



Latinx LGBTQ Young Adults' Coming-Out Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Marriage and family therapists (MFTs) must be culturally competent and sensitive to serve the growing Latinx population in the United States (US). To understand the sexual orientation disclosure experiences of Latinx LGBTQ individuals, we interviewed 10 individuals. Using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenology, we identified six themes: disclosure impacts family closeness, family members experience disbelief, control over the disclosure influences young adults' perception of their coming-out experience, the coming-out experience is influenced by religion, the coming-out experience is influenced by traditional gender roles, and disclosure of sexual identity is a continuous process. We discuss clinical implications and areas for future research.

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According to the United States (US) Census Bureau (2016), the Latinx population increased by 1.2 million people in one year. Fifteen percent of the U.S. LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer) population identify as Latinx (Same-sex couple and LGBT Demographic Data Interactive, 2016). The term Latinx, opposed to Latino(a), is used throughout to promote inclusivity within the language (Salinas Jr. & Lozano, 2017). LGBTQ individuals experience higher rates of mental distress, suicide ideation, and substance abuse due to negative societal responses (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Latinx LGBTQ individuals encounter higher levels of mental distress due to the cultural emphasis on *familism*, or family loyalty, (Campos, Perez, & Guardino, 2016), traditional gender roles (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006) and religiosity (Wolfinger, Wilcox, & Hernandez, 2009). Latinx individuals are discriminated against through current U.S. policies, which may lead to a hostile environment characterized by practices lead to discriminatory actions towards the entire Latinx community (Quiroga, Medina, & Glick, 2014).

Since Latinx LGBTQ individuals identify with the LGBTQ community and the Latinx community, they encounter discrimination associated with both identities (Bieschke, Hardy, Fassinger, & Croteau, 2008; Greene, 2003; Sarno, Mohr, Jackson, & Fassinger, 2015, p. 551). The intersectionality of

ethnicity and sexual orientation, and the unique familial cultural values inherent in Latinx culture, has lead sexual minority Latinx individuals to experience unique challenges navigating the disclosure process. In effort to reduce health disparities for sexual minority Latinx youth, the purpose of this study is to understand their disclosure experiences and the effects on sexual identity development.

Background

Latinx culture

Most Latinx individuals in the United States practice Catholicism (70%) while about 23% identify as Protestant (Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2005). These Christian religions subscribe to heterosexual norms around (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Whitehead, 2010). Latinx culture is characterized by rigid and traditional gender roles. *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). The traditional role of Latinx women is characterized by *marianismo*, which involves child-rearing, attending to the needs of the partner, family and home (Miranda et al., 2006, p. 270). The emphasis on family closeness and commitment may lead to more difficult disclosure experiences for Latinx LGBTQ individuals.

Coming-out process for Latinx LGBTQ individuals

Familism may negatively influence the disclosure process for Latinx LGBTQ individuals. In collectivist cultures, sexual orientation is not an individual issue, but a struggle between individual's individuality and collective social order (Muñoz-Laboy, 2008). Frequent experiences of negative family reactions resulted in negative health outcomes including suicide attempts, higher levels of depression, and substance use (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009).

Latinx individuals are eager to fulfill family obligations and rely on family members as sources of social support (Campos et al., 2016). However, the cultural emphasis on the family may be detrimental to the Latinx individual's mental health (Zayas & Pilat, 2008; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Latinx LGBTQ individuals strive to maintain family connectedness, and it may be difficult to denounce family members' resistance (Szymanski & Carr, 2008). To experience the benefits of close family ties, Latinx LGBTQ individuals must conform to the social norms of the family network (Diaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004).

Sexual identity disclosure is a family issue (Grafsky, 2018). MFTs possess many of the skills necessary to help families during the disclosure process.

Table 1. Participant information.

