **How do you define the term family? How close do you see your family? Do you talk openly about things that bother you?**

2. **How would you describe your relationship with your parents or the family members you disclosed your orientation to?**

3. **Describe your thought process prior to disclosing?**
   - Probe for circumstances before the disclosure (e.g. What was going on for you at that time?)
   - Probe for reasons for and against disclosing (e.g. What did you think would come from disclosing to your first family member? Why did you want to tell him or her?)
   - Probe for anticipated reactions (e.g. How did you think he or she would respond?)

4. **What held you back from disclosing to (first family member) until that point?**

5. **What happened during and after you told (first family member)?**
   - Probe for perceived feelings (e.g. What did it feel like to disclose to (first family member)?)
   - Probe for perceived reactions (e.g. What did that person say? How did the person respond?)

6. **Describe how your relationship is now with (insert family member). How has your relationship changed since you disclosed?**

7. **How do you know (first family member) is comfortable or not with your sexual orientation?**
   - Probe for specifics (e.g. What does the family member do and say that lets you know they are ok with your sexual orientation? How does the family member show you that they are not okay?)
8. Discuss your decision to not disclose your sexual orientation to particular family members.
   o Probe for specifics (e.g. Why have you decided not to disclose to (insert family member)? Is there something about them as a person that is part of your reason for not telling them?)

9. What is it like for you to be (insert sexual orientation) in your family?
   o Probe for specifics (e.g. How does being (insert sexual orientation) affect your interactions with your family? How does being (insert sexual orientation) come up in conversations with family? What happens when it is brought up)

10. What kind of messages do you get from your family about being (insert sexual orientation)?
11. How has your ethnic/cultural identity affected your experience of coming-out?
   o Probe for specifics (e.g. How have your cultural values influenced your family’s reaction? How did religion, if at all, play a role in your disclosure?)

12. For some people, the disclosure process is continuous and ongoing. Does this seem similar or different to your own experiences?

13. Did you use any resources (i.e. program, therapist, LGBQ centers) during your disclosure experience?
   o Probe for reasons as to why or why not and if it was helpful.

Those are all the questions that I have. Thank you for taking the time to share your experience with me. Do you have any feedback for me or anything you would like to add before we end?

Debrief

*Ask these once recorder is turned off*

1. Are you having any strong emotional reactions right now? If so, are you feeling ok to leave? (If not, process a bit with them and give them some time to decompress)

2. Do you have any suggestions to improve the overall interview process?

3. Were there any questions I did not ask that you think would have been useful?

4. Can we contact you afterwards for more information?

5. Do you have any final questions?
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please choose the gender you most identify with:
- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Transgender (3)

What is your current age? ___________

What Latin country do you identify with the most? Check all that apply.
- Brazil (1)
- Mexico (2)
- Colombia (3)
- Argentina (4)
- Peru (5)
- Venezuela (6)
- Chile (7)
- Ecuador (8)
- Uruguay (9)
- Guatemala (10)
- Cuba (11)
- Bolivia (12)
- Dominic Republic (13)
- Haiti (14)
- Honduras (15)
- Paraguay (16)
- Nicaragua (17)
- El Salvador (18)
- Costa Rica (19)
- Panama (20)
- Puerto Rico (21)
Does your family identify with a religion? [If no, please skip to question 7].
○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

If so, what religion?
○ Protestant (1)
○ Catholic (2)
○ LDS (3)
○ Jehovah's Witness (4)
○ Orthodox Christian (5)
○ Baptist (6)
○ Jewish (7)
○ Muslim (8)
○ Buddhist (9)
○ Hindu (10)
○ Other (11)

What language are their religious services given in?
○ English (1)
○ Spanish (2)
○ Portuguese (3)
○ French (4)
○ Other (5)

Do you identify with a religion? [If no, please skip to question 10].
○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

If so, what religion?
○ Protestant (1)
○ Catholic (2)
○ LDS (3)
○ Jehovah's Witness (4)
○ Orthodox Christian (5)
○ Baptist (6)
○ Jewish (7)
○ Muslim (8)
○ Buddhist (9)
○ Hindu (10)
○ Other (11)
What language are your religious services given in?
- English (1)
- Spanish (2)
- Portuguese (3)
- French (4)
- Other (5)

What is your current immigration status?
- U.S. Citizen (1)
- Legal Resident (2)
- Undocumented (3)