Participant	Age	Gender	LGBQ identity	Family member
Jennifer	24	Female	Lesbian	Parents
Rachel	25	Female	Lesbian	Parents
Jack	29	Male	Gay	Parents
Patrick	30	Male	Gay	Father
Jenifer	22	Female	Gay	Aunt and uncle
Renéé	25	Female	Pansexual	Siblings and cousins
Cali	25	Female	Pansexual	Cousins
Matt	23	Male	Gay	Parents
Bob	29	Male	Gay	Parents
Sarah	20	Female	Bisexual	Parents

Though studies have investigated the disclosure process, many of these studies have been conducted using non-Latinx participants (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004). To be culturally competent and sensitive, MFTs who serve the Latinx LGBQ community should be aware of the intersectionality of Latinx LGBQ individuals' two identities: ethnicity and sexual orientation (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Understanding the unique experiences faced by the Latinx LGBQ community will allow MFTs to better serve this community by providing culturally competent and sensitive care. To begin to fill this gap in the literature, the research question that guided the present study is: What are the lived experiences of Latinx LGBQ young adults during the coming-out process?

Method

Participants

Participants self-identified as Latinx and non-heterosexual. Because the study focused on sexual orientation and not gender identity, transgender individuals were not included in the study. On average, young adults disclose their sexual orientation to others between the ages of 14 and 18 years old (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998). We recruited participants who recently disclosed their identity and could readily describe their experiences, by limiting our inclusion criteria to individuals between 18 to 30 years old, who disclosed their sexual orientation to family members within the last five years. Though Morse (1994) recommend six participants in a phenomenological study, we reached saturation with 10 participants, and allowed for richer and thicker descriptions of the participants' experience (Sandelowski, 1986). See Table 1 for demographic information.

Procedures & instrument

Recruitment flyers were posted on a university campus in the western US, and electronic recruitment documents were posted on social media. When potential participants expressed interest in participating via phone, the first

author responded to answer any questions, and to schedule the interview. Though participants were offered an in person, video or phone interview, all participants requested video call or by phone interviews. Prior to beginning the interview, participants completed an electronic consent form and demographic questionnaire. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio recorded. Participants were informed that they could end the interview at any time without consequence. No participants elected to stop the interview prior to completion. A semi-structured interview protocol, adapted from D'Augelli et al. (1998) guided the interviews. Interview questions 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.

Data analysis

We used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 1998). We followed the analytical steps, description of researcher's experience, horizontalization, textural description, structural description, and essence. During horizontalization, we identified participants' statements that described how they experience the topic (Creswell, 1998). We then listed them and treated them with equal value and created a list statements that were non-repetitive and non-overlapping (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). We grouped the statements into meaning units, and wrote a "description of the 'texture' of the experience (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). We identified multiple meanings and perspectives of the phenomena in structural description, and constructed a description of how the phenomena was experienced by using these meanings and perspectives as a frame of reference (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). By reducing the textural and structural meanings of the experience, we developed a brief description that was representative of the experiences of all participants (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, it lead to the essential elements of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness & rigor

We used the epoche process to support credibility and confirmability by reducing researcher bias and increasing awareness of our underlying biases about the Latinx culture and the coming-out experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). To achieve dependability, we reported how experiencing the Latinx culture and the phenomenon of coming-out influenced our perceptions. Additionally, transcription of interviews because it allowed for coding and re-coding of the data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). We

achieved transferability by providing thick descriptions of participants' experiences so that readers could determine the applicability of the findings to similar situations (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Purposive sampling also supported transferability by ensuring that participants met specified criteria (Anfara et al., 2002).

Self of the researcher

The first author is a cisgender, heterosexual, Latinx woman. The daughter of Mexican immigrants, she has a strong association with Latinx culture and witnessed influences of traditional gender roles and religion on LGBTQ family members. She was aware of negative experiences her family members had when disclosing their non-heterosexual identity. These experiences lead to her interested in helping MFTs understand and treat Latinx LGBTQ individuals and families. The second author is a cisgender, heterosexual, white woman. She has personal and professional interest and investment in diversity issues, and social justice issues.

Results

Jennifer. Jennifer is a twenty-four-year-old Latinx, lesbian woman who used social media to disclose her orientation to her family. Her mother had difficulty accepting her sexual orientation, though her father, who was sometimes abusive, was supportive.

Rachel. Rachel is a twenty-five-year-old Latinx, lesbian woman. When she disclosed, both parents did not accept her sexual identity due to their religious beliefs, while her older sister was accepting. Rachel is engaged to her current partner.

Jack. Jack is a twenty-nine-year-old Latinx, gay man who disclosed his orientation to his siblings during a family trauma. He received support from his siblings and his mother.