Have you enacted on your sexual orientation?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

How old were you when you disclosed your orientation, or came out? __________

Information about your LGBQ identity and coming-out process. At what age:
...were you first aware of being attracted to same-sex persons? __________
...did you, if ever, engage in same-sex sexual behavior (beyond kissing)? __________
...did you, if ever, engage in opposite-sex sexual behavior (beyond kissing)? __________
...did you first wonder if you might be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer? __________
...did you first identify yourself as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer? __________
...did you first tell someone that you were lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer? __________

Without using the person's name, please answer the next three questions as specific as possible (i.e. gay peer, straight peer, mother, brother, coach, friend's mom, etc.):

Who did you tell first? ________________
Who did you tell next? ________________
Who did you tell after that? ________________
How would you rate your comfort/lack of comfort with your sexual orientation at the time you were disclosing?
- Very comfortable (1)
- Somewhat comfortable (2)
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
- Somewhat uncomfortable (4)
- Very uncomfortable (5)

How would you rate your level of emotional distress/lack of distress with your sexual orientation at the time you were disclosing?
- Not at all distressed (1)
- Somewhat distressed (2)
- Distressed (3)
- Very distressed (4)

At what age, if at all, did you first tell...

your mother? _________

your father? _________

How would you rate your mother's attitudes about your sexual orientation at the time you first disclosed to her?
- Very supportive/Very positive (1)
- Somewhat supportive/Somewhat positive (2)
- Somewhat unsupportive/Somewhat negative (3)
- Very unsupportive/Very negative (4)
- Not Applicable (5)

How would you rate your father's attitudes about your sexual orientation at the time you first disclosed to him?
- Very supportive/Very positive (1)
- Somewhat supportive/Somewhat positive (2)
- Somewhat unsupportive/Somewhat negative (3)
- Very unsupportive/Very negative (4)
- Not Applicable (5)

How would you describe your sexual orientation when you first came out (i.e. gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual)? ____________________

How would you describe your sexual orientation currently? ____________________
How would you rate your comfort/lack of comfort with your sexual orientation currently?

- Very comfortable (1)
- Somewhat comfortable (2)
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
- Somewhat uncomfortable (4)
- Very uncomfortable (5)
APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Coming-Out Experiences of Latino LGBQ Young Adults

Principal Investigator: Carissa D'Aniello, Ph.D.; Co-Investigator: Monica Muñoz

The purpose of this research is to understand your experience, feelings, and reactions during the disclosure of your sexual orientation.

To participate in this study you must:

- Identify as Latino or Latina
- Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer
- Be 18 to 30 years old
- Have disclosed your sexual orientation within the last 5 years to at least one family member

Participation involves completing a questionnaire and participating in a face-to-face, Skype, or phone interview. Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate. Participation will take approximately 90 minutes of your time. Your responses are confidential

To participate, or for more information please contact Monica Muñoz at munozm@unlv.nevada.edu
APPENDIX D

SOCIAL MEDIA BLURBS

Social Media (Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, LinkedIn, Websites, Blogs, Skype, etc.)

RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT LATINO(A) LGBQ INDIVIDUALS:

I am inviting Latino(a) young adults who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer to share their coming-out stories for a study titled “Latino LGBQ Young Adults’ Coming-Out Experiences”. To participate, individuals must identify as Latino(a), be between the ages of 18 and 30 years old, and have disclosed their sexual orientation within the last 5 years to a family member. Participation consists of completing a demographic questionnaire and engaging in a confidential one-on-one interview, Skype interview, or phone interview about their coming-out experience of their sexual orientation. The total time commitment for participating in this study is 1.5 hours. The identity of all participants is protected. If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact Monica Muñoz at munozm@unlv.nevada.edu or Dr. Carissa D’Aniello at carissa.daniello@unlv.edu. If you do not fit the criteria for participating in this study, please help spread the word about this study for others who may be interested.

Social Media Short Version

RESEARCH STUDY LATINO(A) LGBQ INDIVIDUALS:

I am inviting you to share your stories as a Latino(a) individual who also identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer for a study titled “Latino LGBQ Young Adults’ Coming-Out Experiences”. Participation consists of a questionnaire and a confidential one-on-one, Skype, or phone interview. The total time commitment for participating in this study is 1.5 hours. To participate, please contact Monica Muñoz at munozm@unlv.nevada.edu or Dr. Carissa D’Aniello at carissa.daniello@unlv.edu
REFERENCES


Kimmel (Eds.), *Psychological perspectives on lesbian, gay, and bisexual experiences*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.