Patrick. Patrick is a thirty-year-old Latinx, gay man who was initially fearful of disclosing to his father, he had a positive disclosure experience and was met with support.

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

Renée. Renée is a twenty-five-year-old Latinx woman who identifies as pansexual. She recently had a positive experience disclosing to her siblings and cousins.

Cali. Cali is a twenty-five-year-old Latinx, pansexual woman. She recently experienced fear prior to this disclosure to her cousins due to her family's religious beliefs.

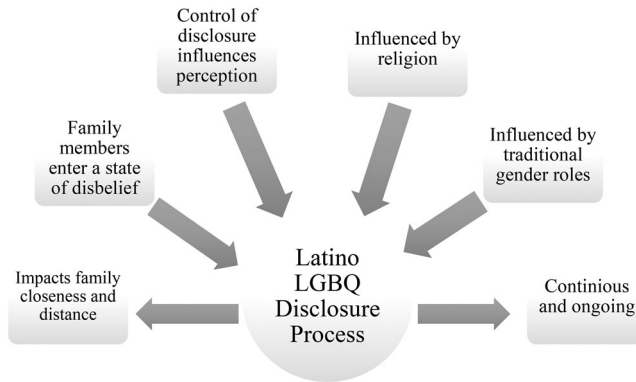


Figure 1. Latino LGBTQ disclosure process.

Matt. Matt is a twenty-three-year-old Latinx, gay man who was outed by someone, and felt powerless when his mother and father confronted him about his sexual orientation. This event had a negative impact on their relationship.

Bob. Bob is a twenty-nine-year-old Latinx, gay man who describes his disclosure to his parents as positive.

Sarah. Sarah is a twenty-year-old Latina, bisexual woman who had a difficult time with her unsupportive parents.

Essential themes

In the following essential themes, we describe participants' common experiences as they navigated the disclosure process. See [Figure 1](#) for an explanation of themes.

Theme 1: the disclosure process impacts family closeness and distance

All 10 participants described experiences of familial closeness and distance during the disclosure process. Four participants expressed that their families were not supportive during their disclosure, which led to increased distance in those relationships. Three participants received support from the family members they disclosed to but withheld their disclosure from family members they anticipated may reject them. Three participants had disclosed to all family members and received support. For the four participants whose family members were not supportive, the disclosure process was a negative experience. Jennifer stated, “[My mother’s] was concerned what everyone else was going to say. She said, ‘I’m going to have to respond to your [aunts] and [uncles].’” 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.” Rachel also experienced disclosing to

unsupportive family members. She stated, "After I disclosed, my mom kicked me out of the house. I was 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. 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. Sarah stated, "I felt that they would have been a little bit more supportive than they were. My dad used the Bible against me by saying that it wasn't Godly. At that moment [prior to disclosure], we were closer than we are now." Matt did not choose to come-out to his parents but was outed by a family friend. Matt's mother denies his orientation. Matt describes distance in his family relationships. He stated, "It makes me interact with them less and have less of a relationship with them because I know they aren't supportive."

Three participants received support from the family members they disclosed to, but continued to fear a negative reaction from closer family members. All three participants chose not to disclose to specific family members in anticipation of their negative reaction. Jenifer decided to come-out to her aunt and uncle. "They said, 'Well we love you the same; nothing changes. We know that you're the same person; it doesn't matter.'" After the disclosure, her relationship with them stayed the same, or got better, because it is easier to talk to them. Although Jenifer received support from the family she disclosed to, she has not disclosed to her parents for fear of their rejection. When Renée disclosed to her siblings and cousins, she received support. She described her male cousin's reaction. "He's okay with [my sexual orientation]. He acknowledges it more and will bring it up and doesn't make me feel like I'm some sort of outcast." Renée wishes she could disclose to her grandmother who raised her but has chosen not to for fear or rejection. She said: "Part of me fears that if [my grandmother] doesn't [accept it], then I'm going to lose the only individual who's been a true parent figure." Cali disclosed her sexual orientation to her cousins and received support. Cali stated, "I 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." Cali would like to disclose to her grandmother but fears a negative reaction because her grandmother is deeply religious. She states, "She is very special to me. She is also very, very Catholic." While these participants had positive disclosure experiences, they also wished to be able to disclose to more immediate family members.

Three of ten participants received support during their disclosure. For example, Jack stated, "I see myself as fortunate to have family that are open." Jack mentioned that his mother did not speak to him for two weeks

after his disclosure, but felt supported. Patrick disclosed to his father and expressed that to his surprise, his father accepted his sexual orientation. Patrick stated, “[My dad] said, ‘It doesn’t matter if you’re gay or straight. Your sexual orientation shouldn’t mean anything’.” When Bob disclosed to his family it took approximately two to three years for his parents to feel comfortable with his sexual orientation. He stated, “My mom has become very involved in my life.”

Theme 2: Latinx LGBTQ individuals’ family members entered a state of disbelief following their disclosure

Five participants stated that their family members experienced a period of disbelief following the disclosure. Jennifer believes that her parents always knew about her sexual orientation but were in denial. She stated, “They knew, but they never said it.” Rachel’s parents continue to live in denial. Rachel stated, “My parents were 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 and it makes our relationship very difficult.” Matt’s mother continues to deny his orientation and occasionally mentions him getting married to a woman in the future. Matt’s mother refers to his sexual orientation as a phase. Jennifer decided not to disclose her orientation to her parents after she witnessed their negative reactions to other LGBTQ family members’. She said, “I have a cousin and she’s been with her girlfriend for twelve years and my mom continues to say that it’s a phase.” Bob’s mother attributed his sexual orientation to possible sexual abuse. He explains, “She thought I was molested or touched inappropriately or that a member of the church could have done something to me.” Bob’s mother asked him to speak with church leaders to see if they could change his sexual identity.

Theme 3: control over disclosure influences Latinx LGBTQ young adults’ perception of their coming-out experience

Five participants described having control of their disclosure influenced their disclosure experience. Jennifer described actively deciding to disclose through social media. 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 prepared to face her parents’ reactions. Similarly, Jack described controlling his disclosure by disclosing during a family trauma. Jack stated, “I think it was easier because no one focused on me.”

Conversely, Rachel described her disclosure experience as having a lack of control. She explains, "It was a confrontation when they approached me so I couldn't say no, so I just admitted it." Similarly, Matt was "outed" by a family friend. Matt said, "I felt powerless because I didn't get a choice. I won't be able to come out again and I won't be able to emotionally prepare myself for that."

Theme 4: the experience of coming-out for latinx LGBTQ individuals is influenced by the cultural value of religion

All 10 participants described religion as a central part of their coming-out process. When Jennifer disclosed her sexual orientation, her mother expressed fear that Jennifer would be punished for her sexual identity. Jennifer was fearful attending church. She said, "I got scared and thought I was going to burst into flames." Like Jennifer, Matt's Christian mother encourages him to be abstinent and follow God's words to prevent him from enacting on his sexual orientation. Matt stated, "She mentioned The Rapture twice this last year. I'm probably never going to be Christian." Rachel's parents are Seventh-day Adventist and she considered the religious community's reaction when she contemplated disclosing her sexual identity to her parents. She said, "I knew that it was going to reflect badly on [my parents] and I didn't want them to go through that." Renée's, father identifies as Catholic and her mother as Jehovah's Witness. Renée is fearful of coming-out to her father because he will describe her sexual orientation as sinful. Renée believes her mother would not accept her sexual orientation because of her strict religion. She said, "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, "My dad used the Bible against me by saying that it wasn't Godly." She went on to say, "I'm not sure what Scripture it is but it states, 'Thou shall not lay with men as thy do with women.' It is a sin and you will be sent to hell and won't be accepted into heaven for it."

Four participants expressed that religion was a factor in their disclosure conversations, but they were not negative. 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." Jennifer's family is Catholic, but their religious identity did not negatively influence her disclosure experience. Jennifer stated, "My family is Catholic but they're not super Catholic."

Bob and his family identified as Latter-Day Saints (LDS). 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, family comes first.” Bob mentioned that when he first disclosed to his parents, his mother took him to speak with a Bishop. Bob described this interaction, “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.’ Bob said this of this interaction, “It was a little bit of a negative impact but 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 coming-out experience is influenced by traditional gender roles

Five participants said that traditional gender roles influenced their coming-out experience. Jack said, “When I first came out, I didn’t want anyone to talk to me. I felt the stigma of the Mexican man having to be macho and 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, Bob said, “My father 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.” Similarly, Sarah said, “Women [in our family] had to be home to clean and cook while my brothers and my father, the men of the house, work and provide.”