CURRICULUM VITAE

Monica Munoz
munozfamilytherapy@gmail.com

Education:

Fall 2015 – Present  
*Master of Science*
University of Nevada – Las Vegas  
Marriage and Family Therapy Graduate Program  
Graduate GPA: 4.00

Fall 2012 – Spring 2014  
*Bachelor of Arts*
University of Nevada – Las Vegas  
Psychology (Major) & Family Studies (Minor)  
Undergraduate GPA: 3.96  
Degree Honors: Magna Cum Laude

Relevant Experience:

January 2017 – Present 2017  
*Student Therapist, Kayenta Therapy Centers*
Provides low-cost mental health services in private-practice setting for individuals, couples, and families in Las Vegas. Responsible for maintaining daily case notes, diagnosing, and creating treatment plans to help clients meet therapeutic goals. Works directly under AAMFT approved supervisor.

Summer 2016 – Summer 2017  
*Student Therapist, Center for Individual, Couple, & Family Counseling*
Provided low-cost mental health services for individuals, couples, and families in the Las Vegas area. Responsible for maintaining daily case notes, diagnosing, and creating treatment plans to help clients meet therapeutic goals. Worked directly under AAMFT approved supervisors and received weekly supervision on cases.

Summer 2014 – Summer 2015  
*Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Nevada Behavioral Solutions*
Helped children, youth, and adults increase and manage their interpersonal, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to different situations. Implemented a variety of interventions to help clients restore daily functioning. Responsible for writing and maintaining case notes for each recipient of services.
Summer 2013 – Summer 2015  
**Basic Skills Trainer, Nevada Behavioral Solutions**
Provided assistance to children, youth, and adults with developmentally inappropriate cognitive and behavioral skills. Taught children, youth and adults constructive cognitive and behavioral skills through a variety of interventions. Also responsible for conducting monthly training for new providers, and writing and maintaining case notes for recipients of services.

Spring 2011 – Summer 2013  
**Communication Lab Peer Tutor, College of Southern Nevada**
Provided assistance to students enrolled in communication classes daily dealing with: topic selection, gathering support material, organizing their speech, outlining the speech, designing presentational aids, designing speaker notes, source citation, transitioning, argument construction, speaking apprehension, and vocal delivery. Also responsible for providing assistance to students in Spanish, conducting course section tours, inputting student tracking information into SPSS, converting student consultation forms into PDF files to be sent to professors and instructors, sending student feedback forms to student emails, providing assistance to the communication labs coordinator when needed, and maintaining an organized communication lab.

**Teaching & Research Experience:**

Fall 2015 – Spring 2017  
**Graduate Assistantship, Marriage and Family Therapy Program**
University of Nevada – Las Vegas
Assist faculty with conducting research (i.e. writing proposals, submitting IRB, references, editing, transcriptions) and planning graduate/undergraduate courses (i.e. creating assignments, grading, email communications). Front desk personnel for the Center for Individual, Couples, & Family Counseling (i.e. interacting with clients, phone calls, center finances, phone intakes, opening and closing the CICFC).

Spring 2014 – Spring 2015  
**Teaching Assistant, Marriage and Family Therapy: Human Sexuality**
University of Nevada – Las Vegas
Facilitate groups focused on the topic of human sexuality as well as assist professor with the maintenance of the
course (i.e. grading, creation of study guides and tests, email communications).

Spring 2014 – Summer 2014 Research Assistant, Stressful Transitions and Aging Research (STAR) Lab
University of Nevada – Las Vegas
Assist professor in conducting research regarding hospice care (i.e. creating questionnaires, conducting interviews, transcriptions, coding).

Publications


Poster Presentations:


Professional Organizations:

Spring 2016 – Present Member of AAMFT
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

Spring 2016 – Present Member of NAMFT
Nevada Association of Marriage and Family Therapy

Spring 2016 – Present Treasurer & Member of Delta Kappa Zeta
Marriage & Family Therapy Honors Society

Certifications:
2012  
*Tutor Certification Training Program*  
National Association of Communication Centers

2009 – 2010  
*International Tutor Program Certification*  
College Reading and Learning Association

**Other:**

**Languages**  
Fluent in Spanish  
Speak, read, and write the language