Theme 6: Sexual identity disclosure is a continuous process

Eight participants described their disclosure is continuous. Jennifer expressed, “I don’t know who knows, but every time I bring my girlfriend around it’s like a new thing.” Patrick described his disclosure to his father as continuous. He stated, “It might come up in future conversations 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 also felt that her disclosure is continuous. She explains, “I definitely have not told some people who are important in my life and I think it is something that is continuing.”

Rachel and Jenifer felt that their disclosure is continuous because they have not disclosed in social settings. 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.” Rachel said, “When I meet new people, they ask if I’m married and I respond ‘No, but I’m engaged to my partner.’ When I say “partner”, they question if I’m gay.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the unique experiences of Latinx LGBTQ individuals as they navigate the process of disclosing sexual identity to their families. Six themes that emerged illustrate the influence of culture, religion, and gender roles on the disclosure process. Participants also described that feeling a sense of control over the disclosure process and receiving support from their family members was helpful in easing their concerns about the future of their family relationships after the disclosure.

Participants described the profound impact of the disclosure process on family closeness and distance. When participants received support and acceptance during and after disclosure, they felt that their family relationships were the same, or closer than prior to the disclosure. These findings align with current research of family relationships which shows 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). Prior to disclosure, individuals anticipated and tried to gauge their family members' reactions, which influenced their decision to disclose. This finding also aligns with other studies that have found that fears of rejection and isolation from their families prior to disclosure are common (Beaty, 1999). For the Latinx participants in the present study, many of these fears were related to Latinx cultural and religious values. This finding suggests that pre-disclosure fears of non-acceptance may be heightened for Latinx LGBTQ individuals. We also found that participants who did not receive support during disclosure felt their relationships had become more distant and challenging, which aligns with findings of D'Augelli, Grossman, and Starks (2005) and Ryan et al. (2009). This experience of distant and challenged relationships may be particularly distressing to Latinx individuals who subscribe to the concept of familism, which emphasizes the family unit (Campos et al., 2016). Because the concept of familism is specific to Latinx culture, Latinx LGBTQ individuals' sexual orientation is no longer seen as an individual issue but rather a family issue. Participants reported that their family members entered a period of disbelief after the disclosure. This finding aligns with previous research in this area which has found that family members experience a reaction that is similar to grief and death (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

Control over the disclosure process

Exerting control over the disclosure process appeared to temper some of the stress associated with the uncertainty of how family members would react. 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. Current research also supports the idea that having control over disclosure may positively influence the disclosure experience by allowing individuals to prepare and consider their options (Corrigan et al., 2009; Rivers & Gordon, 2010). Conversely, those who felt like they were “forced” to come-out or were “outed” described their coming-out experience as negative, involuntary, and confrontational (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Rivers & Gordon, 2010).

Influence of religion on coming-out experience

Given that most Latinx individuals identify with a religion, it comes as no surprise that the disclosure experience of participants in the study were impacted by religion. In this study, families that identified closely to their religion and had a negative view on same-sex relationships responded in unsupportive ways. When family members referenced 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. This finding aligns with research indicating that LGBTQ individuals find themselves having to continuously resist power structures that view same-sex attraction as abnormal throughout the development of their sexual identity (Abes & Kasch, 2007).

Although most described religion as having a negative influence on their experience, others believed it influenced their experiences in positive way. These participants shared that their families identified with a religion but did not practice it stringently. The study’s findings support the distinction between Observant Latinx Catholics and Progressive Catholics for family members who do not practice Catholic teachings stringently (Ellison et al., 2011). Some Latinos who identify as Observant Catholics strictly follow all Catholic teachings. Progressive Catholics are those who identify as Catholic but are more liberal in their views (Ellison et al., 2011).

Influence of traditional gender roles on coming-out experience

The concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo* define how men and women should behave according to their gender (Gonzalez & Espin, 1996). Although sexual orientation and gender are two different concepts, Latinx culture often group the two together (Asencio, 2011). The view of same-sex attraction is viewed as inferior to heterosexual attraction due to the Latin emphasis on heteronormativity (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Findings of our study support these assertions, as Jack and Bob had supportive families during their disclosure, both expressed feeling the stigma of machismo.

Because sexual orientation and gender identity are grouped together, men and women who identify as LGBTQ are viewed as unable to meet gendered expectations, and therefore inferior.

Disclosure as a continuous process

Rivers (1997) acknowledges that disclosure does not occur as a single episode; LGBTQ individuals are continuously disclosing to new individuals in new situations. Participants described starting the disclosure process by disclosing to those who they felt would be the most accepting, or those to whom they were closest. Many participants also had yet to disclose to extended family members. It can be inferred that Latinx LGBTQ individuals may feel a need to disclose to extended family due to the concept of *familism*, which brings about a sense of obligation to extended family due to the emphasis on the family unit.

Implications for clinical practice

The results of this study carry implications for MFTs who treat LGBTQ Latinx individuals and families. If MFTs develop increased awareness about the unique stressors this population faces, they will develop increased cultural competence and sensitivity, which is necessary to best serve the Latinx LGBTQ community (Bean, Perry, & Bedell, 2001; Odell, Shelling, Young, Hewitt, & L'Abate, 1994; Parent et al., 2013). Individuals 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 (Odell et al., 1994). When addressing family closeness and distance, therapists should be aware that Latinx LGBTQ individuals may define family according to the concept of *familism* (Campos et al., 2016). Given the importance of extended family members, therapists may find it helpful to include immediate family members as well as extended family members in treatment. If inclusion of family members in treatment is not possible, it is still important for therapists to keep in mind that the family unit is of great importance within the Latinx community (Campos et al., 2016). Given that sexual identity is viewed as a family issue, the disclosure experience is not only significant for Latinx LGBTQ individuals, but for their families as well. Therefore, family therapy could be beneficial for families who want to work through the disclosure experience. Since family is so important to the Latinx community, they may be less likely to tolerate increased distance in their relationships or family cutoff (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Further, they may experience difficulty ignoring family

members' disapproval, and therefore face the double bind of being who they are, or experiencing familial strain.

Further, family members may seek MFT treatment to cope with the LGBTQ individual's disclosure, since it may cause them distress, or denial. MFTs should keep in mind that cultural influences 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 Latinx culture, family members may need to cope with the disclosure, and find a way to support their Latinx LGBTQ family member.

MFTs can help Latinx LGBTQ individuals and their families discuss sexual identity and culture by exploring their cultural meaning systems (Falicov, 1998). Falicov (1998) provides steps to integrate 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). Using these steps, MFTs provide the space for exploration, awareness, and integration of sexual identity and culture (Falicov, 1998). Further, MFTs can enter into discussions with clients about the distinctions between sexual orientation and gender in a culturally sensitive way (Odell et al., 1994).

Limitations and areas for future research

Though the present study offers substantive contributions to the literature, it carries limitations. Individual experiences are varied and unique, therefore, it is likely that not all Latinx LGBTQ individuals and their families experience disclosure the same way our participants did. Though generalizability was not the goal of this qualitative study, future research may aim to develop a measurement instrument that can be used to generalize these findings to a larger and more diverse sample in a quantitative survey. Though the researcher attempted to reduce researcher biases using epoche (Moustakas, 1994), it is impossible to eliminate all biases. It is likely that the researcher biases (i.e., attitudes, values, and beliefs about the Latinx community) influenced the interpretation of the participants' experiences, thus affecting the findings.

Sampling limitations are notable since participants were recruited on a college campus, they may be more educated than the general population, and their experiences may differ. Future studies may sample for variation in age, socio-economic status, education level to obtain a wider variety of experiences. Further, we limited the participant age to 18–30 years olds who disclosed in the past five years. In future studies, it may be helpful to understand generational and acculturation-related differences in the disclosure process. It appeared that participants who were born in the US did not

adhere as stringently to Latinx cultural values. It is likely that these differences may have an impact on the disclosure experience.

Latinx LGBQ young adults' coming-out experiences are different from those of other LGBQ ethnic groups. Their experiences are uniquely influenced by Latinx cultural values. These cultural values influenced family closeness and distance, families' periods of disbelief, Latinx LGBQ individuals' perception on their disclosure experiences, and the need for ongoing disclosure.

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